THE ROMANCES OF THE SEPHARDIM: A REFLECTION OF
SEPHARDIC HISTORY, CULTURE AND TRADITION

THESIS

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This work is a comprehensive study of the Sephardic Romancero and the historical, political and cultural elements that have contributed to the maintenance of the romance tradition in Sephardic life. The investigation begins with an overview of the past studies of the Sephardic Romancero and is followed by a survey of the history of the Sephardic Jews, both in Spain and in the Spanish Diaspora. An historical approach to the literary and linguistic aspects of the Sephardic Romancero follows and this approach is then applied to a musical study. The concluding chapter discusses the uses and functions of the romancero in the Sephardic world, particularly among the Sephardic women and the social processes that have contributed to the maintenance of the romance tradition in Sephardic culture.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Definitions of Terms

The Sephardim, that is, the Sephardic Jews, have maintained an oral tradition of singing romances or Spanish ballads for almost 500 years since their exile from the Iberian peninsula. The Hebrew word Sepharad (םֶפֶרַד) has been used to connote Spain since the early eighth century and Sephardim (םֶפֶרַדִים) is the masculine plural of Sephardi (םֶפֶרַד) meaning a Jew of Spanish origin. (The adjective "Sephardic" is an anglicized Hebraism.) The word Sephardic is often used erroneously to connote all Jews of non-Ashkenazic, Germanic origin such as the Jews of Yemen, Iran, Iraq, India and Ethiopia.¹ In its truest sense, the appellation Sephardic refers to the Jews who lived in Spain from approximately 70 C.E., the year of the destruction of the Second Temple and Roman Exile from Jerusalem, until approximately 1492, the year of the Spanish Exile.² The term

¹The term "Ashkenazic" is applied to those Jews that settled on the Rhine river between the sixth and eleventh centuries C.E. as well as to their descendants.

²C.E. means Common Era and is the Jewish equivalent of A.D.
also refers to their descendants who, until recently, lived primarily throughout the Eastern and Western Mediterranean. It also refers to the Marranos or crypto-Jews, also called Conversos or "New Christians"—that is, the Jews who converted to Christianity to escape political, cultural, and social oppression but who led double lives as Jews. Many Marranos left the Iberian Peninsula in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and re-established their Jewish faith in more tolerant countries.

During their tenure in the Iberian Peninsula, the Jews absorbed much of the Spanish culture including the Spanish language and the romancero, the "immense" corpus of "Spanish ballad literature dating from the Middle Ages." The Spanish Romancero is perhaps the most exemplary genre of Spanish literature: "the ballads represent the true traditional spirit of Spain and reflect the national conscience and mentality better than any other form of literature." Their enthusiastic assimilation of the Spanish language and romancero demonstrates the extent to which the Spanish Jews were a part of the Spanish culture. Yet the changes that the Spanish Romancero underwent in the Sephardic culture have

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4Ibid., p. 63.
been manifested in an entirely new genre of Spanish balladry, the Sephardic Romancero, unique in its language (Judeo-Spanish), music, content and occasionally, form.\(^5\)

**Summary of Past Studies of the Sephardic Romancero**

Although the Spanish Romancero has been studied since the early nineteenth century, it was not until the turn of the twentieth century that the Sephardic Romancero became subject to serious scholarly investigation. And not until the twentieth century was any study on the vehicle of the Sephardic Romancero, the Sephardic Jews, undertaken.\(^6\) The early scholarship on the Sephardic Romancero began with the appearance in 1873 in the Barcelonian magazine *La Renaxensa* (*The Renaissance*), of a single verse corresponding to a combination of the romances *Gerineldo* and *Conde Sol*. The verse, from the Sephardic romance tradition of Larache, Morocco, was published by an unknown author possessing the initials T. de C. The major work of the initial period of Sephardic romance scholarship was the "Catálogo de romancero judío-español" of Ramón Menéndez Pidal (1869-1968), published

\(^5\) It is true that the Sephardic Romancero is a subtradition of Spanish balladry but I believe that it is a distinct tradition in its own right.

serially in 1906 and 1907 in the Spanish magazine *Cultura Española*. In these articles, Menéndez Pidal reviewed 143 romance texts of the oral traditions of Sephardic communities of Morocco and the Eastern Mediterranean drawing from some 250 different versions. The foundation of this collection is the collection of Jose Benoliel comprising 164 romances from Tangier and Morocco, while the remaining ballads were drawn from other private, unedited manuscripts and the published verses of Sephardic ballads up to 1906. In the years 1911, 1915-1916 and 1919-1920, Manuel Manrique de Lara collected some 1,972 texts of Sephardic romances including 354 musical transcriptions from Morocco, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Balkans including Yugoslavia, Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey, the Island of Rhodes, Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine. Included in this immense collection were transcriptions of 17 manuscripts of Sephardic romances. The first study of the Sephardim themselves (which included 22 romances with musical transcriptions) was *Los hebreos en Marruecos: Estudio histórico, político y social* by Manuel L. Ortega in 1919.

There has been a tremendous volume of scholarship on the Sephardic Romancero and related Sephardic studies especially since the late 1950s. In the area of the history of the Jews in Spain are the following monumental works: *The Jews in the Visigothic and Frankish Kingdoms of Spain and*

To date, the little work that has been done on the history of the Sephardic Jews in the Spanish Diaspora is generally linked with the study of Sephardic Culture. The following works are representative of this field: the aforementioned work by Ortega; Hispanic Culture and Character of the Sephardic Jews by Mair José Bernardete published in 1952; The World of the Sephardim by Cecil Roth published in 1960; The Sephardic Heritage edited by R. D. Barnett published in 1971; Sefarad: The History and Culture of Spanish Jewry by Alan De. Corré published in 1976; A History of the Jews of Rhodes by Marc D. Angel published in 1978. Two works totally devoted to Sephardic culture are Usos y costumbres del los sefardies de Salonica by Michael Molho published in 1950 and Studies in Sephardic Culture edited by Marc D. Angel and published in 1980.
Literary and linguistic studies and collections of the Sephardic Romancero abound. Some of the most monumental of these works are "Romances judeo-españoles de Marruecos" by Paul Bénichou published in 1944 in Revista de Filología Hispánica and reedited in book form as Romancero judeo-español de Marruecos in 1968; Romanzas y cantes populares en judeo-español. Recogidos de boca del pueblo y en parte copiados de manuscritos by Moshe Attias, taken from the Eastern Mediterranean tradition and published in 1956; Romancero Hispánico volumes I-V by Ramón Menéndez Pidal, et al., published between 1953 and 1971; Poesía tradicional de los judíos españoles by Manuel Alvar published in 1966; Judeo-Spanish Ballads from Bosnia by Samuel G. Armistead and Joseph H. Silverman with the collaboration of Biljana Sljivić-Simčić published in 1971; The Judeo-Spanish Ballad Chapbooks of Yakob Abraham Yoná by Armistead and Silverman, which compares the themes of Sephardic ballads with other Hispanic and European ballad traditions, and was published in 1971; Romances judeo-españoles de Oriente reconocidos en la costa occidental de los Estados Unidos by Rina Benmayor published in 1974; Florilegio de romances sefardíes de la Diáspora by Oro A. Librowicz published in 1974; Judeo-Spanish Ballads from Oral Tradition: I. Epic Ballads by

7 Armistead and Silverman are the modern giants in the literary explorations of Sephardic ballads and have published over fifty works in this field as well as works over other romance traditions.
Armistead and Silverman with musical transcriptions and studies by Israel J. Katz which is an extraordinarily complete literary and musical study of the Historical ballads sung among both the Eastern and Western Sephardic communities, published in 1986.

The study of the music of the Sephardic romances is the most neglected area of Sephardic ballad research. The most important of these studies are *Coplas sefardíes* published during the years 1932-1938 by Alberto Hemsí composed of a number of piano-vocal arrangements of Sephardic ballads with minimal commentary which, although not actually a study, was "one of the most publicized endeavors in the field of Sephardic folklore and music;" *Judeo-Spanish Ballads from Atlanta, Georgia* by Raymond R. MacCurdy and Daniel D. Stanley which contains the first musical transcriptions from a gramophone recording in Sephardic ballad research done by American scholars and was published in *Southern Folklore Quarterly* in 1951; *Chants judéo-espagnols* volumes I-IV by Issac Levy, which have been very influential despite their questionable scholarship and were published during the years 1959-1973; "On the Musical Sources of the Judaeo-Hispanic Romance" by Edith Gerson-Kiwi published in *Musical Quarterly* in 1964; "Cantos españoles mencionados en la literatura hebrea" by Hanoch Avenary which is the fundamental work on

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Sephardic romance incipits and was published in Anuario Musical in 1971; Judeo-Spanish Traditional Ballads from Jerusalem: An Ethnomusicological Study volumes I and II by Israel J. Katz, the giant of the musicological aspect of the Sephardic Romancero, published in 1971-1975.

Orientation of Past Studies on the Sephardic Romancero and Orientation of Present Study

The vast amount of work done on the Sephardic Romancero has been produced by Hispanists with a thoroughly Spanish frame of reference. The Sephardic romances have often been viewed as vehicles for the study of Spanish romances and the Sephardim as the preservers of a Spanish tradition which they maintained with greater fidelity than the Spanish people themselves. Sephardic balladry was and is often seen as evidence of lost Spanish culture rather than as a reflection of Sephardic culture having an innate value of its own.

This "Spanish" perspective has tended to color the research done on both the literary/linguistic and musical aspects of the Sephardic Romancero. Initial research assumed the Sephardic tradition to be an unchanged relic from the fifteenth century and ascribed inaccurate characteristics to the Judeo-Spanish tradition: Sephardic ballads with no counterpart in Spanish ballad history were thought to be lost Spanish relics rather than possible accretions into the Sephardic tradition from other cultures and the melodies.
of the romances were thought to be closely related to the melodies of the medieval Spanish ballads. To the extreme that the Sephardic romances were blessed with lofty Spanish qualities, they were, and continue to be, condemned by researchers when they stray from the "original" Spanish texts, language and music. Texts have been corrected of "contaminations" of the "original" Spanish prototype and in some cases synthetic archetypes have been produced. Musical transcriptions may have been altered to be more "regular" or more "Spanish." The Spanish perspective is opposed at the other end of the spectrum by the Jewish perspective which colors the study of the Sephardic Romancero with a romantic Jewish viewpoint that de-Christianizes a romance tradition that is very Christian in its origin.\footnote{This Jewish perspective is well represented by the following quote from William Samelson, "Romances and Songs of the Sephardim," The Sephardi Heritage (New York, 1971), p. 532. "It is in its motifs that the Romance underwent considerable alterations in the Sephardi tradition. The exiles rejected those aspects of the Christian Romance which reminded them of the unpleasant aspect of their former homeland. They also avoided subjects not in religious or ethical accord with their customs."}

The vast majority of Sephardic ballad research has used the Spanish romances as the point of comparison for the Sephardic tradition: the Sephardic Romancero is seen as a sub-classification of Spanish balladry. Yet this is only one manner in which to view the Sephardic ballads, and though it is necessary, it is not an end in itself. The Spanish
Romancero may be seen as a point of departure for the Sephardic tradition, wherein the Sephardic Romancero becomes a ballad tradition in its own right—unique, whole and self-contained. Indeed, this point of view is gaining more credence among ballad researchers in all aspects of the Sephardic ballad tradition.

The Sephardic Romancero is also slowly beginning to be approached in a more holistic manner. Although as early as 1952, Benardete published his Hispanic Culture and Character of the Sephardic Jews in order to fill the need created by the one-sided study of the Sephardic Romancero, the sterile study of ballad "specimens" collected from "informants" has continued to this day. The emphasis has been on collecting a genre of poetry and perhaps music, without looking at either the people that sang these poems or the culture in which they were transmitted for almost five hundred years. As art is an expression of human experience, in order to gain a complete understanding of an art it is desirable to look not only at the artistic objects but at the creators of those objects and the ambience that affords the possibility of the creation of that art. How much more so for an art such as the Sephardic Romancero, which is perpetuated in an oral tradition, an art whose continuing source of existence is made possible by a people very much alive! Recently several works by Maria Teresa Rubiato ("El repertorio musical de un

While it is true that the Sephardic Romancero is, in its origin, a Spanish cultural phenomenon, culture cannot be owned nor can it be stolen, but it can be shared. Once shared it can be transformed into something which is related to its origin but is unique in its present quality. Culture is therefore a dynamic phenomenon and, with an overly optimistic point of view, I would like to say that culture does not deteriorate, rather it evolves. Unfortunately, at times, as is presently happening with the Sephardic Romancero, it evolves itself right out of existence.

This study would like to view the Sephardic Romancero as a dynamic cultural phenomenon that has been evolving over the past 500 years. What began as a Spanish-Christian tradition was adopted by the Spanish Jews, carried with them to the Eastern and Western Mediterranean and Europe and
eventually to the Americas. Even in Spain, the romancero and other elements of Spanish culture had undergone certain transformations in the Jewish communities; in the new Sephardic settlements, even more changes occurred—changes in the language, the text and the music of the Judeo-Spanish romances. These changes reflect the metamorphosis that the entire Sephardic culture was undergoing. Folk ballad traditions are not unique to the Sephardic Jews, and Sephardic balladry is but one of the offshoots of Spanish balladry which underwent transformations of this type, but it is remarkable that the Sephardim maintained the tradition of a country in which they suffered many hostilities and eventually exile almost 500 years ago. The elements that have contributed to the romance tradition among the Sephardim have been touched upon in isolated chapters by numerous scholars. It is from these works that I will draw upon in this comprehensive study of the Sephardic Romancero and the historical, political and cultural elements which have contributed to the maintenance of the romance tradition in Sephardic life.
CHAPTER II

HISTORY OF THE SEPHARDIM

History of the Jews in Spain

The history of the Jews in Spain begins with an intermingling of legends, biblical tradition and historical evidence. Among the legends are those that place Spain under the political reign of King Solomon (tenth century B.C.E.). Other legends describe Jews exiled from Judea by Titus in 70 C.E. and even Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C.E. Still more are legends from the pre-history of Spain about mythological kings such as Hercules, Hispanicus and Pyrrhus that participated in the first conquest of Jerusalem and brought Jewish captives back with them to Spain. At the end of the Middle Ages, the Conversos or crypto-Jews used these legends as a means to prove that their ancestors had not participated in the crucifixion of Jesus. The original meaning behind these legends was to prove that the Spanish Jews came from the tribe of Judah, this being the reason for their high level of culture. The biblical tradition identifies Spain with Sepharad, mentioned in Obadiah 20 as the "site of a colony of exiles from Jerusalem."¹ The Targum Jonathan, a medieval

Aramaic translation of the Prophets completed in the seventh century, identifies Sepharad as Ispamia or Spania and the Peshitta, a medieval Syriac translation of the Bible completed by the fourth century, as Ispania. These biblical traditions must have originated when Spain was considered part of the Roman Empire, perhaps during the end of the Empire (the fourth century) or during the beginning of the Visigothic era in Spain (the early fifth century). According to Cecil Roth, it was the custom of medieval Jewish writers to ascribe biblical names to the countries of Europe and from the end of the eighth century, the Hebrew name Sepharad became synonymous with Spain. Tradition not withstanding, it is of interest to note that two bilingual inscriptions (one in Lydian and Aramaic, and the other in Aramaic and Greek) excavated in Sardis, the capitol of Lydia in Asia Minor, identify Sepharad as Sardis.

It is most probable that the Jews came to Spain around the year of the Roman Exile, 70 C.E. The concrete evidence that is available is sparse. There is a Jewish tombstone dating from the III century C.E. in Adra (ancient Adbera). In 305 C.E. the Council of Elvira adopted anti-Jewish

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2 Ibid.
3 Cecil Roth, The World of the Sephardim (Tel Aviv, 1954), p. 3.
legislation that was only a premonition of future legislations. Already in 418 C.E. there is documentation of the forced and violent conversion of the Jews on the island of Menorca. The existence of Jews in Menorca in this year is significant because we know that the Spanish Jews fled to Menorca from the continent of Spain to escape the conquering Visigoths. The fact that there were enough Jews in Menorca to warrant anti-Jewish legislation points to a significant population of Jews in Spain during the Roman Empire, before the reign of the Visigoths (414-711).

It appears that the Jews lived peaceably under the Romans until the early third century when "their presence became a source of concern to the powerful Christian majority." In spite of the anti-Jewish sentiment and legislation, the Jews lived tolerably well under the Visigoths until the late sixth century. They worked primarily in agriculture and later in commerce and trade. In this period documentation of Jews in the medical profession are infrequent and records of Jews in the money lending profession are rare. How unfortunate it is that among the abundance of documentation from this period

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that we have about the social, political and cultural life of the Spanish Jews, we have no evidence of their secular arts.

Motivated by a desire to unify his Spanish kingdom, the Visigothic king Recared converted to Catholicism in the beginning of his reign (586-601). This union between the church and the state resulted in the large-scale persecution of the Jews of whom a great number fled to Gaul (France) and the North of Africa. But the majority of these Jews stayed in Spain and until the invasion of the Arabs in 711, they suffered decree upon decree with respect to forced baptism and conversion, religious practice, political involvement, social functions, agriculture, the various professions and commerce.

In 694, the 7th Council of Toledo (the seat of the Visigothic reign) was convened because of circulating rumors that the Jews "were thinking of appealing to the Muslim invaders who had shown themselves to be decidedly more tolerant than the Visigoths." The Spanish Jews were then accused of treason. They were reduced to the status of slaves and their material possessions were confiscated and

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6 Simon R. Schwarzfuchs, "Spain: Under Visigothic Rule," Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol. XV (Jerusalem, 1971). Cecil Roth, World of the Sephardim, p. 7, maintains that the presumed tolerance of the Jews was really due to a lack of organization in the Moslem governments. The Moslem "anti-Jewish regulations were therefore sometimes neglected for relatively long periods, which indeed often ended in outbursts of savage violence."
given to Christians who were to assure that the Jews did not practice Judaism. The Christian masters were also to assure that Jewish children, at the age of seven, would be raised in Christian households and then married off to Christians. Many Jews fled to North Africa but many were unable to leave the Peninsula.

At the hour of the Moslem conquest in 711, there were no openly Jewish communities but there was an abundance of "Christians" practicing the Jewish faith in secret. It is interesting that this phenomenon of crypto-Judaism continued to appear as late as the eighteenth century, especially during times of oppressive rule. The secret Jews welcomed the invading Moslem conquerors as saviors and they joined with them, helping them to conquer the country. The Moslem forces would conquer a city and put it under the command of the Jews. In this way, the Arabs were able to conquer many cities without leaving many soldiers behind as guards.

The heavy taxes placed on the Jews (as well as the Christians) and the internal fighting among the conquering rulers brought misfortune to the Jews, yet in spite of this, under the Moslem rule, the Jews entered into a new epoch. The new rulers were much more tolerant than their Catholic predecessors and the Jews were given much freedom in all aspects of life. Many Jews who had previously left Spain returned and many crypto-Jews returned to an openly Jewish life. Jews worked in medicine, agriculture, commerce and crafts. During
the years 900-1050, known as the Golden Age of Spanish Jewry, the Jews, influenced by Arab scholarship and culture flourished and excelled not only in the practical areas of life but also in the arts, primarily in secular and religious poetry and in religious writings. The rapid expansion of the Moslem empire put the Jews in contact with what had been prohibited under the Church—other Jewish communities, especially in Babylonia. In this way, Spain (in particular the city of Córdoba, which was the center of Arab culture) became a center of Jewish scholarship and culture in the Middle Ages.

In the early eleventh century, the Umayyad rule (755-1002) which was based at Córdoba met its downfall and was soon followed by a short-lived reign of the Berbers of North Africa. Córdoba then lost its prominence in Moslem Spain and a period of "petty principalities" under "relatively tolerant" Berber and Arab rule followed. The Jews lived well, particularly the upper class which was "distinguished by several features: the desire for and attainment of political power, the harmony of religious and secular culture, the study of the Talmud along with poetry and philosophy, equal proficiency in Arabic

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7 The Golden Age of Spanish Jewry is considered by some authors, i.e., Cecil Roth, World of the Sephardim, pp. 8-9, as continuing during the early Reconquest to the beginning of the thirteenth century.

and Hebrew." Prominent men in the Jewish community served in the Moslem courts as political advisers and statesmen. Perhaps the most well known of these courtiers was Samuel ha-Nagid who "served as vizier and commander of the army of Granada . . . [and] was also the head of the Jewish community." The elitist "Arabicized" Jewish upper class was only one segment of the "Hispano-Jewish society" however, the rest was composed of "backward masses, primitive in their outlook and way of life."

The death of Samuel ha-Nagid in 1056 and his succession by his son Joseph marked the beginning of changes for the Jews under Arab rule. Joseph's "pride and ambition" aroused the hostility of certain Moslems who assassinated him in 1066. This inspired fanatic Moslems in Granada, who then led a massacre against the Jews of that city. In spite of this persecution, the first incident of its type in Moslem Spain, the Jews continued to flourish until the invasion of the Almohads,

9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., p. 225.
12 Ashtor, "Muslim Spain," Encyclopedia Judaica XV.
a fanatic Berber dynasty from Morocco in 1146. During the Almohad rule, which lasted over a century, Jewish religious practice was outlawed, synagogues and schools were closed and Jews were compelled to convert to Islam. Some converted, others became crypto-Jews and still others fled to the north to Christian Spain.

By the mid thirteenth century, the Christian Reconquest had conquered all of Moslem Spain except the Kingdom of Granada (including Málaga and Almería) which was under a relatively tolerant Arab rule. Although there were periods of religious intolerance and fanaticism, Moslem rule was still more tolerant than Christian rule and the Jews from Christian Spain emigrated south to Granada during periods of Christian oppression.

The last Moslem king surrendered to Ferdinand and Isabella, the Catholic sovereigns, in 1492. Included in the terms of the surrender was a stipulation "that Jews enjoy the same rights as other subjects, i.e., judicial autonomy, freedom to practice their religion, and permission to emigrate."\(^{13}\) In addition, Conversos who had immigrated to Granada from Christian Spain had a month in which to leave. The Catholic rulers did not honor this treaty and Jews of Granada were expelled along with the rest of the Spanish-Jewish population.

\(^{13}\) Ibid.
It must be remembered that the Christian Reconquest of Spain began only seven years after the Moslem invasion and therefore the history of the Jews in Christian Spain was concurrent with that of Moslem Spain. Because of their support of the Moslem rulers, in the early stages of the Reconquest, the Jews were regarded as traitors to the Christians and suffered violence as a result. Yet as the Reconquest advanced, the Christians became pre-occupied with the problems of colonizing the reconquered territory and a change in attitude toward the Jews developed. The Jews were regarded as a "useful and even essential section of the population."¹⁴ The Jews were invited to repopulate the destroyed areas because of their talents in commerce and handicrafts, their economic resources which were needed to finance the Christian military effort, their linguistic, scientific and political abilities and their knowledge of the political and social structure of the Moslem regime. In addition, the Jews were reputed to be more trustworthy than both the Christians (who had political ambitions) and the Moslems (who had both national and religious interests). Jewish courtiers worked at the Christian courts as they had

at the Moslem courts and it is of interest to note that Jews also functioned as court musicians.

The Jewish population was concentrated in the larger Christian states of Castille and Aragon and in these areas they began to prosper. Beginning in the tenth century in Castille, their "judicial status was almost equal to that of the Christians." Privileges were established in the eleventh century to attract Jews to settle in deserted Moslem areas. The Aljamas, Jewish communities or quarters were basically autonomous and only under a "very general supervision of a royal functionary." The Jews were considered the "personal property of the King" and under his protection.

Beginning in the early thirteenth century, various internal and external tensions began to create problems in the Jewish communities. As these problems grew, the social and cultural situation of the Jewish community deteriorated. The Jewish communities were divided between the upper aristocracy, who served in the Christian courts and who were at the seat of power in the Aljamas, the middle class of artisans and

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15 Ibid.

16 Ibid. This type of political structure carried on into the Eastern Mediterranean Jewish communities after the Spanish Exile of 1492.

17 Baer, History of the Jews I, p. 85. According to Baer, (loc. cit.) a municipal charter from Teruel in 1176 states that 'the Jews are slaves of the crown and belong exclusively to the royal treasury.'
merchants and the lower class of peasants. In the early thirteenth century a cry for democracy began to be heard in the Aljamas and internal tensions developed between the upper and lower classes. In the mid thirteenth century, legislation by Alfonso X granted greater religious freedom to the Jews yet imposed harsh political and social restrictions on them. Anti-Jewish sentiments and efforts by Christian courtiers against the Jewish courtiers led to the downfall of the Jewish courtier in the late thirteenth century. Persecutions in the fourteenth century included the exhortation of large sums of money from the Jews, massacres and the selling of Jews as slaves, especially after the Black Death.

The year 1391 marked the beginning of the end of the Jews in Spain. Beginning with Seville, the Christian populace, incited by the archdeacon of Ecija, Ferrant Martinez, (who had called upon the Christians to destroy the Aljama and the synagogues as early as 1378) rioted against the Jews. In spite of the fact that they were under the protection of the King, the Jews suffered many pogroms (violence and destruction instigated by the state).

This destruction extended to all parts of Spain in spite of the efforts of certain Jews and, at times, various kings for whose political interests the Jews were very useful. Particularly subject to terror were the Conversos or crypto-Jews, also known as Marranos (swine), who fell under the
suspicion of the Christian people and of the Inquisition which was established in 1478. During the first twelve years of the Inquisition, over 13,000 Conversos, both men and women were condemned to death and "Guicciardini, the Florentine historian and statesman" records "the burning of 120 persons in a single day at Cordova" as an example of the work of the Inquisition. Theoretically the Inquisition was established in order to maintain the religious purity of those practicing the Christian faith and it operated under this ideal as well as under a more racial ideal of *limpieza de sangre* or purity of blood. As it had no authority over the Jews themselves (who were seen as a corrupting influence on the "New Christians") the solution was to expel the Spanish Jews. In 1492, after the fall of Granada, the Jews were expelled from Spain. It is estimated that "as many as 250,000" fled to Portugal, North Africa (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt).

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19. In his book *The Marranos of Spain* (New York, 1966), p. 3, Ben Zion Netanyahu argues that "it was not a powerful Marrano movement that provoked the establishment of the Inquisition, but it was the establishment of the Inquisition that caused the temporary resurgence of the Spanish Marrano movement." Most Marranos were really true Christians. Netanyahu continues, quoting from his own work, *Don Isaac Abravanel* (Philadelphia, 1953), p. 275, "in seeking to identify the whole Marrano group with a secret Jewish heresy, the Spanish Inquisition was operating with a fiction, and ... it was driven to this operation by racial hatred and political consideration rather than by religious zeal."
Turkey and other parts of the Ottoman Empire and Italy, as well as Sicily, France, Yugoslavia, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. They were let into Portugal; rather, they were permitted to buy their way into Portugal for a "monetary consideration." Yet in 1496-1497 they were seemingly given a choice of either converting or leaving. In actuality they were not permitted to leave and baptism was forced on them. "Portugal, to an even greater extent than Spain, became filled with the so-called 'Marranos.'" Under a more relaxed legislation in 1506 and whenever possible, these crypto-Jews left Portugal, joining their brethren in Italy, the Turkish Empire and France, and creating new communities in London, Holland, Germany, Austria, Poland and the Americas. This emigration continued into the eighteenth century though it was largely completed by the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Settlement in Central and South America occurred primarily after World War I as parts of Latin America were still under Spanish and Portuguese rule and hence under the Inquisition as late as the early nineteenth century.

21Roth, World of the Sephardim, p. 18.
22Ibid., p. 19.
Cultural Assessment of the Spanish Jews at the Time of the Exile

At the time of the Exile, there were two distinct Judeo-Spanish cultures flourishing side by side in the Spanish Peninsula: the Orthodox Jewish culture, composed primarily of poor Jews and the Marranic culture, composed primarily of an upper class of "New Christians." The Marranos, also called Renaissance Jews due to the high level of culture they were able to attain living as Christians, settled primarily in Western Europe and North America. There they often re-established their Jewish faith, but their Sephardic culture, however, soon succumbed to the strong influences of westernization and Ashkenazic (Eastern European Jewish) culture. The romancero, being part of the Sephardic culture also met its demise, and little evidence of Western European romancero tradition has been discovered. In the twentieth century, the Jews of the Sephardic communities of Holland and to a lesser extent, Italy, were virtually "liquidated" at the hands of the Nazis.

It was among the medieval Jews, those Jews who left the Peninsula before 1492, for example, after the riots of 1391, at the time of the Exile and soon after 1506, (from Portugal) that the romancero tradition was maintained. The communities that these Jews established can be roughly divided into the Western Mediterranean communities of North Africa and the
Eastern Mediterranean communities of the Balkans, Turkey, Palestine, Lebanon and Syria. Although both of these communities were Sephardic and have much in common, the geographical proximity of the Peninsula to North Africa, and perhaps, in comparison to the Jews of the Eastern Mediterranean, the oppressive situation of the North African Jews, led to certain differences in the two cultural traditions. The North African Jews were much more influenced by Peninsular and European culture, as well as the Islamic culture of North Africa, and the Eastern Mediterranean Jews maintained their Hispanic culture largely in a vacuum and were influenced primarily by the predominating culture of that area, that of the Turks.

History of the Jews in North Africa

The fate of the Jews who fled to North Africa was soured by the unenlightened state of Islam that was practiced in those Moslem countries during the sixteenth, seventeenth and even eighteenth centuries. Jews were subject to "special taxation" and were required to live in the "mellah," a closed ghetto and to wear a certain costume. They were "excluded from the honourable walks of life . . . and compelled to perform the most degrading labours."23 Occasionally, one

23 Ibid., p. 15.
person would rise as a physician and/or courtier yet when he fell from the Prince's good graces, the Jewish community suffered as well. Though the Jews of North Africa suffered persecutions similar to "less enlightened parts of Christian Europe," the Sephardic culture still flourished. The Jewish culture of the native Jews (some having been in North Africa since the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E.) bowed to the superior culture of the Spanish Jews and it was the Sephardic culture that eventually prevailed among all Jews in North Africa.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the well being of the North African Sephardim depended on the extent of European influence in those countries. The greater the European presence, the more fortunate were the Jews. Therefore, the Jewish population was protected for the most part, by the presence of the French (1798-1801) and British (1882-1922) in Egypt, and the presence of the French in Tunisia (1881-1954) and Algeria (1830-1962). Although parts of Morocco were under French and Spanish rule for a short time (1912-1956) in most parts of the country, the old medieval Islamic standard existed. Efforts by the Italian Jewish philanthropist of London, Sir Moses Montefiore, were of some help to the Moroccan communities but these Sephardic

24 Ibid., p. 15.
communities, like the rest of the North African Jewish communities, lived largely in poverty.

With the resurgence of anti-semitism in Europe in the twentieth century, the previously protective role of the European forces in North Africa began to operate in reverse. In addition, the Moslem world began to implicate the Jews, who were identified with the European rules, in their "political reaction" against the Western World. According to Cecil Roth,

ostensibly, this was bound up with the artificially stimulated opposition to Zionism in the Arab and Moslem countries; though it is arguable that the Jews suffered in fact not as Zionists, but rather as a symbol of European association.

Thus, the Jews were seen as enemies to both the Europeans and the North Africans and they suffered tragically during World War II.

History of the Jews in the Eastern Mediterranean

It is recounted that the Sultan Bajazet thought it ludicrous that the Spanish sovereign Ferdinand should be called "the wise," after he had depopulated his land of some of the most valuable part of its population.

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25 Ibid., p. 34.
26 Ibid., p. 34.
27 Ibid., p. 17.
Bajazet opened the Turkish Empire to the Spanish Jews and "tens of thousands" settled in his lands, especially in the city of Salonica which came to be known as "Little Madrid." Under the Turkish Empire the Jews were a protected and privileged minority (as were other minorities): westernization had not yet reached Turkey.

The Sephardim had come from a productive country and had entered Turkey at the height of its glory which contributed to their economic and cultural success. The Jews flourished in manufacturing (the weaving industry in Salonica, for example, was controlled by the Jews), trade and commerce, medicine and printing and they were employed as fiscal agents of the Turkish government. The Jewish community was, as it had been in Spain, virtually self-governed by a Rabbinic court which oversaw all areas, political, commercial, social and cultural, of life. As in North Africa, the Sephardic culture over ran the culture of the native and Ashkenazic Jews in the Ottoman Empire. This cultural dominance was fueled by the superiority of the Sephardic culture and the sheer numbers of Sephardim, the reputation of Moses Maimonides, a Sephardic

28 Ibid., p. 17.
29 In Turkey, minority (non-Moslem) groups were organized into "millets," which were self-governed according to the group's religious allegiance and which were under the Sultan's protection and rule.
scholar whose works influenced world Jewry, and the advent and spread of the printing press and its use in the Sephardic community which led to the domination of the Spanish liturgy over the "half a dozen main rites of prayer" current in the Middle Ages.  

The productivity of the Turkish Jews also manifested itself in the realm of the spiritual life of the Sephardim. Great numbers of religious works were written and published yet perhaps the greatest religious phenomenon was the popularity of Sephardic mysticism. This movement, which went hand in hand with the Messianic movements of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, had its spiritual headquarters in the Holy Land, in the city of Safed. Unlike the Eastern European Jewish mysticism, which manifested itself in the Hassidic movement, Sephardic mysticism embraced all—"the elite and the masses, the rabbis and the workers, Ashkenazi and Sephardic geniuses, poets [and] Talmudists."  

Sephardic mysticism erupted with the advent and downfall of Shabtai Zvi, a Turkish Jew who proclaimed himself the Jewish Messiah. Shabtai Zvi traveled extensively in the Eastern Mediterranean and attracted many converts. In

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31 Mair Jose Benardete, Hispanic Culture and Character of the Sephardic Jews (New York, 1952), p. 74. Talmudists are experts on the Talmud, a commentary on the Mishnah which is a commentary on the Torah.
1666, while in the hands of the Turkish authorities, he converted to Islam to save his own life. Many of his followers also converted and formed a sect of crypto-Jews within Islam. The rise and fall of Shabtai Zvi was not only injurious to the spirituality of the Sephardic Jews but also to their economic welfare. According to Benardete,

In the long run the Sabbatayic [Shabtayic] movement was detrimental to the best economic interests of the Sephardic Jews in the Orient. The hysterical agitation caused the neglect of their material interests. While they were caught in the whirlwind of messianism, their Greek and Armenian competitors began to encroach upon their domain.  

The spiritual disruption caused by the events of the seventeenth century was partially repaired by the publication of the Meam Loez, a popular religious encyclopedia written in Judeo-Spanish and published between the years 1730-1898. The Meam Loez was a vital force in the Oriental Sephardic world for two hundred years. It made the Bible (written in Hebrew) and the Rabbinical literature (generally written in Hebrew or Aramaic) accessible to the masses who did not know these languages. It also helped, as did the Meldado (a traditional gathering of Jews at the anniversary of a community member's death where Sephardic lore and customs were celebrated) and

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32 Ibid., p. 111.
the Sephardic newspapers of the nineteenth century, to preserve the Judeo-Spanish language.

Beginning in the mid nineteenth century and continuing through the early twentieth century, the Turkish Empire began to decline. The ambitions of foreign powers and the ineptitude of the Turkish rulers affected both the economic well being and the political situation of the Empire resulting in a deterioration of the economy and a loss of territory including "Greece, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Serbia [and] Rumania." The decline of the Empire, the westernization of the Eastern Mediterranean and natural and other disasters such as fires, plagues, tornadoes, wars and Janisary harassment greatly affected the Sephardic Jews. Where, as under a united Turkish Empire, the Sephardim were a relatively cohesive group, the splitting up of the Empire into different countries created different nationalities of Sephardic Jews and led to the decline of the Sephardic language. In addition, as a result of the newly created territories, populations were shifted and the Jews were no longer the majority in Salonica, the "Little Spain" of the Turkish Empire. Westernization of Turkey brought an end to the privileges once granted to the Jews and other ethnic minorities. The economic deterioration of the Empire directly affected the Sephardim who played

\[33\] Ibid., p. 121.
prominent roles in the Turkish economy. Natural disasters led to a rise in superstitious attitudes and behaviors. Rabbinical ignorance and intolerance against the modernization of society led to internal conflicts in the community. Jews remained in the ghetto rather than entering the newly westernized world and as a result they declined in the medical profession and did not even enter the "newer professions of engineering, architecture [and] industrial management."\(^3\)

Working against this era of decline were three educational institutions: the Sephardic printing press which printed tremendous numbers of largely religious books in the nineteenth century, the Catholic and Protestant missionaries and the Alliance Israélite Universelle, an international Jewish organization which was founded in 1860 and had its headquarters in Paris. According to Benardete, Catholic schools all over Turkey counted among their pupils Jewish boys and girls. If they failed to make converts, they succeeded, on the other hand, in teaching them elementary notions of behavior, hygienic properties and the rudiments of knowledge. The Protestant missionaries, however, brought something unique for the Sephardim. For purposes of propaganda they brought translations of the Holy Scriptures in Judeo-Spanish. Scores of people benefited very much from those cheap books, well printed, in a language that was their own.\(^3\)

\(^{34}\) Ibid., p. 123.

\(^{35}\) Ibid., pp. 127-128.
The Alliance schools brought education to both boys and girls (a novel idea for the area) in the Mediterranean area beginning in the latter half of the nineteenth century. While the Alliance was, "by and large, the most important institution to bring regeneration to the Jews of the Mediterranean countries and the neighboring countries," it is unfortunate that rather than utilizing Judeo-Spanish as the language of the schools, and thereby strengthening the Sephardic culture, the language of instruction in the Alliance schools was French. 36

Between the first and second world wars, many Sephardim left the Eastern Mediterranean and established centers in Western Europe, North, South and Central America and Central and South Africa. World War II brought the almost total annihilation of Eastern Mediterranean Jewry at the hands of the Nazis and local fascists. With exception of Bulgaria (whose government had traditionally protected the Jews and "was able to evade the enforcement of the orders of their German allies," thereby saving most of the community), the Sephardic communities of Yugoslavia, Rumania, Greece, Rhodes, Turkey, etc., were reduced to ashes. 37

The Jewish

36 Ibid., p. 130.  
37 Roth, World of the Sephardim, p. 32.
population of Salonica alone was reduced from 60,000 to 2,000.

After World War II and with the advent of the State of Israel (which led to much anti-Jewish sentiment in the Moslem countries) the majority of the Sephardim, both Eastern and Western, emigrated largely to Israel and also to the United States. In these countries, despite cultural and ethnic revival and interest, many of the distinguishing aspects of the Sephardic culture, particularly the language and hence, the romancero, are slowly disappearing.
CHAPTER III

LITERARY AND LINGUISTIC STUDY OF
THE SEPHARDIC ROMANCERO

History of the Spanish Romancero

In the history of Spanish literature, the term romancero has several meanings. It refers to the entire collection of Spanish balladry dating from the Middle Ages, to a single book of romances (ballads) such as the Cancionero sin año published by Martín Nuncio in the mid sixteenth century, and to a number of romances based on the same subject such as the Romancero del Cid. The Spanish romance or ballad is an epico-lyric poem consisting of sixteen-syllable verses, each verse divided into two hemistichs, the final syllable of each verse ending in an assonance. The romances are generally written in eight syllable lines leaving the odd-numbered lines without rhyme and the even-numbered lines rhyming in assonance. There are many exceptions to the sixteen-syllable verse which is probably due to human error in any one of the aspects of the formation of the romances, from the writing and copying, to the reciting in the oral tradition. The romances are of
various lengths, varying from a few lines to several hundreds.¹

There are two theories about the origin of the romances. A little-accepted theory holds that the romances are the earliest examples of Spanish poetry and that these single romances were eventually melded together into longer epic poems. It is now known that the earliest examples of Spanish lyrical poetry and indeed of Spanish literature are found in the jarchas (or kharchas). The jarchas are short romance refrains in the Mozarabic (proto-Spanish) dialect, which are found in Arabic zejels and muwassahas and in Hebrew muwassahas. The zejel and muwassaha are both Hispano-Arabic poetic forms which were popular in Spain in the Middle Ages. The muwassaha, which developed in the tenth century in Spain, was adopted by the Hebrew poets for almost one thousand years. According to Consuelo Lopez-Morillas, the muwashshah (muwassaha) was constructed to fit with the rhythmic scheme and meter of the jarcha which was transliterated from the Mozarabic into Hebrew script.² The origin of the jarchas is unknown but it is possible that the jarcha was a musical incipit, that is, the muwassaha was intended to be sung to the tune of the jarcha.

²Laurie King Cahill, "Enquiries into the Relationships between Arabic, Hebrew & Romance Literature: A Conversation with Consuelo Lopez-Morillas," Newsletter, Middle Eastern Studies Program of Indiana University, VI (February, 1987), 12.
This musical relationship between Spanish and Hebrew poetry has been seen in the use of romance incipits for Hebrew liturgical hymns. Bearing this in mind, it would seem possible that the jarchas are isolated verses of longer ballads that have been lost, but this remains to be seen.

The prevailing view on the origin of the romances is that these poems are the most popular fragments of longer epics which have been lost over the course of history. The only Spanish Epic to survive in its entirety today is the Cantar del Mio Cid which dates from 1140 C.E. Other epics which did not survive intact are Los siete Infantes de Lara, Bernardo de Carpio, Don Rodrigo, el último rey Godo, Fernán González, El Rey don Sancho II, El Infante don García, La condesa traidora y el conde Sancho García and Gesta del abad Juan de Montemayer. With the exception of Bernardo del Carpio, all of the above epics were based on historical happenings and can be considered as primitive histories. The following is based on a summary of the various theories about the origin of the Spanish Epic by Richard E. Chandler and Kessel Schwartz.\textsuperscript{3}

Gaston Paris maintains that the Spanish minstrels were influenced by the traveling French minstrels and that the French Epic formed the basis for the creation of the Spanish

\textsuperscript{3}Chandler and Schwartz, A New History, pp. 46-47.
Epic. Menéndez Pidal, the greatest authority of the Spanish Epic and Romancero believed that the Spanish Epic was an imitation of the Germanic heroic songs which found their way into Spain through the conquering Visigoths. Joseph Bédier's theory provides for a Latin origin of the Spanish Epic. He maintains that both the Spanish and French national epics were written by monks to provide entertainment for passing travelers who lodged at the monastaries. The promise of entertainment along with the night's lodging drew more travelers to the monastaries which in turn provided them with more income. Julián Ribera proposes that the Spanish Epic is Arabic in origin, and that this literary relationship between the Arabic and Spanish peoples is evidenced by the seven centuries of Moslem presence in Spain as well as by the relationship between the Roman Empire and the Orient. In spite of Menéndez Pidal's authority, recent scholars have held for a more catholic view in which all of these influences, the Germanic, French, Latin, and Arabic are possible, each coexisting with each other instead of one pre-empting the other. Along this vein it is possible that the Spanish Epic may have originated as an imitation of the Germanic heroic songs and later have been influenced by the French and Arabic minstrels as well as by the Latin-influenced hands of the monastarrial copyists.

The epic poems were sung by *juglares*, professional entertainers who traveled around the country singing and
reciting poems, performing mime, magic and acrobatics in castles, inns, public markets and abbeys. The juglares originally recited entire epic poems and the people would request encores of the most favored portions. Eventually, the tradition of reciting the entire epic narratives fell out of favor and the juglares just sang the popular portions which today are called romances. The people, upon hearing their favorite portions of the epics over and over, remembered them and sang them themselves thus creating a popular tradition. According to Benardete,

... the Spanish ballads were heard in the market place, in the seigniorial mansions, and on the battlefields... the Jews could not have helped learning the most popular songs of the day: the Catholic Sovereigns, the Court, the aristocrats, everybody sang them. The Jews could no more avoid singing the ballads than they could avoid speaking Spanish.  

It is likely that the romances were first written down singly in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries in pliegos sueltos or broadsides which were large, single sheets of paper on which generally only the texts of the romances were printed and which functioned much like the sheet music of popular

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song today and later on in private manuscript collections known as cancioneros.  

The romances may be classified into two primary categories, romances viejos or tradicionales (old or traditional romances) and romances nuevos (newly composed romances). The romances have been classified by Chandler and Schwartz into the following basic categories:

1. Romances Históricos which are short and objective in nature and pertain to events and persons from Spanish history such as El rey don Rodrigo, El Cid, Los siete Infantes de Lara, Fernán González, etc.

2. Romances juglarescos which are longer and of a more personal nature than the romances históricos and include the Carolingian romances which are derived from the French Epic.

3. Romances fronterizos (and moriscos) which pertain to the amorous and military adventures of the Christians and Moors in the fifteenth century.

4. "Romances novelescos sueltos [which] are generally tales of adventure, but not necessarily epic."

5. "Romances erudites, . . . written on old themes by erudite poets after Ocompa's edition of the Crónica general in 1541."

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5 The fact that the pliegos sueltos contained only the texts of the romances is inconsequential to their function: the songs were so popular that it was assumed that everyone knew the melodies and it was not deemed necessary to engage in the costly printing of the music.
6. **Romances líricos** or **artísticos** which are poems on any type of subject written in traditional ballad meter.

7. **Romances vulgares** which are composed by "street-corner" poets and pertain to many subjects, especially relating to public figures and current events.\(^6\)

The Spanish Romancero is, in its origin, an artistic tradition. The romances were not written collectively but were the works of single poets, juglares, trovères and monks. It must be remembered that there were two romance traditions; the **romances viejos** deriving from the early epics and history of Spain (whether or not the romances were historical or not) and the **romances nuevos** created by Spanish poets of the fifteenth through the twentieth centuries. While some of the **romances nuevos** have survived in the oral tradition, it is largely the **romances viejos** that are alive in this tradition. The **romances viejos** are from a cultural tradition that was disseminated among the people by juglares who then incorporated them into their own lifestyles. The **romances nuevos** were generally available only to the literate levels of society and unlike the **romances viejos**, were not in their origin, coupled with music. This undoubtably had an effect on the popularity of the **romances nuevos** on the populace.

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We know nothing of the history of the romancero among the Spanish Jews prior to the Expulsion save for the information on the Jewish juglares of the Middles Ages. Yet due to the great post-exilic history of the Sephardic Romancero, we can assume that the tradition of the romancero among the Spanish Jews was as prevalent among them as it was among the Spanish Christians or perhaps even greater. Indeed, the "Cura de los Palacios" described the scene of the exodus in 1492 in which the Jews left:

... some dying, others being born, others getting sick, that there wasn't a Christian that didn't feel pain for them; and the rabbis would encourage them, and make the women and men sing and play tambourines in order to make the people happy.

The pandero or tambourine as has been used since the time of Moses as an accompaniment for the psalms and it is also known as an obligato accompaniment for the romances. Therefore this passage is interpreted as indicating that the Jews sang the Spanish romances on their way to exile.

7 Ramón Menéndez Pidal, Romancero Hispanico (Madrid, 1953), 5 vols., II, 212.

8 Ibid., p. 213: "... unos muriendo, otros naciendo, otros enfermando, que no había cristiano que no hubiese dolor de ellos; y los rabíes las iban esforzando, y facían cantar a las mieres y mancebos y tañer panderos y adufes para alegrar la gente." Translations of Spanish and Judeo-Spanish texts are my own.

9 Ibid., 213.
The Romancero Among the European Sephardim

Although the Spanish Jews settled in many parts of Western Europe, it was in the Eastern and Western Mediterranean Sephardic communities that the romance tradition was cultivated. The European Sephardim maintained their Spanish culture up to the eighteenth century whereupon it was quickly lost. The heritage of these Sephardic Jews quickly succumbed to the high level of the European culture and little documentation of a European Sephardic Romancero, particularly from the oral tradition, has been discovered. Recently Armistead and Silverman published a report on a few printed romances from the oral traditions of the seventeenth century in Amsterdam. These ballads, La Infantina, (the only romance from the oral tradition), El sacrificio de Isaac and El testamento del rey Felip (the latter possibly from both the oral and written traditions) may have been brought to Amsterdam by the Hispano-Portuguese Jewish immigrants who arrived in Holland in the late sixteenth century. Little research has been done into the oral tradition of the Sephardic Romancero in Amsterdam and the other Sephardic colonies of Western Europe, but from the small amount of evidence that has been collected, Armistead and Silverman have concluded that "the basic significance remains: the Hispano-Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam, like all
other Hispanic peoples, were acquainted—however tenuously—with the romance of the oral tradition."10

Repertoire of the Romancero Among the Sephardim of the Mediterranean Area

The repertoire of the Sephardic Romancero of the Eastern and Western Sephardic communities contains all of the subcategories of the Spanish Romancero and can be divided into two levels: those romances which the Sephardim brought with them from the Peninsula and those which they received after 1492 by various channels of communication with the Peninsula. It must be remembered that although the official dates of the Expulsion from Spain and Portugal were 1492 and 1497 respectively, the exodus from the Peninsula continued through the early seventeenth and even the eighteenth centuries. Therefore, the Mediterranean communities received romances from the Marranos who fled the Peninsula and emmigrated to the Oriental Sephardic communities. Romances were also received by means of the commercial activity that the Sephardim had with the European Marrano communities and by the contacts that the Sephardim had with the Spanish people: Spain had much commercial and political activity throughout the Mediterranean area. They conquered part of Algeria in the

early sixteenth century and controlled various parts of Morocco from the fifteenth through the twentieth centuries. They were also involved in a war with Morocco in the mid nineteenth century. According to Menéndez Pidal, some Sephardim, particularly those from the most distant settlements in the East, sent their children to be educated in Spain, Flanders and Italy and some Sephardim managed to temporarily evade the authorities and return to Spain, only to return later to exile. Even after the expulsion was largely completed in the early seventeenth century, the Jews still maintained relations with the Peninsula. An interesting example of this relationship is evidenced by the report of the Asturian Captain Domingo de Toral who arrived in Aleppo in 1634 and found over eight hundred Jewish houses where the works of contemporary Spanish authors such as Lope de Vega, Góngora and Villamediana were being read.

Examples of these late romances which came into the Sephardic tradition after 1492 include: La Muerte del Duque de Gandía which is about the son of Alejandro VI who was assassinated in Rome in 1497 and is found in both the Eastern and Western traditions, perhaps disseminated by the Sephardic refugees in Italy or maybe by the broadsides which circulated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Another romance

which dates from 1497 is *La Muerte del Príncipe don Juan* which is only known in the oral tradition. The circumstances of both *Duque de Gandía* and *Príncipe don Juan* were contemporary to the Jews of Portugal who may be another source of the dissemination. Evidence of Portuguese sources of the Sephardic tradition is found in the romance *Flérida y don Duardos* which is from *Don Duardos*, a tragicomedy by Gil Vicente, a Portuguese author of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. This romance is still sung today in Portugal and Asturia and among the North African Sephardim. A romance derived from *Don Duardos* called *Ay Julián, falso traidor... hijo de mi hortelano* is found in the Eastern Sephardic tradition. Other romances that have survived in an altered form from the broadsides are *Landarico* and *Tarquino y Lucrecia* which is also altered in the Portuguese oral tradition. A romance nuevo from the late sixteenth century which refers to *Los siete Infantes de Lara* has been found in altered form in the Eastern Sephardic tradition. Verses from *romances nuevos* have been found inserted into *romances viejos*—out of place stylistically yet evidence to the continuing spread of Spanish culture among the exiled Jews.

Although there are many post-diasporic romances in both the Eastern and Western Sephardic traditions, they are concentrated in the Western tradition and it is the pre-exilic romances which are diffused throughout both the traditions.
As mentioned previously, the geographical proximity of North Africa to Spain facilitated both peaceful and hostile relations between the two areas and this has contributed to the ongoing flow of romances to the North African communities. The Eastern Mediterranean communities received romances both from the North African communities and directly from the Peninsula until the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries when the expulsion was largely completed. At this time, it was primarily the North African Sephardim who continued to receive new romances from the Peninsula and it was also at this time that the different Sephardic communities became more isolated from each other, each developing its own romancero tradition. Therefore, the romance repertoire of the Eastern Sephardim is largely made up of earlier ballads while that of the Western Sephardim contains both pre- and post-exilic ballads. If romances are found only in the Western tradition, we can assume that they are late romances. If they are found only in the Eastern tradition, it is possible that they are earlier romances that have been lost in the culturally exposed (and therefore vulnerable) traditions of the Western Sephardim and have been maintained in the isolated traditions of the Eastern Sephardim.

In spite of these differences, there was still much unity in the repertoire of the two traditions until the late
sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries when the isolation of the two groups became more pronounced. It is interesting that both the Eastern and Western Sephardim continue to sing romances that have been lost in the oral tradition of the Peninsula, namely romances históricos and caballerescos (novelescos), and have little knowledge of romances which are presently popular in Spain. According to Menéndez Pidal, this is due to the fact that the Sephardim sing romances which were popular during the time of the expulsion and the Spanish people sing romances which became popular at a later date and were not diffused at the time of the Exile.\footnote{Ibid., p. 340.}

Uniqueness of the Sephardic Romancero

Previously it had been thought that the Sephardic Romancero was, both in text and music, a virtually untouched relic from the fifteenth century, that the Spanish Jews, because of their cultural practise of "tradition" and their love for Spain, had preserved the Spanish Romancero even better than the Spanish people themselves. Some romances were found in the Sephardic traditions which had no counterpart in either the Spanish printed or oral tradition. Until recently it was thought that the Sephardim had preserved lost Spanish ballads. As of late, Armstead and Silverman have discovered that six of these ballads are Judeo-Spanish
versions of Greek ballads that were adopted into the Eastern Sephardic repertoire and subsequently into the Western tradition. Similarly, Menéndez Pidal has cited romances such as *Infante Arnaldes* and others which are found in both the Sephardic traditions in more "complete" versions than the printed versions of sixteenth century Spain. But it is possible that the "completeness" of the Sephardic versions is due to extraneous material incorporated into the Spanish ballads.

While the Sephardic Romancero has maintained much of its medieval Spanish heritage, recent studies point to the uniqueness of the Sephardic tradition. This uniqueness manifests itself in all aspects of the tradition including language, changes in the text, addition and deletion of material and form. The Hispanic orientation of most romance scholars has colored their understanding of the Sephardic Romancero; most have tended to view this "uniqueness" as a deterioration of the original Spanish tradition. Yet increasingly, the Sephardic tradition is being studied for its innate value rather than solely for the information that it has to offer about the Peninsular romance traditions.

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Both the Eastern and Western Mediterranean Romance traditions were vulnerable to changes over the course of time, changes that contributed to the uniqueness of each of the ballad traditions. The Eastern Sephardic tradition was vulnerable to change because of the geographic isolation of the Eastern Sephardic communities. The ballad repertoire of this community, which rested upon fifteenth and sixteenth-century foundations, was subject to the effects of human memory (which is the storage place of oral traditions), and cultural isolation from the Western Sephardim and from the Peninsula. Although the Eastern Sephardim were subject to acculturation from the poetic, linguistic, religious and musical traditions of their new surroundings, they were in a sense, isolated from the Turks, Greeks, Yugoslavians, etc. As mentioned in Chapter II, the Jews in the Eastern Mediterranean countries lived apart from the rest of the population in millets, independent, self-governed and self-perpetuating communities. This placed the Eastern Sephardim in a sort of double isolation—that from their origins and that from their new host countries.

The Western Sephardic tradition was subject to the effects of its surrounding cultural ambience and was also vulnerable because of cultural contacts with Spain. It is possible that the contacts with contemporary Spanish culture may, instead of reinforcing the medieval heritage of the
Sephardic Romancero, have pushed it toward modernity. In spite of this possible modernization, the overall "superiority of the Sephardic tradition in Morocco" has been noted by Menéndez Pidal and others.\(^{15}\) According to Armistead and Silverman, "Eastern Mediterranean ballads are almost invariably more simplified, eroded and generally more incomplete than their North African counterparts" which preserve more of their archaic Spanish heritage.\(^{16}\) (That is not to say that the Eastern tradition is more "unique" than the Western; rather, both are special--both are unique.) The Western Sephardic tradition has conserved romances históricos which are not found in the Eastern tradition. Some Western ballads so clearly match the Spanish versions found in quinientistas (fifteenth century manuscripts) and cancioneros that it seems possible that the Jews learned these ballads from the printed sources. However, it is more likely that they are from the post-expulsion oral tradition.

Language of the Sephardic Romancero

The main sources of changes in the Sephardic Romancero are due to the Turkish, Arabic, Greek and Jewish influences

\(^{15}\) Ibid., p. 335: "superioridad de la tradición sefardí en Marruecos."

on the Sephardic Jewish culture and hence on the Sephardic Romancero. The major impact of these influences is seen in the language of the Sephardim and the Sephardic Romancero. This language has been called by numerous names: "ladino, Yudezmo, djidid', romance, españiolit, sefardí, Hakitia, lingua franca, žargon, español," etc. Recently, the term ladino has been reserved for the use of the language associated with religious writings and judeo-español (Judeo-Spanish) is used for secular usages.

The earliest linguistic documents in Judeo-Spanish are assumed to be from the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries. Leo Spitzer postulated that the bulk of the language originated in fifteenth century Spain and was therefore 'preclassic or pre-Columbus.' Information gathered by Max A. Luria shows a close relationship between the Judeo-Spanish dialects of the Balkans to twelfth and thirteenth century Spanish. Kalmí Baruch noted in 1923 that it would be difficult to

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assertain exactly when the Spanish Jews adopted Spanish as their daily language, but that claims of thirteenth century usage were likely considering that "... in this time the Castilian language was already advanced to high level in its social and political development ..." In short we can say that Judeo-Spanish is derived from various archaic Spanish dialects (considering that the Jews came from various regions in Spain) and that it has been subject to the influences of the Jewish culture and Hebrew language and the Eastern cultures and languages with which the Sephardim came in contact, i.e., Arabic, Turkish, Greek, French, Italian, Romanian, modern Spanish, etc. These influences affected all aspects of Judeo-Spanish including the lexical, phonetical and grammatical workings.

Judeo-Spanish contains words in archaic Spanish as well as words borrowed from the various languages mentioned above. In addition there are words that are in themselves a mixture of two languages. There is hebraized Spanish, for example, "ladronim,"—"ladron" is Spanish for thief and the plural ending "im" has been borrowed from the Hebrew. There is

also spanlishized Hebrew—for example, the Hebrew word "chen" which means grace, borrows the Spanish ending "oso" and becomes the Judeo-Spanish "jenoso" which means graceful.\(^{21}\) It must be noted that there is not only one single Judeo-Spanish dialect but various dialects eminating from the different Sephardic communities throughout the Mediterranean area. Therefore, there are Balkan Judeo-Spanish dialects, Moroccan Judeo-Spanish dialects, Turkish Judeo-Spanish dialects, etc.

The pronunciation of Judeo-Spanish is difficult to define. In the opinion of Henry Besso, "the pronunciation . . . according to specialists who have devoted years of study to the problem, is similar to Catalan, Asturian, Galician, Portuguese and even Castilian Spanish."\(^{22}\) William Samelson presents us with a simpler idea, that of an archaic Spanish dialect that maintains much of its archaic Castilian pronunciation. For example, the "sh" pronunciation (which corresponds to the Hebrew letter "\( \mathcal{W} \)" ("shin") of the archaic letter "x" (the modern "j") and of the verb endings "-eis" and "-ais" such as in the archaic forms "teneis" and hixo, which reflect archaic Castilian pronunciation.\(^{23}\)


\(^{23}\)Samelson, "Romances and Songs," p. 535.
Judeo-Spanish was originally written in Rashi Script, a form of cursive Hebrew developed by the Rabbi Rashi in France in the eleventh century. The language was printed in either Rashi script or "rabbinical square characters."\(^{24}\) In addition, in certain parts of the Balkans, a type of cursive script known as solitreo was used in business correspondence. Today the Latin alphabet is used almost exclusively.

It is interesting (though not surprising) that the development, growth, transmission and decline of Judeo-Spanish parallels the same of the Sephardic Romancero. Like the romancero, it is a remnant of Spanish culture which the Spanish Jews adopted, took with them into the Exile and maintained for four and a half centuries. Like the romancero, the transmission of the language was largely the responsibility of the Sephardic women. It was, according to Henry Besso, a "maternal language" that was preserved by Jewish mothers who "were isolated from both women of other nations and races, and from the men of their own religion who were not related to them by family ties."\(^{25}\) Like the romancero, Judeo-Spanish was subject to the influences of the various aspects of the Mediterranean cultures and likewise subject to forces which contributed to its decline, (economic difficulties,


\(^{25}\) Ibid., p. 623.
westernization factors, European cultural influences in the Near East, the Holocaust, emigration to the Americas and Israel) and possible extinction. Obviously, the history of the various facets of Sephardic culture mirrors the history of the Sephardic people.

The assimilation of Arab linguistic and cultural elements into the Sephardic Romancero has been documented as early as the seventeenth century. At this time, a Jew named Shabtai Zvi proclaimed himself the Jewish Messiah and traveled through Esmirno, Salonica, Constantinople, Cairo and Jerusalem proselytising among the Jewish communities. He was known for his good looks and pleasant voice and as a singer of psalms and secular Spanish songs, some of which he divinisized.26 In 1667, a Protestant preacher from Holland recorded and translated to Dutch the version of the romance *Melisenda sale de los baños* which Shabtai sang (with allusions to the *Song of Songs*). Shabtai Zvi's version of this romance had taken on a "note of vulgarity" by its use of the first person rather than the traditional Spanish third person and was much more explicit in its description of Melisenda leaving the baths than the conservative Peninsular versions.27

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27 Ibid., p. 224: "nota de vulgaridad."
In addition, Arabic-influenced descriptive phrases and comparisons such as "rostro como espada" and "cejas como arco de acero" were used which have also been found in Sephardic versions of other romances. Although these types of Arabisms are found in Peninsular romances, it is on a much smaller scale than in the Sephardic romances.

Contemporary Mediterranean influences are found, as we have said previously, in the adoption of Arabic, Turkish and Greek words or phrases into the Sephardic romances. Of the Arabic words, a few, such as "alḥad" (Sunday) are of Peninsular origin and this is due to the large-scale contact that the Jews had with the Moslems in medieval Spain. The majority, however, are due to the influences of the Arab societies in which the Sephardim lived and the influence that the Moslem culture had on the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean, for example, the far reaching influence of the Ottoman Empire on the Balkans where many Sephardim lived. The Jews of Salonica, "came to think of Christianity in terms

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28 These phrases translate as "a face like a sword" and "eyebrows like a steel bow."

of the Greeks, their Christian neighbors in the Balkans.\textsuperscript{30}

Therefore, while the following fragment of a Moroccan version of \textit{La expulsion de los judíos de Portugal} reads as follows:

\begin{quote}
Ya me salen a recibir tres leyes a maravilla
los cristianos con sus cruces, los moros a la morisca
los judíos con vihuelas que la ciudad se estrujía,
\end{quote}

relating to the Peninsular versions of the romance, it is not surprising that a Salonican version is as follows:

\begin{quote}
Los turkos en las mexkitas, los gregos van a la klisa
los judíos a la ley santa, la ke la sivdad mos guadra.\textsuperscript{31}
\end{quote}

It is not surprising that the Arabic-Sephardic influences were reciprocal; indeed, in Morocco some Spanish romances are sung by the Arab women and in Fez "one hears popular Arabic stories taken from Spanish romances."\textsuperscript{32}

\section*{De-Christianization of the Sephardic Romancero}

It would seem that the strength of the Sephardic Jewish culture would have exerted a great influence on the Sephardic

\textsuperscript{30}Samuel G. Armistead, "Hispanic Balladry among the Sephardic Jews of the West Coast," \textit{Western Folklore}, IV (October, 1960), 239.

\textsuperscript{31}Armistead and Silverman, "Christian elements," pp. 35-36. These verses translate as: I was received by three perfect laws (religions), the Christians with their crosses, the Moors in the Moorish way, the Jews with vihuelas; and all these things were happening in the city. The Turks in the mosques, the Greeks go to church, the Jews to the Holy Law, that the city protects.

\textsuperscript{32}Menéndez Pidal, \textit{Romancero} II, p. 336: "se oyen relatos populares árabes tomados de romances españoles."
Romancero, resulting in changes that appealed to Sephardic sensitivities. Indeed, as mentioned in Chapter I, William Samelson maintains,

The predominant motifs of the Christian Romance . . . Chivalry, Love and Religion . . . underwent considerable alterations in Sephardic tradition. The exiles rejected those aspects of the Christian Romance which reminded them of the unpleasant aspect of their former homeland. They also avoided subjects not in religious or ethical accord with their customs. But they extracted subjects from the original Romance and sang songs which appealed to them as Israelites . . . .

That the Sephardim were able to sing of the Exile itself seems to negate Samelson's conjecture that they avoided "aspects . . . which reminded them of the unpleasant aspect of their former homeland," and exhaustive research by Armistead and Silverman does not support the rest of the above statement. According to Armistead and Silverman, while a "conscious desire to avoid expressions implying positive adherence to Christian belief" is a factor evident in the rather "sporadic" de-Christianization of the Sephardic Romancero, there is an abundance of ballads dealing with adultery, deception, seduction, etc.34 In addition, "specifically Jewish themes and allusions are not uncommon in the Sephardic ballads. Yet their character and relative infrequency, in comparison with

33 Samelson, "Romances and Songs," pp. 531-532.
Christian elements, does not suggest an inordinate preoccupation with the faith or religious history of the Jews as a balladic theme.\(^3\)

There are only nine romances on biblical themes found among the Sephardim. Five of these ballads, *El sacrificio de Isaac*, *David y Goliat* and *Tamar y Amnón* (from the Western Mediterranean), and *El robo de Dina* and *El paso del Mar Rojo* (from the Eastern Mediterranean), all have counterparts in either "archaic or modern Peninsular versions."\(^3\) It is interesting that of the few biblical romances among the Sephardim, only one romance, *David Ilora a Absalón*, is found in both the Eastern and Western ballad traditions. According to Armistead and Silverman, "evidently, even those ballads which are closest to the sacred tradition of Israel, are, as is the rest of the Romancero, Pan-Hispanic in distribution--part of a cultural heritage shared in common by all speakers of the Ibero-romance languages, regardless of their religious loyalties."\(^3\)

There are some specific Jewish elements found in the Sephardic romances, often though not exclusively in the


biblical ballads, yet often these elements are not part of the romance proper—rather, they are in the form of an invocation or final benediction. For example, a Moroccan version of *La consagración de Moisés* begins with '¡Los angeles te alaben,/gran Dios de Israel!' and this ballad is often ended with a phrase in Hebrew from the Psalms '¡Hodu l'Adonai ki tov, /ki l'olam hasdai' followed by a Spanish paraphrase of the Hebrew.  

Anti-Christian elements are rare yet a few have been found, (Armistead and Silverman cite only four) and the most vicious of these is found in an Eastern version of the ballad *The Idolater* wherein the protagonist, finding that his pleas to the Virgin Mary are unanswered, says, '—Vate, vate, puta María,/que sos falso y mintirosa.'

In contrast to the scarcity of specific Jewish and anti-Christian elements, there are over twenty-five distinctly Christian elements that are found either in unaltered or altered forms in the Sephardic Romancero. Christian elements such as the Trinity, Jesus, priests, pork as a food, etc. in unaltered form occur with the greatest frequency. The replacement of a Christian term by a "neutral" or "secular" term is the most frequent type of alteration, for example,

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38 *Ibid.*, p. 25. These verses translate as 'May the angels praise you, great God of Israel!' and 'Give thanks to the Lord for He is good, for His mercy endures forever.'

39 *Ibid.*, p. 27. This verse translates as 'Go away Mary, you prostitute, you are false and a liar.'
"Virgen de la Estrella" can become "libro de la estreya" and "libro misal" becomes "librito de rezar." Replacement of Christian terms by nonsensical terms such as the transformation of "mal romero de la Roma" to "maromero de la ruina" seems to be due to cultural isolation and loss of understanding of the terms rather than a deliberate de-Christianization. The use of Jewish terms to replace Christian terms is infrequent and the use of words from Eastern Mediterranean languages as a replacement for Christian terms has only been documented twice. There is but one example of a Christian term being maintained unaltered but having lost its original meaning. The deliberate deletion of Christian elements from the Sephardic Romancero is difficult to prove yet according to Armistead and Silverman, it probably is the cause for the most of the substitutions of Christian terms by neutral and distinctly Jewish terms. The loss of meaning or the use of a nonsensical term is probably due to loss of understanding of the Christian terms, and the omission of Christian terms could be either deliberate or due to lack of understanding.

40 Ibid., pp. 29-30. These phrases translate as 'Virgen of the Star,' 'book of the star,' 'missal book' and 'prayer book' respectively.

41 Ibid., p. 30. These phrases translate as 'a bad pilgrim from Rome' and 'an acrobat of the destruction.'

42 Ibid., pp. 30-31.
As we have mentioned previously, the Western ballad tradition is closer to the Peninsular tradition than is the Eastern tradition. Ballads in the Western tradition often contain Christian elements that are lacking in the same ballads of the Eastern tradition. While it is possible that the Sephardim who emigrated to the Eastern Mediterranean took with them versions of ballads which were lacking these Christian elements, it is more likely that the difference is due to the geographical and hence commercial and cultural isolation of the Eastern Sephardim from the Western Mediterranean and the Peninsula.

The impact of time also has affected the presence of Christian elements in the Sephardic Romancero in both the Eastern and Western traditions. In the North African tradition, the older ballads have a greater degree of de-Christianization than do the later ballads. In the Eastern tradition, the forces of chronology and geography create the opposite effect: eighteenth-century ballad manuscripts are more intact than the contemporary romances. The retention of Christian elements may be due in part to their place as "narrative topoi" in the romancero yet . . . the abundant survival of such features, even in the most far removed sub-tradition of Sephardic balladry, cannot be explained solely in terms of the mechanics of traditional poetry. Certain
Although Spain was a tri-religious country at the time that the Jews lived there, the Spanish Romancero "had its origin in the Medieval heroic poetry of the militantly Christian Castilians. And it is their habits and preferences, their ideal and values which the romances will continue to express."  

\[43\text{Ibid., p. 34.}\]
\[44\text{Ibid., p. 36.}\]
CHAPTER IV

MUSICAL STUDY OF THE SEPHARDIC ROMANCERO

Synthesis and Symbiosis in Folk Music

It has been the trend of ethnomusicology in the past three decades to be concerned with the purity or impurity of folk music—that is, with the absence or presence of foreign elements in any given body of folk music. As Edith Gerson-Kiwi has remarked, "nearly every [folk] song on earth appears to be mixed, and its inimitable character is due precisely to its specific mixture and synthesis of styles."¹ As a dynamic phenomenon, folk music is, by nature "impure," for purity implies something that is unchanged and untouched. Nevertheless, the study of the foreign elements and the changes that occur over a period of time in folk music is valuable—it teaches us the history of folk music which is difficult to ascertain since this music is most often cultivated in the oral tradition.

Gerson-Kiwi discusses two processes—synthesis and symbiosis—by which folk music may be altered by foreign

elements and still remain "authentic"—that is, untouched by urban mentality together with its popular songs which (as is happening in the case of the Sephardim) can wipe out an entire body of folk music. Synthesis is the total assimilation of foreign elements into a folk style which leads to the creation of a new style that is a blend of the two (or more) styles. Symbiosis is the adoption of certain foreign elements into a folk style without the total integration that occurs in synthesis; that is, in symbiosis foreign elements are used but one can immediately recognize them as foreign. It is not surprising in light of the different natures of secular and liturgical music, that synthesis occurs mainly in secular music and that symbiosis occurs mainly in sacred music. Among Jewish peoples, symbiosis occurs mainly in the cantillation systems of the Torah and the other holy books and synthesis, in the secular songs and non-musically prescribed sacred songs, for example, liturgical hymns. Thus the Jews who came from Spain to Morocco, for example, chanted the Torah much as their ancestors had in Spain and at the same time adopted the musical styles of Morocco into their secular songs.

The problem of identifying foreign elements in a body of music may be difficult, because seemingly "foreign" elements may indeed be borrowings from another culture or they may be independent occurrences of the same phenomenon. As Gerson-Kiwi has noted,
Man, as the one species of *homo sapiens*, is likely to strive along similar lines and to arrive at similar conclusions—under given circumstances—without working under direct influence.\(^2\)

However, considering the proximity and history of Spain and the Middle East, I am inclined toward viewing the present melodies of the Sephardic romances as a synthesis of styles, the most basic of which is the music of the Iberian romances themselves, which was adopted by the Sephardic Jews and underwent many changes as a result of the cultural contacts that these Jews experienced in the Spanish Diaspora.

**Musical History of the Spanish Romancero**

The music of the Spanish romances and other popular Spanish songs was itself the product of many sources, due to the location of the Iberian peninsula which lent itself to access and conquest by peoples of the European, Asian and African continents. Among the earliest of the ancient civilization whose music may have brought bearing upon the romance were the Basques, who may have been "indigenous to the Peninsula in the late Paleolithic epoch" (?–8000 B.C.E.) and the Iberians, possibly from Africa, who are found in the Peninsula in the Neolithic epoch (8000 B.C.E.–3000 B.C.E.).\(^3\)


The Iberians later mixed with the Celts (sixth century B.C.E.) who came from western Europe and created the Celtiberian race. The Phoenicians "established trading posts in the South as early as the eleventh century B.C.E. and with them probably arrived the first Jewish settlers." The Greeks came to the Peninsula in the sixth century B.C.E. as did the Carthaginians, who managed to conquer most of the Peninsula by the third century B.C.E. Their empire was destroyed in turn by the Romans in the early second century B.C.E., and the Roman Empire dominated Spain until the invasion by the Visigoths, Germanic tribes from the north, in the fourth century C.E. The invasion by the Moslems from North Africa in 711, which was composed mainly of Berbers from Morocco, strongly influenced all parts of the Iberian culture. The Islamic influence continued even after the expulsion of the Moslems (1492-1609), and it is this influence along with the indefatigable culture of the Middle Ages that set Spain culturally apart from her European neighbors.

Little is known about the "musical practises in prehistoric Spain, although musical references of some significance date from the period of the Roman conquest." The first truly important musical document of the early

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4 Ibid., p. 65.
5 Ibid., p. 66.
history of Spain dates from the eleventh century. This manuscript, the Antiphoner of León, contains Christian liturgical music in Mozarabic notation and shows strong evidence of influence of Byzantine church music. The Cantigas de Santa María, which were produced in the court of Alfonso X, el sabio (1221-1284) contain 423 sacred songs "whose melodies were of a 'popular' character."\(^6\) The Cantigas, although attributed to Alfonso X, were said to have been composed by numerous musicians at the King's court, among whom may have been several Jewish musicians. These songs show marked French influence in their forms, and their melodies correspond to the Dorian, Lydian and Mixolydian modes, yet they have also been characterized by Julián Ribera as being of Arabic origin.\(^7\)

The three major factors influencing medieval Spanish music appear to be the music of France, the Moslems and the Byzantine Church. The influence of French music is due to the geographical proximity of France and Spain which lent itself to cultural exchanges on both the informal level, characterized by the traveling jongleurs and religious pilgrims, and on the formal level, by the relations between the Spanish courts and those of Flanders, France and Burgundy which were especially close during the first half of the

\(^6\)Ibid., p. 67.  
\(^7\)Ibid., p. 67.
fifteenth century." The Islamic influence is due, as mentioned previously, to the Arab presence in Spain for over seven centuries and evidence of this musical influence is seen in the adoption of many Arabic musical instruments into Christian Spain. Most interesting, though, is the influence of Christian chant, specifically the Byzantine and Gregorian chants, because it is through the chant that the circuitous nature of the origin of the music of the Sephardic Romancero is revealed. Although the "relationship between Hebrew and Christian chant is still a controversial area," according to Higini Anglés, it is well accepted that Hebrew chant formed the "basis of the chant within the Christian Church in East and West." Anglés further notes that the relationship between the music of the Church and secular music was reciprocal.

The Jewish juglares of Spain

The first musical documentation of the Spanish romances were the polyphonic settings found in the cancioneros of the

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late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. There is no
evidence of the romancero among the Spanish Jews of the
Iberian peninsula; however, there is documentation of Jewish
juglares (minstrels) of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.
Much of this documentation is in the form of general petitions
by Kings for Jewish juglares but there are also citations
where specific Jewish juglares are mentioned. A Jew named
Ismaël and his wife were among the juglares at the court of
Sancho IV (1257-1295) of Castile. Rabbi Semtob (Shem Tov,
Santob) of Carrion (flourished fourteenth century) who is
known for his collection of Proverbios "is recorded in Jewish
historiography as a 'troubador' at the court of Don Pedro de
Castile."¹¹ Semtob could not have been a troubador because
as a Jew this profession was not permitted to him, but we can
designate him as a juglar.¹² Other juglares mentioned in
documentation are Bonafos and his son Sento (Shem Tob), who
were from Pamplona and were loyal to the King Carlos II of
Navarre (1332-1387), Jacob Evenayon, a companion of Bonafos,
Solomon de Besers and his sons Vitalis Ferrari and Vitalonus
Berteefly (Barzillai) of Villafranca mentioned in documentation
during the reign of James II of Aragon (1264-1327), Yussef

¹¹ Alfred Sendrey, The Music of the Jews of the Diaspora
¹² Ibid., p. 97.
Axivil from Borja mentioned in documentation in 1352, Saçon Salomon mentioned in documentation in 1391 and 1392, Abraham Mayor (Meir) of Zaragoza loyal to King Martin (1374-1409) and Barzalay (died 1315). From a stanza of the *Libro de Buen Amor* by Juan Ruiz (1283?-1350?) we have more evidence of female Jewish *juglaries*:

Depúes fiz muchas cantigas de dança e troteras
Para judías et moras, e par entenderas,
Para en instrumentos de comunales maneras;
El cantar que non sabes, óilo á cantaderas (verse 1513).13

According to Alfred Sendry, Juan Ruiz, who was known as the *Arcipreste de Hita* (the Archpriest of Hita), was born Juan de Valladolid, was called Juan Poeta in the courts and was a Converso (crypto-Jew). From a poem to the city fathers of Córdoba by Anton de Montoro, a Christian *juglar* who was an enemy of Juan Ruiz, we can infer that before becoming a cultured poet of the courts, Juan Ruiz was a singer of popular romances. According to Sendry,

... he was a typical representative of the itinerant *juglaries*, singing romances and entertaining the populace ... . . . . . .

He wandered tirelessly from one castle to another,

13 *Ibid.*, p. 107: 'Then I wrote many dance and street songs For Jewish and Moorish girls, and for women who carry love messages [i.e., procurers], For all instruments, in an uncouth manner; For what you do not know, listen to any singing girl,' (this translation is taken from Sendrey).
always taunted, even vilified by his competitors on account of his Jewish ancestry.14

Spanish Musical Influences in the Sephardic Romancero

Considering the archaic qualities of the romance poetry, some scholars such as Alberto Hemsi, Edith Gerson-Kiwi and others have hastened to canonize the archaic Spanish nature of the present day Sephardic tunes. Alberto Hemsi stated in 1938 that

. . . the background of the major part of the Sephardic repertoire--especially the religious songs and the romances--have kept their functionally Iberian traces in spite of this [Turkish] influence and other alterations due to exclusively oral traditions.15

Edith Gerson-Kiwi stated in 1964 that the Sephardic romance tunes

. . . along with the original texts as sung and collected today whether in Jerusalem, Istanbul, Sarajevo, Morocco or Los Angeles, their tunes may be traced back and eventually identified with the historical minstrel songs of pre-exilian times, or at least with the general frame of their melodic models.16

14 Ibid., p. 105.

15 Israel J. Katz, Judeo-Spanish Traditional Ballads from Jerusalem (New York, 1972), 2 vols., I, 126: El fondo de la mayor parte del repertorio sefardi--notoriamente los cantos religiosos y los romances--ha guardado su huella funcionalmente ibérica a pesar de esta influencia [turca] y de las alteraciones de bidades a las tradiciones ex[c]lusivamente orales.

In support of her hypothesis, Gerson-Kiwi compares the Greco-Turkish romance *Estambul es grande* (Figure 1) and a thirteenth century song from *Las Cantigas de Santa Maria*, "Mui gran dereit e das bestias" (Figure 2).

Gerson-Kiwi's reduction of these two songs (Figure 3) shows a striking resemblance of the underlying basic melodic skeleton.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 161: "Istanbul is great, great and much praised. A fire fell down on her, nothing has been left," (this translation is Gerson-Kiwi's).

18 *Ibid.*, p. 161: "My great delight is in the beasts that even they obey Santa Maria by whom our good Lord was born," (this translation is Gerson-Kiwi's).
Analyzing the Salonican romance *El rey que mucho madrugo* (Figure 4), Gerson-Kiwi shows musical characteristic such as the phrygian or Spanish "Mi" mode, a simple, practically unvaried melody and a simplicity of rhythm corresponding to the poetic meter which are closer to the late medieval Spanish songs than to the complex, post-exilian tunes of Greek and Turkish origin.

Gerson-Kiwi's findings are interesting because romances from the Eastern Mediterranean are typically more "oriental" in style, that is, both rhythmically and melodically more complex than their Western Mediterranean counterparts. However, these comparisons are few and perhaps not enough on which to base a whole theory: in the first example, Gerson-Kiwi is comparing a romance with a thirteenth century religious song and though the melodies of the songs from *Las Cantigas* are of a popular nature, it is still not a romance. The
Spanish musical characteristics in the second example may be due to the cultural contacts, however fragmented, that the Eastern Sephardic communities had with the Peninsula and the North African Sephardic communities.

While the music of the Sephardic romances was, like the romance texts, Spanish in origin, it is difficult to say what remains of the origin today because the earliest printed evidence of the Sephardic romance tunes is in the form of textual incipits of the sixteenth century and the earliest musical documentation is from the late nineteenth century. Israel J. Katz has vehemently referred to the Spanish heritage of the Sephardic Romancero as the "myth of the Spanish musical
legacy of the Sephardic Romancero" yet there are Spanish musical characteristics such as the various "Mi" (Phrygian) modes, simple rhythmic structure, limited ranges, a syllabic or neumatic nature and duple or triple meters in many of the romances, particularly those of the Western Mediterranean tradition. It is likely, as Katz has pointed out, that these Spanish characteristics are not remnants of the original Spanish tunes but the results of later Spanish influence due to the continuing cultural contacts that the Western Sephardim, and to a lesser extent, the Eastern Sephardim had with Spain and the Spanish culture. While it is possible that fragments of the "original" tunes remain in the present day Sephardic melodies, a comparison of these Sephardic melodies and the Spanish romances in the pliegos sueltos (broadsides), cancioneros and romanceros of the sixteenth century by Daniel Devoto did not reveal one historical ballad which resembled any of the modern Sephardic melodies. I have not yet found any comparison of the Sepharadic melodies to the modern Spanish versions of romances and folk songs such as those collected by Kurt Schindler and this would be an interesting study to undertake. These tunes, of course, have also undoubtedly changed during the centuries.


22 Katz, Judeo-Spanish Traditional Ballads I, 128.
French Musical Influences in the Sephardic Romancero

While it appears that the original Spanish musical legacy of the Sephardic Romancero has been lost, it is interesting that some of the musical characteristics of the medieval French chanson de geste, (the French Epic) have survived in the Sephardic romances. Only two examples of the chansons de geste in musical notation are known. The first example (Figure 5) is from Adam de la Halle’s pastoral play Le Jeu du Robin et Marion (circa 1280).

![Figure 5. Chanson de geste from Le Jeu du Robin et Marion.](image)

The second example (Figure 6) is from the anonymous epic Bataille de'Annezin:

![Figure 6. Chanson de geste from Bataille de'Annezin.](image)

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24 Ibid., p. 157: "Thuma de Bailloel was quite near to Seclin," (this translation is Gerson-Kiwi's).
Israel J. Katz has compared these two melodic fragments with a Greek version of the Sephardic romance *Arvoleras* (Figure 7):

![Melodic Fragment Example](image)

Reduction of the melody (according to Katz) and transposing up a fifth further facilitates the comparison (Figure 8).

![Melodic Skeleton](image)

Another medieval French form, the *chanson de toile* has been postulated by some writers as being segments of the

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25 Israel J. Katz, "Toward a Musical Study of the Judeo-Spanish *Romancero*," *Western Folklore*, XXI (April, 1962), 87: this phrase translates as "Trees! Gentle trees."
longer *chansons de geste* and as having a similar musical structure to these longer epics. According to Gerson-Kiwi, "as a genre it [the *chanson de geste*] seems to have been a favorite with women (doing needle work, "toile")" and this may bear some relation to the maintenance of the romance tradition among the Sephardic women.

The following are musical characteristics of the *chanson de geste* which may have influenced the musical heritage of the Sephardic Romancero:

1. the melodic pattern of a verse unit;
2. its narrative ("psalmodic") quality;
3. its phrasing with *ouvert* and *clos* cadences;
4. its initial phrases and melodic dominants;
5. its melismatic flexibility;
6. the "cellular" division of the tune;
7. its principle of varied repetition;
8. the repeated appearance of small bridge passages (the volta) in the cadences;
9. occasional refrains after greater verse units;
10. performance mainly by women.

One of these characteristics, the medieval French *ouvert* and *clos* (half and full) cadences, which is also found among the...
medieval Italian laude and the Spanish cantigas, is found in the Sephardic romances of the Eastern Mediterranean. However, as Katz has pointed out, this type of cadence has been typical of Greek songs since the Byzantine period. Similarly, Eleonora Noga Alberti has suggested that it would be erroneous to only discuss the ouvert and clos cadences as a medieval French phenomenon as this type cadence is also related to the Arabic-Turkish maquamat (modal) system.

Eastern and Jewish Musical Influences in the Sephardic Romancero

In addition to the musical remnants of the chanson de geste, the Sephardic Romancero shows great influence by the music of the Mediterranean cultures as well as by Jewish liturgical music. Some of the Mediterranean musical characteristics in the Sephardic romances are as follows: the "declamatory quality" used in the reciting of folk epics in many Oriental countries; the presence of the Arabic-Turkish singing styles; the "Arabic-Turkish concept of melodic development, of maqam improvisation and microtonal ornamentation." In addition, Maria Teresa Rubiato has noted

29 Katz, "Toward a Musical Study," p. 87.


that in the majority of Eastern civilizations, the women are designated as the singers of the non-serious music, i.e., the popular music and the hysterical funeral songs, whereas the men are designated as the singers of the serious music, i.e., the liturgical music. The Sephardic Romancero was both influenced by Jewish liturgical music and in turn reciprocated that influence. This is illustrated by the use of contrafact romance melodies in Hebrew prayers and piyutim (liturgical hymns). Contrafact melodies were not adhered to without the use of improvisation on the singer's part, as improvisation was so much part of the Oriental musical tradition, and, as an oral tradition, the romancero "rests on the impetus of improvisation."33

The practice of contrafactum in music is a phenomenon that has existed in both secular and liturgical music for centuries and perhaps since ancient times by Moslems, Christians and Jews. At times this practice was condemned by religious authorities, but even the harshest criticisms failed to suppress the use of contrafactum. Indeed, in the early seventeenth century, the piyut (Hebrew liturgical hymn) writer Menachem de Lonzano severely criticized the use of contrafact romance melodies by another piyut writer, Israel


de Nagara which he considered especially "repugnant" in the case of the use of the melody for the Spanish song *Muérome, mi alma, ay! muérome* ("I am dying oh my soul"), for the piyut *Mérôme cal mah cam râb hômeh* ("From the heights, how this people longs [for the redemption]"") which has a similar sounding title. 34 However, soon Lonzano himself had written a book of piyutim using romance melodies!

The use of contrafacta romance melodies for Hebrew hymns and prayers is not only important for the understanding of the musical processes which the romance melodies underwent, but it also has historical importance for the whole corpus of Sephardic balladry: it is the earliest printed evidence of the Sephardic Romancero that we possess. The use of romance melodies for piyutim is evidenced by the presence of textural incipits of Sephardic romances in the liturgical hymnals of the sixteenth through the twentieth centuries. These hymnals were popular song books that contained the texts only of the piyutim. Above the poems were printed the first words or the title of a Sephardic romance, the intention being that the singer should sing the hymn to the tune of the romance. The practise of printing songbooks without music is

common in folk music even today. In the case of the Sephardic hymnals, it is likely that the printing of the music was not economically feasible or that the general population could not read music, or that the publishers simply assumed that the tunes were known. The use of the romance incipit was a sort of musical short-hand which was very popular and "seemed to have evolved into a kind of internationally accepted make-shift notation."35

As they were popular songbooks, the hymnals were published cheaply, and not many have survived over the centuries. In spite of this obstacle, a thorough investigation of the romance incipits has been undertaken, largely through the efforts of Hanoch Avenary.36 Ballad incipits have been found in all the countries of the Spanish Diaspora, including Western Europe. Most of the hymnals are collections of many poets although a few are collections of single poets such as Israel de Nagara (three books published in the years 1587, 1599 and 1699), Menachem de Lonzano (one book known from the year 1618) and perhaps, Iosef Ganso (one book attributed to him from the eighteenth century). It is possible that these


books were prepared under the personal supervision of the piyut writers themselves.

Unfortunately, most of the research into the romance incipits is in the form of inquiries into which romances were used as textual incipits, how often they were used, what countries they are found in and in identifying ballads no longer found among the Sephardic tradition and "lost" Spanish ballads. I have found little research into the cultural significance of the incipits. For example, is there a relation between the meaning of the romance and the meaning of the piyut? Are the sounds similar (this was the case for the harsh criticism by Menachem de Lonzano of Israel Nagara)? Why is a particular romance melody used for a specific prayer? The only mention of any of these type of associations is by Gerson-Kiwi who mentions that

Certain romances or canciones . . . are used as model tunes for specific prayers when contents, mood, or image raises some sentimental or spiritual associations with that of the secular songs. Similarity of mood and context means also, in the musical aesthetics of the East, similarity of modal patterns and maquam melodies. Thus the contrafacture is initiated mainly through literary association.37

Therefore, if a singer could only read the piyut but not understand the Hebrew, he was probably familiar with romance

and could gain a general understanding of the pivut through the romance. An example of this use of contrafacture by literary association is found in the use of the melody of the romance Al deredor de la mi cama (Figure 9) for the pivut from the New Year service Sihu 1'immi (Figure 10): the story of the sacrifice of Isaac.

Figure 9. Al deredor de la mi cama, Sephardic romance.

Ibid., p. 164: "All around my bed, many physicians were crowded. They looked at one another, There remained no hope for me to be saved," (this translation is Gerson-Kiwi's).
Gerson-Kiwi's reduction of these two melodies (Figure 11) facilitates the comparison:

a. **Aleredor de la mi cama**

b. **Sibu l'immi**

Figure 11. Melodic reductions of **Aleredor de la mi cama** and **Sibu l'immi**.40

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39 Ibid., p. 165: "Relate to my mother that her joy has waned, The son whom she bore at the age of ninety [Has become the lot of the fire and the sacrificial knife,]" (this translation is Gerson-Kiwi's).

40 Ibid., p. 165.
In spite of the fact that even today, prayers and hymns are sung to romance melodies, one cannot assume that these are the "original" melodies that the Jews brought with them out of Spain. As with the other romances, these tunes were probably lost over a period of time. In addition, it is difficult to say which came first, the prayer or hymn melody, or the romance melody? Likewise, was a particular characteristic originally French or was it Arabic? In short, as was said previously, there is no such thing as pure folk music; rather, folk music is a synthesis of musical styles and elements which are drawn from various cultures.

Musical Style Traditions in Sephardic Romancero

It is a mistake to assume that the Spanish Jews were one homogeneous group with one musical tradition. Indeed, they were from various Christian and Moslem regions in Spain, each of these regions possessing its own musical traditions. The Sephardim undoubtedly carried off with them a rich variety of romance melodies and texts. Over a period of time, even the most cherished tunes were probably lost, especially in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries when, as previously mentioned, relations with Spain became more sporadic and relations between the individual Eastern and Western Mediterranean Sephardic communities became less close.
It was most likely at this time that the "essential stylistic differences between the individual ballad repertoires of the Eastern and Moroccan Sephardic communities began to appear on a textual level and probably also on a musical level as well." Eventually, as Israel J. Katz has pointed out, two musical style traditions developed in Sephardic balladry, one originating in Morocco and representing the Western Mediterranean and the other originating in Turkey, representing the Eastern Mediterranean. Katz has also proposed a possibility of a third musical style tradition originating in Greece.

As mentioned in Chapter III, the poetic form of the Spanish romance consists of sixteen-syllable verses divided into two octo-syllabic hemistichs, leaving the former hemistich without rhyme and the latter rhyming in assonance. Typically, the basic musical format of the Sephardic romances parallels the poetic form, that is, the music is strophic with the melodic strophes corresponding to the textual verses. However, there are many variations on this format. The basic tune may be subject to variation corresponding to irregularities in the text or to the expressive tendencies.


42 Katz, Judeo-Spanish Traditional Ballads I, p. 132.
of the singer. The range of the melody generally lies within an octave and the melody moves diatonically.

The following characteristics are typical of Western romances: the melody is modal "including major and minor;" "some ballads have distinct triadic and pentatonic characteristics;" the pitch is in accordance with the Western traditional concept of pitch which uses whole and half steps; microtones are not used; the tempo and meter are regular; the rhythmic scheme is constant, corresponding to the "melodic scheme [and] irregularities in the rhythm are caused by the addition or omission of syllables in the versification;" thus the phrase lengths are quite regular. The degree of vocal ornamentation is slight and of the neumatic type, that is, ornaments consisting of two or three notes are used. The singer's tessitura is generally in a medium register and the vocal style corresponds to that of "indigenous Spanish balladry."43

The romance Girineldo, seen in Figure 12, is from the Moroccan tradition of Tangier and was sung by Bela Alpaz in Jerusalem, in 1961. Shown are the first three verses (verse two is repeated) with the "melodic quatrains strophe AA'BC."

Figure 12. Girineldo, Sephardic Romance from the Moroccan tradition.44

44 Ibid., p. 76: "Girineldo, Girineldo, my fine knight, Oh, who could have you tonight for these three hours at my service! --Since I am but your servant, my lady, you must be mocking me . . . ., (this translation is Katz's, loc. cit., p. 75).
The Eastern melodies can be differentiated from the Western in a number of ways: the melodies follow the accords of the Turkish-Arabic maqumat system; microtonal intonation is used; the tempo varies from a strictly governed meter to a "parlando-rubato" style with a chant-like quality, sometimes greatly varied in rhythm and meter; the phrase lengths are irregular and vary "according to the amount of ornamentation" which is abundant, "especially at the end of phrases" and melismatic in nature; the vocal tessitura is in a medium high register and the vocal style is "typical of Middle-Eastern vocal practises." As mentioned previously, medieval ouvert and clos cadences are found in this repertoire which may suggest an older style tradition than the Western tradition, perhaps due to greater isolation and likewise according to Eric Hornbostel's maxim that "an object or idea found in scattered regions of a certain district is older than an object found everywhere in the same."46

The romance La adúltera, seen in Figure 13, is from the Eastern Mediterranean tradition, was sung by Ester Maimara, a native of Jerusalem, in 1961. The musical form of this

45 Ibid., p. 75.

romance is AA'B and the second hemistich of each verse is repeated (in the first verse the first hemistich is repeated twice). According to Israel J. Katz, "the melody bears characteristics of the Sikah maqam."

\[ \text{Figure 13. Una lunes por la manana, Sephardic romance from Eastern Mediterranean tradition.} \]

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47 Katz, "A Judeo-Spanish Romancero," p. 76: "Early on a Monday morning, I took my bow and my arrow in my right hand," (this is Katz's translation).
Ballads of Greek origin are typified by a fifteen rather than sixteen-syllable line which is divided into seven and eight-syllable hemistichs respectively. Musically, the first hemistich ends in an *ouvert* cadence and the latter, in a *clos* cadence. Another Greek influence is the use of a "common poetic meter based on quantity rather than quality," that is non-accentual in terms of language but structured by a poetic meter somewhat akin to the rhythmic modes ascribed to by some medieval theorists. 48

The romance *Morikos mis morikos*, seen in Figure 14, is from the Greek Sephardic tradition and was sung by Daniel Arzuz in Tel Aviv in 1960. This romance is in the Dorian mode.

Over all, it is apparent that, as in the case of the poetry, the North African musical tradition is more "Western" or Spanish sounding than the Eastern. As with the poetry, this does not mean that it is closer to the fifteenth and sixteenth-century Spanish ballad music; rather, as we have stated before, the proximity of Spain and North Africa lent itself to cultural relations to which the North African Sephardim were subject. In spite of the Spanish musical characteristics of the North African romances, deviations

are found in these forms which are also found in "their counterparts in the east." This is quite logical since North Africa was also part of the greater Islamic world."50

49 Ibid., p. 90: these verses translate as "Moors, those under the kina (part of a ship?), that are bringing a female slave, O-ho-ho! A captive slave that is not from a noble family or from Kastoria, O-ho-ho!"

50 Ibid., pp. 90-91.
CHAPTER V

THE ROMANCERO AS A FUNCTION
OF SEPHARDIC CULTURE

Uses and Functions of the Romancero in
the Sephardic World

The uses and functions of the romancero in the Sephardic world can be understood at two different levels, the external, sensorial level and the internal, socio-psychological level. These two levels of functioning are not independent of each other, rather they have worked intertwined together, the sensorial uses of the romancero supporting the socio-psychological functions, and the socio-psychological functions perpetuating the entity of the romancero tradition and hence, the basic sensorial functions. The romancero tradition rests on these internal and external factors and simultaneously operates within the Sephardic culture which nourishes (or conversely, starves) the tradition, depending on the economic as well as the spiritual well-being of the community. Thus the romancero is a reflection of the Sephardic culture.

At its most basic level, the romancero has functioned as entertainment for the Sephardim, particularly for the
Sephardic women. The romances were sung by the Sephardic women as lullabies, at family gatherings, at parties and at public celebrations such as weddings and circumcisions. They were also sung as children's songs. Maria Teresa Rubiato recorded in 1965 that Dr. Sadikaro, a Sephardic resident of Eskopia, Yugoslavia related that he learned the romances as a child in Monastir, Yugoslavia:

... from the lips of his mother, over-all, and from his relatives and friends. They interpreted them at any time, in unison, "in the streets, or when the women would sit and sew at the doors of their houses, and for any reason, in order to enliven a gathering of friends or relatives . . . ."

According to Samelson, the romances were a form of pre-electronic entertainment:

They [the romances] were sung on special occasions, such as ladies' gatherings (called convites), for such purposes as honouring one of the visiting ladies' or celebrating the cutting of an infant's first tooth. Any such occasion was opportune for one of the guests to display the quality of her voice, provided it was worthy to be heard. She introduced her presentation by first explaining the contents of her "Romanza" and charmed the gathering with stories pertaining to the song in question. She then began to chant, stressing points of emotion as the drama developed, at times.

1 Maria Teresa Rubiato, "El repertorio musical de un sefardi," Sefarad XXV (1965), 455: "... de labios de su madre, sobre todo, y de sus parientes y amigos. Se interpretaban sin ocasión fija, a una sola voz, 'por las calles, o cuando las mujeres se sentaban a coser a las puertas de sus casas, y con cualquier motivo, para animar una reunión de amigos o parientes . . . ."
exalting virtue, at times narrating stories of unrequited love, of infidelity or faithfulness, of supreme sacrifices and of tardy repentence. Each "Romanza" served the purpose of an effectively presented play. In modern terms we might compare its effects to the impact and the impression which a well-acted film would have on a rapt audience.²

Of all the occasions at which the romances were sung, which range from very informal gatherings to elaborate celebrations, it was perhaps the wedding where the romancero tradition was perpetuated to its fullest extent. According to Raphael Patai,

the greatest and most joyous ceremony known to folk societies is the wedding. Accordingly, we find much folklore material is concentrated around the wedding among the Sephardi Jews, as is the case in practically all folk societies.³

The Sephardic wedding was not a single ceremony but a series of ceremonies, customs and traditions spread over several months. The following celebrations were typical of Eastern Sephardic wedding customs but it is likely that similar traditions occurred in the North African communities. A few


months before the wedding the sewing of the asugar or trousseau was begun by the mother and sisters of the bride. Mattresses for the engaged couple were made on a special day by women relatives and friends. On the Saturday before the wedding was the almusama or almosama, a tradition wherein the bride had to sit, serious and still, in the midst of the women folk who danced and sang around her. The next day was the preciado where the asugar (trousseau) was sent in a "festive, musical procession" to the groom's house and its contents were evaluated. The groom then sent his boycha, his equivalent of the asugar composed of a silk cloth wrapped around "bathing utensils and sweets" in a procession of men back to the bride's home. The following day, the woman folk accompanied the bride to the Turkish baths. The next day the wedding took place and during the week following the ceremony, the bride and groom stayed at home and friends and relatives came over each day for festivities where blessings were recited and much singing and eating took place. At all these celebrations and processions, of which many were gatherings of the Sephardic women, the romances as well as other songs

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were sung. In addition, the communal nature of the gatherings not only afforded the opportunity for the perpetuation of the romancero tradition within the community but also was instrumental in maintaining the accuracy of the oral tradition. In his discussion of the Sephardic community of Rhodes, Angel notes that

since the romances were often sung at family gatherings and public celebrations, the singers and audiences could check one another and would correct any deviation from the traditional words and/or melodies. The community was a relatively small in number and closely-knit, factors which also tended to strengthen their cultural traditions.6

It is curious that the Sephardim identified so strongly with the Spanish Romancero, a Spanish Christian tradition which originated in a country that was essentially hostile to the Jews and whose narrative content had little in common with daily Sephardic life. According to William R. Bascom, there are four ways in which folklore functions in any culture:

1) . . . as a mirror of culture; 2) as a means of validating culture; 3) as a pedagogicial device;

and 4) as a tool for maintaining conformity to accepted patterns of behaviour.  

The Sephardic ballads do not mirror the Sephardic culture precisely—there were no knights in armor or damsels in distress in the aljama (Jewish quarter) but the ballads serve as a "common frame of reference by which each member feels bonded to the group. They function as specific codes by which communal identity is transmitted and allegiance reinforced."  

Perhaps the Sephardim identified with the kings and queens of the romances because they thought of themselves as aristocrats, as possessing a higher culture than that of both their gentile and non-Sephardic Jewish neighbors. According to Angel, the Sephardic Jews have a strong sense of personal pride. Sephardim do not look at themselves as lowly, humiliated people, but as worthy and dignified citizens. They face man and God with self-respect. Rich and poor, learned and ignorant, all have a feeling of self-worth and dignity.

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As discussed in Chapter III, the ballads also reflect the culture in a broader sense: because of the cultural exchanges that took place in their new environments, transformations occurred in the language as well as in the music and other aspects of Sephardic life which were then carried over into the romancero.

The romancero functioned pedagogically in the area of morals and values. An example of this is the romance *Una ramica* (or *matica*) *de ruda*, which is a dialogue between a mother and her daughter. When the mother discovers that her daughter has a young admirer she argues that a "bad husband is better than a new love" and that her daughter should not be tempted into sin. Ending the ballad the "Mother pleads for the daughter to repent, [and] not to let herself be 'lost among the 70 nations,' i.e., not to be lost to the Jewish people."  

It is easy to imagine the influence that this romance would have effected in gatherings of women such as those in the celebrations surrounding the wedding.

It is interesting to note that the Sephardim sang many ballads whose themes of adultery and other immoral behavior seem unlikely material for the folklore of such a religious

\[\text{10 Angel, Rhodes, p. 139. The 70 nations are the descendents of Noah. The title of this romance translates as "A little sprig of ruda, a type of plant.}\]
people. According to Angel, there is no conflict in the Sephardic culture between love and religious life (although there are definite injunctions against immoral behavior). Love was considered part of the human experience and the Sephardim seem to have a practical approach to the subject.  

"The religion-secularism clash that so much bothers orthodox Ashkenazim is irrelevant for the Sephardic mind." Perhaps this is derived from the general Sephardic outlook on life characterized by "synthesis, worldliness and tolerance." According to Ab. Levy, the creation of a workable synthesis between the Torah and secular knowledge resulted in a certain worldliness enabling a degree of positive integration with the gentile community. This resulted in a tolerance and leniency in Halachic [Jewish law] interpretation, which was usually clear cut and free from casuistry.

Scholars have posited many reasons for the maintenance of the romancero tradition among the Sephardim. Menéndez Pidal ascertained that the conservation of tradition is a very strong element in Jewish culture:

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11 Ibid., p. 139.
12 Angel, "Sephardic Culture," p. 278.
14 Ibid., p. 9.
Consider the amazing case of a modern people that maintain live, directly and efficiently, the tradition that goes back 20 centuries before Christ. What modern people conserves national traditions of 35 or 40 centuries ago?15

Menéndez Pidal's point is well taken yet propositions such as the following of Samelson, are romanticized and mystificated notions about the Sephardi heritage.

Sephardi Jewry perpetuated the Judeo-Spanish Romancero after its expulsion from its beloved Spain—through five centuries—out of their profound attachment to the customs and tradition they brought from the country which they loved and cherished. They cultivated this and they bewailed the loss of their Peninsular homeland in a manner similar to Jews in their universal exile who, facing the Wailing Wall, during millennia lamented the destruction of the Temple of the Jews.16

The Sephardim sang the romances not because they felt an historical obligation to Spain, but because these songs were a vital part of Sephardic culture. One of the functions of these songs may be likened to the function of the commercial

15Ramón Menéndez Pidal, "El romancero sefardi: su extraordinario carácter conservador," The Sephardi Heritage, p. 552: "Considérese el caso asombroso de un pueblo moderno que mantiene viva, directa y eficiente, la tradición que remonta a veinte siglos antes de Cristo. Que pueblo moderno conserva tradiciones nacionales de hace 35 o 40 siglos?"

16Samelson, "Romances and Songs," p. 531.
entertainment produced in the United States during the years of the Great Depression. Speaking of the Jews of Rhodes, Marc Angel observes that "in the dull, gray-brown atmosphere of the juderia, Rhodes Jews sang songs which lifted their imaginations from their surroundings and which gave their everyday emotions added poignancy."\(^{17}\) The romances helped keep the Sephardim's "imagination and sense of beauty alive and active;" to rise above the drudgery of daily life.\(^{18}\) Perhaps it is due to their positive outlook on life that the Sephardim did not deplore their poverty and dullness of everyday life. Rather, they maintained a joi de vivre which manifested itself in "their many parties and gatherings, in their love for music, in their enthusiastic communal singing."\(^{19}\) This optimistic attitude may have been particularly beneficial to the Sephardim of North Africa who largely lived in poverty and under oppressive Moslem regimes and to the Sephardic women of both the Eastern and Western Mediterranean who lived confined to the surroundings of their homes.

\(^{17}\) Angel, *Rhodes*, p. 138.
\(^{19}\) Angel, "Sephardic Culture," p. 278.
The Romancero as a Phenomenon of the Sephardic Women's Culture

Indeed, the tradition of the Sephardic romancero is overwhelmingly a phenomenon of the Sephardic women. It is primarily the women who have sung these ballads and who have taught them to their children, thus perpetuating the romancero tradition. In order to understand this phenomenon, it is necessary to assess the situation of women in Sephardic life.

As in most cultures, it has been the traditional role of Jewish women to take care of the home and children. In the case of the Sephardic women, the male-dominated institutions of Judaism and Islam have contributed to the formation of an essentially separate woman's culture, closed off from the economic, political and much of the educational and religious factors of the Sephardic culture. In Turkey, married women had to dress modestly, "covered from head to foot" even inside their own homes. According to Molho,

The woman didn't go out into the street except in the case of necessity, to visit a sick person, to console a family in mourning, to assist at the birthing of a neighbor or of a relative. When relatives and neighbors got together for celebrations such as weddings, circumcisions, etc., these were for the

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20 Michael Molho, Usos y costumbres de los sefardies de Salonica (Madrid, Barcelona, 1950), p. 163: "vestida de pies a cabeza."
women an occasion to interrupt, every now and then, the monotony of her life of reclusion.21

Women attended religious services only on the High Holidays, Rosh HaShannah and Yom Kippur.

In the early eighteenth century, a resurgence of religious fanaticism resulted in various rabbinic ordinances that placed major restrictions on the activity of the women. Included in these ordinances was a restriction prohibiting women from buying flour at the mill except when no male was available to perform the task. Women were prohibited from visiting the city gardens. Later ordinances forbade Sephardic women from attending activities organized by non-Jews, from going for water between twilight and sunrise and from working at shops. These ordinances aimed at completely segregating the sexes and were greatly influenced by the Moslem culture. According to Molho, "Jewish customs were greatly influenced by the cloistered life of the Turkish woman."22

21Ibid., p. 164: "La mujer no salía a la calle más que en caso de necesidad, para visitar a un enfermo, consolar a una familia de luto, asistir al parto de una vecina o de una pariente. Los días de fiesta de parientes o vecinos, como celebración de bodas, circuncisiones, etc. eran para ella una ocasión de interrumpir de cuando en cuando la monotonía de su vida de reclusión."

22Ibid., p. 165: "Las costumbres judías se vieron fuertemente influida por la vida de enclaustramiento de la mujer turca."
This isolation of the Sephardic women created a distinct woman's culture. Outside of male members of their own family, the women associated with each other. Although Sephardic women were generally illiterate, in the latter half of the nineteenth century Sephardic girls began to attend school—first Catholic and Protestant missionary school and later the non-religious Jewish schools of the Alliance Israelite Universelle and rarely, to communal Jewish schools. As a result of their cloistered life, they spoke only Judeo-Spanish to each other and to their families and they did not ordinarily attend synagogue or receive Hebrew education. Their restricted secular life afforded little opportunity to learn Arabic, Turkish, Greek, etc., although especially in more recent times, Sephardic women have been bi- and trilingual to a certain degree.

Women associated with women. They learned from each other and they entertained each other. The isolation they experienced from the rest of the world contributed to their nurturing of some of the distinctly Sephardic aspects of their culture: the Judeo-Spanish language and the romances. Their world was almost totally Sephardic and it is logical that the romance tradition is strongest among the women.
As mentioned in Chapter IV, Maria Teresa Rubiato has asserted another cultural element which contributed to the romancero's being maintained by the Sephardic women: the status of women in the musical life of Eastern civilizations. According to Rubiato, in the majority of Eastern civilizations,

... the women do not take part in the song and in the performance of the religious or synagogal music, they are tacitly permitted only to cultivate an inferior type of music. Perhaps here is the reason that the musicologist will find 'in the music of the women of the first civilizations, the most primitive stages of musical development.'

One sign of this primitivism is the occasional use of simple percussive instruments such as drums and finger cymbals as an accompaniment for the romances. (The use of percussive instruments is even more characteristic in the songs of the Yemenite Jewish women.) Another Eastern cultural element affecting the preservation of the romancero tradition among the Sephardic women is the delegation of, in Eastern cultures, the "serious" singing, such as the singing of the liturgy

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23 Maria Teresa Rubiato, "Notas sobre el orientalismo de la música sefardi," Sefarad, XXVII (1967), 423: ... las mujeres no toman parte en el canto y ejecución de la música religiosa o sinagogal, quedándoles tácitamente permitido cultivar únicamente un tipo inferior de música. Quizá esté aquí la razón de que la el musicólogo historiador encuentre "en la música de las mujeres de las primeras civilizaciones las más primitivas etapas del desarrollo musical."
(which necessitates "the serenity of masculine voices") to the men and the more hysterical type singing, such as funeral laments and the very happy singing at weddings, to the women. How aptly this applies to the Sephardic culture where women do not chant in the synagogues but are often the official wailers at funerals and the singers at weddings.

The Process of Dynamic Re-Creation in the Sephardic Romancero

While it was the women who maintained the romancero tradition, it appears to be the men who afforded the possibility of the transformation in language, music, content and occasionally form, that occurred in the tradition. It was the Sephardic men who had the social, economic, political and cultural contacts with the Moroccan, Turkish, and other societies and it was the men, who having learned the languages, music and customs of these other cultures, brought these cultural influences into their own communities and homes. Therefore, it seems likely that the dynamic re-creation that occurred in the Sephardic Romancero and which helped to keep the tradition alive, was initiated by the Sephardic men and

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Ibid., p. 425: "La serenidad de las voces masculinas."
then passed to the Sephardic women. It is possible to imagine a scene wherein a husband, having learned a Greek ballad at the marketplace, comes home and sings it to his wife, who then later incorporates certain words and various melodic lines into her own verbal and musical vocabularies. Eventually, these foreign verbal and melodic elements would have reached the romancero.

Paul Benichou and Diego Catalán have stressed that the transmission of the romancero and the changes that occurred in it were the result of both the success and failure of the individual and collective memories as well as of creative and inventive processes. Therefore, it is possible that in the Salonican version of the romance *La expulsión de los judíos de Portugal* mentioned in Chapter III, *moros* may have become *turkos* either, because of an individual slip of memory—representing either the collective memory or the acceptance for various reasons by the community of singers—or because of a creative idea of one or more individuals which was then adopted by the community. Whatever the reason

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for the transformation, such changes probably became so permanent that eventually the original version was forgotten.

Social Background for the Maintenance of the Romancero Tradition in the Sephardic Culture

The processes of memory and invention in the Sephardic romancero rest on the background of "very specific social circumstances." As the Eastern Sephardic romancero has virtually completed its cycle of existence, it is a perfect vehicle for the understanding of the relationship of the sociology of the Sephardic community and the life of the romancero. According to Benmayor, the romancero has passed through several stages in the Eastern Sephardic communities:

- A period of expansion and re-creation of the poetic repertoire in the new context of the Ottoman empire from the 16th to the 19th centuries; a period of declining popularity vis-à-vis other poetic forms in the late 19th and early 20th centuries; a moment of temporary vitality after the new wave of emigration to the United States in the early decades of the 20th century; and the current state of near extinction in this American context.

As was explained in Chapter II, the Sephardic communities in the Turkish Empire were essentially independent,

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27 Ibid., p. 155.
self-governed, self-perpetuating institutions that operated as millets under the central government of the Sultan. Until the breakdown of the Turkish Empire in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Jewish communities enjoyed the status of an economically successful, privileged minority in an economically prosperous empire. According to Benmayor,

Sefhardim were able to insure the reproduction of the internal well-being of the community through the particular economic role they played in the larger economic structure ... The Sultans openly recognized the key role Jews played in the economic life of the Empire and thus granted them social and religious protection. 28

Their independent community status was beneficial to the Sefhardim in that the Jews were free to maintain their religious and cultural practices. Through the perpetuation of these practices the ideological foundations of the community were fostered, and this in turn, created a feeling of solidarity within the community. Thus, the Sefhardic and religious and cultural identity was positively reinforced by the community which in turn created an environment suitable for the maintenance of cultural and religious traditions.

Both the synagogue and the home preserved religious traditions and ideology, but the home was "the immediate

28 Ibid., p. 158.
context for the transmission and survival of secular traditions: language, rituals, artistic activities including ballad singing." The romances, like the Judeo-Spanish language, were a distinctly Sephardic element of life that transmitted a feeling of "otherness" to the Sephardim from the Christians, Moslems and other Jews. These cultural traditions then, help to constitute what made the Sephardim feel "Sephardic." According to Benmayor, "singing romances then became one of the many ways of expressing and handing down the Sephardic way of life." The Jews did not sing the Spanish ballads because they longed to return to Spain but because the romances "functioned actively as signifiers of cultural differentiation--in this case, of a separate ethnic, historical and religious tradition." But the Sephardic romancero did not operate in a cultural vacuum: its very existence rested on the economic and social situation of the Sephardic community. In a sense, the romancero was caught between the two forces at work in the Jewish community, the internal forces of the community which sought to maintain the traditions and independence of the

29 Ibid., p. 159.
30 Ibid., p. 159.
31 Ibid., p. 159.
32 Ibid., p. 160.
community and the external economic and cultural forces of the gentile world which pressured the community out of its isolated existence, into the larger Turkish culture. The economic well-being of the Sephardic community allowed the community to retain its independent position and Sephardic character, yet the cultural influences that were effected by the economic activity of the Sephardim competed with the preservation of the Sephardic culture.

The conservative ambience and independent status of the Sephardic communities remained stable until the nineteenth century. At this time, changes in the social and political structures of the Turkish Empire infringed upon the relative isolation of the Sephardim. The resulting cultural contacts brought many more external influences on the Sephardic culture and hence on the Sephardic Romancero.

As mentioned in Chapter III, the nineteenth century saw the economic, political and cultural decline of the Turkish Empire. These factors directly contributed to the deterioration of the Sephardic communities, which likewise suffered economically, politically and culturally. External pressures were compounded by internal social and religious conflicts. Westernization of the Empire brought in European culture which encroached upon Sephardic culture. Even the schools of the Alliance Israélite Universelle (which were attempts to
help the Sephardim) taught in French and Italian, thus contributing to the deterioration of the Judeo-Spanish language.

The popularization of Western culture changed the way in which the Sephardim viewed their own culture. Romances were printed in newspapers with French translations. "Popular traditions suddenly became 'folklore.'"33

Due to external forces, the Sephardic community was no longer one of the many protected minorities of a heterogenous empire but had the new status of a minority within a large, homogeneous, national culture. The internal solidarity of the tightly-knit Jewish community was supplanted by a separation of economic classes, the middle and upper classes developing more individualistic lifestyles as a result of their economic success and cultural ventures. The romancero tradition continued throughout these social changes, but its position as a symbol of "otherness" had less significance now as the fever of modernization swept over the Sephardic communities. According to Benmayor, "the romancero passed gradually into a stage where mnemonic transmission supplanted active re-creation, foreshadowing the state of near extinction."34

33 Ibid., p. 162.
34 Ibid., p. 162.
As mentioned in Chapter II, between the first and second world wars, many Sephardic Jews from the Eastern Mediterranean emigrated to the United States and to a lesser extent, to Western Europe, Central and South Africa and Central and South America. During the early part of this century, the Sephardim were but one of the disadvantaged immigrant minorities who provided cheap labor for the rapidly expanding American industry. In these difficult times, Sephardic ghettos were formed in urban centers such as New York City and, as a matter of economic necessity, the extended family unity was maintained. The close familial and communal structures were beneficial for the fostering of Sephardic culture and in these early decades of the twentieth century, the Sephardic Romancero experienced a temporary revival.

This cultural renaissance however, was "short-lived. Upward mobility was made possible by the intense growth and monopolistic consolidation of power in the U. S. economy since the 40's." Following the trend of their Ashkenazic neighbors, the Sephardim became "self-made" people, sent their children to universities and moved to the suburbs. The breakdown of the Sephardic community resulted in the rapid

\[35\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 163.}\]
disappearance of the Judeo-Spanish language and the social and ideological context necessary for the maintenance of the Sephardic cultural tradition deteriorated. The status of the romancero as a symbol of Sephardic identity was now irrelevant and except in a few instances, the Sephardic Romancero fell out of use as an active spontaneous element of Sephardic culture.

Though the history of the Jews of North Africa differs from that of the Eastern Mediterranean, the ultimate fate of the romancero in the two communities has been the same. As mentioned previously, some factors which affected the Sephardic culture of the North African Jews were the cultural contacts with Spain and the Spanish people (as a result of both friendly and hostile intervention by Spain in North Africa), political intervention by France and England and the indigenous Islamic culture. Compared to the privileged position of the Jews in the Turkish Empire, the North African Jews suffered miserably. Yet despite their being persecuted by the Vichy government in French North Africa during World War II, they were largely spared from the hands of the Nazis, while the Jews of the Eastern Mediterranean were virtually annihilated. It is likely that the North African Sephardic Romancero met its greatest downfall in the mid-twentieth century after the almost mass emigration of the Jews of these countries to Israel, France, and the United States.
In the modern societies of the twentieth century, folk culture stands little chance of survival. In the United States, the work of scholars such as David Bunis and Marc Angel have created a resurgence of interest in the Sephardic culture among Ashkenazim and Sephardim, and there is a tremendous amount of scholarly activity in the area of the Sephardic Romancero. Though these actions may indeed foster some perpetuation of the tradition and help to record the romancero tradition before it is lost entirely, it is unlikely that without a strong conscious effort by the Sephardic (and possibly Ashkenazic) Jews, the Sephardic Romancero tradition will last much beyond the turn of the twenty-first century. It is hoped that this paper has created a broader understanding of the Sephardic Romancero and the historical, political and cultural elements which have contributed to the maintainance of the romance tradition in Sephardic life.
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