

La alegría de Jako: A Judeo-Spanish Song as a Reflection of Linguistic and Cultural Syncretism

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Abstract

Traditional songs have always held a particularly prominent role in the daily life and celebrations of the Sephardim, the descendants of Jews expelled from the Iberian Peninsula, or Sepharad, in 1492 and beyond. The Sephardic diaspora, which from the end of the fifteenth century expanded across the Ottoman lands of the Mediterranean basin and parts of Western Europe, saw the consolidation of a unique supra-national space where Jewish, Hispanic and local cultural elements converged to give way to a remarkable example of cultural and linguistic syncretism. It was within this environment that Salonika (Thessaloniki) established itself as City and Mother in Israel and became an unprecedented example of an urban settlement where Sephardic Jews represented, until the first half of the twentieth century, the most numerous demographic group. In this article, I choose a traditional Sephardic song from Salonika, 'La alegría de Jako' (The Joy of Jako) in order to illustrate how its hybrid textual and musical characteristics reflect the diversity of life in a city which became a symbol of the vitality of Sephardic culture in the Diaspora.

Keywords: Sephardim; Jews, Sephardic; Judeo-Spanish; Salonika, Gulf (of Greece); Oral tradition

Introduction

The Sephardic Jews, or *Sephardim*, represent, alongside the Ashkenazi Jews or *Ashkenazim*, the second main ethnic and liturgical group of Judaism. Although the contemporary use of the term *Sephardi* often denotes Jews of various, predominantly Oriental backgrounds,¹ for the purposes of this study I will refer to *Sephardim* uniquely as the descendants of the Jews expelled from Iberia, i.e. *Sepharad*,² at the end of the Medieval Period (Spain, 1492, Portugal, 1496) and later.

¹ The Hebrew term *Sfaradim Tehorim*, 'pure Sephardim', refers to those Jews who are historical descendants from the exiles of Spain and Portugal. In addition to this, and especially in Israel, *Sephardi* is an adjective also used to denote the *Mizrachi*, or Oriental (i.e. other Ottoman, north-African, Yemenite, Asian etc.) Jews who historically adhered to the Sephardic religious rite, which differs from the rite observed by Ashkenazic communities.

² The term *Sepharad* is found in the Book of Prophet Obadiah, verse 1:20: 'These exiles of the Israelites who are in Halah shall possess Phoenicia as far as Zarephath; and the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad shall possess the towns of the Negeb' (*Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version*, 893). This refers originally to an

According to available data, the current worldwide Sephardic population amounts to ca. 3.5 million,³ within a global Jewish population of 14,410,700.⁴ Important Sephardic communities are especially found, among other countries, in Israel, Turkey, France, and the United States. Out of the current 3.5 million estimated Sephardic Jews, only approximately 112,000 according to Ethnologue (2017) - or 200,000, according to the web server Ladinokomunita⁵ - still retain and use in varying degrees the Judeo-Spanish language, which is now considered a minority language in a state of attrition,⁶ but which was in the past a vibrant vernacular with a rich oral tradition and flourishing literary production.⁷

Juedo Spanish

Judeo-Spanish, the language of the Mediterranean and former Ottoman Sephardic communities, is known under various terms, which are context-dependent. The term Judeo-Spanish itself is a relative neologism introduced by linguists at the beginning of the twentieth century, to indicate the mixed nature of the language, which draws its linguistic basis from Spanish (mainly late Medieval Castilian with the addition of other Iberian Romance elements) and incorporates Hebrew elements, with the addition of linguistic material from the many languages of contact. Among its speakers, this distinctive linguistic variety which from the beginning of the seventeenth century⁸ evolves independently of Spanish in the Eastern Diaspora, is known as *español*, *djudyó*, or *djudezmo* (meaning ‘Spanish’ and ‘Jewish’, respectively) in the Ottoman lands of the Eastern Mediterranean, and *haketiya*, possibly from the Arabic *hekaya* or *hakaita*, meaning ‘clever saying’⁹ in North Africa. The term *Ladino*,¹⁰ which is currently used especially in Israel to refer to the Judeo-Spanish vernacular, denotes, since the twelfth century, the language code used to translate Jewish sacred texts into Romance, i.e. it is a *calque hagiolanguage*.¹¹

In the past, the Judeo-Spanish vernacular has been often referred to (especially by Spanish philologists) as a living repository of Medieval Spanish, as a linguistic fossil of sorts,¹² and indeed linguistic archaism is one its most striking features and one that undoubtedly

unidentified place of residence of the exiles of Jerusalem and has been, since the Middle Ages, associated with the most Westerly part of the European continent, the Iberian Peninsula. In Ivrit, or Modern Hebrew, the term *sfarad* is synonymous with Spain.

³ Kern, Soeren. 'Spain's Law on Citizenship for Sephardic Jews "Does Not Right a Wrong"'. Last modified June, 21, 2015, <http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/6010/spain-citizenship-jews>

⁴ Berman Jewish Databank. 'World Jewish Population 2015 - Sergio DellaPergola (American Jewish Year Book)'. Accessed September, 30, 2017, <http://www.jewishdatabank.org/Studies/details.cfm?StudyID=803>

⁵ Ladinokomunita is a web forum dedicated to themes of Sephardic interest. The main requisite for joining the forum is that all communication be conducted in Judeo-Spanish.

<http://www.sephardicstudies.org/komunita.html>

⁶ See Harris, Tracy K. *Death of a Language – The history of Judeo-Spanish* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994), and Harris, Tracy K. 'The state of Ladino today'. *European Judaism* 44/1 (2011): 51-61.

⁷ In Ottoman times, Judeo-Spanish became so widespread among Eastern Mediterranean merchants and tradesmen that it became a commercial *lingua franca*, reflecting the prominent role played by Sephardim in Eastern Mediterranean trade. See Mazower, Mark. *Salonica, City of Ghosts* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), 51-52.

⁸ Sephiha, Haïm-Vidal, *Le judéo-espagnol* (Paris: Éditions Entente, 1986), 57.

⁹ Díaz Mas, Paloma. *Sephardim: The Jews From Spain*, trans. George G. Zucker (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 75.

¹⁰ Not to be confused with Ladin, the Romance language spoken in the Dolomite mountains and South Tyrol, in Northern Italy.

¹¹ For a discussion of Ladino as a *calque hagiolanguage*, see Sephiha, Haïm-Vidal, *Le ladino (judéo-espagnol canque), Deutéronome, Versions de Constantinople (1547) et de Ferrare (1553). Édition, étude linguistique et lexicque* (Paris: Éditions Hispaniques, 1973).

¹² Díaz Mas, *Sephardim*, 77-78.

fascinated Spanish philologists when they ‘discovered’ the North-African and Oriental Sephardic communities in the late nineteenth century. However, such a statement would be overly simplifying. To focus solely on the archaism and conservatism of some of the language's components would be to ignore its essence as a language of fusion and innovation: Judeo-Spanish is a remarkable example of assimilation of disparate linguistic elements and linguistic creativity, in a way quite similar to Yiddish, the language of Ashkenazi Jewry.¹³

Indeed, this propensity towards adaptation and cultural syncretism is a defining feature not only of the Judeo-Spanish language, but of Ottoman Sephardic culture as a whole, as documented by the song piece at the heart of this study, the *rebetiko* 'La alegría de Jako'. Leaving aside Judaism and the customs associated with religious worship, traditional secular song has always been an important element of Sephardic cultural identity. Sephardic songs in a variety of genres and themes have traditionally been an integral part of community life and family celebrations. It is interesting to observe however that the role of traditional songs does not seem to be exclusively dependent on the vitality of the Judeo-Spanish language, in which they were exclusively composed and which is, as has been stated above, in a state of severe endangerment. It has been noted by scholars that, although Judeo-Spanish language usage is in decline, other aspects of Judeo-Spanish culture, namely cuisine and traditional song, seem to have assumed the role of principal markers of Sephardic Jewish identity. In other words, Sephardic Jewish identity is no longer principally associated with the use of Judeo-Spanish, as it was during Ottoman times and during the first half of the twentieth century, but is now expressed through the various 'artefacts' of Sephardic culture,¹⁴ among them Judeo-Spanish. The fact that Sephardic song has gained popularity among wider audiences since the last decades of the twentieth century is attested by the quantity and variety of Sephardic music interpreters and ensembles (both Jewish and non-Jewish).¹⁵

Finally, from a linguistic perspective, one of the key elements of the Sephardic diasporic experience has always been a marked tendency towards multilingualism and the

¹³ According to scholars, Judeo-Spanish is based on the following linguistic sources:

- a) *Hispanic source material*, consisting mainly of late Medieval Castilian and, to a lesser degree, elements from other Peninsular Romance varieties (northern varieties, Catalan, Portuguese)
- b) *The Hebrew and Aramaic component* (mainly lexical but in some registers also syntactic), which originates in the religious and intellectual spheres.
- c) *The languages of contact*, which vary in relation to the geographic area where a given community is situated: Turkish, Greek, Slavic languages in the Balkan peninsula and Greece; Arabic and local Berber dialects in North-Africa.
- d) *The European languages of culture and academic tuition*. From the last decades of the nineteenth century, a network of European schools was established in the Ottoman Empire, which aimed to educate and modernize Sephardic Jewry, which was seen by Western European (Jewish) philanthropists as isolated, superstitious and backward. The main European languages of instruction are French (schools of the Alliance Israélite Universelle), Italian (Società Dante Alighieri) and German, French being the language which affected Judeo-Spanish to the greatest degree: Sephiha (*Le judéo-espagnol*, 106) even speaks of *Judéo-Fragnoil* as the result of extreme language interference. French affected the Judeo-Spanish language at every level (lexis, grammar, syntax), to the point of replacing it in domains of prestige and thus negatively affecting its prospects of future vitality. However, what eventually sealed the fate of Judeo-Spanish was not the loss of prestige to French, and subsequent language attrition, but the extermination of the near-totality of its speakers during the Second World War. See Weinreich, Max. *History of the Yiddish Language* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), and Hassán Jacob. 'El español sefardí (judeoespañol, ladino)'. *La lengua española, hoy*. Madrid: Fundación Juan March (1995): 117-140.

¹⁴ Papo, Eliezer. 'Ladino', interview by Moshe Shaul, *Autoridad Nacional del Ladino*, May 2006. Video, 41:02-41:50. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RLqIzWvi_4c.

¹⁵ For a complete database of Sephardic music releases across genres, see the *Sephardic Music: A Century of Recordings* database <http://www.sephardicmusic.org/index.htm>

ability to alternate between different linguistic codes,¹⁶ one of them being Judeo-Spanish. Indeed, multilingualism and the ability to successfully navigate between cultures in a multi-ethnic environment remain key markers of Sephardic diasporic identity. As will be demonstrated, the text of 'La alegría de Jako', is fully representative of this reality.

Ottoman Jewish Society

The unique Ottoman methods of administration and government and the Sublime Porte's¹⁷ welcoming and magnanimous attitude towards the Jewish exiles of the Iberian Peninsula from 1492 onwards allowed for numerous Sephardic communities to become established in the Eastern Mediterranean. Of the urban centres of Sephardic settlement, Salonika became the most remarkable.

The newly-established Sephardic communities were incorporated into the Ottoman administrative system, wherein every ethnic and religious minority, known as *millet*, remained a self-governed body with rights to maintain its religious, cultural and linguistic singularity, under the condition that it recognized the superiority of Islam and all Muslims, and the supreme authority of the Sultan and his representatives. This system, which has been traditionally implemented in Muslim states, was based on the *dhimma*, or covenant of protection, established between the Muslim rulers and the 'Peoples of the Book', i.e. Christians and Jews. Thus, Sephardic communities avoided cultural assimilation and were able to maintain their unique customs and language. According to Ottoman census, in the mid-sixteenth century, the Sephardic population of Salonika accounted for 30,000 souls,¹⁸ representing roughly half of the entire population of the city. As Levy¹⁹ indicates, both Christians and Jews technically enjoyed equal social status as *dhimmi* (second-class citizens compared to Muslims). However, Sephardic Jews soon became a leading economical and political force within the Ottoman state: by the mid-sixteenth century, Sephardic Jews practically ran the economy of the Ottoman Empire and had established a special relationship with the Sublime Porte, which placed them at an advantage over (and often at conflict with) their Christian neighbours (Jews were even listed in Ottoman records and historical accounts as *Yehudiler*, 'Jews', as opposed to the rest of *kefere*, or 'infidels').²⁰

By the 1890s, possibly the most prosperous and dynamic period for Ottoman Jewry in modern times, the population of Salonika amounted to approximately 70,000 in a total Ottoman Jewish (predominantly urban) population of 400,000. In the aftermath of the Great Fire of 1917, which completely destroyed the urban districts surrounding Salonika's port, what was to be probably the most accurate census of Jewish population ever conducted in Salonika revealed that the city was home to 75,062 Jews.²¹ Such a large population was, naturally, socially and culturally stratified. It must be emphasised that, in spite of the historical influence and wealth of Jewish communities, the majority of the Salonikan Jewish population were poor and uneducated, and were concentrated in the over-crowded and ill-provided quarters surrounding the city's port area. Salonikan Jewish society was very strongly stratified, both economically

¹⁶ For a discussion of multilingualism among Sephardim, see Varol, Marie-Christine, 'La lengua judeoespañola, presente y porvenir'. *Ínsula* 647 (2000), 23-25, and Harris, Tracy K. *Death of a Language – The history of Judeo-Spanish* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994).

¹⁷ The term Sublime Porte or High Porte was applied to the central government of the Ottoman Empire. Since it was customary for all official announcements and judgements to be made at the main gate to the palace of the sultan, the term became synonymous, by synecdoche, of the sultan's authority.

¹⁸ Mazower, *Salonica*, 65.

¹⁹ Levy, Avigdor. *The Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1992), 28.

²⁰ Levy, *The Sephardim*, 28.

²¹ Naar, Devin. *Jewish Salonica: Between the Ottoman Empire and Modern Greece*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2016), 57.

and culturally. At the top of the social ladder, the upper class of *gebirim*, or ‘gentlemen’, represented the pro-Western Jewish economical and intellectual elites. Below were the middle classes or *medyaneros* (small real estate and business owners). (And finally, the most numerous group of the *proves*, the ‘poor’, who were largely uneducated and often illiterate (particularly the women), and took on all the humble and manual professions which abounded in a busy port city.²² These disadvantaged social groups represented, at the end of the nineteenth century, the very environment from which arose the urban musical style of *rebetiko*, which will be discussed further.

It is important at this point to emphasise the marked differences existing between the lifestyles of men and women across social strata, for this is in direct relation to the subject of our study. In compliance with the prescriptions and cultural conventions of the Oriental Muslim society within which the Jewish communities were embedded, women (mostly uneducated and monolingual) were generally expected to lead a more secluded and domestic life than the male (largely literate and multilingual) members of their community. While women’s lives and activities generally revolved around the home or the *kortijo* (communal courtyard), men’s professional, political and leisure activities brought them to the public sphere, to the streets and cafés, where they interacted with members of other communities. As we will see further, this gender-motivated separation of environments and domains contributed, among other things, to the gender differentiation of traditional song genres, both with regards to language registers, as well as their textual and musical forms.

La alegría de Jako: cultural context, style and textual features

'La alegría de Jako' is one of the better known songs of the Salonikan *koplas* repertory. *Koplas*, or *komplas*, are, along with *romansas* and *kantigas*, one of the three main genres of Sephardic secular song.²³ Featuring a defined strophic structure and paraliturgical, historical, political or simply ‘recreational’ themes, they are predominantly composed and interpreted by male vocalists and instrumentalists, in environments traditionally associated with activities reserved to men. The genre of *koplas* is musically strongly indebted to the musical traditions of the cultural environment, and was generally accompanied with instrumentation characteristic of local styles. It is also the most ‘vital’ genre of Sephardic secular song: *koplas* were composed by identified authors throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and often appeared in printed chapbooks, which in fact places the *kopla* both in the oral and the written tradition (while the rest of the Judeo-Spanish secular song repertory is linked almost exclusively to the area of orality).

Koplas were often composed in reaction to events which had an impact on Sephardic society and daily life. In the twentieth century are worthy of mention, for instance, those which commemorate the Great Fire of 1917 (e.g. 'La kantiga del fuego', ‘The song of the fire’, also known under the title of 'El incendio de Salónica', ‘The fire of Salonika’), or the *koplas* composed in the aftermath of the Holocaust. As mentioned above, 'La alegría de Jako' can be defined as a recreational *kopla*. Also known under the title of 'Jako', it appears to be a contrafactum on the air of the Greek song 'Elenitsa Mou' (My Elenitsa), which belongs to the

²² Mazower, *Salonica*, 54-55.

²³ For a detailed discussion of the genres of traditional secular Judeo-Spanish song see, for instance, Weich-Shanak, Susana. 'Romancero, Coplas and Cancionero: Typology of the Judeo-Spanish Repertoire'. *The National Library of Israel*. Accessed September, 30, 2017, <http://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLI/English/music/Compilations/Pages/Judeo-Spanish.aspx>

Greek style known as *rebetiko* (pl. *rebetika*).²⁴ This intrinsically urban musical genre originated in the cafés, *meyhanes*, or taverns, hash dens and prison cells of Greece and Turkey during the last decades of the Ottoman era (the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) and became identified with the urban underworld and its destitute social classes. As such it found ample ground for development in Salonika, the second largest Greek port after Athens, particularly after the arrival in 1923 of large numbers of Greek refugees following the Asia Minor Disaster.

The *rebetiko* style itself is a remarkable example of late Ottoman cultural pluralism: based on a combination of both Oriental (Turkish) styles and Western European, especially Italian, musical influences, it was played and sung by musicians of diverse ethnic backgrounds, namely Turkish, Greek, Jewish, Armenian or Dönme,²⁵ for equally diverse audiences.²⁶ The classifying of 'La alegría de Jako' as a Judeo-Spanish recreational *kopla* would suggest that it was most likely performed by a male vocalist and instrumentalists. However, within the *rebetiko* genre it was not uncommon to find female vocalists (e.g. the acclaimed Jewish singers Roza Eskenazi and Amalia Baka, who became celebrities not only in Greece, but across the entire Greek diaspora), and in fact, most of the contemporary recordings of the song feature female singers.

Instrumentation is an essential component of *rebetiko*, and indeed a considerable portion of the style's repertory is formed by dance tunes. The instruments used are the traditional Ottoman *ud*, *kanun* (Turkish zither), violin, lyre, cimbalom, clarinet, and frame drum. From the second half of the 1930s the traditional Ottoman instruments became complemented with the *bouzouki* as a melodic and harmonic instrument, which gradually took pre-eminence, somehow effacing *rebetiko*'s original Ottoman character.

The lyrics of *rebetika* described, often with no lack of irony and sarcasm, episodes of everyday life in the most disadvantaged urban areas, frequently involving scenes of petty crime, drug use and a gallery of unedifying stock characters. 'La alegría de Jako' reflects this low-class milieu by featuring a Jewish first-person male narrator, Jako, a *chalgiji* - a member of a *chalgi* or Ottoman café music ensemble, who is regularly hired to play and sing at wedding dinners and *berit*, or circumcision celebrations. His occupation reflects the seldom acknowledged fact that within the multi-layered Sephardic Jewish society of Salonika, there were representatives of all trades: that is, not only merchants, clerks, artisans, and small-scale business owners, but also members of all the humblest trades, including impoverished taverna musicians such as the protagonist himself. The song, in which the singer celebrates his own musical qualities as well as his skills in business, is infused with subtle irony, expressed by several humorous metaphors and turns of phrase.

The Judeo-Spanish text features a number of Turkish loanwords, which is consistent both with language register and cultural setting: Salonikan urban café culture was in essence Ottoman, and Turks were, until the early 1920s the second largest demographic group in the city, after Sephardic Jews and ahead of Greeks (not to mention the fact that until 1917 the city was under Ottoman rule and the official state language was Turkish).

²⁴ Of course, given the syncretic nature of the musical traditions of the lands formerly composing the Ottoman empire, it is conceivable that the Greek song may be, in turn, a contrafactum on a Turkish café melody, much in the way that the multi-lingual Sephardic song 'Fel Shara Kanet Betet Masha' (She walked down the street) is, for instance, a humorous re-imagination of the Turkish café song 'Üsküdar'a Giden İken' (On the way to Üsküdar). The latter has its musically identical, yet textually radically diverging variants in practically all Balkan countries. As the acclaimed documentary 'Whose Is This Song?' (2003) by Bulgarian documentarist Adela Peeva shows, in most cases the general public is startlingly unaware of such musical transfers.

²⁵ The Dönme are members of a religious sect founded in the seventeenth century by Jews converted to Islam.

²⁶ Pennanen, Risto Pekka. 'The Nationalization of Ottoman Popular Music in Greece'. *Ethnomusicology*, 48, no. 1 (Winter, 2004), 6-7.

The verse structure follows the rhyming scheme ABABCCDD, with assonant rhyme, assonance being particularly characteristic of the Hispanic poetic tradition. Lines A, B and C are heptasyllabic, while D lines are octosyllabic.

The song 'La alegría de Jako' can be found on various recordings, reflecting quite diverse musical styles. Undoubtedly the most representative of the *rebetiko* style of pre-War and after-War Salonika is the version recorded by Sephardic traditional singer David Saltiel, on the album entitled *Canciones Judeo-Españoles de Tesalonica / Jewish-Spanish Songs of Thessaloniki* (1997). The vocalist, who usually performs a cappella, is accompanied by an ensemble of traditional Ottoman-Greek café instruments, assembled for the purpose of this recording.²⁷

Another remarkable version of the song was recorded by internationally acclaimed Greek singer Savina Yannatou on her album *Primavera en Salonico / Spring in Salonica* (1994). It is interesting to note that David Saltiel's repertory was one of the sources for the recording of this collection.²⁸

Finally, an interpretation worthy of mention for its original and innovative approach is a recording by Yasmin Levy, on her album *Sentir* (2009)²⁹

The following is the Judeo-Spanish text of the song. I have here standardized the spelling,³⁰ and provided an English translation.³¹

'La alegría de Jako'

Rebetiko; time signature: 2/4; scale: Phrygian major / dominant

Alevanta, Jako,
en bodas i en **berís**(1),
no te amostres flako,
ke tyenes **mushterís**(2).
Chalgijí(3) de **meaná**(4),
yo les kanto sin kedar,
me meto komo **piola**(5)
para les yevar la bolsa.

Come on, Jako,
To weddings and berit,
Don't look weak,
You have customers at hand.
As a taverna musician
I never stop singing
I stick to them like a flea
To reach their purses.

²⁷ Saltiel, David. 'La Alegría de Jako (The Joy of Jako)'. *Jewish-Spanish Songs from Thessaloniki* (Berlin: Oriente Musik, 1998), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mFtwwy0eR4g>

²⁸ Yannatou, Savina. 'Jaco'. *Primavera en Salonico* (Athens: Lyra, 1995), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ugJsc586Y>

²⁹ Levy, Yasmin. 'Jaco'. *Sentir* (Harmonia Mundi – World Village, 2009), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGvb2u0IGnk>

³⁰ The fact that Judeo-Spanish was until the last decades of the nineteenth century written in Hebrew script or Hebrew manuscript cursive known as *soletreo*, and a common transliteration norm was never unanimously accepted by the Judeo-Spanish speaking community, I have decided to standardize the spelling of Judeo-Spanish in accordance with the norm of Israeli based journal *Aki Yerushalayim*. This journal is closely associated with the *Autoridad Nacional del Ladino y su Cultura* (National Authority for Ladino and its Culture), the official body entrusted with the mission on maintaining and promoting the use of Judeo-Spanish in Israel. Where appropriate I indicate written accents (whose rules mirror the rules of contemporary Spanish), following the proposal made by Matilda Koen-Sarano, Israeli folklore collector and leading author of Judeo-Spanish textbooks. Both the recordings by David Saltiel and Savina Yannatou are accompanied by extensive sleeve notes, where lyrics are published using the transliteration system of *Sefarad*, a journal of Sephardic studies published by the Spanish *Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas*, and which is akin to the spelling of contemporary Spanish.

³¹ Joseph Nehama's *Dictionnaire du Judéo-Espagnol* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1977) was consulted to clarify lexical and phraseological issues.

Alevanta, Jako,
 en bodas i en berís,
 no te amostres flako,
 ke tyenes mushterís.
 Chalgijí de meaná,
 yo les kanto sin kedar,
 me maneo komo un barko,
 a mí ya me yaman Jako.

*Come on, Jako,
 To weddings and berit,
 Don't look weak,
 You have customers at hand.
 As a taverna musician
 I never stop singing
 I rock like a boat,
 And they call me Jako*

Alevanta, Jako,
 en bodas i en berís,
 no te amostres flako,
 ke tyenes mushterís.
 Chalgijí de meaná,
 yo me amostro muy **kornaz**(6),
 se las tomo al ke beve,
 les kanto komo se deve.

*Come on, Jako,
 To weddings and berit
 Don't look weak,
 You have customers at hand.
 As a taverna musician
 I am quite cunning
 I take from those who drink
 I sing to them as they deserve.*

Glossary

(1) **Berís** (n. f. pl., sg. *berí*): from Heb. *brit*, ‘covenant’, circumcision celebration. In this case, the expected Hebrew plural suffix *-ot* is omitted, being replaced instead by the Spanish suffix of plural *-s*.

(2) **Mushterís** (n. m. pl., sg. *mushterí*), from Tur. *muşteri*, ‘client, customer’.

(3) **Chalgijí** (n. m. sg.), from Tur. *çalgici* ‘musician, member of a *çalgi*, or traditional Turkish café orchestra’.

(4) **Meaná** (n. fem. sg.), from Tur. *meyhane*, a restaurant or tavern where customers can consume alcoholic beverages. By association, a style of Ottoman music performed in establishments of this type.

(5) **Piola** (n. f. sg.) of perhaps Hispanic origin (the dictionary of the Real Academia Española identifies the word as derived from the Latin *pediola*, meaning ‘thin rope’ used to tie two objects of diverse nature to each other. The term is also found in maritime terminology. In Argentine Spanish *piola* denotes a cunning individual). The translation provided in the sleevenote to David Saltiel’s recording³² suggests that ‘me meto komo piola’ means ‘I stick to them like a flea’. Nehama³³ cites the expression *meterse una piola*, as equivalent to ‘to pester someone (with constant comments)’.

(6) **Kornaz** (adj. sg.), from the Tur. *kurnaz*, ‘a cunning trickster’.

Concluding remarks

As has been demonstrated throughout this study, Sephardic Jewish culture in the Eastern Mediterranean, and especially in Salonika, its most emblematic centre, was characterized by a remarkable tendency towards cultural syncretism. ‘La alegría de Jako’, the traditional Judeo-Spanish secular song on which this is illustrated, is a fascinating example of a Judeo-Spanish song composed on a Greek-Ottoman musical pattern, while its Judeo-Spanish lyrics show multiple lexical borrowings from Turkish. This example of musical syncretism reflects not only

³² Saltiel, *Jewish-Spanish Songs* (sleeve notes).

³³ Nehama, *Dictionnaire du judéo-espagnol*, 436.

the influence of contact between cultures and languages on the Judeo-Spanish musical tradition, but also the milieu of the Ottoman Greek café in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a unique space of cultural encounter in Salonika, a city celebrated for the polyphony of its many voices.

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