



ספר

מגים לועז

חלק שלישי ספר ויקרא

איש ויתקלמו: אין לאחים דאמנו אה אימיסיר אל דינו די גס חרה קי
 דוב' רינרסי לה מייסונס מינון קומארה לה ליי סאנסם •
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 אי פא אים קריסו קין אכללאה קלאהא סאס
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 אימפיד :

אי קין קרי פאבי' אל דינו של ליב'ה קי עודה אים אי גס
 סרוב'ינא קי מי ריסיב'ין די אל • קי פיל'ר לה הקתס דיל
 פריסר ליב'ה אי מי אנטוסיאקס די סודו סוד אנטנה :

איל שניניאדור די ריסד ליב'ה איש הוכס חסלם כתר'
 יצחק משגריסו חי' :

גרפס פת

קושטאנדינא

לגז חתה פסאלת ארונס כמלך טולסן מחבורה י'ס :

סדו סיס סוס יום כישורקה הוא לפק :

נדשע האחים כה' ראינו ותיס אשכני בני
 ססר' יונס ככסר' יפקק זג'ס :

Isaac Magriso, Title page of *Sefer Me-am Loetz* (Leviticus), Constantinople, 1753. Published by Nisim Ashkenazi.

THE OTTOMAN DIASPORA:

The Rise and Fall of Ladino Literary Culture

ARON RODRIGUE

Judeo-Spanish is the preeminent language of the people, and it will remain so for quite some time whatever we might do. Everyone agrees that we should do away with Judeo-Spanish, that there is no reason to preserve the language of our former persecutors . . . and nevertheless, the lower classes, the bourgeoisie, and even the "aristocracy," as they are called here, everyone still speaks and reads Judeo-Spanish and will continue to do so. In committee meetings where all the members are well educated and everyone knows French, a discussion started in correct, even elegant French will, often in an instant, inexplicably move into Judeo-Spanish jabbering. The most "select," dignified Jewish ladies when paying a call on a friend will be politely chitchatting in French and suddenly break into jargon. Turkish is like a borrowed suit; French is gala dress; Judeo-Spanish is the worn dressing gown in which one is most at ease.¹

This excerpt, from a report on the Sephardim² of Constantinople written in 1908 by Moïse Fresco, the director of one of the Alliance Israélite Universelle schools in the city and himself an Ottoman Jew, highlights some of the major themes of the cultural transformation of Sephardic Jewry in modern times. Written at a decisive moment in the history of these communities, the year of the Young Turk Revolution, it captures the new complexities of their cultural profile after decades of change brought about by growing Western economic and political presence in the Middle East, reforms initiated by Ottoman rulers, and attempts at educational and cultural reform undertaken by French Jewry intent on "civilizing" "Eastern" Jewries. Multilingual, and performing different linguistic strategies in different settings, hesitating between the glittering prizes offered by Paris and loyalties to the local Ottoman rulers, and soon to face new Zionist and new Turkish nationalist demands pulling in yet different directions, the Sephardic world was unprepared for the triumphant nationalisms that would gain the upper hand in the Levant after the fateful events of 1908. As Fresco's text makes amply clear, Judeo-Spanish, or Ladino, had remained

one of the most distinctive features of the Sephardic diaspora in the Levant that had come into being after the expulsions and mass departures of the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula at the end of the fifteenth century. Ladino was to remain the hallmark of this diaspora until its mid-twentieth-century destruction and dissolution. Ladino marked deeply all aspects of the cultural life of Levantine Jewry. Its core culture area was situated in the Balkans and Asia Minor, with small offshoot communities in the Eastern Mediterranean such as those of Egypt, Palestine, and Syria.

The reconstituted Sepharad that spoke Ladino in the Levant was an integral part of the mosaic of religious and ethnic groups that lived under Ottoman rule for centuries, sometimes in harmony, sometimes in conflict, but generally in a coexistence that operated according to parameters which were to obtain until new developments in the nineteenth century. In this respect, Ladino culture is inseparable from the Ottoman context of Levantine Jewish life.

Jews lived as a recognized and officially tolerated group under the classical Ottoman political system. The Islamic tradition of toleration of "the people of the book" underpinned the broad contours of Muslim/non-Muslim relations in the empire, with a quasi-contractual "pact" (*dhimmā*, or *zimmēt* in Turkish) that protected non-Muslims in return for their payment of special taxation and acceptance of inferior status. Nevertheless, this Islamic legal regulation was, as in all religious traditions, subject to constant interpretation and was implemented with various degrees of elasticity in different periods and under different rulers. Yet its discursive framework provided a political language and vocabulary to fundamental divides and boundaries in Ottoman society, the most notable of which was the exclusion of non-Muslims from formal political rule, though the rich and influential among them could frequently exercise enormous power informally.

The clear political boundary between Muslim and non-Muslim that could be transcended only by conversion should not obscure the fact that, in many areas of social existence, such boundaries were porous. Through economic and social interaction, especially in the major cities such as Salonica, Constantinople, Izmir, and Adrianople (Edirne), as well as in numerous smaller towns, the Jews came to share much with their neighbors in realms such as dress, food, and music. It is interesting to note that a great part of Sephardic cuisine (adapted to Jewish laws of *kashrut*) is built on the template of Turco-Balkan food culture. Perhaps most strikingly, Sephardic synagogue music is essentially the same as Ottoman high court music, with Sephardic musicians participating in and contributing to the repertoire of high Ottoman classical music. The numerous words of Turkish and Greek origin in Ladino confirm the receptivity of this cul-

Nevertheless, the engagement with external cultural modes did not have the same corrosive effect on group identity that was to accompany it in the modern Western or Westernized nation-state with its nation-building policies of cultural homogenization. Like other empires, the pre-modern Ottoman state was singularly uninterested in such a project. Indeed, the reverse was true, with "difference" rather than "sameness" as the normative and even prescriptive configuration of sociopolitical organization. Each major ethnic and religious group was recognized, whether formally or informally, as a distinctive group, with no expectation of the eventual dissolution of its cultural specificity. The acceptance of difference did not entail equality, because the ruler/ruled divide that usually corresponded to the Muslim/non-Muslim divide brought with it hierarchy and power stratification. This acceptance also provided to large areas of social existence a degree of autonomy that is unimaginable in the modern Western polity.³

In the Levantine city, where most Sephardic Jews lived, with its multilingual, multiethnic, multireligious social fabric, different groups engaged in a daily give-and-take in the cultural as well as the economic realm. In the city, the Jewish man, like others, was able to communicate in a pastiche of languages such as Turkish, Greek, Armenian, and Bulgarian. The Jewish woman, operating in the sphere of the home, was exposed less to outside influences, which nevertheless did frequently manage to make an incursion. Linguistic hybridity was limited to the market place—the bazaar—and stopped at the gates of the household and of the community. Outside influences did exist, but these were domesticated, coopted, adapted, and naturalized by the different communities, losing any corrosiveness for group identity as a whole. Ethnic boundaries were fluid, and they shifted constantly. Nevertheless, the primacy of group distinctiveness and identity remained. The Levantine Sephardim, using strategies common to Jewish diasporas everywhere, Judaized the influence from the outside. And it was Ladino that operated as a powerful tool for the domestication of the "other." Hence, until the modern period, a distinctive culture, transplanted from medieval Sepharad, but now in full mutation, could evolve and flourish in the mosaic that was the Ottoman Levant.

LADINO

There is no consensus among scholars about the existence of major differences between the language spoken by the Jews in Spain and that of the surrounding population. It would be safe to assume that Jews were conversant with the many regional dialects that proliferated there before Castilian imposed its supremacy in the sixteenth century. There were, nevertheless, some words that were particular to Jews, such as *Dio* for *Dios*, reflecting the concern not to attribute a plu-

Ladino, then, according to this interpretation, is essentially a *calque*, a copying language used only for translations from the Hebrew.⁴ In fact, its very name originates from the term *enladinar*, meaning “to render into a Latin tongue.” Ladino in this respect is the counterpart in Spanish of other Jewish translating languages, such as *Taytsch* in Yiddish or *Sharh* in Judeo-Arabic. To confuse matters even more, in modern times Eastern Sephardim have given many appellations to the language that they spoke, ranging from *Espaniol* (Spanish), *muestro Espaniol* (our Spanish), or, less frequently, *djudezmo*.

The Ladino linguistic situation of these communities corresponded to that of diglossia, where “higher” and “lower” variants of the language coexist. As with many diglossic cultures, for a long time there existed a high-culture, written literary language, initially used by the educated rabbinical elite for translation of the sacred texts. This was Ladino proper, and it was heavily influenced by Hebrew syntax. In time the translations, such as those of the Bible and the Passover haggadah, assumed a sacred quality themselves. The spoken language of quotidian speech was much more fluid and evolved in a dynamic dialectical relationship with the surrounding cultures and with the high-culture language of the sacred translations. Eventually, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as free translations of rabbinical texts gained currency, many of the translators used the term Ladino on the title pages of books, in spite of the fact that this was no longer the archaic translating medium. The written language and the popular spoken language represented different stages in a wide spectrum. And, of course, Hebrew reigned supreme as the most prestigious mode of rabbinical literary production. Some familiarity with the surrounding languages added to the linguistic repertoire of the Levantine Sephardim, whose polyglot cultural profile was to remain distinctive until modern times.

Ladino, used to denote both translated calque texts and, eventually, free translations from the Hebrew, was the term most commonly employed by Sephardic writers to refer to the language in which they were publishing in the formative period of Sephardic literary creativity. Although Judeo-Spanish is a neologism that gained currency at the end of the nineteenth century as a result of Westernization, Ladino has the benefit of continuing the usage of the Sephardim themselves, and it is the preferred term here.

The confusion in the very name of this language points to the open-ended and fluid nature of its literary development. No academy, no regulating structure, no conference, no state imposed order on the language or standardized its usage. Unlike their Yiddish-speaking counterparts in the north, Ladino-speaking populations lacked the demographic critical mass that might have opened this matter to debate and resolution in the modern period. The variety that has existed in the

names of the language bears testimony to the overshadowing of Sephardic culture in the modern period by other Jewish and non-Jewish cultural modes and spheres of influence that have demoted its status until our own day.

HEBREW AND LADINO

Throughout its existence, most writing in Ladino consisted of translations, initially from Hebrew, and in the modern period from European languages. Very few publications existed in Ladino in the first two centuries of the implantation of the Sephardim in the Levant. Rabbinical culture produced works exclusively in Hebrew, even if many Ladino words are to be found in these texts, most notably in the *responsa* literature. Ladino, like Yiddish in the same period, simply lacked the prestige of Hebrew and came lower in the hierarchy of the rabbinical value system. None of the great works of Sephardic creativity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were written in the language. Its usage remained mostly in the oral and commercial spheres.

Indeed, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries after the expulsion saw an extraordinary output by the rabbinical elite in Hebrew. Sephardim established the first printing press in the Ottoman Empire in Istanbul in 1493. The cities of Istanbul, Salonica, and Edirne emerged as important centers of Hebrew publishing and, together with Safed, rose to become the principal centers of Jewish intellectual life. Important Yeshivot and Talmudei Torah were established in all four. The Talmud Torah of Salonica attracted students from as far away as Poland. Great halakhic sages such as David ibn Yahya, Jacob ben Habib and his son Levi ben Habib, Samuel de Medina, and Joseph Taitazak taught in these institutions and produced numerous works of Jewish religious law. Joseph Karo, educated entirely in the Sephardic culture area of the Ottoman Balkans, moved to Safed after teaching in Istanbul, Edirne, Nikopol, and Salonica, and prepared the celebrated and authoritative *Shulḥan Arukh*, which became the standard accepted code of law for Jewish communities in the empire and in Europe. Biblical exegesis and homiletics, as well as philosophy (mostly in the sixteenth century), remained important areas of creativity for figures such as Joseph Taitazak and Moses Almosnino. Kabbalistic thought, usually part of the repertoire of Hebrew learning among the Sephardim, rose to particular prominence from the mid-sixteenth century onward, most notably in Safed, where Moses Cordovero, Salomon Alkabez, Isaac Luria, and Ḥayyim Vital studied and taught.

In contrast to this intellectual achievement in Hebrew, whatever existed in writing in Ladino came into being because of some perceived utility. For example, the very first work to be published in the language in the Levant was

the *Dinim de Shehita y Bedika*, which appeared in Istanbul in 1510, a book on ritual slaughter and inspection of animals, obviously of great use for a migrating population. Reinforcing the religious rectitude of the masses remained of paramount concern. In this vein, works on ethics would emerge as an especially popular genre, the most notable in the sixteenth century being the *Regimiento de la Vida* of Moses Almosnino (Salonica, 1564). (The same author's *Extremas y Grandezas de Constantinopla*, an account of the city of Istanbul, though written in Ladino, appeared only in Spanish in Latin script in Madrid in 1567.) Bahya ibn Paquda's *Duties of the Heart* was translated from Hebrew into Ladino at the same time by Tzadik ben Joseph Formon under the title *Obligacion de los Korasones*. The Ladino translation of extracts from another important book of great utility, Karo's *Shulḥan Arukh*, was published in Istanbul under the title *Meza de Alma* in 1568.

But the foundational text was the famous translation into Ladino of the Pentateuch in Istanbul in 1547 from the press of Eliezer Gershon Soncino; the same translation appeared in Latin characters in Ferrara in 1553. The latter version was designed for the Western Sephardim, who were used to the Latin script. This was the first major translation of the most fundamental texts of Judaism, following word for word the Hebrew original and setting the modalities of the future translation enterprise. It was followed by translations of the Passover haggadah and of the prayer book, again in calque form. No doubt this translation of the Pentateuch represented the final fruition of Sephardic attempts to translate the sacred texts, the origins of which went back to the Middle Ages in Spain. It was to assume as sacred a quality as the original text, and it remained the most significant work in Ladino for two centuries. During this period it was Hebrew, and literary production in Hebrew, that provided the determining template of Ladino literature.

SABBATIANISM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Ladino writing, as a palimpsest of Hebrew texts, was to break free from its calque relationship to Hebrew in the course of the eighteenth century and evolve into a full-fledged literary enterprise. Translation from Hebrew was still an important activity, but new works written directly in Ladino became significant. The precedent-setting work that allowed the flowering of Ladino literary creativity was without any doubt the *Me-am Loez* of Jacob Hulli, which began to be published in 1730. The single most important work in Ladino literature, this vast, multivolume compendium of rabbinical lore (which was to be developed, after the premature death of Hulli in 1732, by a host of other writers during the

next century and a half) was organized as a commentary on the books of the Bible, beginning with Exodus. Utilizing all available rabbinical material, halakhic and aggadic sources as well as past commentaries, histories, philosophical writings, and moderate kabbalistic interpretations to explicate the biblical text in the language of the masses as well as impart knowledge about the world and how to live a righteous life, the *Me-am Loez* represented the continuity with the past function of Ladino literature as the medium to moralize and educate the average Sephardic Jew. It established the new genre of rabbinical writing directly in Ladino, giving legitimacy to original creativity in the language.⁵

This seems to have been a direct outgrowth of the Sabbatian crisis that had wreaked havoc in the Jewish world in general and among Sephardic communities in particular in the second half of the seventeenth century. Shabbtai Zevi, born in Izmir, was a native son of the Eastern Mediterranean diaspora, and nowhere was his influence more directly felt than in the Sephardic heartland. New developments in kabbalistic thought and practice among the elite as well as undercurrents of messianism that had been with the Sephardic exiles since the expulsion fused in the person of Zevi to produce a messianic explosion. In 1665 he claimed to be the messiah and announced the beginning of redemption. He attracted a huge following from all sections of the Jewish population inside and outside the Ottoman Empire, being greeted with extraordinary mass enthusiasm wherever he traveled. Many Jews stopped work and sold all their belongings in preparation for the ingathering of the exiles in the Holy Land. Although at first the authorities ignored the movement, its revolutionary implications were brought to their attention by some of its opponents. In 1666 they gave Zevi a choice between conversion to Islam or death; he chose the former. A stunned Jewish world woke up from its dreams, though substantial numbers continued to believe in Zevi and many chose to follow him in his conversion to Islam. These formed the *dönme* (from the Turkish word "to turn") sect that was to survive until the twentieth century in Salonica.⁶

A symptom of intellectual and social crisis and malaise, intimately linked to the socioeconomic dislocations experienced by the Jewish communities of the Eastern Mediterranean, Sabbatianism made the crisis even deeper and cast a pall on Sephardic rabbinical creativity. There seems to be considerable evidence of demoralization and a closing of horizons among the rabbinical elite in the generations that followed the Sabbatian trauma, as well as a decline in religiosity and knowledge among the Jewish masses of the East. As Hulli explained in his introduction to the *Me-am Loez*, it was to remedy this latter condition that he embarked upon his work. Bemoaning the lack of knowledge of Hebrew and of the archaic nature of Ladino texts impenetrable to the masses, Hulli aimed at

nothing less than to reacquaint the average Sephardic Jew with the religious tradition and to revive traditional faith and practice. And the medium to do this was to be the everyday language that was easily understood.

Although the rabbinical establishment received Hulli's first volume with suspicion, the book's extraordinary success soon won it support. Hulli died before completing his work on Exodus. His second volume appeared posthumously in 1733, completed by Isaac Magrisso, who then continued to finish Exodus with a final volume in 1746. Magrisso went on to treat Leviticus (Istanbul, 1753) and Numbers (Istanbul, 1764). Isaac Arguete launched upon the explanation of Deuteronomy (Istanbul, 1773) but did not live to finish it. These texts constitute the classical *Me-am Loez*, which went through scores of printings in the next century and were widely disseminated in the Levant; even poor households possessed a copy. Indeed, if there were to be one book that a Sephardic family owned, it was likely to be a volume of the *Me-am Loez*. In time, these texts assumed a sacredness of their own, and both men and women learned sections of them by heart.

Other writers, such as Raḥamim Menahem Mitrani (Joshua, 1851, 1870), Raphael Hiya Pontremoli (Esther, 1864), Raphael Isaac Meir Benveniste (Ruth, 1882), Isaac Judah Aba (Isaiah, 1892), Nissim Moshe Abud (Ecclesiastes, 1898), and Ḥayyim Isaac Shaki (Song of Songs, 1899), continued the *Me-am Loez* project in the next century. Though of a lesser quality than the first series, these works added to a lively enterprise of religious writing that offers the best insight into the Sephardic tradition. Paraphrasing and commenting, the volumes of the *Me-am Loez* represented in the vernacular the intertextuality of the larger Jewish religious scholarship, and they acted as powerful vectors of transmission down the generations by rendering this tradition comprehensible—and Judeo-Hispanicizing it in the process. Much bigger in scope than the Ashkenazic *Tzema Urena* to which it has been often compared, the *Me-am Loez* appealed to both men and women yet remained prestigious for the rabbinical elite, a status not shared by similar endeavors in Yiddish.

NEW TRANSLATIONS AND ORIGINAL WRITINGS

The emergence of an original Ladino literature was accompanied by the rise of translation that was no longer a calque of the Hebrew. The golden age of classical Ladino, the eighteenth century, was also the one in which arguably the best of the translators, Abraham Asa, produced scores of important works, the most important of which was the new translation of the Bible published between 1739 and 1744. This replaced the old translation of 1547, which had now become too

archaic and utilized, like Hulli's work, quotidian Ladino. Following in Hulli's footsteps in rendering the classical Hebrew texts available for the masses, Asa also produced a new translation of sections of the *Shulḥan Arukh* that appeared under the title *Shulḥan ha-Melekh* (Istanbul, 1749). All these, together with the first volumes of the *Me-am Loez*, were supported by subsidies from philanthropists in Istanbul and benefited from the success of the major new printing press in the city, established by Jonah Ashkenazi.

The impetus given to free productivity in Ladino and its legitimization led to the first printing of religious poetry, a genre that had remained oral until now. The most significant works in this domain were the *Coplas de Yosef Ha-Tzadik* of Abraham de Toledo (Istanbul, 1732) and *Los Maasiyot del Sinior de Yaakov Avinu* (Istanbul, 1748). Purim poems, which were part of this progression from oral to published poetry, were printed in collections known as *Coplas de Purim*.

Ethical writing, a genre that had been popular in the past, was also revived in the new medium. Works on how to lead a just existence steeped in religion, mixed with tales of science and sometimes of Kabbalah, emerged as a favorite genre for the rabbinical elite whose books in this domain would be published first in Hebrew and, soon thereafter, in Ladino. Arguably the most important of these was the *Sefer Shevet Musar* of Eliyahu Hakohen of Izmir, which appeared in Hebrew in 1712 (Istanbul) and was translated into Ladino by Asa in 1742 (Istanbul), with numerous reprints in the next century. One should also note, among others, the *Sefer Tikunei ha-Nefesh* of Reuben ben Abraham (Salonica, 1775) and the hugely popular *Pele Yoetz* of Eliezer Papo (Istanbul, 1824; Ladino translation by his son, Vienna, 1870; and Salonica, 1899–1900). Translations of similar works that saw the light of day in the Ashkenazic world were also significant: Zvi Hirsch Kaidanover's *Kav Ha-Yashar* and Pineḥas Elijah Hurwitz's kabbalistic *Sefer ha-Berit* enjoyed great popularity in Ladino.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Ladino repertoire included the whole range of rabbinical literature with the exception of halakhah, which remained exclusively in Hebrew. The latter language continued as the central referent. In many ways, until this period Ladino literary creativity can be said to have produced a mimesis of Hebraic literature, a situation symbolic of the unequal relationship between the two. Writing was the domain of the educated class, the rabbinical elite, whose first preference was Hebrew. The shock of the Sabbatian phenomenon led to the first major departure from this norm—the appearance of the *Me-am Loez*—which nonetheless remained firmly in the religious sphere. Although the *Me-am Loez* opened the path to original works produced in Ladino, even these emulated and shadowed Hebrew texts, explicating the tradition in the vernacular spoken and understood by the masses. Hebrew

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and the rabbinical heritage hence marked deeply all aspects of Ladino writing. The link between the two languages would be weakened and indeed in many cases snapped altogether with the rise of a new value system. Fundamental changes in the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century dethroned religion in the Sephardic communities and, with it, the primacy of Hebrew.

NATIONALISM AND FRAGMENTATION

The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw major changes in the Ottoman Empire that altered Jewish existence irrevocably. The rise of nationalist movements among the non-Muslim peoples of the Balkans, the overthrow of Ottoman rule with the rise of new nation-states, the irruption of Western power into the area, and new cultural and political orientations all left their mark. The Sephardic community, which had constituted itself as a distinctive culture area under one Ottoman rule, was now fragmented as different states established suzerainty over the various Jewish centers. The Sephardim of Belgrade were now ruled by Serbia, *de facto* independent since 1830 (*de jure* in 1878). Sarajevo fell under Habsburg rule in 1878. The state of Bulgaria came into existence in the same year and encompassed most of the Jewish communities of Northern Thrace and south of the Danube. Greece, independent since 1830, had a relatively small Jewish population until it annexed Salonica during the Balkan Wars of 1912–13. The Macedonian communities of Monastir and Uskup became part of the Serbian state at this time. Of all the Sephardic communities of the Balkans, only Edirne (Adrianople) and a few others in Eastern Thrace remained under Turkish rule on the eve of World War I and would continue to do so with the establishment of the Turkish republic after the war.

Both the institution of reforms by the Ottomans and the creation of new states in areas where their rule was overthrown went in tandem with the massive incursion of Western power into the region. The Ottoman state tried to put its house in order with a series of reforms such as the *Tanzimat* (Reforms) proclamation in 1839, the Reform Decree of 1856, and the constitution of 1876. The latter remained unimplemented under Abdulhamid II but was reinstated after the Young Turk Revolution of 1908. Centralization and state-building policies were the main impetus behind most of these developments. Nevertheless, largely under Western prodding the Ottoman state improved the civil status of the non-Muslims, eventually granting them equal rights in 1856 (though they were not subject to compulsory conscription until 1909). The reforms, however, also eroded the autonomy of the non-Muslim groups, whose members were now subject to the new Western-inspired secular courts of criminal and com-

mercial law. Still, education and culture remained within the purview of each group; until the Balkan Wars and World War I, the overwhelming majority of non-Muslims still attended their own schools. The Jews were no exception. Although successive governments slowly moved toward the creation of a state-sponsored Ottoman Turkish educational structure, a process that received an increased nationalist impetus after the Young Turk Revolution, the goal was far from being reached at the demise of the empire after World War I. Hence, Turkification remained rather weak for the Jews.⁷

THE ALLIANCE ISRAÉLITE UNIVERSELLE

It was the educational institutions of the Alliance Israélite Universelle that came to provide the Sephardim with mass European-style schooling after the third quarter of the nineteenth century. The Alliance was founded in 1860 in Paris to fight for Jewish rights throughout the world and to combat anti-Jewish prejudice wherever it made itself manifest. It lobbied actively for Jewish emancipation with the authorities both in Paris and in the countries where the issue emerged. In addition to its political work, the Alliance was a major force in the field of education. Believing deeply in the moral emancipation of the Jews alongside their political emancipation, it cast its attention on the communities around the Mediterranean basin where, in contrast to the Russian Empire, the political situation made action possible. Attempting to improve the lot of Sephardic and Eastern Jews and also to reform, modernize, and Westernize them, the Alliance gradually created a vast school network in this area. At the height of its influence, in 1913, this network had 183 schools with 43,700 students from Morocco to Iran. Dispensing modern French and Jewish instruction, the schools came to replace much of the traditional education among the Jews in these lands and were a potent force in the emergence of a Jewish middle class in the Middle East and North Africa.

As members of the first Jewish community to be formally emancipated, French Jewish intellectuals and eventually much of the French Jewish elite came to perceive themselves as in the vanguard of Jewish modernity. Grafting the universalism of the French revolution onto a secularized version of Jewish messianism, they came to see it as their mission to spread the message of emancipation throughout the world so that all Jews would emerge into the promised new world of modern civilization. This would naturally entail increased openness to the outside world by the Jews and the reforming of Jewish society. Such a perspective was the guiding principle of the work of the Alliance across the Mediterranean basin.

The Alliance exercised a very powerful influence into the second half of the twentieth century among the Sephardic and Eastern Jewish communities. The history of the organization in this context is at the heart of the decisive encounter of East and West that led to the fundamental cultural, social, and economic reorientation of these Jewries. Working separately but sometimes in tandem with French colonialism, the school network of the Alliance was responsible first and foremost for the spread of the French language among the Jews of the Middle East and North Africa by offering them a modern French primary and lower secondary education. But it also laid great emphasis on the teaching of Jewish religious knowledge, biblical and prayer-book Hebrew, and Jewish history. Indeed, the Alliance schools were most certainly not secular institutions but primarily religious ones, with Judaism taught according to the principal tenets of modern Franco-Judaism. Furthermore, the Alliance was deeply concerned with the status of women and attached a great deal of importance to their education. In this it was at its most revolutionary. Its creation of a mass educational system for girls was a first in the history of Sephardic and Eastern Jewries. The education imbibed in these schools offered many new vistas to Jewish women and led to their individual social mobility but also contributed to the transformation of their status.

The Alliance message was received unevenly in communities far removed from the French sociopolitical context that had produced this form of Judaism. Nevertheless, the education imparted in its schools led to a growing awareness among the Sephardim of newer versions of Jewish existence than obtained in Europe and to a reevaluation of their place and belief-system in their own lands. The reorientation of Middle Eastern and North African Jews away from their traditional moorings in their local societies in the direction of the European metropole was a long secular development that accompanied the irruption of the West in the area. The economic interests of the Jews, a classic intermediary group between East and West, lay certainly in the overall Western presence, and increased trade with Europe led to considerable upward social mobility in major Jewish centers such as Salonica, Istanbul, and Izmir. The Alliance's work contributed to this larger process and played an important role in the creation of a Francophone Jewish bourgeoisie in the Levant.⁸

Familiarity with French became a hallmark of Sephardic Levantine culture. Even the surviving traditional schools emulated the programs of the Alliance and introduced French, which came to pervade all aspects of cultural life. Many upper-class families began to abandon Ladino at home, and the language itself underwent a dramatic change, succumbing to the invasion of hundreds of French words. These usually replaced words of Hebrew or Turkish origin, as is

amply clear in any Ladino newspaper of the time that began to put the older words in brackets after the newly introduced French ones, eventually dispensing with the older words altogether. By the first decade of the twentieth century, the language was quite different from what it had been a century earlier.

One of the paradoxical results of this engagement with the West in general and with French in particular was the remarkable efflorescence of Ladino literature around the turn of the century. Whereas the number of people proficient in French increased swiftly, the language of the masses, in spite of the inroads made by French at school, remained Ladino. Intellectuals, publicists, and writers all needed to use Ladino in order to reach a sizable audience for their works. French may have altered elements of Ladino but did not replace it. French became an additional language, that of culture, added to the polyglossic repertoire of the Sephardim of the Levant. And it acted as the central conduit for the transmission of new genres of literature that it rendered familiar and that were then incorporated into the Ladino canon.

THE SEPHARDIC HASKALAH AND NEWSPAPER CULTURE

Even before the massive incursion of French, new influences had started to make inroads among Sephardic intellectuals. Italy, on the borders of the Ottoman Empire, had long constituted a major area of contact between the Eastern Sephardim and Europe. Trade relationships remained significant, with movements of Jews in both directions. These links were strengthened even more with the establishment of hundreds of Italian Jewish families in some of the major port cities of the Ottoman Empire in the course of the eighteenth century to develop trade and commerce. These Francos, as they were known, and the trade networks that they created were responsible for some degree of familiarity with Italian among the mercantile elements in Sephardic communities. Francos such as the Camondo, Allatini, and Modiano families were important allies of the reformist projects in centers such as Salonica and Istanbul that were pushed by the Alliance in the second half of the nineteenth century.

It is noteworthy, in this context, that David Moses Attias, a Sarajevo-born author living in Livorno, the port of origination of most of the Franco families, wrote arguably the very first book in Ladino echoing some of the themes of the European Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment). His *Guerta de Oro* (1778) was essentially a secular treatise on the new spirit that must be introduced among the Sephardim of the East, highlighting the importance of learning secular subjects and of becoming more acquainted with developments in Europe through the learning of European languages. In order to facilitate this task, the book offered an introduction to Italian.

Following Attias, the systematizing of language study as well as elementary education emerged as a major preoccupation of writers in Ladino. Scores of textbooks appeared in the course of the nineteenth century, beginning with the *Otsar ha-Ḥayim* of Yisrael Ḥayim (Vienna, 1823), which introduced readers to elements of German, Ottoman Turkish, Hebrew, mathematics, and geography. Many an author turned his hand to education manuals, such as *Kuntres Darkhei Noam* by Judah Alkalay and *Livriko de Primera Klasa* by Moses David Alkalay. In addition, many books on Hebrew grammar were published in Ladino, the most important of which were Menaḥem Farhi's *Rav Pe'alim* and Isaac Bekhor Yehudah's *Yavi Mi-piryo*.

Until well into the second half of the nineteenth century, Hebrew continued to be a major conduit for the circulation of ideas between the Ashkenazic and Sephardic worlds, but it now became important in the secular as well as the religious domain. Ideas of the Haskalah made their way and influenced leading Sephardic figures such as Judah Nehama and Abraham Danon. European Hebrew newspapers such as *ha-Magid* were read and commented upon regularly, and letters sent by Sephardim and published in their pages attested to an important readership in the East.

Haskalah-oriented agendas combined with curiosity about different Jewish communities and personalities gave rise to Ladino editions of books about famous Jews such as Moses Montefiore, Adolphe Crémieux, and the Rothschilds. Not only were the new Hebrew classics translated but so were the works of Yiddish literature produced by authors such as Y. L. Peretz, Sholem Aleichem, and Sholem Asch.

However, the most important transmitters of information as well as of new genres of literature were the newspapers, in whose columns almost all of the new books in Ladino appeared first in serialized form. Like the Turkish, Greek, Armenian, and other communities, the Jews created a lively Ladino newspaper culture from the middle of the nineteenth century, closely related to the growing importance of news about economic and political developments. The rise of Ladino journalism was broadly contemporaneous with that of the European Jewish press. The first Ladino newspaper, *La Buena Esperansa*, appeared in Izmir in 1842, to be followed by the *Puertas del Oriente* in 1845–46 in the same city, and *La Luz de Israel* in Istanbul in 1853. These had a brief existence but were soon replaced by much longer-lasting publications. One was the *Jurnal Israelit*, which appeared in Istanbul during the entire decade of the 1860s; its editor, Ezekiel Gabay, and his son Isaac Gabay continued the enterprise in the 1870s with *El Nasiona* and with *El Telegrafo*. The latter was to last, appearing several times a week, until 1930. Equally long-lived was *El Tiempo*, edited by David Fresko, a redoubtable polemicist and radical Westernizer, from the 1870s until the early

1930s. His counterpart in Izmir was Aaron H̄azan, who published *La Buena Esperansa* from 1871 to 1922. In Salonica, Saadi Halevi and his son Sam Levy brought out *La Epoka* from 1875 till 1912. Sofia also had a lively Ladino press, *La Voz de Israel* becoming the most significant Jewish newspaper in Bulgaria between 1877 and 1899. All told, 389 Ladino newspapers were founded, most of them between 1880 and 1920.

These newspapers were important not just for the circulation of information. In continuity with the overall framework of moralization of the masses that had been the mission of traditional Ladino writers, the new journalists were deeply engaged with the reform of Sephardic society, attacking "obscurantist" and "superstitious" habits and spreading new ideas about dress, food, and hygiene. Such preoccupations eventually led to overt politicization, and the whole gamut of political stances such as Ottomanism (patriotism for a united, liberal Ottoman polity), local nationalism in the successor states to the empire, Zionism, and socialism were represented in the columns of the press. By World War I, not only was the Sephardic world fully cognizant of the political movements in the wider Jewish and non-Jewish arenas but it was participating in them.

The Ladino newspaper constituted the most fertile form of creativity in the Eastern Sephardic world in the modern period and created a public sphere in Ladino. The transmission of news was only one among its many goals. Equally important was the omnipresent voice of the editor, who would frequently write most of the news columns but also editorialized throughout the paper, giving his own take on events and developments, polemicizing and militating for his agenda, which was usually in the direction of promoting reform. To further this goal, much space was given to acquaint the reader with the latest developments in the fields of science, technology, dress, and food occurring in Europe. Indeed, in many cases supplements devoted to this task emerged as newspapers in their own right, such as *El Instruktor*, *El Sol*, and *El Amigo de la Famiya*, which were created by David Fresko, the editor of *El Tiempo*. The papers ran advertisements for European products and gave advice on their use.⁹

The attention of the reader was held by serialized translations of popular European novels that would later be published in book form. The newspaper was hence the site of the introduction of entirely new genres in Ladino.

Hundreds of such novels were to appear in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, translations eventually accompanied by some original works by local writers. Nowhere is the Judeo-Hispanicization of outside influences more apparent than in the pages of these translated novels and novellas. The title pages already announced the process with words such as *imitado*, *adaptado*, *rezumido* (imitated, adapted, summarized). The translators rarely searched for

an exact equivalence with the original; rather, these were the products of acts of rewriting.¹⁰ Plots were adapted, transformed, and frequently given a local hue, usually in far fewer pages than the original. The line between what was recognizable as a translation and an original work of fiction blurred and frequently disappeared in this new literature. The new Ladino work of fiction emerged in the interstices of genres. *Manon Lescaut*, by Abbé Prevost, was reduced to 82 pages; *Paul et Virginie*, by Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, to 23 pages. Alexander Ben Ghiat, Elia Karmona, and Shelomo Israel Sherezli were the most prolific of the translators/authors.

Works of drama also gained in popularity. Many of the plays of Shakespeare and Molière were translated, rewritten, and adapted, again rather freely. Original works, some on biblical but also some on secular themes, also emerged. Zionist societies as well as socialist organizations in Salonica were particularly active in fostering this activity. Many plays were published in the Jewish press, which also developed other genres, such as poetry. The Salonican Jacob Jona became famous throughout the Sephardic world with his satirical poems and songs on the events and personalities of the day; he also collected anecdotes, proverbs, love songs, and short stories.

The converse of this increase of secular writing in Ladino was accompanied by a decline in the number of publications of religious import. Sephardic rabbinical culture, ever more anemic, could not withstand the rising tide of cultural adaptation. By the end of the nineteenth century, new Hebraic and religious Ladino works had shrunk to a handful. Secularization had arrived with a vengeance.

The development of new genres in Ladino illustrates an important point about the dynamics of Westernization in this context. Westernization was not just an act of mimesis, with a triumphant West as the subject and a subservient Sephardic East as the object. Rather, it was a dynamic process with the local frequently coopting and domesticating the new, creating new hybrid genres in many domains of cultural creativity ranging from literature to music. The Sephardim, like many of their non-Jewish counterparts in the region facing the same challenges, "imitated" and "adapted" and transformed the Western, creating a complex bricolage of cultural modes that married "East" and "West."

CHALLENGES TO LADINO

Paradoxically, the burning issue in this period of efflorescence was the question of the status of Ladino and whether it should be abandoned. The language was threatened by the very process of change that had seen its emergence as a secular

medium. Accused from all sides of being nothing more than a "corrupt jargon," Ladino steadily lost its legitimacy among Sephardic Jews as a proper language of discourse.

As part of its "civilizing mission," the Alliance was determined to eradicate the usage of Ladino. Like the European reformers for whom Yiddish was an unwholesome relic of the past that must be discarded, the Alliance's Central Committee and the teachers were hostile to all local Jewish languages and dialects. By the early 1880s, some teachers were fining students if they used Ladino in the schools. In 1884, the Central Committee formally banned the language from all its educational establishments. It is doubtful whether this was ever really implemented. Because Hebrew and religious instruction were taught by local rabbis who used Ladino as a teaching medium, its presence in the schools continued. But by frowning upon it and discouraging its usage as much as possible, the schools contributed to its delegitimization in the eyes of the people.

This was aided considerably by the overriding emphasis given to French in the Alliance schools. Apart from the hours devoted to Hebrew, Turkish, and, in some schools, to one other European language, and apart from religious instruction, where Ladino crept in, subjects from natural sciences to geography and arithmetic were taught in French, which the students began to study in the lowest grades.

The next challenge to Ladino came from Turkish. The official view of the Alliance was that a good knowledge of the language of the country was essential if Jews were to deserve emancipation. It was a moral imperative for the Jews of Turkey to learn Turkish. Furthermore, it was indispensable for social advancement, because many careers in the civil service would be accessible to Turkish-speaking Jews. The Alliance had been shocked to see how difficult it had been to find a Jewish leader of any stature who could speak enough Turkish to become a member of the Council of State in 1876, when the abortive first Ottoman constitution was put briefly into effect. For many Alliance teachers, the example of the Armenians who had advanced in the Ottoman administration because of their intimate knowledge of Turkish was one that had to be emulated by the Jews. The Central Committee inquired several times as to how to train Jews to become civil servants, but no adequate means were found. Indeed, though the Alliance paid lip service to the importance of learning the language of the country, in reality it did not make great efforts in this direction. French was the language of civilization, and the Alliance's first priority was civilizing the Jews.

The language issue emerged with acuity as a result both of reform and of the pressure on the state to stem the tide of local nationalisms. Turkicization was adopted as state policy under the Young Turks. But, by the end of the nineteenth

century, increasing emphasis was already being put on control of the foreign schools and on the spread of Turkish among the non-Muslims of the empire. In 1894, the state decreed that the teaching of some Turkish in all non-Muslim schools would be compulsory, and it began to send out Turkish teachers paid by the government. However, the decree did not make Turkish the language of instruction. The Jews and the Alliance could not remain insensitive to this development, and the hours devoted to Turkish were increased in many schools. In the meantime, the Chief Rabbinate began to concern itself with this matter. A commission was created to oversee the ways in which Turkish could be introduced into the Talmudei Torah. An old Talmud Torah in Istanbul was transformed into a school where the language of instruction was Turkish.

The Young Turk Revolution of 1908, which abolished the last inequalities between Muslims and non-Muslims and which instituted compulsory military service, increased substantially the demands for more Turkish in the schools. All of the Alliance teachers pointed out the new possibilities now open to the Jews in the civil service. The Alliance was quick to respond and, in a new decree, increased the hours of Turkish studied in each school. There were by now better teachers of Turkish available, and the aim was to direct the best students to pursue the rest of their secondary education in government schools, a route taken by increasing numbers. Nevertheless, no other major changes in the curriculum were undertaken in the Alliance institutions. The primacy given to French subverted all efforts. Ladino lost out from all points of view. No defender of the language emerged in the educational system in which three languages already took precedence: French as the language of civilization; Hebrew as the language of the religion; and Ottoman Turkish as the language of the country.

Sephardic journalists had been engaged with the language problem since the beginning of their enterprise. Raphael Uziel, the publisher of one of the first newspapers in Ladino, *Puertas del Oriente* in 1845-46, commented in its pages on the "mixed" nature of the language, its lack of standardization, and its inferior status. Similar concerns were to be voiced by almost all Sephardic journalists expressing themselves in the Ladino press. Many, such as the editor of Vienna's *El Nacional*, proposed the outright abandonment of Ladino in favor of modern Spanish, whereas others argued for the adoption of the language of the state, abhorring a return to the tongue of the "ancient persecutors" whose distant offspring, Ladino, was itself distasteful because of its Iberian baggage. Fresko, who was closely aligned to the Alliance, was the strongest critic of Ladino, arguing for increased efforts for the learning of Turkish. Fierce polemics broke out in the pages of *El Tiempo* on this subject after the 1880s. The lone defender of Ladino emerged in the person of Sam Levy, the co-editor of Salonica's *La*

Epoka, who argued for the retention of a modernized and standardized form of the language.

Growing familiarity with political movements such as the emergent nationalisms in the Ottoman Empire made the small but highly vocal Sephardic intelligentsia increasingly uncomfortable with the proliferation of languages in the community. From the 1890s onward, the columns of the Judeo-Spanish newspapers such as *El Tiempo*, *El Telegrafo*, *El Meseret*, and *La Buena Esperansa* are full of polemics about the language question. Sephardic writers, all of them graduates of the Alliance schools, became deeply concerned about the languages that should be taught in these institutions. Writing in Ladino, the journalists nonetheless agreed that it constituted a corrupt medium, did not suit the requirements of the age, and had to go. Although most remained convinced that a knowledge of French was indispensable for an understanding of "civilization," many agreed that the future lay with Turkish—and that both were indispensable for the modern Ottoman Jew.

In 1900, the *Tamim-i Lisan-i Osmani Cemiyeti* (Society for the Propagation of the Ottoman Language) was founded by Jews in Istanbul. Similar societies sprang up in the aftermath of the Young Turk Revolution, which was greeted with great enthusiasm by Ottoman Jews. Ladino newspapers, beginning with the *Ceride-i Lisan* of 1891, had begun to publish a few of their pages in Turkish. An increasing number of Jews began to attend Ottoman secondary schools and institutions of higher education, though these were still a minority of Jewish students on the eve of World War I.

The nascent Zionist movement among Sephardic Jews after 1908 propagandized in favor of Hebrew but was not particularly successful. In theory, most Jewish public figures were convinced of the need for Turkish but, in practice, the move toward it remained limited to a relatively small minority of Jewish students. The educational infrastructure created by the Alliance remained in place; French remained popular as the language of civilization par excellence. Although more Jews were now continuing their education after the Alliance schools in Turkish institutions, the majority of the Jewish population remained satisfied with the Alliance. The multiethnic nature of the empire, the existence of many different educational systems associated with the different religious and ethnic minorities, and the relative weakness of the Turkish educational infrastructure were all contributing factors to the relative slowness of Turkicization among the Jews of the Ottoman Empire.

Nevertheless, Ladino continued to be the object of attack and derision among those who earned their livelihood by writing in it daily. It suffered, on the one hand, from the prestige of French and, on the other, from the necessity accorded to Turkish by Ottomanist patriotism. The nation-states that carved up the Otto-

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man Empire and succeeded it after World War I eroded even further a language whose status had already been weakened considerably. In Serbia, Bosnia, and Bulgaria, and later in Greece and Turkey, the Jewish school systems were eventually nationalized, with the language of the country holding pride of place. In Bulgaria, which had a successful Zionist movement, Hebrew instruction in Jewish schools emerged as a significant alternative. The decline of the traditional educational system and the policies of the Alliance and later modern state schools, all linked in one way or the other to the vagaries of the process of transformation undergone by the Ottoman Levant, converged to sever the chain of transmission of Ladino from generation to generation in a written form and relegated it exclusively to the home. The same process that begat the explosion in Ladino literary activity was also eventually to be responsible for the demise of the language.

By the 1930s, the number of Ladino speakers had begun to diminish. Serbo-Croatian newspapers had already replaced the last Ladino newspaper of Sarajevo, *La Alborada*, in 1901. In Bulgaria, the interwar period saw a precipitous decline in the number of publications in Ladino. In Turkey, the move toward Latin script in the 1920s prompted the Jews to switch to this script in Ladino. This led to cutting off new generations from the centuries-old literature written in Hebrew Rashi script. Creativity and literary activity in the language declined dramatically in Turkey in the twentieth century.

Salonica, the largest Sephardic center, held out the longest. Publishing in Ladino continued in the interwar years. Nevertheless, there too the decline in the number of publications was quite evident. "National" languages were replacing Ladino as the mother tongue of the Sephardim, and the new value system continued to valorize European languages to the detriment of the local "jargon." The latter was also under attack from Hebrew, promoted by significant Zionist movements in Bulgaria and Greece. The last Ladino newspaper in the world printed in traditional Rashi script, *El Mesajero*, was closed down by the occupying German forces in Salonica in 1941.

The Holocaust destroyed Ladino together with the communities that had seen it flourish over the centuries. The Jews of Salonica, with the rest of Greek Jewish communities, were decimated. Most of the Sephardim of Belgrade and Sarajevo perished. Bulgarian Jewry, which survived the war, was deeply traumatized and left en masse for Israel after 1948. Turkish Jewry, which survived intact, had also suffered major trauma during the war years and also migrated in large numbers. By the second half of the twentieth century, only small remnants were to be found in the old heartlands of the Eastern Sephardic diaspora. Most were transplanted to Israel.

Ladino did not survive the transition to Israel, meeting yet another nation-

state with demands for an exclusive national language—in this case, Hebrew. Today, there is no serious literary creativity in the language that is spoken and understood mostly by the older Sephardim. Writing in Ladino survives here and there in a few periodicals, and in a page devoted to it in each issue of the Turkish Jewish newspaper *Shalom*. No young Sephardim speak it as their mother tongue. Having lasted for five centuries, the language is for all intents and purposes dead, a casualty of the Holocaust and of the long-term, secular processes of political, social, and cultural change that destroyed the transnational Levant in which it had developed and flourished.

NOTES

1. Archives of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, France XVII.F.28, M. Fresco, Rapport annuel 1907–1908.
2. The term Sephardim is used here to refer to the direct descendants of the Jews of the Iberian Peninsula who retained Judeo-Iberian traditions and languages.
3. For a discussion of these points, see Aron Rodrigue, "Difference and Tolerance in the Ottoman Empire: Interview by Nancy Reynolds," *Stanford Humanities Review* 5 (1995): 81–90. For a general history of the Sephardim, see Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry: The Judeo-Spanish Community, 14th–20th Centuries* (Berkeley, 2000).
4. The principal modern proponent of this view is Haim Vidal Sephiha, *Le Ladino: Judéo-espagnol calque* (Paris, 1973).
5. For an overview of the *Me-am Loez*, see Michael Molho, *Le Me-am Loez: Encyclopédie populaire du séphardisme levantin* (Salonica, 1945).
6. The most comprehensive book on this episode is still Gershom Scholem, *Sabbetai Sevi* (Princeton, N.J., 1973).
7. See Aron Rodrigue, "From Millet to Minority: Turkish Jewry in the 19th and 20th Centuries," in Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katznelson, eds., *Paths of Emancipation: Jews Within States and Capitalism* (Princeton, N.J., 1995), 238–61.
8. For the latest overview of the Alliance's activities, see Aron Rodrigue, *Images of Sephardi and Eastern Jewries in Transition, 1860–1939: The Teachers of the Alliance Israélite Universelle* (Seattle, 1993).
9. For this and for a case study of Ladino newspaper culture, see Sarah Abrevaya Stein, "The Creation of Yiddish and Judeo-Spanish Newspaper Cultures in the Russian and Ottoman Empires" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1999).
10. For a study of this phenomenon, see Olga Borovaia, "Translation and Westernization: Gulliver's Travels in Ladino," *Jewish Social Studies* n.s. 7, no. 2 (Winter 2001): 149–68.

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