THE VALLADOLID TAQQANOT OF 1432:
A LINGUISTIC STUDY

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Was there a Jewish dialect of Castilian before the expulsion of 1492 which might have served as the basis for the extant dialects of Judeo-Spanish, rather than their stemming from "standard" Castilian common to the non Jewish Spaniards of the fifteenth century? Similarities in various contemporary dialects suggest the possible validity of such a conclusion. Across dialects, some of those differences from "standard" Castilian are the following: *Dios* is regularly *el Dio; negro* means 'evil' and *prieto* is used for 'black'; the imperfect subjunctive is often notable by its absence. The second- person singular preterite forms are made to conform to the model of all other second-person singular forms not by adding an -*s* at the end, but rather by metathesizing the existing -*s*-, so that *amaste* becomes *amates*.

Since such morphological, lexical and syntactic variations from non Jewish Castilian are common to Judeo-Spanish dialects scattered throughout the Middle East, Eastern Europe and North Africa, we are left with three possible explanations for their origin. These changes may have developed independently and spontaneously in each of the areas of Sephardic settlement, however much that may strain credulity; similar variants in different areas may be due to the influence of travelers, such as businessmen; or they may reflect the language which was the common base for all of the existing dialects. The first of these possibilities, because of its improbability, may well be discarded, at least until such time as neither of the other explanations proves out.

The second alternative, that of the influence of travelers in the various communities of the Sephardic diaspora, seems on the surface to be quite persuasive. However, there is one factor which weakens it considerably, and that is the pronunciation in the Salonica dialect. In 1492, at the time of the Jews' expulsion from Spain, what had been initial *f*- Latin (and, originally, in Spanish) was in the process of changing to *h*-, first aspirated and then unas-

pirated. According to Menéndez Pidal, *f-* was conserved in the written langua-
ge until the end of the fifteenth century.[1] Antonio de Nebrija's *Gramática
castellana*, published in the very year in which the expulsion took place,
describes the initial sound of *hago* and *hecho* as a distinctly aspirated *h-*,[2] so
that, regardless of the exact time of the change, we know that it was going on
when the Catholic Monarchs enacted their decree of expulsion fot those Jews
who would not convert to Catholicism. While most dialects of Judeo-Spanish,
including those of Istanbul (Constantinople) and Rhodes, say *ijo* and *azer*
(modern Spanish *hijo* and *hacer*), in Salonica those words are *fijo* and *fazer*.
It, frankly, does not seem logical that the influence of travelers would operate
on the relatively subtle matters of morphology (second-person singular prete-
rite forms), semantics (*negro*) and syntax (imperfect subjunctive), while it had
no corresponding leveling influence on matters as immediately obvious as the
sounds with which some words began. For that reason, let us —tentatively, at
least— reject this attempted explanation of the variants in Judeo-Spanish from
non-Jewish Spanish while, at the same time, admitting that it is certainly much
more plausible than the idea of spontaneous and independent coincidence.

Fortunately, a third explanation is possible —that of a base language which
already contained the changes noted. That would certainly explain the coinci-
dence of difference between Judeo-Spanish and non-Jewish Spanish. Evidence
for or against this hypothesis can come only from documents written in Judeo-
Spanish before 1492, documents written by Jews still living in Spain. It is with
this idea in mind that we may find useful a linguistic study of the Valladolid
Taqqanot.

In 1432 the Chief Rabbi of Castile, Abraham Benveniste, called together
representatives of Castilian Jewry in Valladolid for the purpose of composing
ordinances to regulate the lives of Castile's Jews who, as a result of the attacks
against them in 1391, had gone through a great deal of suffering as well as
relocation. These laws, or *taqqanot*, are divided into five parts, dealing with
schools and synagogues, courts, denunciations, taxes, festivities and clothing.
Written in Judeo-Spanish, in the Hebrew alphabet, this document exists in a
single fifteenth-century manuscript of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.
Fritz Baer's *Die Juden im christlichen Spanien*[3] contains his transcription of

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1. *Manual de gramática histórica* española, 11a ed. (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1962), §38 121.
2. Ed. crítica de Pascual Galindo Romeo y Luis Ortiz. (Madrid: Edición de la Junta del Centenario,
1946) I, 22-23: "La *h* no sirve por si en nuestra lengua, mas usamos della para tal sonido cual pronuncia-
mos en las primeras letras destas diciones *hago hecho* ; la cual letra, aunque enel latin no tenga fuerça
de letra, es cierto que, como nos otros la pronunciamos hiriendo enla garganta . . ."
3. 2 vols. (Berlin, 1936, reprinted by Gregg International Publishers Limited, [England], 1970).
The document in question is found in II, 280-297.

the Paris manuscript, and it is on Baer's edition —still in Hebrew letters— that this study is based.

Aside from the obvious historical and sociological value of such a document, it is a linguistic treasure. Written in the Hebrew alphabet, it did not observe spelling conventions inherited from Latin for representing the sounds of Castilian and, because it is a document written by Jews and for Jews, we may assume that, except for set legal formulae, it represents the Castilian spoken by those Jews living in the early fifteenth century.

The Hebrew alphabet was adapted for writing Spanish, so that various sounds which did not exist in Hebrew could be represented. Since the Hebrew alphabet is made up only of consonants, some of them were used for vowels: *alef* was used for /a/ in most cases, although word-final /a/ was represented by the Hebrew *hay*. (*Hay* is a feminine ending in Hebrew, as is -*a* often in Spanish). Hebrew *yod* was used to represent the sounds written in the Roman alphabet with *e* and *i*, as well as for the palatal elements in the Spanish *ll* and *ñ*. Hebrew *vav*, which could represent labiodental /v/ (alternating with *bet*), was also used for *o* and *u*.[4]

Phonologically, we can make reliable statements for only one vowel, /a/. Because *yod* stands for both open and close *e* as well as for *i*, we cannot tell from the Taqqanot if the word for 'and' was still /e/ or if it already had the pronunciation of /i/. We are likewise unable to state whether the preterite of *aver* (MS *haber*) was *ovo* or *uvo*, since Hebrew *vav* represented both of those initial vowels. We can, however, make some statements about the pronunciation of consonants among the Castilian Jews of the early fifteenth century.

The Taqqanot show a clear distinction between voiced and unvoiced *s*, the former being represented by a *zayin: razon, fazer, quinze, juezes*. Unfortunately, we cannot be as inequivocal about voiceless *s*, since it is represented by both *samekh* and *sin*. The latter appears regularly in word-final position and before a consonant. If there was any difference in the pronunciation of the two, it would seem to have been minimal, given cases such as *lišensya* and *lisensya*, both of which are to be found here.[5] Further strengthening the idea that there was virtually no difference in the pronunciation of these two letters are one occurrence of the word *ordenansas* with the final consonant *samekh* rather than *sin* and, on the same page, *crištianos*, where *sin* is used for the first *s* and *samekh* for the final one.[6]

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4. For a good explanation of how Judeo-Spanish is written in the Hebrew alphabet, see Foulché-Delbosc, "La Transcription hispano-hébraïque", *Revue Hispanique*, I (1894), 22-23; or David M. Bunis, *A Guide to Reading and Writing Judezmo* (Brooklyn, NY: Adelantre!, 1975).

5. I use *š* for the *sin,* and *s* to represent *samekh*.

6. Baer II, 287, lines 30 and 12 respectively. Further citations of the text of the Taqqanot will appear in the text parenthetically.

Aside from this occasional confusion of *sin* and *samekh*, a further complication arises when we note that *samekh* also alternates with *tzade*, pronounced /ts/. Again, the word *lišensya* provides us with an example, with the second sibilant appearing four times as *samekh* and twice as *tzade*. Other occurrences of *tzade* are in the words *Juŝti{ts}ya* (twice), *pertene{ts}en* (once), *gra{ts}ya* (once) and *tre{ts}ya* (once). It may because of such cases that a recent transcription of the Valladolid Taqqanot regularly renders the samekh as ç.[7]

The *rafé*, a mark above a consonant, serves the purpose of changing that letter's phonetic value. *Sin* with a *rafé* has the value of *shin*, a palatal *s*, equivalent to Old Spanish *x*. There are three occurrences of this consonant, once each in *traxio, dixiere, dexe*. *Gimel* plus *rafé* represents both the voiced affricate /ĵ/ and its unvoiced counterpart ǀ ĉǀ. However, the fact that a single symbol is used does not permit us to suppose that fifteenth-century Jewish Castilian did not distinguish between the initial sounds of *gente* and *chico*.

Although we cannot positively identify all of the sibilants used in Jewish Castilian in 1432, we can see a richer sibilant system than exists in modern Spanish; one in which the voiced equivalent of ç —i.e., /dz/— had simplified to /z/, and where /ts/ was in the process of simplifying in the same manner. If, in fact, number of occurrences is any indication, we may say that /ts/ is fast approaching obsolescence because the *samekh* is much more common than *tzade* in the text.

Unlike modern Spanish pronunciation, where both *b* and *v* represent a bilabial sound, Nebrija's grammar of 1492, sixty years after the composition of these *taqqanot*, testifies to a bilabial *b*, but a labiodental *v*, the voiced equivalent of *f*.[8] Hebrew *bet* in this document represents labiodental *v*, the voiced equivalent of *f*.[8] Hebrew *bet* in this document represents labiodental *v*, but a *rafé* above the letter turns it into the bilabial. This is contrary to Nebrija's remark in *Reglas de orthographia*, to the effect that the *bet* is normally /b/, but "pronuncian su 'beth' con 'raphe', como 'u' consonante".[9] Nevertheless, internal evidence in the Valladolid Taqqanot supports the use of simple *bet* as /v/. The unadorned *bet* alternates on occasion with *vav* in various forms of the verb *venir*, the noun *vino* and the preposition *salvo*. We can consequently deduce with confidence that the preposition which is modern *sobre*

7.   Yolanda Moreno Koch, "The Taqqanot of Valladolid of 1432," *The American Sephardi,* IX (1978), 58-145. This is approximately half of the document; the remainder was scheduled to appear in volume X.

8.   Antonio de Nebrija, *Gramática castellana* I, 20: "La *p ph b* suenan espediendo la boz, despues delos beços apretados mas o menos ... La *f* con la *v* consonante, puestos los dientes de arriba sobre el beço de baxo, i soplando por las helgaduras dellos ...".

9.   Antonio de Nebrija, *Reglas de orthographía en la lengua castellana,* ed. Antonio Quilis (Bogotá: Instituto Caro y Cuervo, 1977), 138.

was pronounced /sovre/ and that the auxiliary verb for the compound tenses was /aver/. Interestingly enough, the city names *Balderas* and *Badajoz* appear only with the initial *vav* never with *bet*.

Castilian written in the Hebrew alphabet, at least in this document, makes no distinction between single and double *r*. As can be expected in the early part of the fifteenth century, initial *f-* is still common: *fasta, fazer, fijos, ferir, fallar.* We see the unvoicing of final *-d* in words with the *-dad* or *-tad* suffix: *voluntat, diversidat, verdat.* The nasal used before *p* , contrary to what might be expected, is inequivocally *n* : *tienpo, cunplir,* but the final sound of *según* is regularly *m*. The metathesized form *presona*, used to mark Sancho Panza's substandard speech in *Don Quixote* , is the only form which appears in this document and, like *segum,* it appears repeatedly, in variety of contexts. Equally, we see the methathesized form for the conditional of *venir: vernia.*

The preposition *para* does not exist in the language of the Taqqanot: *pora* is used regularly. The participle of *tener* is *tenudo*, with at least five occurrences, but none of modern *tenido*. Negative words are still clearly *nin* and *non*, both ending in final *nun* every time they appear, and *alguno* is clearly preferred to *ninguno* in negative contexts. : ". . . e ̃non Ŝalgan dende elyoŜ nin alguno delyoŜ. . ." (p. 258, 1. 14). Contractions such as *sovrel* and *delyo* are the rule, as is the old present subjunctive of *valer: vala. Seer* is still the regularly-used form of the copulative verb, although there is one occurrence of modern *ser.*

The past participle of *escrivir* shows up three times; always as *escrivto*, following the same pattern as *sujevto, sivdat, adevdar*, each of which apperars once . While we see the adjective *privilejados* once, the noun, which appears several times, is always *provelejo. Cualquiera* appears here as *cual quier* or *cual quiere,* but never with final *-a. Grande* is given a feminine singular form, with the final vowel changed to /a/ (Hebrew *hay*) : ". . . Ŝu pena deve šeer muy granda . . . " (p. 289, 11. 6-7). Epenthetic *b* in the *-mbre* suffix is completely absent in this document: *omre, nomre, azumres.*

Syntactically, we notice the common use of future subjunctive. Although no imperfect subjunctive forms are found, the contents do not call for that form. Law codes tend to deal with what one should do in the future rather than with what might have been done in the past.

The Hebrew pattern of *cada kahal en kahal* is a normal structure in fifteenth-century Judeo-Spanish, and agreement of a singular collective subject with plural verb is also the rule: ". . . porende ordenamoŝ que cada kahal en kahal fagan ordenansa entre Ŝi Ŝovrela dicha razon . . ." (p. 297, 11. 15-16).

The clearest influence of Hebrew is lexical. Not only do sentences switch languages entirely, but there are cases in which a single Hebrew word is used in an otherwise Spanish sentence. *La mayoría* is commonly replaced by *el*

rov, the radical-changing *meldar* replaces *aprender* and, while *cristiano* and *cristiana* are used, so ares the words *goy* and *goya*.

If a study of the Taqqanot of Valladolid of 1432 cannot, by itself, yield any definitive conclusion about the existence of a Jewish dialect of Spanish in Castile during the fifteenth century, it does point toward that possibility. In addition to the Jews' tendency to reject Latin and its influence, as being representative of the church which was their oppressor in medieval Spain,[10] use of the Hebrew alphabet to transcribe Spanish would break the hold of any existing spelling conventions, so that we could reasonably expect as phonetic as possible a rendering of the Spanish in the document.

The transcription system used for the Spanish vowels leaves us unable to tell if the old strong preterite stems in —*o*— had become —*u*— in Jewish Spanish by the early fifteenth century, or if the conjunction for 'and' was pronunced /e/ or /i/, but, on the other hand, we can gather some specific information on the pronunciation of consonants among this component of the Castilian population. The voiced affricate /dz/ had been simplified to /z/ and its unvoiced counterpart was quickly heading for the same fate; labiodental / v/ was not only used, but in some cases had replaced the etymological bilabial, as in *escrivto*, from *scriptum*. *Presona*, considered substandard in the early seventeenth century, was the regular form here, with no occurrence of *persona*.

Ser is beginning to appear, but is still highly outnumbered by the older *seer, grande* becomes *granda* in the feminine singular and the -*mre* suffix has not yet developed the epenthetic *b* distinctive of modern Castilian. A comparative study of this text ped and contemporary documents by a non-Jewish Spaniard would give us information on whether these archaic forms were still current outside the Jewish communities in the first third of the fifteenth century.

As expected, Hebrew influence was the greatest differentiating element in Jewish Castilian and, while we see its syntactic influence in constructions such as *de cada anyo en anyo*, Hebrew is more often apparent lexically. In some cases, a single word will appear, and not necessarily because there is not an equivalent word in Spanish. Compare, for example, " Pero del vino que se vendiere a *criŝtianos*. . ." (p. 287, 11. 11-12; boldface mine) with " Otro ŝi ordenamoŝ que algun judio nin judia no sea osado de traer *goy* o *goya* para rogador . . ." (p. 290, 11. 4-5; boldface mine).

But even more marked is the amount of lexical borrewing from Hebrew to replace existing Castilian words completely: *meldar 'aprender', rov'*-

    10. Américo Castro, *The Structure of Spanish History,* tr. Edmund. L. King (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1954), 481.

mayoría, kahal 'comunidad'. Does the presence of such words suffice to call this language a dialect? Perhaps, even with the inclusion of syntactic and morphological variance from non-Jewish Spanish, it amounts to no more than Castilian spoken with an ethnically-identified accent. However, the study of additional fifteenth-century documents should provide the basis for a definitive conclusion about the existnece of a pre-expulsion Jewish dialect of Castilian.