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“A Bridge of Communication: Spaniards and Ottoman Sephardic Jews in the City of New York (1880-1950)”

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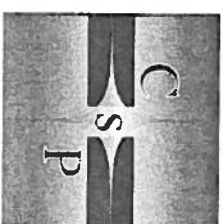


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**Recovering Hispanic Religious Thought
and Practice of the United States**

Edited by

Nicolás Kanellos



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Recovering Hispanic Religious Thought and Practice of the United States, edited by Nicolás Kanellos

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¹⁵ "Lo que tenemos que rectificar es la primacia que se adjudica por Mateos y por Chism a la Logia de la calle de Ratas. Desde 1782 a 1784 y en los años siguientes, las actividades de ciertos emigrantes franceses, sospechosos para la Inquisición, eran evidentes; las reuniones en la relojería de Larroche...donde los concurrentes se reconocían por los signos estatuidos por la fraternidad y que la fiesta solsticial del verano de 1791 fue allí celebrada. Todo esto se sabe de modo por documentos auténticos, que son testimonio al alcance de cualquier investigador, hallados en el Archivo General de la Nación; de manera que deben merecernos absoluto crédito, y siendo así, podemos saber que fue en la relojería de Larroche donde trabajó la primera logia masónica que hasta ahora tenemos noticias." Zalce y Rodríguez, 7-8.

¹⁶ This is related to the work of Alberto Carreño with respect to the importance of the relations outside of the political sphere in Mexican-United States matters. See Alberto María Carreño, *La Diplomacia Extraordinaria en México y los Estados Unidos*, 1789-1947, Vol. I, Editorial Jus, México, 1961, 7.

¹⁷ The members of these so-called secret societies, including Masonic organizations, insist to this day that Masonry is no a secret society, but rather a discrete one (Roberts 118).

CHAPTER TWO

A BRIDGE OF COMMUNICATION: SPANIARDS AND OTTOMAN SEPHARDIC JEWS IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK (1880-1950)*

AVIVA BEN-UR

In the 1980s, historian Germán Rueda was immersed in a study of Spanish immigration to the United States. In the course of his research, he stumbled upon a group of early-twentieth-century newcomers who, though born and raised in the Ottoman Empire, identified their country of origin as "Spain." They spoke Ladino, a language traditionally written in Hebrew letters, based on early modern Castilian, and fused with elements of Arabic, Aramaic, French, Hebrew, Italian, and Portuguese. Rueda realized that these individuals were Sephardim, Jews whose ancestors had resided in *Sefarad* (the Hebrew word for Spain) for over a millennium before Ferdinand and Isabel expelled them in 1492. He concluded emotionally that these handful of examples gave testimony to the thousands of Sephardim who "for more than four centuries had preserved the language, customs, and something more than just a memory of their ancestors' country..."¹ (Rueda 36)

Elsewhere, we read that Ottoman Jews of Iberian ancestry "had no sense of identification with Spain.... Moreover, Sephardim in no way seem to have communicated with other Spanish-speaking groups in this country." (Gann and Duignan 28) This astonishing statement, published in a 1986 historical survey of United States Hispanics, would have dismayed a small, but influential group of university educators and communal leaders who facilitated some of the most intense and public cooperative efforts between gentile Spaniards and Ladino-speaking Jews. These personalities, active in the City of New York during the first half of the twentieth century, proved the elasticity of the relatively new concept "Hispanic" and demonstrated its power to reconfigure the self-identity of Spaniards and Sephardic Jews alike.² Rueda's discovery, suggesting a nostalgic tie with Spain, was just the tip of the iceberg.

The Ties That Bind

Probably unbeknownst to them, Spaniards and Sephardic Jews in the United States shared much in common demographically. Their populations were slight in comparison to the various European ethnic groups that had immigrated during the course of the nineteenth century. By the first decades of the twentieth century, the Spanish population numbered a mere 200,000, roughly comparable in size to the *kolonia* (the Ladino term for the local Sephardic community), with 100,000 members in 1916.³ (Rueda 20) Both groups tended to be overshadowed by the overarching categories with which they were sometimes associated. The agents of this phenomenon of invisibility have been immigration officials, demographers, and historians, who by and large have failed to consider Spaniards and Ottoman Sephardim as distinct sub-ethnic groups. In the case of Spaniards, this was because their most prolific period of immigration, 1900 to 1924, coincided with the droves of southern and eastern European immigrants who arrived during the same period. Spaniards were often classified as "other persons of Spanish origin," and government statisticians often merged them with Argentines, Colombians, and other peoples of Central and South America. (Quintana 948-49) Sephardim, for their part, were almost completely eclipsed by the two and a half million eastern European Ashkenazim who immigrated largely between 1880 and 1924. Moreover, Jewish and non-Jewish officials alike often mistook them for gentle Spaniards, Greeks, Turks, or Arabs. (Ben-Ur 2002)

Spanish émigrés and Sephardic Jews were overwhelmingly attracted to the country's urban centers, with New York dominating as the leading destination. Between 1897 and 1944, 38 percent of Spanish immigrants settled in New York State.⁴ (Rueda 286-86) New York was also the leading destination for the country's Sephardic immigrants. Some ninety percent of Sephardim chose to settle there. (Ben-Ur 2001)

Sephardim and Spaniards could also find commonality in their ancestral origins, an identity perhaps distasteful to many Cuban or Puerto Rican immigrants who embraced independence from Spain in 1898. The aforementioned immigration records, analyzed by Rueda, indicate that a number of Sephardim emigrating from Ottoman lands, particularly during the period from 1904 to 1914, designated Spain as their "country of origin," and "Turkey" as their "last place of residence." One should not discount their attempt to obscure their "Oriental" identity, particularly in view of the Act of April 27, 1904, which reaffirmed and indefinitely extended the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.⁵ But additional evidence suggests that the connection some Sephardim claimed to have with Spain reflected more than just immigrant pragmatism. A linguist researching New York's Sephardic community in 1930 found his

informants eager to learn of Spain and the differences between their native language and modern Spanish. While he was unable to classify any customs as "essentially Spanish," he did detect "a deep-seated, tender memory and a pronounced nostalgia reverting to the Spain of their ancestors, the home of their fathers for so many centuries." (Luria 323-24; 331)

Particularly because most Spaniards and Sephardim tended to identify regionally rather than nationally (Quintana 950; Papo 129-176),⁶ a more forceful connection was language. Ladino, the ancestral language of Ottoman Sephardim, often extended a bridge of communication to speakers of Spain's many regional dialects. Sephardic émigré and Brooklyn College Professor Mair José Benardete observed in the 1940s that non-Jewish Hispanic Americans, especially Spaniards in New York, would sooner or later inevitably hear the "archaic Spanish" spoken by Ottoman Sephardim. (Benardete 1944) That Sephardim, in turn, were receptive to modern Spanish is borne out by the Ladino press, which over the years made increasing accommodations to modern Castilian. This adjustment delighted Benardete, who, with patent hostility to his own mother tongue, observed in 1953 that the "outlandish exrescences [of Ladino] are filed away or dropped off" during encounters between Sephardim and modern Spanish speakers. (Benardete 1953: 71)

Linguists have long recognized the centrality of language to social organization and cultural expression.⁷ Language in a multi-lingual or multi-dialectal environment has the power to open and close membership to an ethnic group.⁸ Recent studies have affirmed the primacy of language in interactions that test the boundaries of ethnic belonging. Sociolinguist Ben Rampton examines the use of Panjabi among adolescents of African-Caribbean and Anglo descent, the use of Creole by adolescents of Panjabi and Anglo origins, and the use of stylized Indian English to challenge racial and economic stratification among British youths. Linguistic anthropologist Dinah Dabhan-Miraglia recorded cases from the 1970s of Yemenite-descended Jews who, by responding in African American Vernacular English⁹ during momentary encounters with American Blacks, tacitly avowed an African American identity. Similarly, Katya Gibel Azoulay, an American-born cultural anthropologist of "Jewish and West Indian descent," noted that while attending high school in the early 1990s, one of her children "consciously adopted the gestures [i.e. body language], dress codes, and hairstyle that would mark him as "Black." (Azoulay 18, 25; Miraglia 12; Rampton)

No such studies exist for the U.S. Sephardi community, but historical archives suggest that similar dynamics emerged among Spanish- and Ladino-speakers during the first half of the twentieth century. The camaraderie potentially evoked by shared language likely stimulated the incidence of casual sexual encounters and intermarriage between Sephardim and the largely

Catholic Puerto Rican population of East Harlem in the 1920s and '30s.¹⁰ Another example involves two Harlem women in the 1920s, caught by surprise when a gentele Puerto Rican neighbor understood (and eavesdropped on) their very private conversation.¹¹ Similarly, "Madame Esther Tuvi" remarked in 1935 that her Catholic friend, fluent in Spanish, could understand the Hebrew-scripted articles in New York's Ladino weekly *La Voz*, when Tuvi read them aloud to her. Alas, Tuvi does not mention her friend's ethnicity, perhaps again suggesting that for some Sephardim language was a more important identifier than national origin.¹² Glimpses of similar spontaneous, daily encounters between Spanish-speaking gentiles and Ottoman Sephardim in America's immigrant neighborhoods are inconspicuously dispersed throughout the pages of the American Ladino press, but are generally not elaborated.¹³

For a more detailed and reflective view, the historian must turn to the city's intellectual elite. One circumscribed framework in which many of these interactions took place was Columbia University, where professors, students, and community members representing both the Spanish and Sephardic ethnic groups discovered one another in carefully organized, ideologically specific settings.

The Pan-Hispanic Dream

Because their respective residential patterns tended not to overlap, Spaniards and Sephardim probably had few spontaneous opportunities to interact.¹⁴ New York City's Spaniards tended to cluster in four zones. Most of them settled in Southeast Manhattan.¹⁵ (Rueda 85, 87) Perhaps 10,000 immigrants lived there in the 1920s, a number that climbs to 25-30,000 if their American-born children and grandchildren are included. Others settled in East Manhattan, especially in an area known as "Little Spain,"¹⁶ (Rueda 87) as well as in Brooklyn and in Astoria. (Rueda 89-90) The principle settlements of Sephardim (until they fanned out to Brooklyn and the Bronx) were the Lower East Side, just north of the area harboring the highest concentration of Spaniards, and Harlem.¹⁷ In the 1930s, members of these communities were drawn uptown, to Columbia University, which became a meeting place where Spaniards and Sephardim tested the boundaries of their respective ethnic groups.

The catalyst was Federico de Onís (1885-1966), professor of Spanish Languages and Literatures at the University of Salamanca and the Center for Historical Studies in Madrid. In 1916, Columbia University president Nicholas Murray Butler appointed Onís, a renowned specialist in Spanish and Latin American literature, to organize Hispanic Studies upon a new foundation. Butler was responding to an exponential increase in the popularity of Spanish academic studies, witnessed nationwide, particularly in the fields of language

and literature. One scholar describes the boom in Spanish studies during the years on either side of World War I as "arguably the biggest and most dramatic surge ever in the history of U.S. Spanish studies."¹⁸ (Fernández 51)

Matriculation in the century's first decade had already stretched Columbia University's Spanish professors beyond capacity. Then, from 248 students enrolled during the academic year 1911-1912, enrollment rose to 1,626 in 1915-1916. Until the Depression, matriculation steadily mounted without interruption, peaking at 2,923 undergraduates during the 1920-1921 academic year. A new maximum was achieved in 1948-1949 with 4,169 students (among them 1,050 graduates and 3,042 undergrads). In terms of Hispanic Studies, Columbia University was distinctive nationally, for since 1916 graduate matriculation in Spanish exceeded parallel enrollment in all other universities nationwide.¹⁹ (Onís 1955: 729)

Onís, who arrived in September of 1916, had initially intended to remain in the United States for just a year, but eventually resolved to settle permanently. This decision was interrupted only 38 years later upon his retirement and move to Puerto Rico. In a 1955 retrospective of his mainland career, Onís reflected that in North America he felt "more in the center of Spain than when I was in Spain itself," where he had spent the first thirty years of his life. (Onís 1955: 9) In this sense, Onís may have been exceptional among U.S.-based intellectuals of Spanish birth, who tended to separate themselves from the local Spanish colony. (Rueda 91)

In 1920, Onís and his colleagues founded the Instituto de las Españas, an organization directed at guiding the "triangular relations between Spain, Hispanic America, and the United States."²⁰ (Onís 1955: 8-9) Initially, the Instituto de las Españas had no building of its own and activities took place in various edifices of the university. But in 1930 President Butler decided to fund a center that would house the institute's programs. The building, just one block north of Columbia's main campus, was inaugurated as the "Casa Hispánica," influencing the organization's English name, "Hispanic Institute," and avoiding the awkwardness of a literal translation of the institute's Spanish name (which would theoretically have been "Institute of the Spains"). The choice of the organization's English name was fortuitous, for it offered the opportunity for complete inclusion—at least taxonomically—of Sephardim as fellow Hispanics. The selection of the English name may have also been a nod at New York's Hispanic Society of America, founded in 1904 by American Hispanist Archer Milton Huntington and located further uptown. In 1916, Nicholas Murray Butler had appointed Huntington to select an academic from Spain to organize Hispanic Studies at Columbia upon a new foundation. Huntington had handpicked Federico de Onís. (Onís 1955: 729)

The time was auspicious for both programmatic expansion and conceptual revolution. Infrastructural reorganization at Columbia University in 1929 had divided the Department of Languages and Romance Literatures into three sections. This allowed Spanish scholars to adopt the term "Hispanico" to designate their newly independent section. (Onís 1955: 728) Moreover, this independence seems to have given free reign to a multi-cultural approach to Spain. Brazilian-born Spanish historian Américo Castro (1885-1972) would spearhead such a scholarly approach in the following decade. Castro served as visiting professor at Columbia University's Hispanic Department in 1923 and may have influenced Onís's conceptualization of Spanish historiography.²¹ A more direct impact on Onís was novelist Miguel de Unamuno, who had been his principle teacher in Spain, and who spoke of "the blood of the spirit" that united all Spanish speakers "through the tie of the language." (Onís 1955: 8)

The expansive approach of the Hispanic Institute should be viewed within the context of a trend developing around 1915 that challenged Spain's central position in American Hispanic Studies. Previously, there existed "no division between the Spanish and the Spanish-American language and culture. In order to learn Spanish, you read the works of the great Spanish writers. And in reading Spanish literature, you learned about the Hispanic mind and character in America as well as in the Peninsula."²² The new trend commencing around 1915 allowed academics to lend primacy to cultural manifestations of "Hispanidad" (Hispanicity) as they developed outside of Spain.²³

Expanding the Borders of the Pan-Hispanic Dream

These historical and political trends prepared the grounds for an encompassing view of Hispanicity, but do not entirely explain how the borders of the "Spains" were stretched to include Jews in and from the Ottoman Empire. The "discovery" of Ladino-speaking Jews by Spanish Senator Ángel Pulido Fernández during a voyage on the Danube in 1904, and his efforts to "repatriate" them to Spain, is sometimes identified as the country's most important reconciliatory overture to Ottoman Sephardim. (Pulido 1993 [1905]) Several gentle Spanish writers and scholars of the early twentieth century were involved in the campaign to both repatriate Sephardim and spread knowledge of the Ladino language. Many of these Spaniards, including the "apostle of the Sephardim," Pulido himself, came to suspect their own Sephardic roots, and some even asserted a Jewish identity.²⁴ Spanish novelist and critic Rafael Cansinos-Asséns (1883-1964), through kabbalistic calculations, arrived at the conclusion that his ancestors were crypto-Jews. His conviction led him to join the small group of Moroccan and European Sephardim who dwelled in Madrid and he saturated his pamphlets, essays, short stories, poems, and novels, with

Sephardic themes. (Benardete 1947: 137 and 1953: 156) Even Federico de Onís briefly flirted with his possible Sephardic origins. (Besso 1968: 176; Onís 1953: 103)

It is thus likely that the inauguration of the Casa de las Españas in 1930 spurred the founding, sometime between 1930 and 1934, of the institute's "Sección Sefardí" (also called Sección de Estudios Sefardíes, and hereafter referred to by its English name, Sephardic Section). Its mission to advance the study of "Spanish-Jewish culture" included "Research projects...carried out in the history, literature and folklore of this culture [and published]." The field was to be studied "both from a historical standpoint and also as it is preserved today in the traditions of the Sephardic people."²⁵ In casting its eyes eastward toward the Ottoman Empire, the Sephardic Section blazed a trail, for until that moment, Ottoman Jewish history had been neglected by gentle and Jewish historians alike. (Benardete 1953: 23)

Onís invited the aforementioned Mair José Benardete to direct the Sephardic Section.²⁶ Their relationship, and indeed, Onís's interest in Sephardim, long preceded the establishment of the Sephardic Section. In 1923, Onís had encouraged Mair José Benardete to begin a thesis at Columbia University on Spanish ballads preserved among Eastern Sephardim of the "slums of the East Side and Harlem."²⁷ Onís, Benardete noted, imbued in Sephardic students a love for their heritage, which Eastern Sephardim had been taught by their own community to despise. Onís was part of "the Philo-Sephardic movement in Spain," whose followers included Benito Pérez Galdós, Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, Ramón Menéndez Pidal, and the aforementioned Ángel Pulido Fernández and Rafael Cansinos-Asséns, all of whom encouraged Eastern Sephardim "to maintain their traditions and reverentially love and study them." (Benardete 1953: 14) In the late 1920s, Onís had also assisted an Ashkenazi graduate student, Max A. Luria, with research on the Monastir dialect of Ladino, which appeared as a lengthy article in the 1930 issue of *Revue Hispanique*. In his acknowledgments, Luria thanked Onís "for generous assistance and advice while the study was being prepared and for his painstaking care and invaluable criticism in reading the manuscript in final form." (Luria 334) When Henry V. Besso sought to enroll in the Spanish Department as a prospective graduate student around 1931, Onís warmly welcomed him and extended him a long-enduring personal and professional friendship. In a 1938 article he published in the Ladino weekly *La Voz*, Besso referred to Onís as a "great friend of the Sephardim." (Besso 1968: 176).

Though Onís apparently did not teach Sephardic-related courses, a multi-cultural orientation to Spanish civilization was developed under his directorship. The Hispanic Institute offered such courses as "La Cultura Española," an interdisciplinary course bearing three credits and cross-listed with

an astounding number of departments (Anthropology, Architecture, Art, French, Geology, History, Latin and Greek, Philosophy, Law, and Semitic Languages). The course consisted of a series of English-language lectures on various aspects of Spanish civilization, including a two-day lecture by Salo Wittmayer Baron on "The Hebraic Civilization in Spain" and a one-day presentation by Jewish anthropologist Franz Boas on "The Diffusion of Spanish Folklore in Africa, Asia and America." Considering Boas had directed a study on North African Judeo-Spanish around 1912, his course probably included Sephardic material as well. Benardete offered history lectures on Sephardic Spain, including "El judío en la España cristiana del Medioevo" (summer 1935).²⁸ The array of courses is all the more impressive when one recalls that during this time academic scholarship and instruction on Jewish civilization in Christian Spain (and indeed, Jewish history in general), were in their infancy.²⁹

Sephardic Studies programming was developed more intensely under Benardete, an obvious choice for the position of Sephardic Section director. Born and raised in Dardanelles, in the former Ottoman Empire, he arrived in the United States in 1910 at the age of fifteen, old enough to be fully immersed in his native language and culture, but young enough to be fundamentally shaped by America's institutions of higher education. He graduated from the University of Cincinnati and received his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from Columbia University, mastering Spanish literature and completing both theses on the topic of Sephardic civilization. (Benardete 1923 and 1953: 11-12) With extensive knowledge of both Ottoman Sephardic civilization and Spanish literature, something neither Eastern Sephardim nor Spanish scholars embodied until then, Mair José Benardete styled himself as a bridge between cultures and scholarship. (Benardete 1953: 12-13) Though he was affiliated with Columbia University through its Hispanic Institute, Benardete's academic career as a professor of Spanish literature developed mostly at Hunter College, and also at Brooklyn College from 1930 until his retirement in 1965.³⁰ The position of director of the Sephardic Section afforded Benardete a great deal of creative freedom to not only develop Sephardic programming but to also involve the local Ladino-speaking population.

The Sephardic Section: Casting a Wide Net

Sephardic Section programming was not ghettoized, but rather formed part and parcel of the Hispanic Institute. Among varied receptions, plays, and lectures on general Hispanic culture, literature, history, and current events, were interspersed similar events of Sephardic interest. Federico de Onís and other genteile Spanish members of the Hispanic Institute often collaborated in specifically Sephardic programs.

From the beginning, the Hispanic Institute did not shy away from controversial subjects, nor from involving the individuals who would have found these topics personally sensitive. In April of 1931, Benardete mediated and presided over a discussion on "the new attitude of Spain towards the Sephardim." A synopsis of the event stated that the subject matter was "of special interest to a number of students of the department, who are of Judeo-Spanish origin." Numerous Sephardim living in New York and some students, professors, and members of the institute participated. (*Bulletin* January 1931: 5) The following year Onís and Benardete hosted a similar discussion on the Spanish Republic's attitude regarding Sephardim. Thessaloniki-born Sephardi and Hispanic Institute member, Henry V. Besso, participated as a presenter.³¹ Besso, reading aloud from a previous issue of *La Vara*, foretold economic disaster for would-be Sephardic immigrants to Spain.³² Besso does not seem to have harbored veiled opposition to Spain for expelling its Jews in 1492. Three years later, in an article published in New York's *España Libre*, Besso would maintain that the expulsion was the result of "a false guide/leader." Moreover, he pointed out, in the mid-1930s Spain's republican government and its desire to receive Sephardic immigrants contrasted favorably with contemporary nationalism and anti-Semitism in other lands. (Besso 1935)

Onís agreed about the potential hardships, but diplomatically remarked that "an ideal moved the Spaniards to [expel the Jews from Spain]... and... this same ideal and a strange sense of justice now impels them to open their arms to these Spaniards without a land." Implicitly, then, the enduring ideal of national unity could have both beneficial and disastrous consequences for Jews in Spain. Now, in the twentieth century, that ideal called for the inclusion of Jews in Spanish society. Citing Spain's "Edict of Freedom" (*edicto de la libertad de los cultos*), Onís maintained that the Spanish government now recognized that one could be a Protestant or a Jew and still be Spanish.³³

The event brings to mind debates in the Jewish community about a campaign begun twenty years earlier to repatriate Sephardim to Spain. Embraced by the Spanish government and the Spanish Embassy in New York, the campaign riled many U.S. Sephardic leaders who did not hesitate to publicly express their vitriolic opposition. Bulgarian-born Moise Gadol (1874-1941), editor of the country's first enduring Ladino newspaper, *La America*, reminded Spanish delegates that Sephardim had still not forgotten the bitterness of the "cruel and barbaric" Inquisition and that "we would not be so ignorant as to return to a country that left us with such sad memories." (Gadol 1915) Joseph Gedalecia (1876-1960), the Constantinopolitan-born president of New York's Federation of Oriental Jews, agreed that Ottoman Sephardim had "not forgotten the sufferings of their ancestors" and hoped they would "receive the magnanimous condensation of the Spanish Government with an eloquent

shrug." (Gedalecia 7) By contrast, the Hispanic Institute's intellectual environment in the 1930s allowed for discussion that could move beyond emotional ties to Spain or historical resentment. The absence of Sephardim in the audience on this occasion, duly noted by *La Vira*, might have also steered the discussion away from a hotbed of emotions.

Most of the Sephardic-related events sponsored by the Hispanic Institute tended to include the participation of *kolonia* members unaffiliated with the institute. Musical presentations were an ideal catalyst for inter-communal relations because of their political and ideological neutrality. These presentations were perhaps inspired by Onís's own original fieldwork among Ladino-speaking Sephardim. In 1930, he invited Simy (Suzanne) Nahón de Tolodano, sister of a Columbia University graduate student, to record some ballads at the Casa de las Españas. He built up an impressive archive of Eastern Sephardic Ladino songs thereafter, recording the songs of informants from Thessalonika (including Elvira Ben David, Maria Vivas, Mentesh Amiras, and Isaac Sustiel) and Rhodes (Clara Turiel).³⁴

The Hispanic Institute sponsored a musical presentation in 1936 featuring native singers of Judeo-Spanish folksongs, including the aforementioned Amiras and Sustiel, as well as Elvira Rubi and Jennie Abolafia. Some of the performers, including Joseph Kartan and Henry V. Besso, had been graduate students in the Hispanic Studies Department. Though the singers were native speakers of Ladino, the musical arrangers instrumentally westernized each piece, apparently rendering them more palatable to non-Sephardic audience members unfamiliar with the atonal cadences of Middle Eastern melodies.³⁵

Leaders from the local Sephardic community who attended these events thrilled at the public performance of Sephardic folksongs in such a highbrow setting. Simon S. Nessim, a Thessaloniki-born Sephardic lawyer, attended the "Sephardic Recital" at the Casa de las Españas in February of 1935, and found that the performance dignified Sephardic culture, particularly because it was witnessed by an "intellectual audience of all races." (Nessim 8) Such performances implicitly helped the Sephardim battle communal obscurity, particularly within the greater Jewish community.

Perhaps the highlight of the institute's Sephardic programming were the events commemorating the 800th birth anniversary of Moses Maimonides (1138-1204), a Jewish philosopher, legal codifier, and physician born in Córdoba and commonly known by his Hebrew acronym as "Rambam."³⁶ Jews and gentiles in various parts of the Western world, including Rumania, Spain, and the United States, celebrated the occasion.³⁷ The National Committee for the Maimonides Octocentennial in New York, in cooperation with the Hispanic Institute and Columbia University, organized an event that spotlighted

university speakers who were not directly associated with Sephardic or Spanish Studies. Renowned lecturers included President Butler,³⁸ Salo Wittmayer Baron (History),³⁹ Richard J. H. Gottlieb (Semitics), and Richard P. McKeon (Philosophy). Again, the Sephardi reporting on the event for *La Vira* remarked on the diverse audience, "a galaxy of men and women of all races, professors, rabbis, ministers, scholars, students." Onís, who presided over the evening, made a concerted effort to claim for the Spanish world Maimonides, whom he identified as "a Spaniard, a citizen of the many Spains."⁴⁰

The Sephardic Section contributed a musical presentation by Sephardic Talmud Torah students, and lectures by an assortment of intellectual community members, including (aside from Besso and Benardete) rabbinically-trained Talmud Torah teacher and insurance broker Alberto Matarasso (1890-1971), Talmud Torah teacher and Ladino journalist Albert Levy (1897-1963),⁴¹ and an unidentified physician named Jacques Behar. The following month the Sephardic Section followed up with a second Maimonides event presided over by Spanish lawyer José A. Carás. Yet another event was subsequently held in Harlem, where the Ladino-language program suggests a largely foreign-born Sephardic audience.⁴²

Other events extending a bridge between gentile Spaniards and New York's Sephardic community were the plays performed during the annual "Fiesta de la Lengua." The Festival of the Language, inaugurated in 1920 to "celebrate all who are united through the tie of the language," (Onís 1955: 8) coincided with the birth anniversary of Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (1547-1616), creator of Don Quixote, the most famed character of Spanish literature. Here, interethnic cooperative endeavors were at their most bombastic. The cast of a 1934 dramatic and musical presentation, set in the times of Cervantes, included native speakers of Ladino clad in ostentatious seventeenth-century style costumes.⁴³ The 1941 event featured Lope de Vega's *El Robo de Dina*, animated once again by native Ladino-speakers of New York, mostly students.⁴⁴

The dramatic events seemed to operate under the faulty conviction that Ladino was a petrified Old Spanish, the Spanish of the Golden Age, and that any distinctive elements were "corruptions." (Besso 1968) This idea was common among many nineteenth- and twentieth-century Spanish scholars, including José Estrugo, who maintained that the language of Sephardim approximated a live recording of a lost language.⁴⁵ Sephardim, in turn, were implicitly portrayed as a long-lost component of Spanish civilization, frozen in time, and ready for reclamation. Many Sephardic intellectuals were complicit in the perpetuation of this distortion.⁴⁶ Benardete's first announcement of the Sephardic Section in the Hispanic Institute's organ, *Revista hispánica moderna* (hereafter cited as *RHM*), maintained that Judeo-Spanish culture today preserves very valorous Spanish traditions," with not even a nod at Ladino's Jewish,

Hebrew, and Aramaic components. The section, he continued, proposed to "reintegrate into the Hispanic spiritual community these Spaniards who for historical reasons have remained for more than four hundred years separated from Spain." The aforementioned Henry V. Besso maintained in 1934 that despite 430 years of separation from the "mother country," Sephardim had maintained the "language of Cervantes" in a "relatively pure" condition.⁴⁷ Another dramatic performance in Judeo-Spanish, performed under Benardele's direction in 1936, promised to showcase the Spanish language "as all Spaniards spoke it during the time of the Catholic monarchs and discovery of America."⁴⁸ Ironically, this presentation—a Ladino translation of Jean Racine's *Athalie*—was set not in early modern Spain, but rather in Jerusalem around 700 B.C.E.!

Earlier that year, Henry V. Besso had been appointed assistant director of the Sephardic Section, which seems to have intensified his relationship with both Mair José Benardele and the local Ladino-speaking community. *Athalie*—translated to Ladino as "El Castigo de Ataliahu"—played to two separate audiences. A Hebrew-scripted Ladino playbill indicates that one audience, gathered on the Lower East Side, the historic neighborhood of Ottoman Sephardim newcomers, was composed primarily of Sephardic immigrants, rather than American-born community members unable to read their domestic language. The other audience, more motley, assembled in Columbia University's MacMillin Hall. Spatially reinforcing their role as a cultural bridge, the dramatic group had rehearsed both at the Casa de las Españas and on the Lower East Side.⁴⁹

The impact of these plays was arguably greater than the Sephardic Studies scholarship produced by the Hispanic Institute's professors and students. The Columbia University showing of "El Castigo de Ataliahu" attracted an audience of hundreds. Henry V. Besso reported that it was not just a success—it was a triumph! In the audience, he noted, were representatives of various nationalities, interspersed with a number of Spanish and Hispanic American professors of Hispanic Studies. While the actors and actresses of "Ataliahu" were amateurs, the presentation was enhanced by professional trappings, including excellent acting and musical accompaniment by musicians from the Juilliard School of Music. (Besso [1936]) Hundreds of Sephardim also attended. Mair José Benardele seized his opportunity to advertise the Sephardic Section he directed, opening with an introduction on its goals. Federico de Onís, in turn, explained the aims of the Instituto de las Españas to "preserve and unite all those who speak Spanish, be they Spanish, Hispano-American, or Sephardic." Onís, Besso affirmed, was by then well known among the colony's Sephardim. (Besso [1936])

Aside from Onís's renown in Sephardic circles, what is most interesting is the audience's reaction during the performance. Spectators

engrossed in the plots vocally expressed their anger, and women in particular emitted words of reprimand upon hearing the words of the Queen Ataliahu and her plot against the Jews. Such open displays of excitement were typical of Ladino theatrical productions on the Lower East Side.⁵⁰ Spontaneous audience response to actors was also characteristic of North American Yiddish theater culture. In a Yiddish production of Jacob Gordin's *Siberia* in 1891, women in the audience emphatically cast their shawls upon the stage for the Siberian prisoners suffering from the cold.⁵¹

Sephardic intellectuals must have experienced the Sephardic Section as a particularly refreshing development. During this period, the pursuit of intellectual matters was a rarity in Sephardic circles, where business and commercial enterprises were generally more valued. Mair José Benardele had accepted the directorship of the Sephardic Section apparently envisioning an intellectual group, and hence initially hesitated to admit anyone who was not a college graduate.⁵² He, along with Henry V. Besso, nurtured a sense of elitism for the non-academic Sephardic community. In a private correspondence from 1936, Besso admitted that he had purposefully disassociated himself from the Sephardic Brotherhood, the city's leading Sephardic mutual aid, social, and cultural society, "because they have a bunch of non-intellectuals and discussing things with them in an intelligent manner is rather impossible."⁵³ Joseph Kattan, also active in the Sephardic Section, co-founded in the 1930s the Sephardic College Fraternity EKØ. A search through "enrollment records at various local colleges and universities" had resulted in a membership of merely twenty-five Sephardim, including the community's "few practicing professionals such as doctors, dentists and lawyers." The EKØ's decision to admit Sephardic "co-eds" was no doubt vital to its viability as a society.⁵⁴

And yet, the common pursuit of higher learning and culture did not guarantee harmonious relations. Kattan locked horns with Henry V. Besso in 1936, and a series of tense letters written in February of 1936 indicate petty feuding just three weeks before the Columbia University performance of "Ataliahu."⁵⁵

These gossip letters nevertheless contain key information about the functioning of the Sephardic Section. The 1936 presentation of "Ataliahu" was Benardele's brainchild. The Sephardic performers strove for professionalism, and at one point sought advice from a Sephardic acquaintance active in the moving picture industry. Moreover, the plays do not appear to have been familiar to Sephardic Section members from their possible earlier involvement in the Old Country Ladino theater.⁵⁶ Besso mentions that he searched the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, a few blocks north of Columbia University, to locate Judeo-Spanish plays the group would select for presentation. He retrieved four, likely printed in Hebrew-scripted Ladino, but

the group selected none of these. Apparently, Racine's *Atalie*, which the group ultimately chose, was only available in French. Benardete, Katran, Molino, and possibly Albert Matarasso collaborated to produce a Latin-scripted Ladino translation that year.⁵⁷ Besso suggested that the group's translation of *Atalie* be published as a book issued by Albert Levy and Albert Torres (1892-1970) of the Ladino periodical *La Vara*, but nothing came of this, although all agreed it was an auspicious idea. Perhaps the failure to publish was partly due to Benardete's explosive behavior.

These same letters reveal that Benardete was also involved in various verbal and physical disputes with members of the Sephardic community who were unaffiliated with the Hispanic Institute. Because of these conflicts, which culminated in 1936, the esteem of *La Vara*'s readership for Benardete and the Sephardic Section plummeted.⁵⁸ The community had once regarded Sephardic Section organizers as "demi-gods, as the future leaders of the people." Only the previous year, as a result of the Maimonides quincennial events, and through Benardete's influence, the Sephardic Section had secured the admiration of the "entire colony, almost."⁵⁹

Were it not for these internecine disputes, the Sephardic Section might have proven more prolific in both programming and publications. The Hispanic Institute was an ideal venue for Sephardic academic print culture. Out of 146 publications between 1922 and 1963, however, only four were Sephardic-oriented. These, appearing between 1930 and 1953, included Henry V. Besso's M.A. thesis on Amsterdam's Sephardic dramatic literature and Mair José Benardete's dissertation on the Hispanicity of Western and Eastern Sephardic Jews.⁶⁰ A few other intended publications never saw the light of day, including a magazine on Sephardic culture to be titled simply *Revista Sefardi*, slated to serve as a "loudspeaker" for the various Sephardic communities of the world and for Spaniards and Spanish-Americans alike.⁶¹ The small number of actual publications also suggests the rarity of Sephardic intellectuals who wrote about their own heritage, a phenomenon of an immigrant culture that generally valued economic progress over secular intellectual development. That all four authors were themselves Sephardic also indicates that the Hispanic Institute's gentle Spaniards tended to facilitate Sephardic Studies more as mentors than as researchers in their own right.

Coda: A Retrospective

The Spanish rapprochement with New York's Ottoman Sephardic community set a receptive stage for native Ladino-speakers, who in years to come would enroll in the university in intellectual search of their own storied heritage.⁶² In the summer of 1943, just after receiving her degree in Spanish

from Hunter College, twenty-year-old, Harlem-born Denah Levy decided to pursue her academic interest in Ladino. She learned of a Spanish professor at Columbia University who was interested in language and would perhaps be responsive to "her Spanish." Denah Levy Lida found Tomás Navarro Tomás, an adviser to the Hispanic Institute, in his office and introduced herself, proposing to write a Master's thesis using her own family members as linguistic and folkloric repositories.⁶³ Navarro Tomás was "very, very excited" and "wanted to know everything about it," Lida recalls. He exhibited "enormous interest, personal curiosity, and warm encouragement." Under his direction, Lida studied Spanish literature and also enrolled in a seminar designed to further her M.A. thesis. It was in this latter course that Lida came to fully appreciate her heritage and ceased to disdain Ladino as "kitchen Spanish." Navarro Tomás would ask her pointed questions, instruct her to gather specific vocabulary ("what do they call the jamb of a door?"), and handed her his own standard linguistic questionnaires.

Tomás's intense curiosity was not just lexical, but also cultural. Suddenly, Judeo-Spanish and its heritage seemed very important to Lida. "I realized through him that we could learn much about medieval Spanish and poetry that had been preserved in Ladino," she reflected in 1999. Navarro Tomás transformed her entire perspective towards her native language. She "distinguished, elderly man" would even ask about Sephardic cuisine. She would bring in lists of gastronomical vocabulary and when no equivalent existed in modern Spanish, her task was to write detailed descriptions that stimulated Navarro's academic interest no less than his tastebuds. Navarro Tomás unabashedly requested samples of these delicacies, and Lida's mother obliged by preparing the goods for her daughter to bring in as part of the course syllabus. Lida recalls that he relished these moments, "especially when his wife was away." He sampled Turkish and Greek Sephardic pastries, such as *baklava* and *kuraviedes* (baked dough stuffed with chopped almonds and topped with powdered sugar), and would exclaim, "Ah, este está muy bueno."⁶⁴

In 1947, a Columbia University student named Susan Bassan completed an M.A. thesis in the Spanish Department on *romansas* gathered from her family members, friends, and acquaintances, mostly from Thessalonika, the city of her own ancestors. Her introduction, while stopping short of outright praise for Spain as a medieval home for the Jews, did not condemn it. Bassan, who carried out some of her research at the Casa Hispánica, drew on studies by Amador de los Ríos and other monographs romanticizing Sephardic connections to Spain.⁶⁵

In their focus on Ladino as a distinct language in its own right, these studies were very much in consonance with another, more muted approach of the Hispanic Institute that did not view Ladino as synonymous with early

modern Spanish. This approach was expressed not on stage, but apparently only through scholarly output. Max A. Luria's aforementioned study of the Monastir dialect of Ladino appeared under the Hispanic Institute's imprint, and the institute also demonstrated its awareness of Ladino as a singular, living language through its subscription to a Hebrew-scripted Ladino periodical.⁶⁶ Moreover, the institute's reception to modern-day Sephardim and the celebration of their still-thriving culture is evidence that for Spanish intellectuals such as Federico de Onís and Tomás Navarro Tomás, Sephardic civilization was not frozen in a mythical Golden Age, but rather a continuing tradition, encompassing sounds and tastes, no less than words and ideas. The Hispanic Ivory Tower embraced its distant cousins as part and parcel of the Spanish-speaking world, past and present. In the words of Onís, "Séneca [sic], Lucano, San Isidoro, Averroes, and Maimonides are as Spanish as Góngora and Cervantes."⁶⁷

Sephardic-oriented cultural and intellectual activities at Columbia University continued through at least the 1960s, but the heyday of the Sephardic Section was the 1930s. The collaboration of gentile Spaniards and Sephardim in this decade was no doubt intensified by sea-changing events in Spain. The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and the fall of the Second Spanish Republic in 1939 stimulated the exile of "a small but highly significant group of refugees and exiles," among them leading Spanish intellectuals, transplanted to the United States. (Quintana 950) Ramón Menéndez Pidal, a visiting professor at Columbia University from 1937 to 1938, attended at least one event, his presence being duly noted by *La Prensa*, New York's most important Spanish-language newspaper.⁶⁸

Sections, chapters, and affiliates of the Hispanic Institute were opened after 1920 all over the country in such cities as Atlantic City (1937); Austin (1941); Chicago (1935); Los Angeles (1939); New Mexico (1935); New Orleans (1933-1935); Newark (1936); Omaha (1936); San Francisco (1935); Washington D.C. (1933-1935); and Winter Park, Florida at Rollins College (1933).⁶⁹ (Rueda 223, 231-33, 236, 237) But to my knowledge, none of these developed a coexisting Sephardic Section, though one did sponsor Sephardic-related events.⁷⁰ Columbia University's Hispanic Institute was in this respect singular.

The cooperative efforts between Spaniards and Sephardim in the institute were made possible through something best described by the Spanish term *coyuntura*, an auspicious juncture of disparate events and factors. Of all the cities where offshoots of the Hispanic Institute were established, none (save perhaps Chicago) harbored a significant Ladino-speaking population by the 1930s. New York was the only city that was home to vibrant Spanish and

Sephardic populations of roughly the same size. Moreover, the city's *kolonia* was home to the nation's most prominent Sephardic leaders and intellectuals.

During its roughly forty years of active existence, the Hispanic Institute attempted to narrow the cultural and political gap between the Spanish diaspora and local Sephardim residing in the New York City area. With extensive knowledge of both Ottoman Sephardic civilization and Spanish literature, something neither Eastern Sephardim nor Spanish scholars embodied until then, Mair José Benardete served as a bridge between cultures and scholarship. In a commemorative volume, Benardete was credited for his success in "placing the Sephardim of this country in closer relationship with the Hispanic world." (Besso 1965: 462)

Federico de Onís's approach is best demonstrated in his manifesto of the Hispanic Institute's mission. Onís explained the plural usage of the word "Spain" as:

... all of the various forms that Spain has taken across time and through the peoples in its fertile and magnificent historical career. For the complete success of this work, the collaboration of everyone is necessary: Spaniards of every region, Hispano-Americans of all countries, Jews of Spanish origin and North Americans dedicated to the study of our culture should join in the House of the Spains and convert it into what it aspires to be and what it in fact is already to a large extent: a common home where everything that unites us among ourselves and entwines us with the rest of the world is maintained alive, that which is highest, most universal and most eternal in Spanish culture. (Onís 1931:2)

The Hispanic Institute's evening lectures held on Mondays (*veladas de los lunes*) continued to feature Sephardic-related topics through the 1960s. Some of the presenters, including Berraha Safira, who performed Sephardic songs in 1950,⁷¹ were obviously members of the Sephardic *kolonia*. Sephardic-related *veladas* seem to have largely ceased after Mair José Benardete's retirement from Brooklyn College in 1965, a possible indication of the fragility of the Sephardic endeavor in an institute of higher learning.⁷²

In 1971, William J. McGill, Columbia University's President, decided to suspend the Casa Hispánica's bibliographical service, which he apparently regarded as superannuated. Responding to an open letter of protest submitted by Henry V. Besso, McGill stressed that both the Hispanic Institute and the Casa Hispánica, administered under the direction of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, represented the university's "recognition of the large Spanish community which surrounds Columbia." He promised that the activities of the institute and its building would be maintained and promoted, but his resolve to terminate bibliographical services effectively transformed the institute's archival collection into an abandoned warehouse.⁷³ When I first visited the archives in the year 2000, I found them wasting away in a dungeon-like basement, in

complete disarray and gathering thick layers of dust. If this collection has been superseded as a bibliographical resource, its value as an archive has unwittingly increased in direct proportion to its neglect. Some of the rarest materials documenting Spanish/Sephardic relations in twentieth-century New York have been preserved in this storehouse of the past.

The enduring influence of Spanish émigrés on the local Spanish-speaking population remains an open question. What is certain is that for a brief moment Spaniards played a pivotal role in intensifying Hispanic identity in hundreds, if not thousands, of Sephardic Jews living in the City of New York.⁷⁴ The Sephardic Section endeavor, in turn, allowed idealistic Spanish intellectuals and their students to promote a truly ecumenical vision of Spain beyond itself. The activities of Columbia University's Hispanic Institute functioned as a bridge between the Ivory Tower and New York's Sephardic Jews, constructed by Spanish intellectuals who were appreciative of Sephardim as real-life people, as opposed to petrified relics of a glorious medieval age.

In 1948, the country's only Ladino newspaper folded due to the illness of its sole redactor. By the 1960s, the decade of Benardele's retirement, the city's Sephardic population had largely forgotten its native language and intramarrated with Ashkenazim or (more rarely) outmarried.⁷⁵ For these reasons, the links established between Spaniards and Sephardim beginning in the 1920s are best described as a drawbridge, extended for a relatively brief moment in time and then forever lifted as the local Sephardic population acculturated to Anglo-American society and Spanish intellectuals made way for more pressing Hispanic concerns.

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¹ Most of these immigrants arrived between 1904 and 1914. Rueda, p.276, documented 58 Spanish immigrants to the United States who listed "Turkey" as their country of last residence for the years 1899-1921, 1923-30, 1932, 1944, and 1945. On the Ladino language see Harris 1994. Sefarad, like Roman Hispania, encompassed the entire Iberian peninsula; Portugal did not emerge as an independent kingdom until the twelfth century.

² The U.S. census currently defines Hispanic as people who originate from Spanish-speaking countries or regions. Hispanics are understood as an ethnic group and may belong to any race. U.S. government agencies began to disseminate the term Hispanic in 1970. The term as an ethnic indicator grew more entrenched in the mainstream beginning in 1980, when, for the first time, a question on the U.S. Census asked respondents to indicate whether they were of "Spanish/Hispanic origin or descent." Suzanne Oboler, *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives: Identity and the Politics of (Re)Presentation in the United States* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), vii, xiii.

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hispanic_American#History_of_the_term_22Hispanic.22.

⁴ Rueda, p.20. Compare Quintana, p.948, who offers the figure of 250,000. The figure of 100,000 is from [Moïse S. Gadol], "Nada por Nuestros Sefaradim," *La America* (July 7, 1916): 3.

⁵ Florida, which attracted 21 percent of the new arrivals, followed in popularity. Rueda, Table 17, "Estados de Destino de los Españoles al Llegar (1897-1944)," pp.286-87.

⁶ The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives, barred the "coming of Chinese laborers to the United States" for the next ten years. This

Act was reissued in 1902 and in 1904 "reenacted, extended, and continued, without modification, limitation, or condition." At this time, other immigrants were not restricted by national origin. The Immigration Act of 1924 introduced the first permanent limitation on immigration, establishing the "national origins quota system." See http://www.cetel.org/1882_exclusion.html; http://www.cetel.org/1904_extension.html and <http://www.uscis.gov/graphics/shared/aboutus/statistics/legislat/470.htm> (last accessed July 14, 2006).

⁶ Unlike Spaniards, Sephardim did eventually embrace an overarching identity as Sephardim, largely relinquishing their regional ties. See Joseph M. Papo, *Sephardim in Twentieth Century America*.

⁷ See, for example, Joseph Harold Greenberg, *A New Invitation to Linguistics*, p.84.

⁸ Compare the similar dynamics in the use of dialects in Southern Britain, as discussed in Bolinger, *Aspects of Language*, p.591.

⁹ Alternative terms for the English language varieties spoken by African Americans have been Negro English (used mostly before the 1950s), Black English Vernacular (coined in 1972), and ebonics (coined in 1973). See Stanley M. (Ben) Novak, "American Shibboleth: Ebonics," released in September 200 and available at <http://www.csa.com/discoveryguides/ebonics/overview.php> (last accessed July 14, 2006).

¹⁰ These relationships are mentioned in the following sources: Congregation Shearith Israel Sisterhood Archives, Alice David Menken, "Report on Conference of Members from Board of Directors of Sisterhood," American Jewish Historical Society, Alice D. Menken Papers, Henry Pereira Mendes to Alice Davis Menken, December 17, 1933, 3; Bula Satula [pseudonym of Moïse Soulan], "Postemas de Mujer," *La Vara* (July 26, 1929); 10; Han Moshon [pseudonym of Moïse Soulan], "Postemas de Han Moshon," *La Vara* (April 20, 1934): 8.

¹¹ See Bula Satula [pseudonym of Moïse B. Soulan], "Postemas de Mujer," *La Vara* (November 30, 1928): 10. For a discussion of the semi-fictional anecdote reproduced here see Ben-Ur, 1998.

¹² Esther Tuvi to Editor, *La Vara* (April 26, 1935): 7. For examples of linguistic encounters between gentle Puerto Ricans and Sephardim in New York see Ben-Ur, "'We Speak and Write This Language Against Our Will'" and "Embracing the Hispanic."

¹³ The U.S. Ladino press encompasses 19 periodicals of varying duration, appearing from 1910 to 1948. See Ben-Ur, 2001.

¹⁴ Interactions with the city's burgeoning Puerto Rican population, concentrated in the neighborhood of Harlem, may have been more common. See Ben-Ur, 2005.

¹⁵ This area included the neighborhood from the intersection of Cherry Street and Franklin D. Roosevelt Drive in the east, to Canal Street and southward.

¹⁶ Their neighborhood in East Manhattan extended from Christopher Street to West 23rd Street. Rueda, p.87. Little Spain is usually identified with West 14th Street. See Marks, Fieldsteel.

¹⁷ A small contingent of Spaniards, mostly stevedores, did dwell on the Lower East Side in between the Greek and Syrian quarters. "New York City and the Spanish," unidentified article published in 1924, www.oldandsold.com/articles/06/new-york-city-65.shtml (last accessed July 14, 2006).

¹⁸ A slightly different version of this article appeared in Kagan, 2002. The impetus for this explosion can be traced to economic developments, particularly the emancipation of Spain's New World colonies and the building of the Panama Canal, which increased U.S. trade with South America at the expense of Europe. See Fernández 2005, p.52 and Lawrence Wilkins, "On the Threshold," *Hispania* [Organization Number] (1917): 3. Wilkins also attributes the boom to hostility towards German as an enemy language and consequent attrition from German-language classes.

¹⁹ On the explosion of Spanish Studies in colleges and schools beginning in 1916 see also Federico de Onís, "El Español en los Estados Unidos," *Hispania* 3:5 (1920): 276; Lawrence Wilkins, "The President's Address," *Hispania* 2:1 (1919): 38 and *Hispania* 4:1 (1921): 31.

²⁰ Its establishment was a joint effort by the Institute of International Education, the American Association of Teachers of Spain, the Junta para Ampliación de Estudios, and several Spanish and American universities.

²¹ Castro's revolutionary works on Spanish historiography include *España en su historia: cristianos, moros y judíos* (Buenos Aires, Editorial Losada, 1948).

²² Quoted by Edith Helman, "Early Interest in Spanish in New England (1815-1835)," *Hispania* 29:3 (1946): 340; discussed in Fernández 2005: 51.

²³ "Hispanidad," a term that developed after the Spanish-American War of 1898, reaffirmed Latin America's links to Spain. Fernández 2005: 60.

²⁴ Pulido was apparently aware of his "Hebraic" origins. G., "The New Era for Jews in Spain: An Interview with Eduardo Zamcois," *The American Hebrew* 101: 4 (June 1, 1917), 1 and 101: 101. I was unable to identify "G" among the journal's staff. For the nickname "'apóstol' de los sefardíes" see Besso 1968: 191.

²⁵ Center for Jewish History, American Sephardi Federation archives (hereafter noted as ASF archives), Henry V. Besso collection, folder, "El Castigo de Atalau," April 18, 1936. M.J. Benardeite is first mentioned as director of the Sephardic Section in a list of officers, *RHM* 2:1 (October 1935), first page of the unnumbered blue pages appearing before p.1. The first reference to the Sephardic Section in the *RHM* appears in 2:4 (July 1936): 371. The heading reads "Sección de Estudios Sefardíes" and announces the formation of a dramatic group whose first performance in April of that year, "El castigo de Atalau," translated to Ladino, achieved "extraordinary success." However, it is likely that the Sephardic Studies Section was founded closer to 1930. Henry V. Besso indicates that the Instituto de las Españas was concerned with the "aproximación hispano-sefardí" since 1930 and that he met Federico de Onís around 1931. Besso 1968: 176.

²⁶ The first reference I have found to Benardeite's directorship of "Estudios sefardíes" appear in *Revista hispánica moderna* [hereafter *RHM*] 2:1 (October 1935), list of officers.

²⁷ Arnistead and Silverman 1981: 7 and 11; Benardeite 1923.

²⁸ *Bulletin of the Spanish Institute in the United States* 1 (January 1931): 9; Nahón 1912.

²⁹ The state of the field began to improve in the 1940s. See Yitzhak Baer, *Toldot ha-Yehudim bi-Sefarad ha-Nozrit* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1944) and, translated from Hebrew by Louis Schoffman, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1971). Also available, before and after, were José

Amador de los Rios, *Historia social, política y religiosa de los Judíos de España*, 3 vols. (Madrid: Imprenta de Fontanet, 1876); Heinrich Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden von den ältesten Zeiten bis zur Gegenwart*, 11 vols. (Leipzig, O. Leiner, 1897-1911), translated as *History of the Jews*, 6 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1891-1898); and Abraham A. Neuman, *The Jews in Spain: Their Social, Political and Cultural Life during the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1942).

³⁰ The earliest evidence I have regarding the starting date of his directorial position is the first issue of *RHM*, inaugurated in 1934, which carries a listing of the Hispanic Institute's officers. For the years of his career as professor and director of the Sephardic Section, see "Mair J. Benardete, 93, Spanish Professor, Dies," *New York Times* (April 19, 1989): B7, and the Hispanic Institute's list of officers in *RHM* 31: 1-4 (January-October 1965). Private correspondence implies he began as director in 1934. ASF archives, Henry V. Besso collection, Henry V. Besso to Mair José Benardete, February 29, 1936, pp.9-10.

³¹ Besso published a Spanish word list, *Elementary and Intermediate Spanish*, in 1933. For a reference to his Spanish textbook, see *Bulletin of the Spanish Institute in the United States* 12 (July 1934), 112 and 115. Besso also authored the Latin-scripted, *Ladino Books in the Library of Congress: A Bibliography* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1963). He took advantage of the institute's programming to preserve Sephardic culture, as in 1935, when he attended a "Recital de música sefardí" there and collected the texts of four romances performed. Arnistead and Silverman 1981: 8.

³² His prediction evokes the Spanish decline myth popularized in the nineteenth century by American travel writers and scholars. On this myth see, Kagan 2002.

³³ See "En la Universidad de Colombia," *La Vara* (April 8, 1932). In 1937, Onís delivered a similar lecture at the Sephardic Brotherhood of America in New York. Besso 1968: 183.

³⁴ See Katz 1993: 331-56; 336, without attribution. For Moroccan recordings by Onís see Arnistead and Silverman 1977; Arnistead and Katz 1979.

³⁵ ASF archives, Henry V. Besso collection, Henry V. Besso to Mair José Benardete, February 29, 1936, p.9. The musical arranger was "Cavallero" Alberto Hensi, a musicologist from Alexandria. Westerners often found Ottoman Sephardic music "confused and even disagreeable." For a commentary on this "musical system," whose tones were described as "vacilantes y engañadores" and with "acordes disonantes y ajenos, ritmos sumamente complejos y sutiles," see S. L. Levenson, review of A. Hensi, *Coplas sefardíes* (Chansons judéo-espagnoles), in *RHM* 1:4 (July 1935): 275.

³⁶ During the most recent commemoration of the Rambam's death in 2004, scholars established his correct birth year as 1138 (not 1135).

³⁷ See Albert Levy, "El Sentenario de Maimonides será solemne en Espanya," *La Vara* (March 1, 1935): 2; "La Selebrasion del Aniversario de Memonides en Bukarest," *La Vara* (April 19, 1935): 6.

³⁸ His address was published in *RHM* 1:3 (April 1935): 302.

³⁹ His lecture also appears in Spanish in the same issue, pp.303-307.

⁴⁰ Henry V. Besso, "Maimonides and Columbia University," *La Vara* (April 5, 1935): 10. Yet another celebration organized by the Maimonides Octocentennial Committee was held at the Hotel Pennsylvania on April 14 and presided over by Albert Einstein,

honorary chairman of the committee. "Speakers Are Listed for Rambam Fete," *La Vara* (April 12, 1935): 10.

⁴¹ Obituary of Albert Matzarro, *New York Times* (July 5, 1971): 22. Levy's dates were provided to Randall Belinfante by one of Albert Levy's daughters. Randall Belinfante, email correspondence to Aviva Ben-Ur, December 22, 2005.

⁴² ASF archives, Henry V. Besso collection, circular in Hebrew-scripted Ladino entitled "The Maimonides Octocentennial Celebration." Sephardic Talmudei Torah (plural of Talmud Torah) were religious primary schools, typically meeting three or four times a week after public school hours.

⁴³ *Bulletin of the Spanish Institute in the United States* 12 (July 1934), 112. The actors and actresses included a student listed only as "Señorita Abolafia," Benardete, and Besso. The student is identified as Jennie Abolafia in a typewritten, undated transcript by Henry V. Besso [c.1980], p. 2, ASF archives, Henry V. Besso collection.

⁴⁴ Author's interview with Celia and Dinah Hakim, June 11, 2000. The Hakim sisters were able to identify from performance photographs several members as young Ladino speakers from New York. Besso identifies as active in the Sephardic Studies Section the following "Sephardic students": Rachel Nahoun, Robert Nassi, Henry V. Besso, Jennie Abolafia, Paula Ovadia (Benardete), Joseph H. Katran, Maurice Molho, Albert Matzarro, Professor Abraham Yahuda, "and a couple of others whose names I cannot recall." Some of the "young men and young women" in this list were "either students at Columbia University, or students of Prof. Benardete either at Hunter College or Brooklyn College." Archives of the Henry V. Besso family, typewritten, undated transcript by Henry V. Besso [c. 1980], p. 2.

⁴⁵ Henry V. Besso, "Los Sefardíes y el Idioma Castellano," *RHM* 34: 1-2 (January-April 1968): 176-194; 183, citing José Estrugo, *Los Sefardíes* (Havana, 1958). Onís, who had traveled in rural Spain observed among the peasants there remnants of early modern Castilian that had also survived in Ladino. Besso, "Los Sefardíes y el Idioma Castellano," 183.

⁴⁶ This included Thessaloniki-born historian Joseph Nehama. He concluded that sixteenth-century Thessaloniki Jews spoke a Spanish "free of admixtures and in general rather pure," evidently basing himself on the Spanish used by former crypto-Jews who settled in the Ottoman Empire. As noted, without attribution, in Benardete 1953: 56.

⁴⁷ Henry V. Besso, review of Abraham Yaari, *Reshimot Sifré Ladino*, *RHM* 1:4 (July 1935): 274-275; 275.

⁴⁸ Announcement of a Sephardic Section event, *RHM* 2:4 (July 1936): 371.

⁴⁹ They rehearsed at 133 Eldridge Street, home of the Settlement House since 1918. This center served the immigrant Sephardic community. Yaakov Kirschenbaum, p.7. For a photograph of the costumed performers from the Aitalahu cast see *RHM* 3:1 (October 1936): 95.

⁵⁰ See, for example, the review of the 1938 drama on the biblical prophetess Deborah, before which the master of ceremonies asked the audience to remain quiet during the presentation so that all could understand the show. "En la Kolonia: El Drama Devorá Presentado," *La Vara* (January 28, 1938).

- ⁵¹ Joel Berkowitz, *Shakespeare on the American Yiddish Stage* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002), 10, 14, 80, and especially 46 and 214-15.
- ⁵² ASF archives, Henry V. Besso collection, Henry V. Besso to Mair José Benardete, February 29, 1936, pp. 9-10.
- ⁵³ ASF archives, Henry V. Besso collection, Henry V. Besso to Mair José Benardete, February 29, 1936, p. 11.
- ⁵⁴ ASF archives, Central Sephardic Jewish Community, Box 4, folder: Board of Directors, 1967-1974, Joseph Kattan to Victor Tarry [October 30, 1972].
- ⁵⁵ ASF archives, Henry V. Besso collection, Joseph Kattan to Henry V. Besso, February, 1936. The long friendship between Besso and Benardete, who first met in 1925, was also punctuated by spiteful, narrow-minded arguments.
- ⁵⁶ See Elena Romero, *El teatro de los sefardíes orientales* (Madrid: Instituto Arias Montano, 1979), and *Repertorio de noticias sobre el mundo teatral de los sefardíes orientales* (Madrid: Instituto Arias Montano, 1983).
- ⁵⁷ ASF archives, Henry V. Besso collection, "El Castigo de Ahalau," play transcript, [1936]. What is evidently Benardete's handwriting identifies him as sole translator on the cover page; however Besso's handwriting gives collective translation credit to all five men.
- ⁵⁸ ASF archives, Henry V. Besso collection, Henry V. Besso to Mair José Benardete, February 29, 1936, p. 5.
- ⁵⁹ ASF archives, Henry V. Besso collection, Henry V. Besso to Mair José Benardete, February 29, 1936, pp. 7-8.
- ⁶⁰ Hispanic Institute archives, folder: Publications. Copyrights, "List of Instituto Publications." The institute published Besso's M.A. thesis as *Dramatic Literature of the Sephardic Jews of Amsterdam in the XIIIth and XVIIth Centuries* (New York: Hispanic Institute in the United States, Sección de Estudios Sefardíes, 1947), reprinted from various instalments in the *Bulletin Hispanique* XXXIX-XLI. Benardete's book is the aforementioned *Hispanic Culture and Character of the Sephardic Jews*. Western Sephardim are Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking Jews who remained in Europe or immigrated to America directly from the Iberian peninsula. "Eastern Sephardim" is here used synonymously with Ottoman Sephardim.
- ⁶¹ M. J. Benardete, "Cultural Erosion Among the Hispano-Levantine Jews," in *Homengaje a Millás-Villacrusa*, vol. 1: 125-53; 147; ASF archives, Henry V. Besso collection, Henry V. Besso, review of "El Castigo de Ahalau," typewritten manuscript, 4 unnumbered pages; p. [1]. A collection of essays on Maimonides, slated for publication in 1936, apparently also never came to fruition. The proposed collection is mentioned in Henry V. Besso, "Maimonides and Columbia University," *La Vara* (April 5, 1935): 10.
- ⁶² Earlier, Zaria Nahón, a Columbia University graduate student from Tangier working under the guidance of Professor Franz Boas of the anthropology department, pursued a study of Haketa (North African Judeo-Spanish). Columbia University's library catalog lists the M.A. thesis as "Spagnoli of Tangier" (1912). In 1930, Nahón enlisted her sister, Simy (Suzanne) Nahón de Toledo to perform a number of ballads and songs she had collected, which were recorded under Boas's supervision and represent the first "scientific attempt in the United States to make field recordings of Judeo-Spanish songs." Katz 1993: 335, citing Armistead and Silverman 1977. Following the Nahón sisters was

- Robert J. Nassi, who undertook an M.A. thesis on a converso playwright. Nassi is cited in ASF archives, Henry V. Besso collection, typewritten, undated transcript by Henry V. Besso [c. 1980], p. 2. Nassi's thesis is preserved in Columbia University's library under the title "Traditional Lore in El Siglo Pitagórico y Vida de Don Gregorio Guadalupe" (1934 [1935]). The work—which does not focus on Jewish themes—deals with the life and literary output of Antonio Enriquez Gómez, the son of a converted Portuguese Jew who fled to France and Amsterdam, where he openly returned to his ancestral faith. Nassi, who had settled in Van Nuys, California by the 1950s, continued on to an academic career in Spanish and published several Spanish language textbooks. Onis 1955: 851.
- ⁶³ Denah Lida, untitled essay in author's possession, 21 pages; Denah Levy, "El sefardi de Nueva York: observaciones sobre el judeo-español de Esquina," Master's Thesis, Columbia University, 1944. She concluded her doctoral studies in Mexico with "El sefardi esmiriano de Nueva York," Ph.D. dissertation, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1952. Rueda, p. 173, indicates that Navarro Tomás was a professor at Syracuse University since 1942.
- ⁶⁴ Navarro Tomás also encouraged Lida to retain her native pronunciation of the letter "s," which differs markedly from the lisp-pronunciation of modern peninsular Spanish. This validation of her own linguistic heritage left a deep pedagogical imprint. When Lida found "ghetto children" among her students, she urged them not to suppress their dialects, informing them they had something crucial to communicate to the larger world. Author's interview with Denah Levy Lida, April 2, 1999.
- ⁶⁵ These included M. Josep Estrugo's *El retorno a Sefarad* (Madrid: Europa, 1933) and Ángel Pulido's *Españoles sin patria y la raza sefardi* (Madrid: E. Teodoro, 1905). Susan Bassan [Warner], "Judeo-Spanish Folk Poetry," M.A. thesis, Columbia University, 1947, 162-65. Bassan writes: "I should like to stress the point that regardless of how they lived in Turkey, the Jews could not and did not forget or lose contact with their mother country" (p. 16). Bassan's parents were likely from Thessaloniki; she heard much of this city since childhood and most of the poems she gathered were contributed by natives of that metropolis (p. 14 and passim).
- ⁶⁶ In 1931, *El Erasmiano*, a publication of New York's Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America, appeared on the institute's subscription list (*Bulletin of the Spanish Institute in the United States* 1 (January 1931): 10).
- ⁶⁷ "El Centenario de Maimónides Festejado Solemnemente en la Casa de las Españas," *La Prensa* (April 1, 1935).
- ⁶⁸ "Los sefarditas españoles conservaron las costumbres y usos tradicionales," *La Prensa* (April 13, 1938); Virginia E. Sánchez Korrol, *From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York City*, p. 70.
- ⁶⁹ The Atlantic City chapter is first mentioned in *RHM* 4:1 (October 1937): 183. The chapters of Newark, N.J. and Omaha, Nebraska are first listed in a list of officers, *RHM* 3:1 (October 1936), first unnumbered blue page before p. 1. The Florida branch opened on December 29, 1933, not in 1935 as Rueda indicates. The Florida chapter is first mentioned in A. J. Hanna, "Sección de Florida," (extract of official announcement),

RHM 1:1 (October 1934): 76, and the Texas chapter, whose center was located at St. Edward's University, in *RHM* 7:3-4 (October 1941): 370.

⁷⁰ I have perused all issues of *RHM* through the 1960s. In 1935, the New Orleans section at Newcomb College sponsored a lecture on Maimonides's life and invited representatives of the "various Hebraic groups of the city." *RHM* 1:4 (July 1935): 315. In the same issue a "cantiga Sefardita" was published (p.316) along with a portrait by [Spanish painter Juan Eugenio?] Mingorance [b.1900] of "Hebrews in synagogue" (p.318). The following year the section sponsored a lecture at Tulane University on Spinoza and his philosophy. *RHM* 2:4 (July 1936): 374. The activities of the various Hispanic Institute branches tapered off or ceased entirely during World War II and were never again announced in *RHM*.

⁷¹ Columbia University, Hispanic Institute, Veladas de los Lunes announcement card, Bertha Safra, cancioneros sefardies, March 6, 1950. The last Sephardic-related announcement card I was able to locate dates to December 16, 1968.

⁷² The list of Hispanic Institute's officers, including Bernardete as Director of the Sephardic Section, appears for the last time in *RHM* 34 (1968). Bernardete is last listed among the Institute's "colaboradores" in *RHM* 35: 1-2 (January-April 1969), where the collaborators' names appear on the table of contents page. By the following year [*RHM* 36:1-2 (1970-1971)] no Hispanic Institute officials are listed, and only a list of editors and advisory editors appears. This would suggest that by 1970 the Institute had officially ceased to function as a multi-faceted cultural and intellectual center. Its name continues on largely through the *RHM*, the journal Federico de Onís founded in 1920.

⁷³ Hispanic Institute archives, folder: "RHM (old) Correspondencia," William J. McGill to Henry V. Besso, April 5, 1971.

⁷⁴ Here I consider not only audience members, but also readers of *La Voz*, which so carefully chronicled and commented upon the activities of the Hispanic Institute.

⁷⁵ Nearly all Sephardim who immigrated in the early twentieth century married fellow Sephardim; by the third generation, intramarrriage "had become the rule, rather than the exception." Hayyim Cohen found in the early 1970s that 72 percent of second-generation Sephardim had married non-Sephardim, 87 percent of whom were Ashkenazim and 13 percent gentile. The figure jumped to 90 percent in the third and fourth generations. See Angel, "Sephardim in the United States" and Cohen, "Sephardi Jews in the United States: Marriage with Ashkenazim and non-Jews."

CHAPTER THREE

LITERARY RESOURCES FOR 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY SPANISH-SPEAKING PROTESTANT MINISTERS ALONG THE BORDERLANDS: A REVIEW OF THE MÁXIMO VILLAREAL COLLECTION

PAUL BARTON

Introduction

Spanish-speaking Protestant preachers in the borderlands in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries displayed a broad education in their preparation for ordained ministry. Primary sources, such as a collection of books, hymnals, and tracts by the Rev. Máximo Villareal, the writings of the Rev. J. N. de los Santos, as well as the minutes of Spanish-speaking Methodist annual conferences along the U.S.-Mexico border, demonstrate the advanced educational levels of these preachers and illumines the literary sources they used to undertake their ministries. The Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage project has already microfilmed most of the Máximo Villareal Collection, thus preserving the data for future scholarship. There remains the matter of studying the contents of the collection so that others can gain awareness of this rich source of data on nineteenth century U.S. Hispanic Protestantism. This review of the collection will examine the literary, intellectual, theological, and spiritual influences that shaped their ministries.

The materials of the collection provide a counterbalance to the more prevalent missionary literature, which tells the story of Protestant evangelization of Mexico and the U.S. Southwest from the perspective of the transmitters of the faith. I will juxtapose the literature in the Máximo Villareal Collection with the missionary literature to demonstrate the incongruence of Anglo-American Protestant leaders' assessment of the abilities of Mexicans and Mexican Americans, and in particular the emerging group of Spanish-speaking Protestant