

SPRACH- UND KULTURKONTAKTE
IN EUROPAS MITTE
STUDIEN ZUR SLAWISTIK
UND GERMANISTIK

Herausgegeben von
Andrzej Kątny und Stefan Michael Newerkla

Band 2

Andrzej Kątny / Izabela Olszewska /
Aleksandra Twardowska (eds.)

**Ashkenazim and Sephardim:
A European Perspective**

Bibliographic Information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available in the internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

Published with financial support from the University of Gdańsk (Faculty of Languages, J.G. Herder Foundation) and the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń (Faculty of Languages)

Reviewers: Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska,
Michael Nagel, Stefan M. Newerkla

Cover image: "Migrations and Settlements of the Spanish Jews"
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Sepharadic_Migrations.jpg

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Ashkenazim and Sephardim : a European perspective / Andrzej Kątny, Izabela Olszewska, Aleksandra Twardowska (eds.). — First edition. pages cm
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 978-3-631-64308-2
I. Ashkenazim. 2. Sephardim. I. Kątny, Andrzej, 1949- editor. II. Olszewska, Izabela, editor. III. Twardowska, Aleksandra, editor. DS112.A83 2014
305.892'404—dc23

2013047474

ISSN 2192-7170
ISBN 978-3-631-64308-2 (Print)
E-ISBN 978-3-653-03216-1 (E-Book)
DOI 10.3726/978-3-653-03216-1

© Peter Lang GmbH
Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften
Frankfurt am Main 2013
All rights reserved.

Peter Lang Edition is an Imprint of Peter Lang GmbH.

Peter Lang – Frankfurt am Main · Bern · Bruxelles · New York ·
Oxford · Warszawa · Wien

All parts of this publication are protected by copyright.
Any utilisation outside the strict limits of the copyright law, without the permission of the publisher, is forbidden and liable to prosecution. This applies in particular to reproductions, translations, microfilming, and storage and processing in electronic retrieval systems.

This book is part of the Peter Lang Edition list
and was peer reviewed prior to publication.

www.peterlang.com

Contents / Inhaltsverzeichnis

| | |
|---|-----|
| <i>Andrzej Kątny / Izabela Olszewska / Aleksandra Twardowska</i> Preface: Ashkenazim and Sephardim. A European Perspective..... | 7 |
| <i>Andrzej Kątny / Izabela Olszewska / Aleksandra Twardowska</i> Vorwort: Aschkenasim und Sephardim. Eine europäische Perspektive..... | 13 |
| <i>Krinka Vidaković-Petrov</i> The Ashkenazi-Sephardi Dialogue in Yugoslavia 1918–1941 | 19 |
| <i>Milica Jakóbiec-Semkowowa</i> Sarajevo's Sephardim and Ashkenazim in a Literary Mirror of Their Own and Foreign Authors..... | 41 |
| <i>Maia Dalcheva</i> Sephardic Jews in Bulgaria – 1330 Years of Coexistence..... | 57 |
| <i>Rafael Arnold</i> Postumer Kulturkontakt – Aschkenasische und sephardische Sepulkraltraditionen auf dem Jüdischen Friedhof in Venedig..... | 73 |
| <i>Magdalena Sitarz</i> Jiddische Literatur und Kultur in der deutschsprachigen Presse vom ersten Drittel des 20. Jahrhunderts..... | 95 |
| <i>Izabela Olszewska</i> Ostjuden vs. Westjuden. Zu den kulturellen Differenzen innerhalb des europäischen Judentums am Beispiel der Flugschrift von Nathan Birnbaum <i>Was sind die Ostjuden? Zur ersten Information</i> (1916) | 113 |
| <i>Joanna Lisek</i> Orthodox Yiddishism in <i>Beys Yakov</i> Magazine in the Context of Religious Jewish Feminism in Poland..... | 127 |
| <i>Susanne Marten-Finnis</i> Staatliche Zensur, Selbstzensur und Mehrsprachigkeit in der jüdischen Presse Russlands (1804–1906) | 155 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| <i>Zofia Abramowicz</i> | |
| The Role of the Name in the Identification of Jews in the Podlasie in the 16 th –20 th Centuries | 175 |
| <i>Aleksandra Twardowska</i> | |
| The Characterization of Male Names among the Sephardi Jews in Sarajevo | 189 |
| <i>Mohamed El-Madkouri Maataoui</i> | |
| Die Hakitia zwischen Ursprung und Wiederaufbau | 211 |
| <i>Paloma Díaz-Mas / Pilar Romeu Ferré</i> | |
| Being Multilingual: Judeo-Spanish as a Homeland in the Diaspora as Reflected in Jewish Sephardic Memoirs | 227 |
| <i>Agnieszka August-Zarębska</i> | |
| The Representations of <i>kurtijo</i> and Their Function in Contemporary Judeo-Spanish Poetry..... | 245 |
| <i>Alla Kozhinova / Alena Sourkova</i> | |
| Polyglossia of the <i>Book of Daniel</i> and Its Reflection in Text Structure of <i>Vilnius Old Testament Florilegium</i> : On Some Problems of Jewish Translation Technique | 269 |
| <i>Piotr Kallas</i> | |
| The Last Historian? The Wandering Jew as a Chronicler of the World..... | 287 |
| Notes on the Authors / Autorinnen und Autoren | 305 |

- Moreno, Harry (2003): *Caminando y hablando. La historia real de una familia sefardí*. Barcelona [2nd ed.].
- Morin, Edgar (1989): *Vidal et les siens*. Paris.
- Mostrel, Alexandre (2006): *Une Saga Séfarade*. Paris.
- Papo, Isaac (2006): *Viaje en el ocaso de una cultura ibérica: Recuerdos y reflexiones de un médico sefardí*. Barcelona.
- Perera, Victor (1987): *Rites: A Guatemalan Boyhood*. London.
- Serotte, Brenda (2006): *The fortune teller's kiss (American Lives)*. Nebraska.
- Shaltiel-Gracian, Moshe (2005): *Shaltiel: one family's journey through history*. Chicago.
- Wagenstein, Angel (2005): *Abraham le poivrot (Loin de Tolède)*. Paris [1st Bulgarian ed. 2002].

The Representations of *kurtijo* and Their Function in Contemporary Judeo-Spanish Poetry

Agnieszka August-Zarębska
University of Wrocław

Abstract – The paper discusses representations of *kurtijo* in contemporary Judeo-Spanish poetry. The Ladino word *kurtijo* denotes both a yard and a typical Sephardic house with an inner courtyard, where many families used to live together. In the lands of the Turkish-Balkan Diaspora, the majority of Jewish *kurtijos* were left desolate by the Holocaust and, later, by the emigration of their inhabitants to Israel and other countries. The abandonment entailed not only the disappearance of a certain physical reality, but also the end of some traditional forms of life and customs, which for ages made up the texture of people's everyday experience. Representations of *kurtijos* that appear in contemporary Ladino poetry are connected with the commemoration of, or a nostalgia for, the communities destroyed in the Second World War. Furthermore, depictions of imagined *kurtijos* evoke the old reality or express the authors' bonds with their roots and family past. They also convey their need to retrieve their roots or (re-)define their identities.

Keywords: Sephardic Jews, Judeo-Spanish Contemporary Poetry, *kurtijo*, Home, Holocaust, Identity

Introduction

Poems reminiscing on the places inhabited by the Sephardi communities before the Second World War feature prominently in contemporary Judeo-Spanish poetry. Decimated by the Holocaust and subsequently depopulated by the emigration of survivors to the newly founded state of Israel as well as to other places, they have never come back to life again. They are revisited by the Sephardi authors who have chosen to compose their verses, among others, in Ladino, which is believed to be a dying language. Among the poems which linger on and conjure up the bygone Sephardi homelands, particularly important are those employing the motif of *kurtijos*, the yards of the houses resided by Jews in the cities of the Mediterranean. Depicted in specific contexts, they always represent the reality which has passed away or which is imagined. The frequency they recur with and the emotional intensity they are enveloped in make them into one of the most prominent symbols of the irretrievably lost Sephardi world. This paper aims to analyze the images of *kurtijos* in contemporary Judeo-Spanish poetry and to explore the diverse functions they fulfill in the works by particular authors.

Kurtijo: The Word and Its Meanings

The *kurtijo* entries in Judeo-Spanish dictionaries usually provide different spelling variations of the word¹ and detail its two meanings. Joseph Nehama (1977: 306) supplies the most comprehensive explanation of the term, defining *kortižo* firstly as a yard, which is an ‘unroofed space surrounded with walls, located near the house’, and secondly as ‘a vast courtyard, around which there are entrances to small rooms that serve as housing for poor households; very common in big cities of the East’.² The same dictionary provides also a separate entry for *kurtižo*, but its definition actually duplicates the ones quoted above:

“[...] yard (of a house); unit of dwellings, outbuildings, very simple rooms, built around a spacious courtyard, where families cook, do laundry, make toilet. (Poor households lived there by charity or for a small charge).” (Nehama 1977: 313)

In *Diccionario básico ladino-español* by Pascal Recuero, *kortižo* is defined as a cluster of houses (Spanish *caserio*) as well as a courtyard (*patio*) and a vestibule (*vestíbulo*). It also defines *kortižera* (an exclusively feminine term) as a female resident of *kortižo* and as a talkative woman, keen on gossiping (1977: 84). *Ladino-English/English-Ladino Concise Encyclopedic Dictionary* by Ellia Kohen and Dahlia Kohen-Gordon provides three spelling variations of the word: *cortijo* – ‘neighborhood’, *cortijo* – ‘patio’ (2000: 83) and *kortijo* – ‘courtyard, patio’ (2000: 222).³

Kurtijo: Literary Renderings

In her essay *La mužer sefardi de Bosna* (1931)⁴ discussing lives of Jewish women in Bosnia, Laura Papo Bohoreta devotes separate chapters to Sephardi houses and yards as well as to forms of neighborhood life they were a site of. The architectural arrangements and manifestations of neighborliness seem to have been inextricably related. The essay portrays large *kurtijos* inhabited by many families, where people used to spend their free time after work together with their neighbors. While generally conducive to the communal intercourse, *kurtijos* –

1 Throughout the paper I follow the spelling *kurtijo*. However, in the original texts I preserve the spelling chosen by the authors or provide a version preferred by them in brackets.

2 If not stated otherwise, translations from Spanish, French and Judeo-Spanish are mine [A.A.-Z.].

3 In contemporary Castilian, *cortijo* means ‘a homestead; a landed estate; a farm’.

4 Laura Papo Bohoreta never published her essay. It appeared first in 2005, when its Bosnian translation – *Sefardska žena u Bosni* [Sephardi Woman in Bosnia] – was published together with the original manuscript in print (Papo Bohoreta 2005).

the author emphasizes – were predominantly women’s space since the traditional week arrangement and division of labor in the Jewish culture bound them with the home both in everyday chores and in the little leisure they were allowed. While men usually worked outside the house and after work returned homes, where everything was ready waiting for them, the female neighbors used to share their household routines as well as their spare time. Together they grew plants in flowerpots. Together they kept the yard clean. Together they watched their children, who played there. Before Shabbat every family used to delegate one person to wash the stone floor. The walls were whitewashed even three times a year, before Pesach, Sukkot and Tisha B’Av. On Shabbat, women gathered in the yard to talk, exchange their experience, and tell anecdotes and stories. Papo Bohoreta highlights the unique female bonding and deep-running solidarity of women both before and after childbirth. Treating each other as sisters, women sustained the bonds even if someone moved to another house (cf. Papo Bohoreta 2005 [1931]: 87-97).

In post-war literature, the already non-existent *kurtijos* of Thessaloniki are recalled by Michael Molho in his book *Usos y costumbres de los sefardies de Salónica* (1950), which – though not scholarly study as such – is a priceless source of knowledge on the customs, traditions and everyday lives of the city’s Sephardi community. In the very introduction, the author promises readers to show them around the ‘houses of previous generations, around their intact shelters, where the patriarchal life was lived, around the *cortijos*, where beautiful women used to sing while drawing water from the wells, along the meandering streets of old Jewish districts, where Jewish family life was flourishing and near the synagogues, where the worshippers used to nourish their souls and poured forth their religious feelings’ (Molho 1950: 12). Invoking the *cortijos* in one breath with the house, the synagogue and the streets of the Jewish quarter, Molho clearly frames the courtyards as locations of paramount importance to everyday life of the Jewish communities.

Molho supplies the minutiae of the houses: the yard was sometimes partly roofed, often with a well at its center,⁵ and the kitchen and the toilet more to its sides. The apartments that were constructed in the earliest times usually had small windows overlooking the street. Nevertheless, as the families were growing or new residents were coming, new extensions would gradually sprawl over the yard, and its space would slowly contract. Usually, one family lived in one room, and even when the children grew up and got married, sons with their wives would stay at their parents’ for the first years. When the family concluded that the apartment could not house any more residents, new rooms were built

5 The residents of *kurtijos* which had no wells were supplied with water by the water carriers.

and sometimes larger rooms were divided into smaller ones. The sanitary conditions of the overcrowded *kurtijos* must have fallen short of standard, but Molho insists that although on the outside the home could make a rather modest and poor impression, inside it looked decent and was kept in perfect order by its female dwellers. In some *kurtijos* trees and bushes were planted to provide shade, and herbs were grown in flowerpots on the window sills (cf. Molho 1950: 147-148). The dwellings erected around one yard would occasionally house as many as fifty families, "whose co-existence made them develop extraordinarily tight bonds" (Molho 1950: 57). Like Laura Papo, Molho emphasizes the prevalent commitment to neighborly help, for instance in case of childbirths and diseases.

The contemporary evocations of *kurtijos*, not much different from the ones presented above, are to be found in Rachel Amado Bortnick's article *Los kurtijos de djudios: Izmir i Buenos Aires*. Bortnick describes *kurtijos* remembered from the 1950s in Izmir and in Buenos Aires soon after her emigration to Argentina, where such houses were mostly inhabited by immigrants of different nationalities. She highlights the double meaning of the word *kurtijo*, which denotes primarily the yard as a spatial element of nearly all houses in Turkey, but also a type of house shared by many families. In Turkish, these dwellings were also called *aile evi* ('the house of many families') and *Yahudihane* ('the house of Jews').⁶ The houses had different numbers of storeys. In the center of the yard, there was a well and a kitchen; and at the side, there was a toilet. Some apartments had additionally their own separate small kitchens. Generally, *kurtijos* in Izmir were not supplied with electricity and running water, and their inhabitants went to the Turkish bathhouse to take a bath before Shabbat. In some dwellings, a large bread furnace was placed at the entrance and used by all the families. After the state of Israel was founded and many poor Jewish families left Turkey, some of the abandoned houses were taken over by the Muslims, while other ones slowly decayed. Amado Bortnick observes that the still remaining houses are completely derelict today.

The images of *kurtijos* have been preserved also in prose fiction: novels and short stories. Pre-war descriptions are lively, vivid and detailed. A *kurtijo* appears, for example, in *The Yard of Old Rafo*, a Serbian-Croatian debut story by

6 A similar distinction into *kurtijo* (here: *kortijo*) as a yard and as a set of houses inhabited by many members of the same family, or different families, appears in Marie-Christine Varol's Judeo-Spanish *Manual of Judeo-Spanish. Language and Culture* (2008: 84, 86). Varol states that the name *kortijo* was used mostly in Greece and Bulgaria, whereas in Turkey this type of a building complex was referred to as *yahudhane*. The photograph of such a house is presented on p. 244.

Isaac Samokovlija from 1927 (Samokovlija 1991: 111-126).⁷ Again, the description of the whole dwelling and the bedroom of the story's protagonist, Rafo, is accompanied by extensive evocations of the neighborly intercourse the residents engage in. They know more or less what is going on in each other's lives because of the sounds coming from the yard and other apartments, such as the voices of the playing children and the reprimanding parents, the sounds of a rocking cradle, the thump of a slammed door, the singing of women and the barking of dogs. Everybody soon finds out about Rafo's disease, the neighbors offer him help, bring him food, visit him in his room to ask how he feels and tell the children not to make noise so that they do not disturb him. Someone oils the gate to prevent it from squeaking. When Rafo dies, the entire community of the *kurtijo* participates in the farewell rituals, and many days after his funeral the yard is still quieter than usual. Interestingly (and importantly), not all the residents are Jewish: one of the neighbors together with her granddaughter pray to the Mother of God for Rafo's recovery.

In many post-war Judeo-Spanish prose texts, the motif of *kurtijos* appears typically in the context of recalling the pre-Holocaust past. For instance, in historical novels the *kurtijos* are an important setting of the action, which serves to recapture the local color. This is the case in *En torno de la Torre Blanca* [Around the White Tower], in which Enrique Saporta y Beja (1979: 58-64) meticulously describes a Thessaloniki *kurtijo*, as well as in *La Megila de Saray* [The Scroll of Sarajevo], in which Eliezer Papo mentions the Sarajevo *kurtijos* (1999: 17). Apart from conveying the palpable specificities of times and places, the *kurtijo* images carry also an emotional load. Namely, they encapsulate the nostalgically recalled reality in vignettes of familiar places which evoke tenderness and are associated with family and home. Often, however, they are no longer thought of as one's own home but rather as the home of parents or grandparents. Such representations appear not only in prose but also in poems, in which the yards on the one hand connote an idyll, but on the other hand are overhung with the looming shade of the Holocaust, the main reason why *kurtijos* in the Balkan cities were forsaken and destroyed.⁸

Deserted when their residents were deported to the death camps, they have not been re-settled by the few survivors who returned to their birthplaces. Even if some of these survivors found their old dwellings, to reconstruct in them the

7 Although written not in Ladino but in Serbian-Croatian, this short story is included in the present analysis as an exception, because, as its title indicates, its main subject is the courtyard and the relationships among the neighbors living there.

8 Unlike in the Balkan areas, the Jewish community in Turkey was safe during the Second World War. The Jewish districts were gradually depopulated only in the post-war decades as a result of the Jewish emigration to Israel and other countries.

typical Jewish life proved impossible simply because there were no other Jewish neighbors or not enough Jewish residents to revive that life. Conjuring up the images of those homes is often bound up with the awareness that the continuity of the life and history of the community has been disrupted, with the sense of loss caused by so many relatives' deaths or displacement and with the experience of uprootedness. The *kurtijo* motif is deployed in this way in *Mi Saloniko* [My Thessaloniki], a short story by Shmuel Refael, who sketches his personal vision of the hometown inhabited by his ancestors:

“En la primavera del año 1943, cuando en la sivdad de Saloniko se konsentia el guezmo del yasemin, i ke de los tiestos de barro y de teneke enkalados en los *kurtijos de las kazas* despuntavan las primeras flores del año, nona Sultana, djudia fiera i kreyente, fue arestada i embiada kon uno de los estremesientes vagones de beemot, verso el norte, a la tierra de dezolasion.” (Refael 2005: 146)

[In the spring of 1943, when in the city of Thessaloniki the scent of jasmine could be smelled, and the first flowers of the season sprouted in clay or tin flowerpots in the yards of houses, grandma Sultana, a religious and zealous Jewess, was arrested and sent in one of those terrible cattle cars northwards, to the land of distress].

The apparently serene introduction unfolds into a story recounting the death of the author's grandmother and her two daughters in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. The plot is mostly based on the imagined scenes from the last days and moments of its protagonists' lives. The continuity of the history and culture that Sultana belongs to is emphasized until an abyss opens before them. Refael imagines that while being transported to the camp, his grandmother murmured traditional love songs and *romances* (ballads), and quotes excerpts from them. She planned to have her daughter married after returning home, where a dowry chest was waiting ready for the occasion. Before death, she was whispering *Shema Israel*. The vision ends with the sentence: “Nona Sultana suvio al sielo kantando sus romansas, i sovre esta tierra me desho a mi sonyando sovre su figura i el imajen del Saloniko djudio” [“Grandma Sultana went up to heaven singing her *romances*, and in this world she left me, dreaming of her figure and of the image of the Jewish Thessaloniki”] (Refael 2005: 147).

Afterwards, the narrator goes on to produce for himself and the readers an imaginary portrait of the city, which he feels intimately related to, but which he does not actually know. He dwells on the effort which must be made to salvage, or rather to erect anew in his mind, his Thessaloniki – “the city made of the memory snippets” (Refael 2005: 149). In his narration, the *kurtijo* is the last place that links his grandmother, and thereby also himself, with the old, already obliterated, world of the Sephardi culture. In this story, the *kurtijo* is the very last element of his grandmother's “normal” life; what comes next is the *Shoah* and the new world afterwards. The place seems to be tangibly real, resembling

many similar ones which existed in Thessaloniki in 1943 and which his parents told him about. At the same time, it is patently invented since – having never actually seen it – he recreates its image drawing on literature and other people's stories.

Below, I will analyze in some detail how the motifs just mentioned intertwine in poetry. As the double meaning of the *kurtijo* is usually preserved in poetry, it tends to be difficult to establish what it is that particular poems actually refer to when the word appears. A yard or a house may be mentioned in a purely personal context as a family house, or in a communal context as a site of the neighborly intercourse and relationships, which are wider than family ties. Moreover, it symbolizes the bulwark of the Judeo-Spanish language and brings in the reverberations of the folklore annihilated in the Holocaust. As the poems are predominantly lyrical, they do not contain descriptions of *kurtijos*, but tend to more or less directly allude to them by featuring particular props associated with them. The poets usually refer to the images of houses and yards entrenched in the Sephardi culture and memory and transmitted in diverse narratives of the past.

Kurtijos: Reminiscences of the Family House and Childhood Memories

A *kurtijo* known from childhood is conjured up in *Una kaza* [Home], a poem by Gracia Albuhayre, a Bulgarian teacher and journalist from Karnobat, a member of the “Ladino” club in Sophia, and the author of three volumes of Judeo-Spanish rhymed verse. They all revolve around the motif of transience and nostalgia for the past, with the I-speaker reminiscing on the bygone situations and times and the people once important and intimate.⁹ In *Una kaza*, the I-speaker revisits in her thoughts or, as she says, “in her dreams”, the home remembered from childhood, described here only cursorily as large and having a yard (*kurtijo*) full of flowers and fruit trees. The image of the house, which has already perished, is accompanied by the memories of youth preserved in the author's heart and – as the poem implies – it is often evoked by her in her daydreams as a

9 Another leitmotif in Albuhayre's poems is a reflection on being a Jewish woman – in particular, on being a Sephardi Jewish woman and a Bulgarian at the same time, as Michael Studemund-Halevy argues in his paper “Yo so djudia sefarada”. Gracia Albuhayre, a poetess from Karnobat delivered at the international congress *Mujeres sefardies lectoras y escritoras (siglos XIX-XXI)* (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid, 19.10.2012). I would like to thank Michael Studemund-Halevy for making Gracia Albuhayre's poems available to me.

soothing picture. The simple three-stanza poem communicates mainly the pleasure that the recollections of the family home stir up and claims that returning to this image comforts and strengthens her in various situations of life. The description corroborates the observations on the poetics of home formulated by the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard:

“When we dream of the house we were born in, in the utmost depths of reverie, we participate in this original warmth, in this well-tempered matter of the material paradise. This is the environment in which the protective beings live.” (Bachelard 1994 [1958]: 7)

La sivda miya [My City] – another poem by Albuhayre – also refers to the family house. This time, the image is embedded in the recollection of these protective beings, mainly the mother and the father. The poem expresses the emotions the author experiences on visiting her hometown after many years and finding it conspicuously different from what she remembered. The main difference lies in the fact that her family house does not exist anymore, and the people she meets are only strangers. This twofold absence produces sorrow, deprivation and nostalgia instead of consolation for her. Although the word *kurtijo* does not occur in the poem, a short description of the yard is the main component of the family house’s image:

| | |
|---|--|
| “La kaza de mi papa no estava, ni mi madre ke me asperava y abrasava, ni el pozo kon agua dulce y yelada ni la goerta con flores ensembrada. | No estava el arvole de peras savrozaz. Ni el periko, ni las vizinas henozas. Kon lagrinaz mis ojos se incheron Todo karo, ande se hueron?” (Albuhayre 2007:18) |
|---|--|

[My father’s house was not there. / nor my mother waiting for me with her embrace, / nor the well with sweet and cold water / nor the orchard with flowers in it. / There wasn’t any pear tree with sweet fruit. / Neither was there the little dog, nor the graceful neighbors. / My eyes filled up with tears / All those I loved, where did they go?]

Symptomatically, it is again the courtyard rather than the interior to be described to convey the unique character of the home: it connotes idyll, relaxation, blooming and fruition. For the author, the evocation of the yard is a key to the profound intimacy of the family house recollections. Another indispensable component of this vision are the parents, who ensure care, tenderness and the sense of security. The familiarity of the image is intensified by the presence of a dog (the word is used in its local diminutive form). Also the neighbors linger in the picture, which could be interpreted as a reflection of the social life typical of the old Sephardi societies in the region. Though the neighbors are not mere props, the two poems by Gracia Albuhayre foreground not so much the communal involvement as the personal investment. The images of the yard are central to the

rendering of her family house as the place of warmth, security and hope, a representation ensuing from the experience of her youth spent in a *kurtijo*.

While Albuhayre indulges in the personal, the community dimension inscribed in the notion of *kurtijo* prevails in *Silencio* [Silence] by Rita Gabbai-Simantov, a poet born in Athens in 1935. Presumably, she also still remembers the old Sephardi houses and their yards in Greece and in Turkey, where her family survived the Second World War. *Silencio* is one of her two poems commemorating the Jewish Thessaloniki. The I-speaker forewarns a passer-by walking in the city streets:

“Hombre ande vas
pedrido en las calles
del viejo Salonik
Ya no existen mas
ni visintados
ni cortijos
ni cuentos de Shabat
companiero en tu buelta
sera el silencio” (Gabbai-Simantov 1992: 25).

[Man, where are you going / lost in the streets / of old Thessaloniki / There are no more / neighborhoods / houses with courtyards / Shabbat tales / as you walk on / silence will be a companion of your walk.]

The poem is set in a contemporary Greek city dubbed here as “old Thessaloniki”, with the epithet referring to its age-old history, especially the multicultural Ottoman era. What the passer-by searches for and what the I-speaker knows is gone is the Sephardi place identity determined, as the poem insists, by neighborhoods and houses with yards as well as Shabbat tales. In their basic literal meaning, *visintados* and *kurtijos* are simply divisions and architectonic arrangements organizing the urban space, whereas in their figurative meaning they synecdochically stand for their residents – the exterminated Jewish community with their customs and daily life practices. They represent the reality, once common and quotidian, but already obliterated – swept away by the Holocaust. Now silence looms over the places. And in the poem, silence is not expressive of the current material conditions in the districts of Thessaloniki, but, is symbolic of an emptiness produced by a rupture in the Jewish culture (represented here by the Shabbat tales). Gabbai-Simantov neither describes *kurtijos* nor rhapsodizes over their picturesque aspect;¹⁰ she treats them as a codename which evokes associations with a specific moment in history and culture as well as with the customs and behaviors performed against the background of the traditional yards.

¹⁰ This perspective is actually more pronounced in the prose written by Sephardi authors.

When interlinked, the *kurtijos* and the Shabbat tales become the principal symbols of the Sephardi culture in the Judeo-Spanish language. The yards of the houses resounded with this language because it was exactly in these yards that families and neighbors interacted every day, as Michael Molho describes (1950: 12). Beautiful girls sang while drawing water from the wells; in work and leisure people crooned *romances* and popular songs; the older generations told the younger ones *cuentos* and *consejas* (traditional folk tales and stories). On the one hand, the Shabbat tales materialize here as part of the heritage of Sephardi oral literature but, on the other hand, they are inextricably linked with the most important holiday in Judaism – one of the fundamental determinants of the Jewish identity in the diaspora. Clearly, the poem by Gabbai-Simantov, despite its brevity and simplicity, is replete with meanings. The silence referred to in the title and in the last verse symbolizes the end of the Sephardi culture and language in the place where they used to thrive; it also conveys the attitude to the Holocaust characteristic of many survivors and their offspring.

***Kurtijos*: Images From Family Story-Telling**

The Sephardi courtyard is one of the central leitmotifs in the first two bilingual (Ladino-Hebrew) volumes of poetry by the Israeli poet Margalit Matitiah. Born in Tel Aviv in 1935, she did not experience the reality of *kurtijos* in the Turkish and Balkan cities herself, but she was told about it mainly by her parents, who came from Thessaloniki. It must have been an important element of the family mythology and of her Sephardic identity as the title of her first volume is *Kurtijo kemado* [A Burned Yard]. A *kurtijo*, thus, becomes a symbol of the past and the Sephardi culture. In Matitiah's poems the images of houses with the yards are employed in the context of seeking to discover the past of her own family as well as of the entire community. As a result, the representations of *kurtijos* recurring throughout her oeuvre serve her as a tool for reclaiming her Sephardic identity.

The volume *Kurtijo kemado* registers the poet's experiences and feelings on her journey to Greece in 1986, a few months after her mother's death. She travelled with a group of the second generation members – the children of Greek-Jewish Holocaust survivors (Refael 2008: 168). Visiting the places connected with her mother's childhood and youth, the poet went through a specific ritual of mourning and grieving for her. At the same time, the journey was an attempt on her part to relate to her own roots and the past, which her mother guarded and passed on. When her mother was still alive, the poet developed a sense of cultural continuity, but when she passed away the daughter needed to physically

seek the roots and submerge in the place where this culture had been formed. Such were the motives behind her sentimental journey to Thessaloniki, which was her parents' hometown, and to the street and to the house where her family used to live. Besides, the tour had also a wider, communal dimension, as it gave her an opportunity to see the sites of persecution of Jews during the Second World War.

The personal aspects dominate in one of the two poems titled *Saloniki* [Thessaloniki] preceded by the remark "In the street where my mother grew up" (Matitiah 1988: 17). That is where the speaker encounters her own history, history she has actually been searching for. She finds herself in the place which the opening poem of the volume – a dialogue with her absent mother – designates as "the gate of your childhood" ("portal de tu chikes"). The metaphor refers to the beginning of her mother's life as well as to the sources of her identity, which will also become a significant part of her daughter's identity. The image of the gate of childhood evokes also associations with the entrance to the yard of a Sephardi house. This is where the poet would like to be, yet realizes on her journey the futility of her yearning as that reality is irretrievably lost: it only exists in the nostalgic vision handed down by her mother. The entrance to the *kurtijo* remains closed.

In this poem, the contemporary material reality is confronted with the poet's imagined visions. The construction of the image importantly involves a specific rendering of time and space, which are both real (a sunny afternoon, the street where the mother's family house is situated) and imaginary (the time which the mother talked about, the house yard remembered by her). The past can be recovered and engaged with in the realm of emotions and imaginative visions:

"La kaye paresia intchirse de mis ondas sentimientos,
En kaminando I bushkando mi viejo nombre.
Las solombras de la tadre
Empesavan a kaye sobre las kazas.

Las ventanas seradas paresian metersen
En una gera muda contra el tiempo pasado.
Mezo las memorias plantadas en mi por mi madre
Via la kaza ke supito se enchekisiya
Asta tokar la tiera del kurtijo
Ande las bozes de lo pasado kedaron en el aver.
I sintia la prononsasion de un nombre
Komo una kampana
kunandose en el tiempo i Disiendo
The Thessaloniki, odos 'The oienos Harisis 59'." (Matitiah 1988: 17)

[The street seemed to fill up with my deep feelings / I was walking and looking for my old name / Afternoon shadows / started to descend over the houses. / The closed

windows seemed to enter / into a silent war against the past time. / Through the memories my mother planted in me / I suddenly saw the house shrivel/ till it touched the ground of the courtyard, / where the voices from the past still echoed in the air. / I heard the sound of a name / Like a bell / swinging in time and saying: / Thessaloniki, odos "The oienos Harisis 59".]

Against the silence of the place on a summer day,¹¹ the powerful emotions which overwhelm the poet and transform the image of the street in her eyes resonate all the more passionately. She is searching for "her past name", which is probably the name of the street or, maybe, the name which would fully recapture her identity – the name which she could hear if she had been born there and if her relatives still lived there, if the story of her family and the entire community had taken another course. Her intense feelings are contrasted with the unconcern of the environment symbolized by the windows of the houses, which impassively reflect the surrounding area. These indifferent windows are a metonymy of the indifferent eyes of the contemporary city dwellers¹² and symbolize a barrier acutely felt by the poet – standing in the street, outside the house – between the actual reality and the nostalgic vision cherished by her mother ("las memorias plantadas en mi por mi madre").

These two different worlds wage a silent war on each other, which reveals the depths of sorrow and disappointment experienced by the poet in the place which has been appropriated by a completely different culture. The desire to actually touch the reality that has already vanished proves so potent that it readily produces an insight into this reality on the level of imagination. A fantasy of the Sephardi *kurtijo* based on the stories told by the mother suddenly begins to materialize. The surrounding houses start shrinking to the ground, the barrier fades away and the woman, while contemplating the yard of the Jewish house, can hear the voices from the past still echoing in the air. The experience is intensified by uttering or hearing the Greek address of the house at the end of the poem. The formula operates as a time machine, which puts the time into a swinging motion, as if the time travel between the present and the past could be repeated.

Another poem with the *kurtijo*-based imagery is titled *Kurtijo kemado*. Since this is also the title of the entire volume, the special significance of the poem does not have to be conjectured. It is underlined at the beginning that the poem is an account of a dream. In the first stanza, the speaker outlines the vision of a

11 The poem is dated July 1986.

12 The poet notices that the house is still in its place, but its surroundings, as well as its function, have changed – it has been converted into a sewing factory. She remembers that two local women were staring at her when she was there (The information received in a personal conversation with Margalit Matitiahu on July 5, 2012).

deserted, burnt house. The blackness of the house, symbolizing death and destruction, is reinforced by the proliferation of negatively charged vocabulary, such as a foreign land, a strange *kurtijo*, black barracks and chaos. It seems both a hostile place in the foreign land and a closed, inaccessible space. In opposition to this image, the second stanza conveys the sense of peace, calm and security that apparently permeate other places on earth. In order to recapture this well-being, this atmosphere of openness and freedom, the poet employs the imagery of shining colors and resorts to abstract concepts of prevailing silence, peace and security. In the third stanza, the I-speaker confesses:

"A mi esprito keria dar
La libertad de fuir,
El kurtijo kemado
Me azia sinios
Sin dizir." (Matitiahu 1988: 25)

[I wanted to give my spirit / A freedom of escape, / The burned courtyard / Was gesturing to me / Without a word.]

The passage expresses the dilemmas of a Jewish woman who lives in Israel, but feels that her roots are somewhere else and connect her also with these other places. The power of nostalgia and longing prompts her to return to them in order to sustain also her Sephardic identity and not only her new Israeli identity founded upon the Hebrew language and the common myths of the Jewish people. The community the poet originates from is molded by the experience of the Diaspora and its legacy. While living in Israel, she turns her face towards the places bound up with the history of her family and community. According to Robin Cohen, "The Jews are not a single people; they have a multi-faceted, multi-located history with a genetically complex set of roots. At different periods, they looked either to their homeland or to more local links" (Cohen 2008: 34-35). Matitiahu undoubtedly looks both to her homeland and to the former local embeddedness of her family.

However, engaging with the past of the Sephardi community in Greece breeds ambiguous effects. On the one hand, it buttresses the poet's sense of identity, but on the other it brings sorrow and makes her aware that the cultural continuity has been broken beyond repair. The Sephardi person who comes to Thessaloniki will neither hear the language of her ancestors, nor immerse in the Jewish life, nor see the places of a great importance to the Sephardi culture. And hence, *Kurtijo kemado* serves as the title of the entire collection devoted to the poet's journey to Greece. The house and the yard that have been consumed by fire come to symbolize the paltry remnants of the age-long history of the Jews expelled from Spain and their rich culture. It also comes to symbolize the dismal

condition of the Ladino language and literature at the time when the poems are being written, i.e. the mid-1980s. For, indeed, it was a dying language then. Matitiahū's – and for that matter several other authors'¹³ – poetry is an attempt to revive the Judeo-Spanish language and literature.

Whereas the predictions for the Judeo-Spanish culture comprised in *Kurtijo kemado* are pessimistic, *Alegrika* (1992), the second volume of Matitiahū's poetry – which also extensively employs the motif of *kurtijos* – is more serene though, admittedly, not free from nostalgia. The change of mood is signaled in the very title: *Alegrika* is a female name which literally means 'cheerful'. With the Holocaust far less thematized in the volume, the explorations of the past shift toward attempts to preserve the bygone Sephardi world with all its daily routines in the language. The courtyards provide here a natural background for descriptions of the people – the human types characteristic of the past family and neighborhood life. The poet declares that she wanted to furnish the names remembered from her childhood with new fictional personalities; thus, the names are real while the stories of the characters are in part truthfully reproduced and in part ingeniously invented. The poems sketch primarily portraits of women, which substantiates the claim that the *kurtijo* is a predominantly feminine space. Margalit Matitiahū describes it in the following way: "At the *kurtijo* the day belonged to women and the afternoons sometimes belonged to men because in the morning the men worked in shops and workshops."¹⁴

In some poems the *kurtijo* is evoked directly, whereas in other ones it is only an implicit presence. The word *kurtijo* is also used in its two meanings as a courtyard and as a residential space. Most of the scenes are set in the courtyard; nevertheless, for instance passage F of the poem *Los vizajes* [The Persons] and the poem *Las paredes del tiempo* [The Walls of Time] record episodes set in the interiors – the latter is an attempt to recapture an intimate relationship between the spouses (cf. Matitiahū 1992: 25).

13 For instance, in the late 1970s the French novelist Clarisse Nicoidski and the Israeli translator and poet Avner Perez started to write Ladino poems, whereas the first volume of poetry by Rita Gabbāi-Simantov from Greece was published at the beginning of 1990s. Symptomatically, Perez, like Matitiahū, diagnoses the present state of the Judeo-Spanish culture. In the volume *Siniza i Fumo* [Ash and Smoke], the images of flames and debris are used in order to present what has remained after the Sephardi culture and community in Thessaloniki. Although there is no reference to the destroyed *kurtijos*, an analogical symbol appears in it: a burned garden ("guerta kemada") with a figure of a young grief-stricken woman who is sitting in it and mourning the victims and the heritage annihilated with them (Perez 1986: 6).

14 The information received in personal conversations with Margalit Matitiahū on February 24, 2011 and July 5, 2012.

Los vizajes, *Sunhula* and *Tia*¹⁵ *Ester* portray several persons who are recalled by the I-speaker in the past tense. The concluding verses of particular stanzas imply that most of them are just figments of remembrance now. The visions emerge from memory consisting, as the first volume insists, mainly of what was planted in it by the poet's mother:

| | |
|--|--|
| "En mis ojos transparan los anyos Formando direksiones yenas de vizajes Ke van koriendo i metiendo Los rekordos en empenyo. | Komo sones i golores De un manadero suven las figuras Adjuntandosen a las trupas De serenas enlokesidas." (Matitiahū 1992: 15) |
|--|--|

[The years show through my eyes / Forming lines of persons / That run and pawn / their memories / Like sounds and scents / From a spring, figures arise / Joining groups / of frenzied mermaids.]

The characters appear together with scraps of the environment they used to belong to, which include typical sounds, smells, specific light and shade as well as emblematic objects the *kurtijo* is composed of. There is no room for detailed descriptions of the yard; however, the few items named or alluded to in the poems – such as the stone floors, the water intake (probably the well in the middle of the yard), the washtub and the walking sticks in the hands of old people – combined with a variety of sensory impressions, vibrantly and palpably recapture its atmosphere. The poems make an impression of commentaries written on some old, slightly faded photographs.¹⁶ The pace of the poems is slow as if they imitated the deliberate measure of steps cautiously taken by old people, or the lazy rhythm of the day of people who do not have any work to do. The times of day follow one after another unhurriedly in a progression signaled by the changes in the balance of light and shadow. The world seems suspended in peace and inaction; most of the persons are sitting and waiting as if petrified in their past poses. However, somewhere beneath the surface, a bustling movement and rapidity are throbbing to break the silence all of a sudden when the children run about or when one of the women bursts out with anger.

For example, one poem says:

"Tia Dudun i tia Lea
Asentadas en el kurtijo de la kaza
Asperando la sołombra de la esperansa,
Ke las avrige otra ves." (Matitiahū 1992: 15)

15 *Tia* 'aunt'; a word customarily used to address a married or an elderly woman.

16 The cover of the volume is illustrated with a *collage* made of photographs of the poet's family – her grandfather Yitzhak, her grandmother Dudun (Sara), her mother Matilda and her aunt Rebecca (a conversation on February 24, 2011).

[Tia Dudun and tia Lea, / Sitting in the courtyard, / Are waiting for a shadow of hope / To come and shield them once more.]

Inferably, the verses refer to the hope of being at least for a moment retrieved from oblivion. The persons who appear are by no means eminent individuals performing important functions in the community. They belong to the lower social stratum and are very advanced in age, long past their prime. *Tia Dudun* used to feed the yard cats and share bread with them, as well as with children, having none of her own. The body and mind of *tia Lea* were affected by old age:

“En sus ojos empanyados ainda bivian
Los kurtijos de Salonik.
De su espalda dovlada una mano espania
Para detener el baston de la muerte.” (Matitiah 1992: 17)

[In his misty eyes still lived / The courtyards of Thessaloniki. / From his hunched back he stretched his hand / To stop the stick of death.]

Some of the figures in the poems seem to balance precariously at the verge of life and death, their existence gravitating inexorably toward and ultimately tilting to the side of the latter:

“Tia Diamante i tio Shabtay
Kaminavan uno detras de la luz
Del otro. deteniendosen.

Tia Diamante arebivia kon su boz
Los palasios de sultan Hamid,
I al son de los kantes
Aparesian vizajes.

Ma kuando el aire de Petah-Tikva
La mareo komo kampo de vinia,
De Salonik i Izmir
Solo la memoria kedo.” (Matitiah 1992: 17)

[*Tia Diamante* and *tio Shabtay* / Walked one behind the other’s light, / Making stops. / *Tia Diamante* revived Sultan’s Hamid palaces / with her voice / And to the sound of her song / figures appeared. / But when the air of Petah-Tikva / Intoxicated her like a vineyard. / About Thessaloniki and Izmir / Only a memory remained.]

The face of uncle Shabtay, who used to drown his inner sorrows in *ouzo* and *ret-sina*,¹⁷ bears the traces of the *kurtijos* of his youth lost in Thessaloniki (“los kurtijos de la djoventud piedrida en Salonik” (Matitiah 1992: 19)). The washerwoman Sunhula is involved in her work: she goes to the center of the *kurtijo* to do the laundry, leans over the washtub and makes her repetitive, trance-like movements, as if spell-bound, with the fragrance of soap enveloping her figure.

17 Names of Balkan alcohols.

When the sun sets, her tired body wanes along with the glow on the courtyard stones. Smelling of garlic, *Tia Ester* is sitting in a wicker chair with her hands folded together on her belly and sometimes bursts out with anger at the noisy children, who are afraid of these abrupt fits of rage. Her shadow is always cast on the wall; even after her death it seems to linger on it as if it was permanently incrustated there. *Matitiah* seems to be bent on brooding over the simple people who have been somehow defeated by their lives. She does not glorify them as part of the grand past of the Sephardi culture.

Indeed, it cannot be stated with any degree of certainty whether all the scenes recaptured in her poems reproduce the pre-Holocaust era or whether some of them depict the later times and the new places inhabited by the emigrants from Thessaloniki, those who only bear the trace of old *kurtijos* inscribed on their faces and in their hearts. The images of the Balkan yards overlap and merge with those in the new dwellings of the protagonists (i.e. aunt *Diamante* from Petah-Tikva), who sit in front of their houses and wander in their minds across their lost homelands. The poet focuses on the passing time and a certain reality which is slipping away together with people who embody it. She muses about it as if in a reverie, with sympathy and tenderness.¹⁸

***Kurtijo*: A Place of Folklore**

In *Silencio* by Gabbai-Simantov and in the aunt *Diamante* passage of *Los vizajes* by *Matitiah* – both quoted above – the concept of *kurtijo* is explicitly interwoven

18 Such vision of *kurtijos* resembles to a degree the post-Holocaust visions of the Ashkenazi *shtetl*, a typical East European little town populated largely by Jews. Although for some authors, i.e. Kalman Segal, that reality was outdated, too backward and unadjusted to modern times, they recalled and depicted it with nostalgia and tenderness, because it was a fragment of the world of their ancestors – the world which used to be close and familiar but which was ruthlessly and irrevocably destroyed (cf. Ruta 2003: 134-137). However, certain similarities do not abolish the crucial differences between the Sephardi *kurtijo* and the Ashkenazi *shtetl*. A *kurtijo*, a small part of Jewish districts in a large city or a small town, represents mainly the domain of family and neighborhood life with its typical practices and routines, whereas a *shtetl* is an entire town (not a very big town or a city, though) which includes the private and public spheres of Jewish life. It means that beside the family and neighborhood life, the concept of the *shtetl* comprises also a specific religious and administrative structure and refers to the traditional modes of relationships between the Jews and the non-Jewish, religiously and ethnically diverse population, including the town authorities. In terms of space and symbolic meanings, *kurtijo* is a smaller, closer and more intimate site, whose literary reminiscences are not subject to profound ideological analyses (for different ideological attitudes to the *shtetl*, see Ruta 2012: 231-245).

with the oral heritage. In the yards, *cuentos* and *consejas* were told and songs and *romances* were sung, all of which are the fundamental genres of Sephardi oral literature. A similar association of the *kurtijo* with folklore is forged in *Sarina kanta romansas* [Sarina Sings Romances] and *Melizelda*, two poems by Avner Perez (born in 1942 in Jerusalem) from the volume *Verdjel de Mansanas* [Apple Tree Orchard], in which he recalls the figure of his grandmother. In both poems, the I-speaker describes events and episodes against the background of the *kurtijo*. It is depicted conventionally with a formulaic image of the well – the water element is very important here – and with a fragrant jasmine shrub.

| | |
|--|---|
| “Enfrente del yasimin en su kortijo Sarina kanta romansas. Tiene los kaveyos eskuros i de plata fina l’alma. Por el rio ke desha su boz en el aire vienen los peshes kon los ojos abiertos sonyandosen un esfuenyo. | Se sonyan de los kavayos del ritmo ke galopan i korren sin topar repozo asta ke yegan al portal de la romansa i entran adientro. Sarina, riéndose, serra las puertas.” (Perez 1996: 2) |
|--|---|

[Opposite a jasmine shrub / in her courtyard / Sarina sings *romances* [ballads]. / She has dark hair / and her soul is of pure silver. / In the river that her voice / is leaving in the air / the fish are coming / with eyes wide open / dreaming a dream. / They dream / of the horses of rhythm / galloping and running / never resting / until they reach / the gateway of *romance* / and dash in. / Sarina, laughing, / shuts the door.]

In Perez’s poem, the *kurtijo* is a feminine place and the space of certain intimacy – the main figure seems to be there alone, and even if it is not the case, she is so deeply absorbed in her singing and so entirely devoted to it, that she finds herself in an isolated world of her own. Her cursory description, limited actually to an observation that her hair is dark and her soul is made of pure silver, recapitulates most of the likewise scant descriptions of female characters in old *romances*.¹⁹ Sarina captivates and changes the world around her with her singing, which is vividly illustrated in a surrealist image of fish blindly floating in the air towards her along the path her voice “paves”. She not only chants her songs, but also – in a fit of inspiration – creates them. This is suggested by the rapid and briskly cadenced image of the horses of rhythm. Sarina as the mistress of *romance* lets the horses in with laughter, whereby the poetic inspiration is transformed into an actual poem.

19 See e.g. the poems *Romance de Guiomar y del emperador Carlos*, *Romance de la infantina*, *Romance de Rosa fresca*, *Romance de la linda infanta*, *La dama y el pastor* (Alcina 1987: 44-51, 150, 158, 160, 167-168).

The *kurtijo* is here a kind of liminal space, which links an entirely private space (apartment) with the outside world. In the poem, it furthermore reflects the symbolic sphere of creation: both biological conception and literary production. In this context, the woman decides to open up and let the *romance* penetrate into her inner being, so that it could produce fruit and come to existence. The pro-creative overtones of this image are additionally emphasized by the presence of jasmine in bloom as well as fish and water symbolizing fertility. In his poem, Perez transports the readers back to the halcyon times of the Sephardi culture, when *kurtijos* resounded with Ladino and its folk poetry. This sparkling vision radically diverges from the current decay of this culture. Perez is one of the few authors who in the second half of the 20th century undertook to write literature in the dying language of the ancestors in order to prolong its life. His frequently applied poetic strategy is to identify various sources of Sephardi literature and dialogically engage with them. In this poem, he enters into a dialogue with the *romance*.

Importantly, for Sarina singing is as natural as doing other activities traditionally associated with women in the *kurtijo*. She is doubtlessly the mistress of singing. The poem could be interpreted as a kind of homage paid by the poet to the genre of *romance* and its anonymous authors, as well as to the women regarded as guardians of *romances*, cherishing, preserving and passing them on to the further generations.

Perez’s other poem – *Melizelda* – is directly inspired by an authentic *romance* beginning with the words: “Melizelda, Melizelda la ija del enperante / Ke venia de los banyos de los banyos de lavarse” [“Melizelda, Melizelda, the emperor’s daughter, / who was going out of baths, of baths, where she washed herself”] (Perez 2006: XIII). Even more clearly than in *Sarina kanta romansas*, the *kurtijo* is framed here as a space of privacy, where on a sleepless night Sarina runs out dressed only in a night gown and experiences erotic and mystic raptures. Her behavior pulsates with an excitation induced probably by her longing for a man and intensified by the smothering scent of jasmine. The image of the restless girl who tosses and turns in her bed like a fish in the rough sea, animates the vision, imbuing it with dynamics, rapidity and excitement. Admittedly, Perez’s poem could be read simply as a love poem; however its deliberate references to the mystical tradition can hardly be overlooked. The *romance* about Melizelda was used as a prayer by the Dönmeh, the worshippers of Sabbatai Zevi.²⁰ According to some preserved reports, Sabbatai Zevi sang this *romance*

20 In 1665, Sabbatai Zevi (1626–1676) proclaimed himself the Messiah and gained numerous worshippers, especially in the Turkish-Balkan Diaspora. In 1666, he converted to Islam, but he combined elements of Judaism and the Muslim religion. He initiated the

himself when he took out the Torah scrolls from *aron ha-kodesh* and when he left *mikvah* after having a ritual bath. Supposedly, he saw Melizelda as a personification of *Shekhinah*, the Presence of God, and chanting the song enabled him to enter a relationship with God (Perez 2006: III). As already indicated, the *kurtijo* in Perez's poetic world becomes a borderline space; here it functions specifically as a threshold that facilitates experiencing the Presence of God. Similarly to Perez's other poems, this one alludes to the sources of Sephardi literature, in this case to the mystical tradition. The poet indicates the points where secular literature and religious writings aligned with and interpenetrated each other. Additionally, the situation delineated in *Melizelda* enables the reader to witness the old lively reality of the Sephardi communities.

***Kurtijo*: An Illusory Place of Dream**

Another function attributed to the *kurtijo* image in literature is exemplified in one of poems by Denise León, a Spanish-language poet from the younger generation. She was born in 1974 in Argentina; her grandparents were Sephardi immigrants from Europe. The reality of the former Sephardi communities in the Turkish-Balkan Diaspora and the language of the Sephardi people are for her rather indistinct shapes shimmering in the dim past of her ancestors' history (cf. Martín Ortega 2011: 353). The poem in which a *kurtijo* image appears comes from the first, bipartite poem collection by León *Poemas de Estambul* (2008), composed of the Spanish part *La isla de Alicia* [Alicia's Island] and the Judeo-Spanish part *Poemas de Estambul* [The Poems from Istanbul], with parallel Spanish translations. Elisa Martín Ortega argues that although both subtitles include an onomastic component suggesting real locations, in Denise León's poetry they are transformed into entirely imaginary spaces which foster reflection on the issues she repeatedly explores, such as faithfulness, expectations, and the capacity of language to fathom inaccessible realms. In *Poemas de Estambul*, the poet attempts to find her way into the past of her family and the heritage bound up with it. A reality spun out of her dreams, it remains forever elusive and unattainable to her as there are no pathways granting a direct access to it. It is ultimately Ladino, the old language of her ancestors, that becomes one of the tools which might bring her closer to her distant roots (cf. Martín Ortega 2011: 353-354).

Locating the imagined and fervently sought center of her identity in Istanbul, she makes the city into the destination she travels to in her mind. The

Judeo-Spanish part of the volume is preceded by a motto from Elizabeth Bishop: "Piensa en el largo viaje a casa" ["Think of the long trip home"], which makes Istanbul seem, at first sight, to be the poet's own place she wishes to return to in order to attain a complete self-recognition. Nevertheless, the conspicuous absence of the name of this Turkish city throughout the volume makes the reader realize that the city in the poetic world created by León does not correspond to any real place. It symbolizes a home an individual wants to come back to, but the homecoming proves impossible because the place does not exist anymore (cf. Martín Ortega 2011: 355). Istanbul 'keda leshos de tu sangre / i de la solombra de tu sangre' ["remains far away from your blood/ and from the shadow of your blood"] (León 2008: 60); the I-speaker calls it a city of the night, in which she collects one dream after another, vulnerable to fear and kissed by the shadows (León 2008: 62). The city is engulfed in silence and mystery, but also in hope that one day the word will be uttered which lifts off the fear and opens up tomorrow (León 2008: 64). In the city, she has an impression that someone writes her name in darkness (León 2008: 68) and the days pass by as if they were standing still in one place (León 2008: 72).

In the penultimate poem of *Poemas de Estambul*, the I-speaker confesses that she is searching for a *kurtijo*:

| | |
|--|--|
| ~Abiertas las angostas mis manos me asento i voy yorando. | Bushko en las sal y las cenizas el kurtijo de ausencias onde alguna vez nos koronimos ireynas." (León 2008: 70) |
|--|--|

[Opened / my cramped hands / I sit down / and cry. / I grope / in salt / and ashes / for the courtyard of absences / where one day / we crowned ourselves / queens.]

Her pursuits proceed in sorrow, weeping and loneliness. She wants to find the place among the salt and ashes, the images implying a desert landscape, an infertile Waste Land, burnt by the sun or fire and hostile. The image of the house or the courtyard also diverges from the conventional renderings: empty and deserted, it is described as "the courtyard of absences" ["el kurtijo de ausencias"]. And yet, it is a dreamlike place with some allures of the fabulous and reserved for the idyll of childhood, as implied by the last image of children playing together in the yard. Nevertheless, neither this poem nor any other one offers any indication that the poet has actually found her home. The last poem concludes that every day is similar to another. Therefore, what remains at the end is a sense

Sabbatean movement. The Dönme are one of the sects within this movement (Turk. *dönme* 'an apostate').

of deferral and failure to accomplish the goal, a frustration relievable only by continual probing into the language of poetry and into the language of ancestors.

In a certain sense, the functions that Istanbul and the *kurtijo* imagery fulfill in León's poetry are similar to those of Thessaloniki and their yards in Matitiahu's poems. Both poets feel nostalgia for the places bound up with the history of their families. They want to approach them because they feel that these places are constituents of their identities. Their imaginary visions build on family stories, but the Israeli poet is separated from this reality by one generation and the Argentinian one by two generations. Probably, that is why *kurtijos* in the poems by Matitiahu seem to be more tangible and easier to visualize. While visiting the places connected with her mother's life, Matitiahu experiences a partial fulfillment, whereas León's poems leave the reader with a sensation of being suspended in the void with no recognizable or reachable points of reference.

Conclusion

The images of *kurtijos*, old Sephardi houses and courtyards, are ample in Judeo-Spanish literary works of several authors writing after the Holocaust. In all these texts, the images refer to the bygone reality, which ceased to exist in the Turkish and Balkan regions mainly as a result of the Holocaust and, then, emigration to Israel and the countries of the so-called second Diaspora. The *kurtijos* have become a sign of commemorating the old, traditional forms of Jewish life which were effaced partly or completely in the 20th century.

The *kurtijos* are conjured up by the writers who saw them themselves or who grew up in them before the Second World War (e.g. Albuhayre and Gabbai-Simantov), as well as by those who remember them only as an important element of the family lore (e.g. Matitiahu and León). The images of houses and yards bring the reader into everyday domestic spaces, the realm of family and neighbors, in which the Sephardi people lived their lives in cities and towns of the Turkish-Balkan Diaspora. The writers revisit them in their thoughts prompted by a nostalgia for their own past or for the history of their families and communities. Some poets foreground the personal investment, observable for example in the poems by Albuhayre, who longs for the security and serenity associated with the ancestral home. In other writers, the personal dimension is inseparably intertwined with the communal experience. Thus, the images of *kurtijos* serve to preserve or to regain the memory of the past of their families and the community they originated from. This leads to buttressing the Sephardic identity of the poets, perceivable in the poems by Matitiahu, or enables them to get closer to it, as evidenced in León's poetry. The *kurtijos* evoked as the places where

folklore developed become a symbol of the Sephardi communal life and Ladino culture, whose growth was interrupted by the Holocaust. The *kurtijo* images commemorate and pay homage to this culture as well as to the people who formed it and passed it on to the further generations – as is the case in the poems by Gabbai-Simantov and Perez.

References

- Albuhayre, Gracia (2007): *Poezia en djudeo (espanyol)*. Sophia.
- Albuhayre, Gracia (2011): *Poezia en djudeo-espanyol. Livro no. 2*. Sophia.
- Alcina, Juan (ed.) (1987): *Romancero viejo*. Barcelona.
- Amado Bortnick, Rachel (2012): *Los kurtijos de djudios: Izmir i Buenos Aires*. <http://www.esefarad.com/?p=30988> [15.03.2013].
- Bachelard, Gaston (1994 [1958]): *The Poetics of Space*. Translated from French into English by Maria Jolas. Boston.
- Cohen, Robin (2008): *Global Diasporas. An introduction*. London and New York.
- Gabbai-Simantov, Rita (1992): *Quinientos Años Despues*. Athens.
- Gabbai-Tazartès, Rita (2007): *Poezias de mi vida*. Paris.
- Kohen, Elli / Kohen-Gordon, Dahlia (2000): *Ladino-English / English-Ladino Concise Encyclopedic Dictionary*. New York.
- León, Denise (2008): *Poemas de Estambul*. Córdoba.
- Martín Ortega, Elisa (2011): "¡Una boz ke es la manyana": El judeoespañol como lengua del rescate en la obra poética de Denise León. In: Caballero-Álías, Pilar / Chávez, Ernesto Félix / Ripoll Sintes, Blanca (eds.): *Del verbo al espejo. Reflejos y miradas de la literatura hispánica*. Barcelona, 353-361.
- Matitiahu, Margalit (1988): *Kurtijo kemado*. Tel Aviv.
- Matitiahu, Margalit (1992): *Alegrika*. Tel Aviv.
- Molho, Michael (1950): *Usos y costumbres de los sefardíes de Salónica*. Translated from French into Spanish by F. Pérez Castro. Madrid-Barcelona.
- Nebama, Joseph (1977): *Dictionnaire du judéo-espagnol*. Madrid.
- Papo, Eliezer (1999): *La Megila de Saray*. Yerushalayim.
- Papo Bohoreta, Laura (2005 [1931]): *Sefardska žena u Bosni*. Translated from Judeo-Spanish into Bosnian by Muhamed Nezirović. Sarajevo.
- Pascual Recuero, Pascual (1977): *Diccionario básico ladino-español*. Barcelona.
- Perez, Avner (1986): *Siniza i Fumo*. Yerushalayim.
- Perez, Avner (1996): *Verdjel de Mansanas*. Maale Adumim.
- Perez, Avner (ed.) (2006): *Agua, Fuego i Amor. Gazeles i Kantes Mistikos de los Sabetaitas*. Maale Adumim.
- Refael, Shmuel (2005): Mi Saloniko. In: Nassi, Gad (ed.): *En tierras ajenas yo me vo murir. Textos contemporáneos en judeoespañol*. Barcelona, 146-149.
- Refael, Shmuel (2008): *Un grito en el silencio. La poesía sobre el Holocausto en lengua sefardi: estudio y antología*. Barcelona.

- Ruta, Magdalena (2003) *Pomiędzy dwoma światami. O Kalmanie Segalu* [Between Two Worlds. On Kalman Segal]. Kraków.
- Ruta, Magdalena (2012) *Bez Żydów? Literatura jidysz w PRL o Zagładzie, Polsce i komunizmie* [Without Jews? Yiddish Literature in Postwar Poland on the Holocaust, Poland and Communism]. Kraków-Budapeszt.
- Samokovlija, Isak (1991): Podwórze starego Rafa [The Yard of Old Rafo]. In: *Kadisz, modlitwa za umarłych*. Translated from Serbo-Croatian into Polish by Alija Dukanović. Warszawa.
- Saporta y Beja, Enrique (1979): *En torno de la Torre Blanca*. Paris.
- Varol, Marie-Christine (2008) *Manual of Judeo-Spanish. Language and Culture*. Translated and adapted into English by Ralph Tarica. College Park.

Polyglossia of the *Book of Daniel* and Its Reflection in Text Structure of *Vilnius Old Testament Florilegium*: On Some Problems of Jewish Translation Technique

Alla Kozhinova / Alena Sourkova
Belarusian State University

Abstract – In the context of the history of translation and language contacts between the European Jews and the Eastern Slavs, we explore the phenomenon of the Cyrillic manuscript, known as *Vilnius Old Testament Florilegium* (F 19–262) (approx. 1517–1533). It is a copy of nine biblical books, translated directly from Hebrew. According to the most recent studies, this translation could be made by a Jew, belonging to the cultural tradition of the Provençal Jews. Most of his translation solutions demonstrate the high ability to differentiate an original language material. This differentiation is manifested the most distinctly in his translation of the *Book of Daniel* (as known, the author(s) of Daniel began their discourse in Hebrew, switched to Aramaic, and concluded in Hebrew). Analyzing the lexical and grammatical structure of the earliest East Slavic *Book of Daniel*, we can specify some tendencies in the Jewish translation technique.

Keywords: Polyglossia, the *Book of Daniel*, the *Vilnius Old Testament Florilegium* (F 19–262), Hebrew, Aramaic, Yiddish, Greek, Church Slavonic, *prostaj(a) mova*, Correspondences in Translation

1. Introduction

Contemporary biblical scholarship generally assumes that the *Book of Daniel* contains two well observable but difficult to explain dichotomies. The first one reveals itself in literary forms (narratives and visions), the second one – in languages (Hebrew and Aramaic).¹ These two phenomena became a framework for development of the theories of a single author writing in two languages and theories based on complex translation or composition history.²

1 The book contains parts in two different languages: Dan. 1.1–2.4a is in Hebrew (until the word אָרַמִּי 'in Aramaic), Dan 2.4b–7.28 is in Aramaic and chapters 8–12 are once again in Hebrew.

2 Bibliography of these and other general topics in the nearly 2,000 entries is provided by Henry O. Thompson (1993). The major compendia and comprehensive commentaries in literary-critical, form-critical, tradition-critical, etc. problems are submitted in works of: Adam S. Van der Woude (1993), John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint (2001a; 2011b). Review of the most recent explorations of Daniel as well as the bibliography of relevant works after 1993 are presented in: David M. Valeta (2008).