

Iberian Catholic Elements in Bosnian and Moroccan Judeo-Spanish Refraneros

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Introduction

Following the 1492 expulsion from Spain, the Spanish (later in the text Sephardic) Jews scattered all over the world, carrying with them (among other things) their Iberian oral culture. Many of the expellees found a safe haven in the provinces of the then ever-growing, new world's superpower, the Ottoman Empire, which happily embraced the influx of this eminently urban, highly professional, and skilled manpower as an unexpected blessing from Heaven. Others expellees opted for the immediate vicinity, migrating to northern Morocco (which will prove to be a better choice than neighboring Catholic countries) or to Portugal (where they were forcefully converted a few years later, this time even without the option of leaving the country to remain in one's faith). Both groups that were spared forced baptism to Catholicism, namely the Ottoman and the North Moroccan Sephardim, have kept their distinctive Judeo-Hispanic character until our own times. This has been, primarily, through the preservation of their vernacular daily language and through the perpetuation of its rich oral culture.

One of the oral genres that has remained dominant in Sephardic culture to this very day is, certainly, the genre of *refranes* or proverbs. During their five-hundred-year-long separation, both Sephardic groups, the Ottoman¹ and the

1 For an exhaustive study on Ottoman Sephardic *refranero* see, for example, Tamar Alexander, *'Words are better than Bread': Studies in Ladino Proverbs* Ben-Gurion University Press and Ben-Zvi Institute, Jerusalem 2004 [in Hebrew]

North-Moroccan² Jews produced many new proverbs. Some of these were a Judeo-Spanish translation or an adaptation of local (Balkan or Moroccan) sayings, while others were produced by the ethnic group itself. Yet, the overwhelming majority of proverbs in both traditions stem from their common Iberian roots, some of which are shared with all speakers of different Iberian (especially Castilian) dialects, while others were particular to the Jewish population of the peninsula (to this category belong translations of non-biblical Hebrew and Aramaic proverbs deriving mostly from Rabbinic literature).³ Some of the mentioned common Iberian elements have an apparent Catholic origin, and the sole role of this study is to analyze the appearance of these eminently Catholic proverbs among the Sephardim in the Muslim Morocco and in the Muslim-dominated Ottoman Empire. As representative of the extensive Ottoman *refranero*, one single tradition was chosen as a point of reference: the Bosnian. Being the most northern autochthonous Sephardic tradition and also being an eminently continental one (Bosnia of the time did not have ports and Bosnian Jews did not live in them), Bosnian Sephardic common masses did not have much contact with their Moroccan brethren or with their common country of origin. No less important, during the first few centuries of Sephardic presence in Bosnia most of the Jews were concentrated in Sarajevo, where they have developed strong relations with the two biggest local communities: Muslims and Orthodox Serbs (whose liturgical language is Church Slavonic and not Latin). Catholic Croat presence in Sarajevo was not that numerous until the Austro-Hungarian occupation in 1878. Moreover, even the Catholics who lived in Sarajevo and were acquainted with Bosnian Sephardim were of Slavic stock and did not speak any Roman language (even if they prayed in Latin, without understanding much of what they said). Therefore, any residual Catholic elements in traditional Bosnian Judeo-Spanish *refranero* should be seen as traces of pre-Expulsion traditions and not as a result of local influences. Consequently, a comparison of these two Jewish ex-Iberian proverbial traditions might provide us with a usable criterion for a more precise dating of the absorption of Catholic elements in different Sephardic proverbial repertoires, helping us better define which of its

2 For a thorough study of the North Moroccan Sephardic *refranero* see, for example, Tamar Alexander and Yaakov Bentolila, *La Palabra en su hora es oro: El refrán judeo-español en el Norte de Marruecos*, Instituto Ben Zvi, Jerusalem 2008 [in Hebrew and Spanish].

3 For the relations between the Ottoman Sephardic *refranero* and Hebrew/Aramaic sources, see, for example, Alexander (Note 1), pp. 207-257. For the relations between the Moroccan Sephardic *refranero* and Hebrew/Aramaic sources, see, for example, Alexander and Bentolila (Note 2), pp. 51-72.

elements could and should be seen as pertaining to some common, pre-exile Iberian tradition and which should be viewed as a result of post-exilic linguistic and cultural contacts of certain Sephardic communities (primarily the Moroccan one, due to geographic proximity) with their old Iberian motherland.

As far as Bosnian Sephardic refranero is concerned, I have consulted more than 1,500 proverbs presented in eight different collections which embody this tradition. For the examination of Moroccan Sephardic tradition I have used 1,200 proverbs that were provided to me by Prof. Tamar Alexander and Prof. Yaakov Bentolila, even before their monograph on the subject was completed. I use this opportunity to thank both for their academic altruism.

At the beginning of this study, I assumed that there should exist a firm shared base of Catholic Iberian elements in both refraneros, which would prove that most of them (if not all of them) were incorporated in these two traditions before their separation, in other words before the Expulsion. However, during the research I've discovered that my assumptions and the reality were not even remotely related. First of all, in both *refraneros*, in a corpus of almost 3000 proverbs I've discovered only ten proverbs of an evident Catholic origin or inspiration. To my great surprise, none of them coincided in both traditions. Out of ten mentioned proverbs, three were found in Bosnian Sephardic *refranero* and additional seven were found in the Moroccan one.

Catholic elements in Bosnian Sephardic Refranero

One of the most Christian proverbs in Bosnian Sephardic proverbial tradition says:

Salir de Herodes y entrar en Pilatus.⁴ To get out from Herod and enter to Pilatus.

Its Iberian parallel, attested by Gonzalo Correas Íñigo, in his famous *Vocabulario de refranes y frases proverbiales* from 1627 reads as follows:

Andar de Herodes a Pilatos.⁵ To go from Herod to Pilatus.

4 Žamila Kolonomos, *Proverbs and Sayings of the Sephardi Jews of Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia, Belgrade 1976, proverb 1026.

5 Gonzalo Correas, *Vocabulario de refranes y frases proverbiales* (1627), Edición de Louis Combet, revisada por Robert James y Maïte Mir-Andreu, Editorial Castalia, Madrid 2000, proverb 1837, p. 86.

The proverb is accompanied by the following explanation by Correas:

Cuando se anda a negociar con diferentes personas en diversas partes; y si con juez, letrado, procurador y escribano, viene mejor acomodada la metáfora de la Pasión.	When going to negotiate with different people, in different parts; and if it is with a judge, man of letters, procurator and notary, the metaphor of the Passion is quite adequate.
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Both variants refer to two new-testamental personalities: Herod, the Tetriarch, and Pontius Pilatus, the Roman Procurator of Judah and to their role in the trile of Jesus. In Herod's palace Jesus was condemned to a capital punishment. Later, Jesus was taken to an additional trile, at Pilatus, where the same punishment was confirmed. In Bosnian Sephardic tradition this proverb is used to describe perpetual deterioration.

The mere fact that this proverb (at least until recently) was frequently used amongst Bosnian Sefaradim shows that one does not need to understand the meaning or know the ethimology of all the elements of a proverb in order to use it in a proper manner and context. Until the XX century, and the modern western education which it brought about, most of Bosnian Sephardim did not really know who were Herod or Pontius Pilatus. However, though, this did not prevent them from applying the proverb in proper situations. It is arguable that those Bosnian males who were versed in Rabbinic literature might have known who the King Herod was, but even they would have difficulties in recognising the other protagonist of the new-testamental story on Jesus's trial. Still, hoeweever, this evidently Catholic proverb was used in an eminently Jewish microculture in a predominantly Muslim context.

Two other Bosnian Sephardic proverbs of an apparent Catholic origin represent references to Latin liturgy. The firsty one reads:

Al fin se canta la gloria. ⁶	[Only] At the end the "Glory" is sung.
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Both, Correas and Sebastián de Horozco (in his *El libro de los proverbios glosados*), brings identical wording, followed by these two explanations:

Porque al fin de cada salmo se canta "Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto" por ordenación de San Dámaso, papa	Because at the end of every Psalm <i>Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto</i> , is sung, by ordination of San Damaso, Spanish Pope;
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6 Kolonomos (Note 4), proverb 40.

español; por metáfora se aplica el premio después del trabajo y semejantes cosas.⁷

Al fin de cada salmo se canta en la iglesia, *Gloria Patri et Filio* etc., de donde provino este vulgar que al fin se canta la gloria el qual se dize y aplica, porque al fin de la vida de cada uno se le ha de dar la gloria y honor de las buenas obras que hizo, o el vituperio de las malas porque, allí es quando se vee y sabe si el hombre fue bueno o malo. Y así este proverbio en latín dize, *Exitus acta probat*, “El fin, remate y salida del hombre o del negocio prueba las obras y les da aquel valor y quilate que merecen.” Y así se dice, *Quod nemo est laudandus in vita*, “Que ninguno ha de ser loado en la vida,” porque la muerte y fin suyo le ha de dar la loa o vituperio...⁸

metaphorically it means: the premium is received after the job is done etc.

In the church, at the end of each Psalm *Gloria Patri, et Filio*, etc. is sung, and from there came this popular saying: *At the end the glory is sung*, which means that by the end of person's life, everyone receives the glory and the honor for his good deeds, or the rebuke for the bad ones; because it is then that it is seen and known whether a person was good or bad. Thus this proverb in Latin says: *Exitus acta probat*, “The end, the finish and the result of a person or of a transaction prove the acts, giving them the value and the prize that they deserve”. In this same manner it is said: *Quod nemo est laudandus in vita*, “None should be praised in life”, because (only his) death and end will give him the prize or the rebuke.

Given the fact that this proverb refers to one of the most famous Latin Christian doxologies: *Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto* (Glory to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit), one has to ask himself to what extent Bosnian Sephardim, who used the proverb in a mostly Muslim or Christian-Orthodox-Slavic context, were aware of the fact that the word *Glory* refers to a passage from the Latin liturgy. As for its context, this proverb is used among Bosnian Sephardim as a warning that one should not pride himself about having accomplished anything before actually bringing it to a successful end. Once again, we see how the lack of information about the original

7 Correas (Note 5), proverb 1227, p. 57.

8 Sebastián de Horozco, *El libro de los proverbios glosados 1570-1580*, Edición del manuscrito, introducción y notas de Jack Weiner, Edition Reichenberg, Kassel 1994, two volumes, vol. 1, proverb 199, pp. 259, 260.

meaning of the components of the proverb does not prevent its oral carriers from using it in proper manner in well-known contexts.

The last Bosnian Sephardic proverb of an eminent Iberian Catholic origin also has to do with the Christian dogma of Trinity, and it is used in reference to a person who does not have anyone to rely on in this world:

No tiene ni padre ni madre ni Spiritu Santo. ⁹	He does not have a father, or mother or a Holy Sprit.
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Unlike in the previous two examples in which there is no pun concerning the Christian faith (and, consequently, I tend to see them as examples of *bona fidae* usage of Iberian Catholic proverbs whose Christian origin, context, and significance were long forgotten), the last one might be seen as a deliberate parody on the common Christian formula that is uttered while making the sign of the cross over one's upper body, at the beginning of any prayer or any endeavor: *En el nombre del Padre del hijo y del Espiritu Santo! Amen!* (In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit!), and (as such) a continuation of a conscious usage of an originally Catholic expression, parodied with the purpose of mocking the rival religion.

This notion is doubly reinforced by the fact that Correas attests in his *Vocabulario* the following variant, which might have well served as a base for the Bosnian Sephardic parody:¹⁰

Ni tengo padre ni madre, ni perro que me ladre.	I do not have a father, a mother or a dog to bark me.
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To be honest, Bosnian Sephardic tradition contains many such traditional parodic distortions of expressions related to Catholic/Iberian beliefs and practices. As a notorious example I shall bring a passage from the Bosnian version of the Ladino translation of the *Ma'ase Rav* (a Great Tale), which tells the story of how the famous Ribbi Moše ben Naḥman was introduced to *qabala ma'asit* (practical Kabbalah). Originally, this story was written in Hebrew by Ribbi Gedalya Ibn Yahya, in his famous *Šalšelet haQabala*.¹¹ Later it was translated into Judeo-Spanish by AM Ribbi Yiṣḥaq ben Šelomo Amariyo, in his *Sefer Leḥ Šemurim*.¹²

9 Kolonomos (Note 4), 83.

10 Correas (note 5 above), proverb 332, p. 556.

11 Gedalya Ibn Yahya, *Šalšelet haQabala*, Venice 1586, p. 126-128.

12 Yiṣḥaq ben Šelomo Amariyo, *Sefer Leḥ Šemurim*, Thesalonica, 5632/1872, p. 40.

Ma'ase Rav from Sefer Lel Šemurim

Kuando se fueron a echar a dormir, le disho el ḥaxam ael zaqen: *Una koza le kero a kavidar asu mersed, ke lo tenga de avizo, ke aki ay una maldicha kaleja de 'arelim, ke la tienen por muy santa enhermada, ke Djidyó ke pasa por eya, lo aferan en su punto i lo meten en karsel, para kemarlo, en día de šabat davka. Ino pasa redja en esto, ni moneda, ke ansi tienen esta mala uzansa enkonada, ke tienen a la Maria zona i ael Taluy en esta kaye, el Š[em] Yit[barah] kelos ateme – Amen!*

A Great Tale

from the *Book of the Guarding Night*¹³

While they were getting ready to lie down, the ḥaxam told the old man: *[There is] one thing that I wanted to warn His Mercy, to have in mind, that here there is a damned street of the uncircumcised, which they esteem as very holy, [may it be] cursed, that a Jew who passes through it, they catch him immediately and put him into a prison, in order to burn him, on the day of Shabbath itself. And the presents do not help in this, or money, as they have this evil and impure custom, having there Mary the Prostitute and the Hanging-one [Jesus], may the Blessed God bring them to an end – Amen!*

Amariyo's translation of the story was "copied" by the famous Bosnian Sephardic traditional pharmacist, Tio Avram Papo, in the following distorted and mocking way:¹⁴

Kuando se hueron a echar a dormir, le disho el rav al zaqen: *Una koza le kero akavidar a su mersed, ke lo tenga de avizo, i es ke aki en esta sivdad ay una kaleja maldicha de 'arelim, ke la tienen por muy **chanta** enhermada, ke Djidyó ke pasa*

- 13 According to popular belief, the night before the circumcision (which is traditionally performed on male children on the eighth day after the birth) is the most dangerous one for the newborn, as Lilith (a main female demon) might try to prevent him from entering Abraham's Covenant and attaining the divine protection accompanied by it. Consequently, during this night the newborn is not to be left alone. Rather, he is surrounded by adult males, who engage in learning, for protective purposes. The night is called *Lel Šemurim*, the Night of Guardianship, and various special books with texts to be read on it were published in the Sephardic world, *Sefer Lel Šemurim* being one of the most famous in the genre.
- 14 For more information about this manuscript and its author, see Eliezer Papo, "Healing the Sick, Subjugating the Spirits, Fighting the Magic and the Evil Eye: A Glance at Medical Lore of Bosnian Sephardic Men", in preparation.

*por eya, lo aferan en su punto i lo meten en prezo, para kemarlo, dia de šabat davka. I no pasa redja en esto, ni moneda, ke ansi tienen esta mala uzansa, ke tienen ayi a la **chanta** Maria, zona, i a el Taluy en esta kaleja, el Š[em] Yit[barah] kelos ateme – Amen!*¹⁵

The first time the word *santa* (holy) was used in reference to a street held holy by Catholics, even though the adjective is immediately followed by the derogatory term *enheremada* (cursed), the Bosnian Sephardic author changes the adjective *santa* for the Turkish *çanta* (bag). Until World War II, there were still elderly pious Jews in Sarajevo who would never use the term *santo/santa* in relation to anything Christian. To avoid what they saw as a dangerous, eventual veneration of foreign deities, they would replace the adjective *santa* with the noun *çanta*, creating thus a mocking distortion. If am Ribbi Yişhaq ben Šelomo Amariyo (unlike Tio Avram Papo) was ready to use the adjective *santa* in relation to a street venerated by the Catholics of Gerona as holy, when referring to Maria he calls her *Maria zona* (a prostitute), without the usual Christian honorific *Santa*, that precedes any mentioning of Mary. Yet, in his copy of the story, Tio Avram Papo, knowing that the name Maria is always preceded with the honorific adjective *Santa*, replaces it with *çanta* for the second time: *chanta Maria, zona*.

These anti-Catholic puns were not reserved to the rabbinical or male population only. Thus in the play *Pasensia Vale Mučo* (Patience Is Worth a Lot), written by the most prolific Bosnian female Sephardic playwright, Laura Papo “Bohoreta”,¹⁶ one of the central female characters of the play, Grasia, says:

Las kašas vazijas de ašugar para las
fitižas y la kavesa me se vazja i me se
ezvanese de tanto avlar y čijar kon los
salantonjos.¹⁷

The cases with the dowry for the
daughters are empty and my head is
emptied and void of so much talking and
screaming with the **saint-anthonies**.

15 (Tio) Avram Papo, *Livro de Refua*, unpublished ms., ca. 1840, p. 45 [38].

16 For the biography of this prolific Sephardic dramatist, see Eliezer Papo, “Entre la modernidad y la tradición, el feminismo y la patriarquia: Vida y obra de Laura Papo ‘Bohoreta’, primera dramaturga en lengua judeo-española” [Spanish: Between Modernity and Tradition, Feminism and Patriarchy], *Neue Romania* 40 (2010), pp. 97-117. For her bibliography, see Eliezer Papo, “Estado de la investigación y bibliografía anotada de la obra literaria de Laura Papo «Bohoreta»”, *Sefarad* 72 (1) (January–June 2012) pp. 123-144, as well as Eliezer Papo, “Bohoreta—Kommentierte Bibliographie”, *Transversal* (accepted).

17 Laura Papo “Bohoreta”, *Pasensia Vale Mučo*, unpublished ms., p. 6, 7.

Referring to her disobedient children, Grasia calls them *salantonjos*, in other words: *San Antonios* (Saint Anthonies). The pun of the metaphor is quite apparent: just like the statue of Saint Anthony does not hear when spoken to, thus the disobedient children do not hear. Just like the statue of Saint Anthony does not extend a hand to help to those praying to it, thus disobedient children are not helpful to their elders.

This tendency to mock Catholic saints was not typical only to Bosnian Sephardim. In an age that was not marked by religious tolerance, it seemed to be cherished by all the Ottoman Sephardim. Thus, for example, in his *Coplas de Yōsēf ha-Šaddīq* (Constantinople 1732), Avraham Toledo puts following words into the mouth of Zevulun, when reproaching the paid professional lamenter Manaka:

Quén la acarreo aquí	Who brought her here
Cal güerco endiablado	What devilish devil
Arremátate de aquí	Go away from here
Ija de un sanpavlo . ¹⁸	Daughter of a saintpaul .

Here, the name of an even more important all-Christian Saint, Saint Paul, is used as a pejorative: *Ija de un sanpavlo* – *Daughter of a saintpaul*. The indefinite article *un* (a) shows that the personal name of the saint is seen by the Sephardim as a noun, even as a derogatory one. On other occasions the expression: *Ijo/a de un ...* (son/daughter of a ...) is used in combination with such nouns as *mamzer* (bastard) or *tal* (anyone).

In the *compla Bejor Carmona, Yehezquel Gabay y el armenio Duz Oglú*, edited recently by Elena Romero,¹⁹ one can show that the term *sanpablo* can be used in Judeo-Spanish as an adjective, noting the fact that it is preceded by a quantitative *muy* (very):

Su pecado le alcanzó del arur el malo	His sin has reached him the cursed and
Porque era un haber con este diablo	evil one
Salio muy sanpablo se trujo en este hal	Because he was a friend of this devil
a judíos ya hizo mal	He came out as very saintpaul
le pagó el Dio presto a él y al resto.	bringing himself to this condition
	To the Jews he already caused evil [things]
	God paid him rapidly to him and [to] the
	rest.

18 Re-published by Moshe Lazar in *Joseph and His Brethren: Three Ladino versions*, Labyrinthos, 1990, p. 184, verses 1280-1283.

19 Elena Romero, *Entre dos (o más) fuegos. Fuentes poéticas para la historia de los sefardíes de los Balcanes*, CSIC, Madrid 2008, pp. 218, 219.

Julius Subak, one of the first investigators of Balkan spoken Judeo-Spanish, registered a Sephardic curse in which Saint Paul and the Devil act together: *El guérko i el Sam Pávlo ke se lo yéve* (May the Devil and the Saint Paul take him).²⁰

The analyzed examples seem to show that Ottoman Sephardim in general, and those from Bosnia in particular, after living for centuries in Ottoman urban centers, dominated by Islamic culture and concepts and without too much (if any) exposure to Catholic world and culture, developed a special sensibility (if not aversion) towards the Catholic concept of saints. The further away from Spain they were, the more the concept of veneration of statues and images seemed to them increasingly strange, abhorrent, and abominable. Interestingly, a well-known and very popular Bosnian Sephardic proverb asserts that Jews who live outside the greater Ottoman urban centers, in smaller towns, exposed to the popular culture of the Christian peasants, are themselves half-Christians:

Al kazalito medio blahito.²¹

[A Jew] in a small town, half a Christian.

Catholic Elements in Moroccan Sephardic Refranero

Unlike their Bosnian brethren, the North Moroccan Sephardim did maintain different levels of contact with the peninsula from the time of their expulsion on. With the Spanish occupation of Northern Morocco, these contacts were deepened and accelerated, until they brought about the total adoption of the Iberian Castilian language among this Sephardic branch; and, consequently, gradual but total abandonment of *Hakitia* (Moroccan Judeo-Spanish). Aware of these historical circumstances, I was not surprised to find more Iberian-Catholic elements in the North-Moroccan tradition than the Bosnian. I was quite surprised, however, by what can be seen as *thematic unanimity* of these elements in the Moroccan Sephardic refranero. Out of seven proverbs, only the following one does not deal with the phenomena of veneration of saints:

Hay quien va a misa todos los dias y
comete los mismos pecados.²²

There are people who go to a mass every
day, and always commit the same offense.

20 Julius Subak, "Zum Judenspanischen", *Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie* 30 (1905), pp. 129-185

21 Kolonomos (Note 4), proverb 32.

22 Alexander and Bentolila (Note 2), proverb 475.

The message of the proverb is quite simple: the mere performance of religious duties of ritual character (such as attendance of a mass) is not enough for one's perfection. In order to attain divine favor (and/or salvation), one needs to observe the moral demands of religion as well (refrain from sin). Similar ideas can be found in Jewish ethical literature, too, but the usage of the term *misa* (mass) as a representative for the ritual aspect of religious duties discloses the undisputable Catholic origin of the proverb. Interestingly, Moroccan Sephardim use this Catholic proverb in the same context and with the same meaning, thus ascribing to the word *misa* (mass) the positive status of the representative act of religious percepts of ritual nature.

As already stated, all other proverbs from the Moroccan Sephardic *refranero* that refer to Iberian Catholic concepts and practices are related to the veneration of saints (a theme totally unheard of in Bosnian Sephardic *refranero*). Only one of them, to the best of my knowledge, is not recorded in the Iberian Catholic tradition:

Santos de palo, no hazen milagros.²³ Wooden saints make no miracles.

And even this seems to be for a good reason. The proverb's strong opposition to the very idea of expecting intervention and intercession from the wooden statues of saints makes it much more likely that this particular proverb was produced in Jewish circles, rather than in Christian ones. Even more importantly, it was probably inspired by the Psalm 115:

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|---|--|
| ⁴ Sus idolos de plata i oro, ovra de
manos de ombre. | ⁴ Their idols are silver and gold, the work
of men's hands. |
| ⁵ Boka a eyos, i non avlan; ojos a eyos,
i non ven. | ⁵ They have mouths, but they speak not;
eyes have they, but they see not. |
| ⁶ Oidos a eyos, i non oyen; naris a eyos,
i non guezman. | ⁶ They have ears, but they hear not; noses
have they, but they smell not. |
| ⁷ Sus manos, i non apalpan; sus pies, i
non andan, non avlan kon su garganta. | ⁷ They have hands, but they handle not:
feet have they, but they walk not;
neither speak they through their throat. |

Two additional Moroccan Sephardic proverbs, both unattested in Iberian Catholic tradition, seem to reflect Jewish criticism of the Catholic belief system. The first one proclaims:

23 Ibid., proverb 916.

Más cercano está el Dió que los santos.²⁴ God is closer than the saints.

and, according to the informants it actually laments the arrogance of the functionaries, as sometimes it is easier to obtain a solution for one's problems from the highest instances than from lower level clerks.

Another one reflects an eminently Christian idea, the idea of the celestial hierarchy of saints, but it also seems to be critical of it:

Si no es este santo, sera otro mas alto.²⁵ If it is not this saint, there will [surely] be another one, even greater.

as one could argue that the content of the proverb is making fun of the multitude of Catholic saints, treating them in a dismissive and disrespectful manner.

The rest of four saint-related proverbs in the Moroccan Sephardic *refranero*, all have Iberian Catholic parallels, all reflect Catholic beliefs and practices, and all are used in the same contexts with the same messages, without any special Jewish twist or addition.

Thus, for example, the proverb

Santo que mea, maldito sea.²⁶ The pissing saint, may he be damned.

has many parallels in Luis Martínez Kleiser's *Refranero general ideologico español*, all of which reflect the same idea: A person who claims sainthood should first elevate him/herself above regular corporal needs:

De santo que mea a la pared nunca me fié.²⁷ I never believed in a saint who pisses by the wall.

En santo y santa que mea nadie crea.²⁸ No one should believe in a saint who pisses.

Santa que mea, arimale una tea.²⁹ A pissing saint, a torch she should get.

24 Ibid., proverb 634.

25 Ibid., proverb 948.

26 Alexander and Bentolila, manuscript of the study (Note 2). This proverb was not included in the final version of the book.

27 Luis Martínez Kleiser, *Refranero general ideologico español*, edición facsímil, tercera reimpresión, Editorial Hernando, Madrid 1989, proverb 57-443 (recorded by Francisco del Rosal, *Refranes*, ms. 1560; Juan de Mal Lara, *La Filosofía vulgar*, 1568).

28 Ibid., proverb 57-444 (recorded by Rosal and Mal Lara, see above).

29 Ibid., proverb 57-445 (recorded by Rosal and Mal Lara, see above).

The function of urination has been chosen as a fitting representation of anything corporal, as it is commonly perceived as one of the lowest and most degrading corporal functions.

Some other Iberian Catholic versions refer, in this context, to other bodily functions, such as eating or drinking:

Santo que come y bebe, hacer peores cosas puede. ³⁰	A saint who eats and drinks can do even worse things
Santo que come y bebe, a mas se atreve. ³¹	A saint who eats and drinks will dare to do even worse things

This demand upon all candidates for sainthood to overcome their physical nature is deeply Christian in its very nature. This popular Catholic preconception of a saint as a superhuman entity is well represented in the following Iberian proverb:

Santo que come y bebe, Dios o el diablo se lo lleve. ³²	A saint who eats and drinks, either God or Satan should take him.
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Conversely, the Jewish “saints” (venerated rabbis and kabbalists) were not really expected to overcome their human/corporal aspects as a *conditio sine qua non* in order to be recognized as saintly. Perhaps the most blatant example of the built-in “humanity” of Jewish saints is to be found in the fact that not only does Rabbinic Judaism not preach celibacy for its spiritual elite—but, rather, Jewish candidates for sanctity are expected to marry and procreate. If they do not, it will seriously damage their public image; and, consequently, their claim to sanctity. From the many variants of this proverb existent in the Iberian Catholic *refranero*, as well as from its complete absence in the Ottoman Sephardic *refraneros*, one can deduce that the proverb: *Santo que mea maldito sea* (The pissing saint, may he be damned) reflects Catholic and not Jewish concepts. However, in both communities, the Iberian Catholic and the Moroccan Sephardic, it is used to convey the same message: people who claim a higher level of spirituality should not be caught engaging in mundane things.

A similar discrepancy between rhetoric and behavior on the part of a religious hypocrite is the main subject of another Iberian Catholic proverb incorporated in a Moroccan Sephardic *refranero*:

30 Ibid., proverb 57-439 (recorded by Rosal and Mal Lara, see above).

31 Ibid., proverb 57-440 (recorded by Rosal and Mal Lara, see above).

32 Ibid., proverb 57-441 (recorded by Rosal and Mal Lara, see above).

Palabras de santo y uñas de gato.³³

Words of a saint and nails of a cat.

This proverb appears in Kleiser's collection in the same form, followed by few additional variants:

Uñas de gato y hábitos de beato.³⁴

Nails of a cat and costumes of a beatified man.

Cuentas de beato y uñas de gato.³⁵

A beading of a beatified man and nails of a cat.

Beata, beata que rascaña como gata.³⁶

Beatified, beatified, but she scratches as a cat.

In all the variants, the term *santo* (saint) is replaced by the term *beato/beata* (blessed or beatified), a technical term from Catholic hagiology.

At the same time, another Moroccan Sephardic proverb

Lo que Dios no quiere, santos no pueden.³⁷

What God does not want, saints cannot [do].

teaches that if the highest instance decides not to grant a certain petition—then the lower instances cannot do anything about it.

Also this proverb has an Iberian Catholic parallel, attested by Kleiser:

Cuando Dios no quiere, los santos no pueden.³⁸

When God does not want, the saints cannot [do].

Interestingly enough, rabbinical tradition teaches quite the opposite. The famous anthology of classical rabbinical homilies known by the name of *Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah*³⁹ elaborates the biblical verse from Qohelet/Ecclesiastices (12:11), "The

33 Alexander and Bentolila (Note 2), proverb 793.

34 Kleiser (Note 27), proverb 57-478 (recorded in Hernán Núñez, *Refranes o proverbios*, 1555).

35 Ibid., proverb 57-479.

36 Ibid., proverb 57-484 (recorded in Sebastian de Horozco, *Teatro universal de proverbios*, 1616).

37 Ibid., proverb 582.

38 Kleiser (Note 27), proverb 18-600 (recorded in Pedro Vallés, *Libro de Refranes*, Zaragoza 1549, Núñez (Note 34), Rosal (Note 27) and Mal Lara (Note 27).

39 *Bamidbar Raba*, Vilna edition, peraša 14, incipit "Bayom haševi'i".

words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd”, by stating the following: “In the same way that nails fastened in the gate maintain the wings of the door, thus when the ṣaddiqim pass their judgment, the Holy One Blessed be he affirms it”. Often, however, many times common Jewish masses are better versed in the popular culture of their immediate environment than in the writings of the rabbinical elite.

Consequently, an eminently Catholic proverb, such as

*Desnudar a un santo para vestir a otro.*⁴⁰ Denude one saint to clothe another.

is used among the Moroccan Sephardim as a way to criticize futile actions which while solving one problem create another of the equal rank.

Correas brings a very similar version of this proverb:

Quitar de un santo para darlo a otro santo.⁴¹ To take from one saint to give it to another.

Conclusion

The few Iberian Catholic elements attested in the traditional *refranero* of Bosnian Sephardim seem to belong to pre-Expulsion times, having survived in the oral patrimony of Bosnian Jews until modernity mostly because they were not necessarily recognized as such. As already stated, a person unacquainted with New Testament personalities such as Herod and Pilatus can proceed to use the proverb *Salir de Herodes y entrar en Pilatus*, as if referring to imaginary people, such as Hana (from the proverbs *Hana detras de Mohulu*,⁴² *Si negra Hana mas negra su ermana*,⁴³ or from the expression *Hana la pensadera*),⁴⁴ Hudara (from the proverb *Viste Hudara lo de Shabat en simana*),⁴⁵ Huro (from the proverb *Izo Huro loke no izo ninguno*),⁴⁶

40 Alexander and Bentolila (Note 2), proverb 245.

41 Correas (Note 5), proverb 919, p. 703.

42 Kolonomos (Note 4, proverb 526.

43 Ibid., proverb 1054.

44 Ibid., proverb 527.

45 Ibid., proverb 1166.

46 Ibid., proverb 544.

Marta (from the proverb *Muera Marta, al menos arta*),⁴⁷ none of which refers to any actual people. Similarly, a person unacquainted with Latin mass would not recognize the Christian base of the proverb *En fin se canta la gloria*. In contrast, the proverb *No tiene ni padre, ni madre ni Spiritu Santo* might have been recognized by Bosnian Sephardim as a parody on the Christian Trinity and as such perpetuated in the community for reasons of religious mockery.

At the same time, the dominant Iberian Catholic elements of the Moroccan Sephardic *refranero* are *refranes de santos*, proverbs related to the Catholic concept of veneration of saints. One of them (*Santos de palo, no hazen milagros*) is derogatory, while two others (*Más cercano está el Dió que los santos* and *Si no es este santo, sera otro mas alto*) seem to refer to the Catholic concept of veneration of saints in a critical manner. Consequently, all three proverbs seem to have originated in Jewish circles. Another five proverbs of apparent Iberian Catholic origin, attested in Moroccan Sephardic *refranero* but unknown in the Bosnian *refranero* (or in other Ottoman Sephardic traditions), seem to be borrowed from Iberian Catholic *refranero* and used by Moroccan Sephardim in the same way and same contexts they are used by their Spanish neighbors. One of them (*Hay quien va a misa todos los dias y comete los mismos pecados*) sees the Catholic mass in a positive light, while another four (*Santo que mea, maldito sea, Palabras de santo y uñas de gato, Lo que Dios no quiere, santos no pueden, Desnudar a un santo para vestir a otro*) reflect the centrality of the cult of saints in Iberian Catholic culture, as well as the ease with which Moroccan Sephardim borrow these apparently Catholic proverbs and quote them in their own proverb anthologies, without any change or intervention on their part.

Conversely, in the Bosnian Sephardic *refranero*, there is not a single proverb, derogatory or affirmative, that relates to the Catholic cult of saints. Even more importantly, in traditional Bosnian Sephardic culture, the names of certain Catholic saints (San Antonio or San Pablo) were used as pejoratives and derogatory nicknames, while the Spanish adjective *santa* (saint) on many occasion would purposely be distorted into Ottoman Turkish *çanta* (bag), just to prevent the application of the adjective to a Catholic saint.

It seems that vivid, direct, and constant contact with Spanish culture, with its deeply rooted veneration of the saints, attenuated among the Moroccan Sephardim the traditional Jewish reservations regarding the Christian concept of saints. Consequently,

47 Ibid., proverb 743.

in time, Moroccan Sephardim felt more and more at ease using the Iberian Catholic proverbs as semantic units, conveying agreeable and desirable messages, without paying too much attention to the question of the “halakhic legitimacy” of their content.

At the same time, living in an Ottoman urban setting, dominated by Islamic concepts and culture, only fortified traditional Jewish reservations towards Christian veneration of saints, and especially towards their graphic or three-dimensional presentation. It should be noted, that Ottoman Sephardic tradition is much more puritan even when it comes to veneration of saintly rabbis and *ṣaddiqim*, so typical of Moroccan Jews, of Mustʿarabim, however, much more than of Ḥakitia-speaking Sephardim of North Morocco.

It seems, however, that even among Moroccan Sephardim these proverbs related to Christian saints are quite recent, as one would expect the mechanisms of mental self-protection of these two Sephardic sister-communities not to be all that different. Apparently, the Spanish occupation of Northern Morocco, the gradual westernization and secularization of Ḥakitia-speakers and their ever-growing identification with the potent and progressive West, created an environment in which the newly heard Spanish Catholic proverbs could penetrate traditional Moroccan Sephardic *refranero* and be absorbed into it, even before this group opted for definitive linguistic assimilation into Modern Spanish. Thus, the Iberian Catholic elements in the Moroccan Sephardic *refranero* reflect the gradual but ever-increasing absorption of the Spanish language, including its traditionally Catholic *refranero*, among the Ḥakitia-speakers.