



*Review Essay*

**Ladino in print: Toward a comprehensive bibliography**

AVIVA BEN-UR\*

*Dept. of Judaic and Near Eastern Studies, University of Massachusetts Amherst, U.S.A.*

**Abstract.** Ladino literature, encompassing some 3,000 titles from the 1540s to the present day, and including genres as varied as translated biblical texts, rabbinical commentaries, prayer books, novels, dictionaries, plays, and newspapers, has rarely been used as a historical source. Nor has any scholar attempted a history of this literature, its producers and its consumers. This article argues that the lack of historically-oriented bibliographies largely accounts for this scholarly neglect. Surveying major Ladino collections worldwide, the mostly enumerative bibliographies that have been produced since the late 19th century, and historical insights from three annotated Ladino bibliographies, this study argues that the crafting of annotated bibliographies constitutes in itself a form of historical research. Suggesting new directions for cataloguing Judeo-Spanish items, especially the incorporation of detailed content analysis and what the late D. F. McKenzie called, “the sociology of texts,” this study concludes in addressing the feasibility of Abraham Yaari’s hope for a comprehensive bibliography of predominantly Hebrew-scripted Judeo-Spanish literature.

Writing in the 1930s, the distinguished scholar Salo Wittmayer Baron noted the historical importance of Ladino literature. He also observed that the history of this literature had yet to be written.<sup>1</sup> This statement remains true even today; no detailed history of Ladino writings, nor of their producers and consumers, has ever been attempted.<sup>2</sup> Rarely, moreover, has Ladino literature been used as a historical source.<sup>3</sup> A prime reason is that a comprehensive, annotated, and nuanced bibliography of this literature and its authors has yet to be prepared – and this, notwithstanding that most scholars estimate that some 3,000 Ladino titles have appeared from the sixteenth century until today,<sup>4</sup> titles which encompass a broad array of genres, including novels, memoirs, dictionaries, translated biblical texts, rabbinical commentaries, prayer books, poetry, plays, communal records, almanacs, calendars, newspapers, historical and scientific accounts, political tracts and broadsides.

It should be obvious, going beyond the need to remark even, that without proper bibliographies, a historian begins work in a jungle sometimes too dense to penetrate, or, to extend the metaphor, a desert too dry for cultivation. Yet were it my intention only to repeat this point, the purpose of this

\* The author wishes to thank Angel Saenz Badillos, Wim Klooster, Sarah Stein and Kenneth Stow for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

article would be only to urge the preparation of the necessary bibliographies. And by itself, this would be a small, first step, pointing to various archives and the preliminary work that has already been completed. But I would like to argue further: that thoroughly prepared Ladino bibliographies, ones that in particular concentrate comparatively on varied holdings (what one collection has and another does not), coupled with material descriptions and, especially, detailed annotations, constitute in themselves a form of historical research.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, as this article will demonstrate, historically-minded Judeo-Spanish bibliographies can potentially direct and enrich monographs related to explorations of the Jewish past.

Evaluating the utility of Ladino bibliographies first requires a consideration of taxonomical categories, of which there are two principal types.<sup>6</sup> The first, the enumerative bibliography, is most often a straightforward list of books on a specific subject or by a particular author, usually arranged in alphabetical or chronological order. Enumerative bibliographies are essentially lists that allow readers to identify books through such data as the author's name, the title, edition, publisher, publication date, and details regarding page numbers or illustrations. The second type deals with a book's physical properties and is alternately known as analytical, descriptive, or material bibliography. By contrast to the enumerative, the material bibliography, as I prefer to term it, views the book as "primarily a material entity or artifact." In addition to providing the main identifying details of the book (title, author, publisher, and so forth), the material bibliography usually entails a careful and accurate physical description of books, either by an author or on a specific subject, with literal transcriptions of the title pages, physical information allowing a scholar to differentiate one edition or issue from another, and details on size, page gatherings, page numbers, measurements, and paper quality.<sup>7</sup>

Ladino bibliographies have traditionally been enumerative, mere listings of titles with their authors, publication dates and publishers. Historically-orientated bibliography demands much more. Thorough lists of Ladino books should consider material aspects, noting characteristics like those just mentioned of size and page gatherings, but also typeface, binding, paper quality, and printer marks. Such features provide clues about an author's reputation, the stature of the genre, intended readership, and consumer taste. But Judeo-Spanish bibliography must also describe and analyze thematic content in the manner of the annotated bibliography, something that until now has been rare in Ladino book lists. An enumerative structure, fortified materially and annotatively, would lay the necessary foundation for building more sophisticated and historically useful bibliographical studies. At the same time, it would subtly advocate and facilitate the use of Ladino literature as a historical source.

### Major known Ladino collections worldwide

Before discussing the historically-orientated bibliography in fuller detail, a survey of existing Ladino collections and bibliographies is appropriate. Today, the majority of libraries known to possess Ladino works are in the United States. The major collections catalogued in separate bibliographies are those held by Yeshiva University (approximately 900 items), Harvard College (384 items), and the Library of Congress (289 items).<sup>8</sup> To these should be added the recently catalogued Judeo-Spanish collection of the Lubavitcher Rebbes (approximately 200 items) and the private collection of the late New York Sephardi leader Louis N. Levy (approximately 200 items). Institutional libraries with collections that have not been catalogued separately include the New York Public Library's Jewish Division (approximately 300 items),<sup>9</sup> the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (approximately 250 items),<sup>10</sup> YIVO (approximately 200 items),<sup>11</sup> and the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati.<sup>12</sup>

The State of Israel, home to the largest population of Ladino speakers (some 100–200,000), not surprisingly houses the most complete Ladino collections. Jerusalem's Ben-Zvi Institute alone has 1,300 titles, including journals and ephemera (such as fliers and announcements); the catalog remains to be computerized. Nine hundred items are housed in The Jewish National Library at the Givat Ram campus of the Hebrew University. This collection was catalogued in the 1930s; currently a descriptive bibliography of these and more recent Judeo-Spanish acquisitions is being prepared.<sup>13</sup> There are several other institutional collections and private holdings in Israel and worldwide.<sup>14</sup> Yet, despite these rich collections and the relatively recently initiated process of cataloguing (within the last half century or so), the scholarly world has generally ignored the content and value of Ladino writing.

### Ladino bibliographies and their objectives

Ladino bibliography began to develop in the second half of the nineteenth century. These early bibliographies, including Meyer Kayserling's 1890 *Biblioteca Española-Portuguesa-Judaica*,<sup>15</sup> were not specifically devoted to Ladino publications, but included them alongside other Sephardic or Hebrew-scripted publications. These early bibliographies also lack a shared methodology, as well as essential information, such as details about book-content, authors, publishing houses, printers, and the whereabouts of comparative holdings in other collections.<sup>16</sup>

Subsequent work has become more sophisticated. In a recent article addressing the standards of enumerative and material bibliography, Shmuel Refael of Bar Ilan University identified seven types of Ladino bibliography.<sup>17</sup>

First, publications appearing in general bibliographies of the Hebrew book. Second, bibliographies devoted solely to Ladino publications. Third, bibliographies arranged according to community, place of publication and publisher/printer. Fourth, bibliographies arranged according to genre. Fifth, bibliographies limited to specific library collections. Sixth, bibliographies devoted to a specific author. And seventh, supplements to previously published bibliographies.

Most listings of Ladino books are, as said, enumerative and function as check-lists for readers seeking publications on a particular subject or author. Enumerative Ladino bibliographies of collections in the United States include those describing the Judeo-Spanish holdings of Yeshiva University, Harvard College, and, with the exception of a few entries that describe content, although minimally, the Library of Congress. Enumerative listings of Europe and Israel include the Ladino catalogue of the Kongelige Bibliotek of Copenhagen<sup>18</sup> and the bibliography of Hebrew-scripted books prepared by Bernard Friedberg.<sup>19</sup> These enumerative bibliographies are crucial for understanding the scope of Ladino literature and its whereabouts. However, they generally provide little, if any, information to stimulate historical research. Specifically, most do not facilitate access to books by registering comparative holdings, nor do they provide physical and textual description, as in material bibliographies or those with content analysis.

Shmuel Refael has proposed four essential requirements of Judeo-Spanish bibliographies: that they advance the state of knowledge of Ladino books (professional); aid students and researchers to access books (utilitarian); analyze content (content); and detail technical aspects (physical). Most bibliographies, particularly English-language ones that deal poorly with Hebrew-scripted title pages, notes Refael, fail to describe content, rendering difficult to impossible the identification of a book or specific edition.<sup>20</sup> Refael points to Yeshayahu Vinograd's *Thesaurus of the Hebrew Book* as the most inclusive and systematic bibliography containing information on Ladino publications.<sup>21</sup> Each of its entries lists the title, author, subject, place and year of publication, name of the printer, number of pages, bibliographical references, and various miscellaneous observations. Still, Refael notes, this bibliography falls short, since it does not specify the location of Ladino books.<sup>22</sup> Nor does it generally provide thematic descriptions.

Refael's criteria may be developed further to enhance our understanding of Ladino books as potential historical sources. Content analysis is no doubt the central concern of historians focusing on the text itself, but other bibliographical aspects are important, too.<sup>23</sup> Ladino book lists have failed to attain the level of sophistication established by the bibliographical theory of the last few decades, which advocates the inclusion of production information and re-

ception studies. Ladino bibliographies have also failed to include what the late D. F. McKenzie described as "the sociology of texts." Existing Ladino bibliographies stop short of considering the social and technical circumstances of the production and reproduction, editing and reediting, and reading and rereading of Ladino publications.<sup>24</sup>

Future Ladino bibliographies would be enhanced by entries that consider text production (the labor of writers, editors, publishers, and printers alike, as well as their tools and technologies), readership (gender, age, sub-ethnic group, geographical distribution), and reception (circulation – often derived through an analysis of paper or printer marks – reprints, and translations into other languages). Prepared with an eye to these criteria, Ladino bibliography may help uncover aspects of Jewish history that conventional historical methodologies do not. As McKenzie has noted, when books are treated through the lens of the sociology of texts, "bibliography can be an essential means by which we recover the past . . . [n]o other discipline – and certainly neither history nor criticism – commands the range of textual phenomena, or the technical scholarship, to deal fully with [a book's] production, distribution, and consumption."<sup>25</sup>

Three Ladino bibliographies prepared by me during the past eight years are not directly informed by "the sociology of texts." However, the underlying methodology has sought both to meet Refael's criteria<sup>26</sup> and also to go beyond them by introducing additional criteria that are essential, in my opinion, for bibliography that is historically orientated. These include a full transcription of the title page in the original language(s); a detailed content analysis of the introduction(s) and main text; a history of the provenance of the specific collection catalogued; the inclusion of books predominantly written in Hebrew but containing some Ladino material; and the inclusion of books translated from the Ladino into other languages. The three bibliographical entries now to be discussed illustrate the point.

### **A precious inheritance: The Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) collection of the Lubavitcher Rebbes**

The private library of the Lubavitcher (Chabad) Rebbes in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, New York is the unanticipated repository of a sizable number of Ladino items. Under instructions of the seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the library completed in 1993 a computerized catalogue of its collection, which includes over 200,000 Hebrew-scripted volumes, and shortly thereafter it opened its doors to the public. This public access led to the cataloguing of the library's rare Judeo-Spanish collection, which includes a content analysis of each item listed, as well as lists comparative holdings in selected, major Ladino collections

worldwide.<sup>27</sup> The result is a descriptive inventory of 207 Ladino items, a preface tracing the provenance of this collection and exploring the ideological reasons why Yiddish-speaking Hasidic leaders amassed Ladino publications, and an introduction providing an overview of Ladino literature within the context of Sephardic history.

The main text of this bibliography, tentatively entitled, *A Precious Inheritance: The Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) Collection of the Lubavitcher Rebbes: A Descriptive Bibliography*, reproduces the title page of each item, lists information regarding the production of the book, and technical information about the book size and page length, provides content analysis and literary and historical notes of interest, and compares the Lubavitch collection to other major Ladino collections. Unlike many Ladino bibliographies, which are either in Hebrew or Latin letters, this one provides titles and authors in both Hebrew and Latin characters, English translations of titles, and both the Jewish and Christian dates of publication.

The Ladino collection of the Lubavitcher Rebbes represents works gathered from four continents and spanning five centuries, the earliest among them being the so-called Ladino Pentateuch, published in Istanbul in 1547. Though this collection is distinguished in its variety of genres, the majority of titles represent sacred literature, and many of these works have not been catalogued in other lists to indicate that they contain Ladino material. An example is several Ladino prayerbooks bearing Ladino directives and "tune indicators" of Ladino melodies. One of these is the Sephardic prayerbook, *Seder Tefilot* [Order of Prayers], published in Florence in 1736, which includes a Passover haggadah with Ladino directives and Hebrew poems to be sung to various melodies, including "ya viene el senyor de la redensyon;" "nuestro senyor;" and "yamava la mi madre."<sup>28</sup> Some of these tune indicators refer to well-known Ladino *romansas*, while others represent heretofore unknown melodies.

A number of items in the Lubavitcher Rebbes' library represent titles previously unknown to scholars. One is a Zionist tract from mid-nineteenth century Belgrade, entitled *Sha'arei Teshuva* [Gates of Repentance], which is a rare source for the history of Jewish nationalism among Belgrade's Sephardim. Comprised of four unnumbered pages, this Rashi-scripted booklet was published by the members of the Tithing Society, who founded the Sha'arei Teshuva Society in order to donate their collections to Shelom Yerushalayim, "a very praiseworthy and blessed society which began in large and honorable communities." The text urges its readers to donate tithes to the Shelom Yerushalayim society founded in 1851 by Rabbi Judah Alkalai to promote Jewish settlement in the land of Israel. The Tithing Society's ideology is

based on Alkalai's innovative interpretation of *teshuva* as a *physical* return of the Jewish people to the land of Israel.

Another noteworthy book in this collection is the historical novel, *Esther The Beautiful*, a Hebrew translation originally published in Ladino in 1900.<sup>29</sup> This book, which, like every Ladino book, must be read by the bibliographer in its entirety, poignantly depicts the enchantment with which Ladino was often perceived and speaks volumes about the myth of Sephardic supremacy, a myth that also extended to the language of Sephardic Jews.<sup>30</sup> The story takes place in late sixteenth-early seventeenth-century Istanbul and is based on the courtier Esther Kyra of that city and Solomon Ashkenazi of Cracow, who later became court physician to the Sultan. In a climactic scene, Muslim characters plot to kidnap the young Esther and her adopted sister, Rivka Nunes. Observing these two Sephardic women from afar, the Muslim would-be kidnappers, Sifan and his servant, exchange the following. Sifan begins:

- “In what language are they speaking?” ...
- “Spanish! ... They are Sephardic Jewesses, who came from Spain not long ago and have not abandoned their language.”
- “Ah, but that is lovely!” (... grasping his servant's hand), “Ah, but that is magic!”<sup>31</sup>

The attitudes toward Ladino expressed here are particularly significant. Sephardi women were often literate only in the vernacular, and they thus formed an important segment of the Ladino readership of the Ottoman Empire and its Sephardic Diaspora. Examples such as the novel *Esther The Beautiful* are welcoming entry points for an analysis of the so-called “feminine” elements of Ladino and its literature, parallel to the way the female dimensions of Yiddish and its literature have been examined by scholars such as Shmuel Niger and Naomi Seidman.<sup>32</sup>

As mentioned before, the edition of *Esther the Beautiful* cited above is in fact a Hebrew translation of an original Ladino work. Clearly, Ladino literature was sufficiently appealing to the greater Jewish world to merit translation into a more universal Jewish language, suggesting that Sephardi historical fiction and other Judeo-Spanish literature had a special importance in the Hebrew speaking world. The existence of this edition also raises anew the question of how much of Ladino literature is not original, but comprised of either translations of religious texts or novels originally published in French, German and Italian. As David Fintz Altabé demonstrated in his ground-breaking article in 1976, most of the Ladino literature listed in Abraham Yaari's catalogue of Ladino books housed at the Jewish National Library in Jerusalem is actually original. Altabé's survey of 254 novels indicates that the overwhelming majority of works published from 1900–1933 (that is, 241 out

of 254 books, or 95%) were the original works of Ladino writers, and not translations.<sup>33</sup>

The study of the Ladino items in the Lubavitcher Rebbes' library is particularly significant, since the collection was previously unknown to Sephardic Studies Scholars and Ladino bibliographers. The seemingly incongruous presence of Judeo-Spanish books in a strongly Yiddish-speaking, Hasidic environment suggests that additional Ladino collections may be awaiting discovery in other unexpected places.

### **A Ladino legacy: The Judeo-Spanish collection of Louis N. Levy**

The renowned Sephardi leader Louis N. Levy (1918–1994), the child of Judeo-Spanish immigrants from Monastir and Istanbul, co-founded the New York based Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies and Culture (incorporated in 1969), which is devoted to promoting Sephardic language, cultural and historical studies. Levy, who made his living in the garment industry, personally assembled one of the richest Ladino and rare Judaica libraries in the country, which he began to do as early as the late 1960s.

In tribute to his memory, in 1998, the Levy family commissioned a descriptive catalogue of this library. The resulting bibliography, *A Ladino Legacy: The Judeo-Spanish Collection of Louis N. Levy*, which appeared in 2001, includes 204 entries of books from five continents.<sup>34</sup> Like that of the Lubavitcher Rebbes, most of Levy's collection falls into the category of religious literature, although it also contains a variety of publications ranging from almanacs and grammars to works on science. Using the method noted above for describing Ladino works, *A Ladino Legacy* details the provenance and history of this library<sup>35</sup> and proceeds to a discussion of the Ladino language and its literature. Most of the book is composed of entries arranged by genre. Each section opens with a brief introduction to the specific genre, and continues by detailing, one by one, the books of the genre being catalogued, concluding with a list of comparative holdings. An example follows:

#### **#99A**

##### **Copy #1**

זהלציב. ספר שבט מוסר. ראו זה חדש ספר כתב איש רבי מרבי המלך  
היושבים רא[שונה ע]ם [ה]מלך במלאכתו כדרכיו כמעלליו אשר פעל ועשה  
ורבים השיג מעןן ושבט פושעים הגיע לפרשת דרכים פתח להם פתח פתוח  
כפתחו של אולם להשיב ידי כופרים מוסר ה' ודרכיו הישרים זכה וזכה את  
הרבים ה"ה החכם השלם הדיין המצויין הרב הכולל מוה"ר אליהו הכהן זלה"ה  
מתושבי ק"ק אזמיר יע"ש: אגורה שי אישטאנפה אין לאדינו פארה דארלו קון  
פ'ורמאש אה אונה פאר"ה איל פליגו פארה קואלקיר אומברי קי לי שיאה קולאי  
שי אה מירקארלו שי פארה מילדארלו. אי שיר [מזכה] את [הרב] ים. אי קון



אישטו אלרגארן וידאס בע[זרת ה] אל ובמהרה יבא הגואל. אכ[י"ר]: נדפס בקושטאנדינה אשר תחת ממשלת אדוננו המלך שולטן מוסטאפה יר"ה. שנת קוד קויתי ה' לפ"ק בדפוס האחים ה"ר ראובן וה"ר נסים אשכנזי ינ"ו.

*Sefer Shevet Musar.* [*The Staff of Moral Chastisement.*] Rabbi Elijah son of Rabbi Solomon Abraham HaCohen of Izmir. Translated from the Hebrew by Abraham son of Rabbi Isaac Asa. Istanbul, 1765/6 (5526-י"ו). Publisher: Moses Sid. Printers: Rabbi Reuben and Rabbi Nisim Ashkenazi. [Typesetters: Nisim son of Hayim Ashkenazi and Moses son of Mordecai Ashkenazi.] Rashi script. [1] [1a–2b]; 1a–301b ... pages. 18.5 × 13.5 cm. Red and black marbled hardcover binding with the words הצעיר יצחק הכהן "סיט בכר בנינו" inscribed on the front cover. The spine and back cover are missing, the pages are loose, one page is missing from the end, and the pages are stained and worm-eaten, sometimes affecting the text. Fragile condition.

#### **Main text:**

A moralistic and sermonic guide in 52 chapters on the life cycle. Discussions include midwifery, transmigration of the soul, repentance, and commentaries on Hebrew prayers. Abraham Asa published three editions of this book in Ladino (Istanbul, 1740 and 1766; and Izmir, 1860).

#### **Introductory pages:**

With the author's Hebrew introduction (p. [2a]). The author indicates that he wrote this book to "castigate" (לייסר) himself and others like him and describes the contents of the book. He divides this book into four sections: discussion of sins according to rabbinical works and his own original ideas; three sermons on repentance, including his original ideas; discussions on repentance, and an explanation on three Hebrew prayers; and original ideas on his book, *Midrash Talpiot*. He explains that the book is divided into 52 chapters, the numerical value of the letters of his first name.

With the translator's rhymed Ladino introduction and a Ladino poem bearing the acrostic, "Abraham Asa Hazak" (p. [2b]). The translator praises God and warns his readers to avoid sin. He acknowledges Moses Sid as the publisher of this book and himself as the translator. He refers to the Ladino languages as לאדינו ["Ladino"] and the work of translating to Ladino as "ladinar" ["לו לאדיני"]; lo "ladini"].

#### **Concluding pages:**

With Asa's rhymed Hebrew poem on completing this work. This is followed by a rhymed passage in Ladino encouraging his readers to read this book and pray for the messiah and the redemption of the Jewish people (p. 297b).

With an index (pp. 198a–300b ...).

[The following information is from *A Precious Inheritance: The Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) Collection of the Lubavitcher Rebbes, A Descriptive Bibliography* and substitutes for pages missing in this copy:]

With a Ladino note from the “kopiador,” Moses Sid, explaining that he was left impoverished by a fire, and appealing to his subscribers to pay their dues (p. 302b). The colophon (p. 302a) reads:

על ידי המסדר העוסק במלאכת הקודש נסים בכר חיים אשכנזי יצ"ו: ועל ידי המסדר העוסק במלאכת הקודש משה בכר מרדכי אשכנזי יצ"ו: על ידי הפועל העוסק במלאכת הקודש משה בכר מרדכי אשכנזי יצ"ו.

**Comparative holdings:**

Agudas Chassidei Chabad Library:	#139
Library of Congress:	no listing
Bet Eked Sepharim:	Vol. 3, pp. 961–62, #311 (Istanbul, 1740; Istanbul, 1766; Izmir, 1860)
Harvard College Library:	p. 156 (Izmir, 1860 edition; hard-copy and microfiche)
Yeshiva University Library:	p. 50 (undetermined edition lacking a title page)
Jewish National and University Library:	#197 (Izmir, 1860 edition)

Readers will note the attention paid to the name utilized to describe the Judeo-Spanish language of Eastern Sephardim (in this case, “Ladino”) and the process of translating from Ladino to Hebrew (“ladinar”). Additional observations include all personal information supplied by the authors, editors, or printers. Particularly in the case of books such as Bibles or ethical literature, a thorough literary and content analysis of each item’s main text is not always possible. However, general information on the structure and theme(s) of each book does appear. Introductions, prefaces, and conclusions, by contrast, always receive detailed synopses, since they are of manageable length and often include historical information the main text itself omits.

**“In search of the American Ladino Press”**

Arguably, the richest historical source in Ladino is the press. To date, the most comprehensive bibliography on the world Ladino press is Moshe David Gaon’s, *A Bibliography of the Judeo-Spanish (Ladino) Press*.<sup>36</sup> Gaon, working partially through correspondence with Judeo-Spanish scholars residing in the United States, counted twelve American Ladino periodicals. These periodicals have been used by only a handful of historians, foremost among

them Marc D. Angel and the late Joseph M. Papo.<sup>37</sup> Even with Gaon's nearly exhaustive bibliography, scholarly awareness of the American Ladino press, where it exists, has been meager and often distorted, largely because few scholars can read Hebrew-scripted Ladino. Scholars wishing to locate American Ladino periodicals in the United States and elsewhere will also encounter great difficulties, since anthologies of ethnic literatures do not generally consider the Ladino press and never cite holdings. Reference manuals are also lax regarding Judeo-Spanish. *Newspapers in Microform*, a reference book which includes all reports of the U.S. section of newspapers in microform submitted from 1948 to 1982, plus additional reports received through 1983, names only *La America* and *El Luzero Sefaradí*, both available at the American Jewish Periodical Center in Cincinnati, Ohio. The *United States Newspaper Program National Union List* includes several Jewish newspapers, but not one Ladino periodical. In the case of those institutions that have computerized their catalogues, computer searches, such as RLIN (Research Libraries Information Network) and World Cat OCLC (Online Computer Library Center), can ascertain holdings. But this method is effective only if the scholar is familiar with specific titles in advance, as well as with standard transliterations into Latin letters.

Angel and Papo, respectively, were aware of only eight and thirteen U.S. Ladino journals. Recent research has uncovered as many as nineteen separate publications, which appeared between 1910 and 1948.<sup>38</sup> This research has also established that nearly every editor and publisher of the American Ladino press originated from Salonika. This point is at once informative about the leadership of the American Sephardic community and the shared intellectual and professional heritage of many Salonikan Jews themselves. Cataloguing these periodicals has been no small challenge. Each periodical entry had to be provided with technical information regarding title, editors, publishers, lifespan, place of publication, and circulation, followed by a list of depositories according to their National Union Catalog Symbols, and then a transcription of the earliest masthead available. Content analysis and biographical information on the editors and contributors was necessary as well. A sample entry follows:

---

14. Amigo, El NY New York 1923?-1942?

---

Title: איל אמיגו	First issue: 1923?
Title translit:	Last issue: 1942?
Title trans:	Vols. (nos.):
Add.lang:	Frequency: yearly
Editor:	Pages: 1; 4; 6; 8; 16
Assist. editor:	Preservation: scattered issues only
Bus. manager:	Category: communal

Publ: New York Committee Address: (as of Sept. 1933): 725 Fox  
 for the Insane Asylum of St., Bronx, N.Y. (as of Sept. 1937):  
 Salonika 16 Elliot Place, Bronx, N.Y.  
 Circulation:

Depositories: HVB: Sept. 1926; Sept. 1928; Sept. 1930; Sept. 1931; Sept. 1932; Sept. 1933;  
 Sept. 1934; Sept. 1935; Sept. 1937; Sept. 1938; Sept. 1940; Sept. 1941; Sept. 1942 (3 copies)

Masthead:

איל אמיו

פוב"ליקאדו פור איל קומיטי די אליידוס אה איל "אזילו די לוקוס די סאלוניקר" אין ניויורק.

#### Content and Biographical Information:

*El Amigo* was published by the New York committee for the Insane Asylum of Salonika. The 1923 issue of The Sephardic Brotherhood's annual review mentions *El Amigo* as a forthcoming trimestrial bulletin of the Insane Asylum of Salonika. The article explains that the Asylum was founded in 1908 by a group of Sephardi youths who wished to establish a home for Jews who, "through misfortune or maladies lost their sense of reason." These unfortunate individuals "wandered the principal streets of the city, without consciousness of their own existence, and thus caused the Jewish people dishonor among other ethnic elements."<sup>39</sup> By the September 1933 issue, *El Amigo* was published by Isaac Saltiel, the secretary of the New York Committee. Moshe David Gaon and Elena Romero are the only scholars, to my knowledge, aware of the existence of this periodical. Gaon gives *El Amigo* the late date of 1931 and identifies it as an annual publication.<sup>40</sup> Romero dates *El Amigo* to 1932, notes that it was founded to aid the Insane Asylum of Salonika, but does not cite her source of information.<sup>41</sup>

\* \* \*

The scope and richness of Ladino literature is hence considerable, yet it remains mostly untapped, which perhaps partly accounts for the belief that this literature's literary or historical value is slight. Bernard Lewis, for example, has said in his *The Jews of Islam* that Sephardic literature after the sixteenth century, whether in Hebrew or Ladino, "is of limited appeal," though he admits – in the same paragraph – that Sephardim produced "original literature" which "has so far not been adequately studied."<sup>42</sup>

Significantly, those who have recognized the richness of Ladino literature as a reservoir for historical studies have often been bibliographers. Abraham Yaari, author of the first bibliography devoted exclusively to Ladino publications, remarked seventy years ago that his monograph could assist not only researchers of the Ladino language, but also historians of Middle

Eastern Jewry. He hoped that his 1934 bibliography of the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem, the longest Ladino list of any collection until that time, would encourage other libraries to publish catalogues of their own Ladino collections. Such individual lists, he speculated, would allow scholars to construct a comprehensive bibliography of every Ladino item ever published.<sup>43</sup> It is highly appropriate that the first attempt at a comprehensive, descriptive list of Ladino literature has been undertaken at the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem. Nonetheless, such a list will be definitive only when the contents and whereabouts of all individual Ladino collections worldwide are explored and determined, procedures are sufficiently defined, and the newest insights on the crafting of historically orientated bibliography and the "sociology of texts" are applied.<sup>44</sup>

As Ladino bibliographers embark on individual projects, they might also note the bibliographical studies on the far more extensively surveyed literature of the Yiddish language, where most such bibliographies are arranged according to author, not genre. *The Biographical Dictionary (or Lexicon) of Modern Yiddish Literature* includes over seven thousand biographies of writers from the mid-nineteenth century to 1981, with references to their best-known works.<sup>45</sup> Following this model, such a bibliography of Ladino literature may assist in bringing into the mainstream important writers, the authors of dozens of published books, whose names and works reference books on Jewish literature and history often still omit.<sup>46</sup>

During the Holocaust, eighty percent of the people who spoke, wrote and read the Ladino language were murdered by the Nazis. Although Ladino continues to be published until today, mostly in Latin letters, almost nothing original in Ladino has been produced since the folding of the last Ladino newspaper in 1991.<sup>47</sup> Thus, there is a prescribed literary body whose parameters and contents beg to be defined and fully described. This cessation to Ladino literary creativity, though regrettable, also indicates that the work of the Judeo-Spanish bibliographer is finite and eminently possible. What is virtually limitless are the implications for a more varied and complete history of the Jewish people and its literature.

## Notes

1. Salo Wittmayer Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (New York, 1937), 3: 94, n1.
2. Various brief or selective overviews of Ladino literature may be found in general volumes on Sephardic history or culture, most comprehensively, Michael Molho, *Literatura Sefardita de Oriente* (Madrid-Barcelona, 1960); and Elena Romero, *La Creación Literaria en Lengua Sefardí* (Madrid, 1992). Selective treatments include Manuel Alvar, *Judeo-Español Calco* (Madrid, 2000); Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry:*

- A History of the Judeo-Spanish Community, 14th to 20th Centuries* (Berkeley, 2000), 60–64 and 110–115; Moshe Lazar, *The Sephardic Tradition: Ladino and Spanish-Jewish Literature* (New York, 1972); Angelina Muñiz-Huberman, *La Lengua Florida* (Mexico, 1989); and Shmuel Refael, ed., *From Folklore to Judeo-Spanish Literature* (Tel Aviv, 1987) (in Hebrew).
3. Works relying heavily on Ladino periodicals as a historical source are Marc D. Angel, *La America: The Sephardic Experience in the United States* (Philadelphia, 1982); Joseph M. Papo's *Sephardim in Twentieth Century America: In Search of Unity* (San Jose and Berkeley, 1987); Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *The Creation of Yiddish and Judeo-Spanish Newspaper Cultures in the Russian and Ottoman Empires* (diss., Stanford University, 1999), and Aviva Ben-Ur, *Where Diasporas Met: Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews in the City of New York—A Study in Intra-Ethnic Relations* (diss., Brandeis University, 1998). Studies on other genres of Ladino literature include Matthias B. Lehmann, *Judeo-Spanish Musar Literature and the Transformation of Ottoman Sephardic Society (Eighteenth Through Nineteenth Centuries)* (diss., Freie Universität, Berlin, 2002).
  4. Several scholars, including Hayim Y. Sheynin of Gratz College, Philadelphia, Dov Cohen of the Ben-Zvi Institute, Jerusalem, and the late Isaac Rafael Molkho of Jerusalem have agreed that the number of Ladino titles, including periodicals, published since the sixteenth century is about 3,000, but the late Nehemya Alloni of Israel estimated 1,500. (Email correspondence with Hayim Sheynin and Dov Cohen, 2001.) Both C. Ramos-Gil and Henry Besso offered approximations of 5,000 titles, while Marius Sala of Romania numbers these titles at 5,000–6,000. Henry V. Besso, "Judeo-Spanish Literature" *Le Judaïsme-Sephardi* (December 1961): 1016, based on C. Ramos-Gil, "La Lengua española en Israel," in *Tesoro de la Literatura de los Sefaradís*, Vol. 1, Jerusalem, 1959, XXXVII. Ramos-Gil writes, "Generalmente se estima que llegan a 5000 obras," without a reference. Marius Sala, "Die romanischen Judensprachen/Les langues judeo-romanes," *Lexikon der Romanistischen Linguistik* (Tubingen, 1998), G. Holtus, M. Metzeltin and Christian Schmitt, eds., 372–395, 380. I thank Hayim Sheynin for this last reference.
  5. Though the field of book history is gaining recognition in academic circles, bibliography in general, particularly the study of a book's material dimensions, is much denigrated, usually not regarded as an important branch of historical inquiry. And yet, many scholars have convincingly demonstrated the centrality of bibliography to historical scholarship. See, for example, G. Thomas Tanselle's reviews of the field in his, "A Description of Descriptive Bibliography," *Studies in Bibliography* 45 (1992): 1–31, and "Printing History and Other History", *idem*, 48 (1995): 269–290. I thank David Vander Meulen, Professor of English at the University of Virginia and editor of *Studies in Bibliography*, for these references. Exemplary of detailed content analysis is Peter A. Stern's *Sendero Luminoso: An Annotated Bibliography of the Shining Path Guerrilla Movement, 1980–1993* (New Mexico, 1995), in which the author provides detailed synopses of and critical observations on each entry.
  6. There is much taxonomical disagreement among bibliographers, particularly regarding subcategories of these two types. Theoretical guides to bibliography are often mutually contradictory. For his clarifications I thank James L. Harner, of Texas A&M University, who also recommends William Proctor Williams and Craig S. Abbott, *An Introduction to Bibliographical and Textual Studies* (New York, MLA, 1999). See, too, Harner, *On Compiling an Annotated Bibliography*, second edition (New York, 2000). I also thank James Kelly, Humanities Bibliographer at the University of Massachusetts W. E. B. Du Bois library, for introducing me to the world of bibliographers.

7. E. W. Padwick, *Bibliographical Method: An Introductory Survey* (Cambridge/London, 1969), 13–14 and Edwin Elliott Willoughby, *The Uses of Bibliography to Students of Literature and History* (Hamden, CT, 1957), 13–17.
8. Since Besso's 1963 catalogue, the library has acquired 50 more items.
9. This collection appears only as a small section within the library's reference book for Hebrew-scripted card catalogue entries.
10. On computerized card catalogue only.
11. On hard copy, card catalogue only.
12. The number of this institution's Ladino holdings has yet to be established. An undetermined number of Ladino items can also be found in HUC's other library branches, including Los Angeles. The American Jewish Historical Society's catalogue also includes some Ladino materials. A search in 1995 turned up only three Ladino titles at the AJHS, excluding scholarly works on Ladino language and literature. Among these titles is a partial run of the New York Ladino newspaper, *La Vara* ("The Staff").
13. See Dov Cohen's "Database of the Mif'al Habibliographia Ha-Ibrit." Cohen, Deputy Director of the Ben-Zvi Institute Library, began his project in March of 1998. His ultimate goal is a comprehensive bibliography of Ladino literature published through 1960, including books not owned by the Jewish National Library. In a November 2001 email correspondence, Mr. Cohen indicated that he had already surveyed the collections of the Ben-Zvi Institute; Makhon Ma'ale Adumim; Archivo de la Literatura Ladina at Bar-Ilan University; and the private collections of a number of Israel-based scholars, including his own. Cohen's bibliography includes such descriptive details as notes about past and future editions, the relation between diverse translations, and the indication of authorship in the case of anonymous works. Since each entry is mostly in Hebrew and provides only the bare minimum of data in English (e.g., title transliterated, author, year), scholars lacking modern Hebrew will find this database largely impenetrable. Cohen's database is currently available through the ALEPH electronic catalogue at Israeli Universities, specifically the catalogue of the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem.
14. See, too, the growing collection in Makhon Ma'ale Adumim le-Teuda ha-Espanolit, overseen by Avner Perez. Additional catalogued collections are those of the Kongelige Bibliotek of Copenhagen (52 items) and the collections of rare book dealers, such as that of Rabbi Yosef Goldman (208 items). A description of Goldman's now dispersed collection appears as, *Catalogue of Rare Ladino Books* (catalogue no. 8), Brooklyn, New York, January 1996. Other collections, of unknown size, include those of Columbia University (New York); recently launched collections at Sephardic House and the American Sephardi Federation (New York); Casa Cervantes (New York); Hispanic Institute of America (New York); Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies and Culture, not to be confused with the collection of Louis N. Levy (formerly housed in New Jersey); the American Jewish Archives (Cincinnati); the library of UCLA (Los Angeles) and Instituto Arias Montano (Madrid).
15. Meyer Kayserling, *Biblioteca Española-Portuguesa-Judaica* (New York, 1971).
16. See Shmuel Refael, "Trends and Objectives in Catalogs and Bibliographies of Ladino Publications," (in Hebrew) *Pe'amim* 81 (1999), 120–154.
17. Refael, "Trends and Objectives," 123.
18. S. Heinmann, *Die Ladino-literatur mit hebrdischen Lettern der königlichen Bibliothek zu Kopenhagen* (Copenhagen, 1984).
19. Bernard Friedberg, *Bet Eked Sepharim* (Israel, n.d; possibly 1990 edition).

20. Henry V. Besso's bibliography, for example, is entirely in Latin letters. *Ladino Books in the Library of Congress* (Washington DC, 1963).
21. Yeshayahu Vinograd, *Thesaurus of the Hebrew Book: Listing of Books printed in Hebrew Letters since the Beginning of Hebrew Printing circa 1469 to 1863*, parts I and II, (Jerusalem, 1993) (in Hebrew).
22. Refael, "Trends and Objectives," 123. Part I of Vinograd's volumes includes Indexes to books and authors, the Bible, prayers and Talmud, subjects and printers, chronology and languages, and honorees and institutes. Part II focuses on places of print. Although Part II describes itself as inclusive of annotations, content analysis generally does not extend beyond a mention of genre (such as *halakha*, *musar*, prayers, etc.).
23. James Harner speaks of the "paraphrase and commentary approach to annotations." See Harner, *On Compiling an Annotated Bibliography*, 25. Both of these approaches have influenced my work.
24. D. F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (Cambridge, 1999).
25. D. F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*, 55.
26. Aviva Ben-Ur, "In Search of the American Ladino Press: A Bibliographical Survey, 1910–1948," *Studies in Bibliography and Booklore* 21 (Winter 2002); *idem*, *A Ladino Legacy: The Judeo-Spanish Collection of Louis N. Levy* (Alexander, NC, 2001); and, *idem*, *A Precious Inheritance: The Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) Collection of the Lubavitcher Rebbes: A Descriptive Bibliography*, in progress. Refael, "Trends and Objectives."
27. See Ben-Ur, *A Precious Inheritance*. Before this catalogue, most of the Ladino books had been correctly identified, but dozens of others had been either miscatalogued as Latin or Judeo-Arabic or had not been earmarked for Ladino content. I am grateful to the director and archivists of Agudas Chassidei Chabad for kindly permitting me to research this collection.
28. All Ladino translations and transliterations in this paper are mine.
29. Moshe Bar Nissim, ed., *Esther the Beautiful* (Jerusalem, 1923).
30. On Sephardic superiority myths see Ismar Schorsch, "The Myth of Sephardi Supremacy," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 34 (1989), 47–66. For a more recent treatment of this theme in the United States, see Ben-Ur, *Where Diasporas Met* and *idem*, "Ladino: A Precious Legacy," *Pakn Treger* (Oral Interview, National Yiddish Book Center) No. 32 and No. 33 (Spring and Summer 2000).
31. *Esther The Beautiful*, 23.
32. See Shmuel Niger, "Yiddish Literature and the Female Reader," translated and abridged by Sheva Zucker, in Judith R. Baskin, *Women of the Word: Jewish Women and Jewish Writing* (Detroit, 1994), 70–90 and Naomi Seidman, *A Marriage Made in Heaven: The Sexual Politics of Hebrew and Yiddish* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 1997).
33. David Fintz Altabé, "The Romanso, 1900–1933: A Bibliographical Survey," *The Sephardic Scholar*, Series 3 (1978), 96–106. Yaari's bibliography is *Catalogue of Judaeo-Spanish Books in the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem* (Jerusalem, 1934). See, too, the essay of Olga Borovaia in this issue of *Jewish History*.
34. Ben-Ur, *A Ladino Legacy: The Judeo-Spanish Collection of Louis N. Levy*.
35. At the request of Stephen Levy, this introduction was shortened, so that it does not include the originally prepared detailed account of the library's provenance. Time constraints necessitated the elimination of information on comparative holdings. The book opens with a description of Louis N. Levy and his leadership in the Sephardic community.
36. *Haltonut BeLadino: Bibliografia* (Tel Aviv, 1965) (in Hebrew).



37. See Marc Angel, *La America: The Sephardic Experience in the United States*, a biography of Moise S. Gadol and the Ladino newspaper he launched in 1910, and Joseph M. Papo, *Sephardim in the Twentieth Century*, partly focusing on Ladino American periodicals and their editors' biographies.
38. Ben-Ur, "In Search of the American Ladino Press: A Bibliographical Survey, 1910–1948," an inclusive and detailed list of American Ladino periodicals, with biographical details of editors and publishers, as well as the cataloguing information noted in the body of the paper above. I thank the editors of *Studies in Bibliography and Booklore* for permission to reprint an excerpt from this article.
39. "Anunsio: El Amigo," *The Sephardic Brotherhood of America Inc., Sixth Annual Review*, 1923, 39 (pages in the original are unnumbered; the title page has been counted as the first page).
40. See M. D. Gaon, *Haltonut BeLadino*, 23, entry 29, who knows of an issue from Elul 1931, but is not certain of its number.
41. Elena Romero, *La Creación Literaria en Lengua Sefardí*, 189. I thank the Besso family for granting access to the library of the late Henry V. Besso. In May of 2000, several rare American Ladino periodicals, including these issues of *El Amigo*, once considered irredeemably lost, were discovered in the private archives of the late Henry V. Besso, thus confirming Refael's belief that additional Ladino publications can be located in the homes of native speakers in Israel and the Diaspora ("trends and objectives," 142). This bibliographical entry appears here in slightly abbreviated form.
42. Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1984), 129.
43. Abraham Yaari, *Catalogue of Judaeo-Spanish Books*, V (in Hebrew).
44. See above, note 13.
45. See *Biographical Dictionary of Modern Yiddish Literature*, ed. by Shmuel Niger and Yankev Shatski, 8 vols. (New York, 1956–1981), and its predecessor, Zalman Reyzen's *Biographical Dictionary of Yiddish Literature and the Press* (Warsaw, 1914), both in Yiddish.
46. Yaari's observation of the 1930s concerning these authors still remains largely true. See his *Catalogue of Judaeo-Spanish Books*, VI. Notable is that, by and large, Judeo-Spanish literature is not yet considered part of either the Jewish or Spanish literary canon.
47. Nessim and Rosa Bueno, eds., *La Luz de Israel* (Bat Yam, Israel). Recent original Ladino literature includes David Fintz Altabé, *Una Kozecha de Rimas i Konsejas/A Harvest of Rhymes and Folk-Tales* (Miami, 2000); Lina Kohen Albukrek, *87 Anios Lo Ke Tengo (Poemas)* (Istanbul, n.d.; c. 1988); Isaac Jack Lévy, trans. and commentary, *And the World Stood Silent: Sephardic Poetry of the Holocaust* (Urbana and Chicago, 1989); Margalit Matitiah, *Matriz de Luz: Poesía en Judeo-español* (Tel Aviv, 1997); Matitiah, *Vela de la Luz: Poesía en Ladino* (León, Spain, 1997); Matitiah, *Vagabundo Eterno (Vagabondo Eternal)* (Acuarelas, Juan Fernández, 2001); Matitiah, *Bozes en la Shara* (Cuenca, Spain, 2001); the illustrated recipe book, *El Gizado Sefaradí*, Moshe Shaul, Aldina Quintana Rodríguez, and Zeldá Ovadia, eds., (Zaragoza, Spain, 1995); Eliezer Papo, *La Megila de Saray* (Jerusalem, 1999); the trimestrial magazine, *Aki Yerushalayim*, edited and published in Jerusalem by Moshe Shaul, and the multilingual, and also trimestrial journal, *Los Muestras*, edited and published in Brussels by Moise Rahmani. Recently, a number of Ladino novels have been reprinted or transliterated into Latin letters, many with critical notes, including Isaac Jack Lévy, *Istoria Enteresante de la*

*Ermoza Rahel* (Columbia, South Carolina, 2000); Pilar Romeu Ferré, *Los Dos Mellizos* (Barcelona, 2001); and Salvador Santa Puche, *La Ermoza Ester* (Valencia, Spain, 2000), which includes Puche's own Latin-scripted Ladino introduction and summary of the novel.