

Editors' Foreword

Recent years have seen an intensification of interest in Jewish languages in general, and in Yiddish and Ladino in particular, as witnessed by several collective volumes providing linguistic overviews of the individual languages and their shared and distinctive features, numerous scholarly conferences devoted to Jewish vernacular languages and their literatures, and the incorporation of courses dedicated to the languages and their literatures in universities in many parts of the world, including The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the University of Oxford, and Stanford University. Despite this growth of interest, however, the distinctive characteristics of the rabbinical literatures in the two languages, which were in fact the major forms of literature produced in the languages until the middle of the nineteenth century, have hardly received scholarly attention until now. The present volume therefore makes a special, broadening contribution to the field of Jewish vernacular language and literature studies, focusing on their unique Yiddish and Ladino rabbinic variants.

The need to foster the study of rabbinic literature in Yiddish and Ladino was proposed in 2013 by Dr. Katja Šmid and Professor David M. Bunis in the framework of the Marie-Curie Action: Intra-European Fellowship for Career Development “Sephardi Halakhic Literature and Ladino Rabbinic Language” SEPHARAB (629304), funded under Specific programme “People” implementing the Seventh Framework Programme of the European Community. The project directors decided to organize an international workshop on Ladino and Yiddish Rabbinic Writings which took place on 9–10 March 2016 at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and The National Library of Israel. The academic committee, composed of the editors of the present volume and Professor Avraham Novershtern, coordinated this academic event with the participation of 33 scholars and presentation of 27 papers, in collaboration with The National Library of Israel, which was the venue of an exhibit of representative samples of Yiddish and Ladino rabbinic writings. The present volume was inspired by the workshop and reflects most of the papers presented at the workshop, after having undergone significant modifications and expansions, partly in light of the peer reviews which each contribution underwent.

The volume offers a broad introduction to the rabbinical literature written in the two major traditional Jewish languages of Europe: Yiddish, the language of the Ashkenazic Jews of Eastern Europe, Germany, Italy, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Eretz Israel, and Ladino (or Judezmo or Judeo-Spanish), the language of the Sephardic Jews of the Ottoman Empire and its successor states, Italy and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Rabbinical literature in the two languages began to appear practically from the advent of printing; from its very beginnings, Yiddish and Ladino rabbinic works proved to be immensely popular, especially because most

speakers of the two languages were characterized by a traditional, religious Jewish orientation but were unable to read works in the more classical rabbinic languages of the Jews, Hebrew and Aramaic. Works in Yiddish and Ladino gave the speakers access to the world of traditional Jewish learning. Written by contemporary scholars representing several academic disciplines—including literary studies, history, and linguistics—and using the analytic tools characteristic of researchers in those disciplines, the present volume offers a diverse overview of the most central topics germane to this field of inquiry, presented within a broad historical context. The scope is wide-ranging, discussing Yiddish and Ladino rabbinic works published early on in the history of these literatures as well as those appearing in the modern era, in the major geographic centers of Yiddish and Ladino book publishing, and representing the major genres of rabbinical writing in the two Jewish vernaculars. Some of the contributions highlight the lives and work of outstanding rabbinic figures who wrote in Yiddish or Ladino, and the crucial role they played in the transmission of rabbinic knowledge among the more popular sectors of their communities, as well as in the shaping of the Yiddish and Ladino reading public. The volume also acquaints the reader with the linguistic and literary features common to rabbinic writing in both languages, as well as those characteristics particular to the writing in one or the other of the languages. Close attention is paid to long-established genres such as the highly-popular Biblical commentaries, as exemplified by the *Me-ʿam loʿez* in Ladino (1730–1899); prayer books and liturgical compositions in prose and verse; responsa collections incorporating texts in Yiddish or Ladino; guides to religious observance; moralistic works; as well as more modern genres having rabbinic content, exemplified in works that began to appear in the second half of the nineteenth century, when the Jewish communities of the Diaspora underwent radical cultural, religious, social and political changes.

We kindly thank all the institutions who contributed to the success of the workshop and the present volume, especially the European Commission, and Beit Sholem Aleichem in Tel Aviv for their financial support, as well as the Center for the Study of Jewish Languages and Literatures, and the Yiddish Studies Program at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem for being such wonderful hosts of this project, and to The National Library of Israel in Jerusalem, which made it possible to reach out to a broad, general audience extending beyond Israeli and international academia. We deeply appreciate the efforts of all the individuals who contributed to the success of this project at different stages, and especially thank all the lecturers and chair persons who participated in the workshop; Dr. Anabella Esperanza and Ms. Ekaterina Kuznetsova, who, with the editors, constituted the members of the workshop organizing committee; as well as to Professor Elhanan Reiner, Dr. Yoel Finkelman and Dr. Dov Cohen for their help in organizing the book exhibit at

the National Library of Israel. Last but not least, we express our gratitude to Alice Meroz, our editor at De Gruyter for her assistance and patience throughout the publishing process.

A note on transcription

In the present volume Yiddish passages transcribed from the original Hebrew letters follow the system advocated by the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research [<https://www.yivo.org/yiddish-alphabet>]. Judezmo passages are Romanized from the original Hebrew-letter text in accordance with the system advocated by La Academia Nacional del Ladino en Israel [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354148556_Las_Ortografias_Las_Ortografias_del_Ladino_del_Ladino]; divergences from the latter system used in the article by Bunis are explained there in a footnote. The standard academic transcription symbols are used in the transcription of material in Hebrew and Aramaic proper, including personal names: *qamaš* and *pataḥ* = *a*; *šere* and *segol* = *e*; *ḥolam* and *qamaš qaṭan* = *o*; *šuruq* and *qubbuš* = *u*; *šewa naʿ* = *ě* (but zero with a consonant preceded by word-initial ו); *šewa naḥ* = zero; *dageš ḥazaq* = doubling of the consonant (e.g., חזן = *ḥazzan*); א = ' (no symbol is used to denote *alef* after a blank space or a hyphen, e.g., אדם = *adam*, אדם- = *-adam*); ב (with *dageš qal*) = *b*; ב = *v*; ג/ג (with or without *dageš qal*) = *g*; ד/ד (with or without *dageš qal*) = *d*; consonantal ה = *h*; consonantal ו = *w*; ז = *z*; ח = *ḥ*; ט = *t*; י = *y* (except after *šere*, where it is zero, e.g., אחר י = *aḥare*); כ (with *dageš qal*) = *k*; ד/כ = *k*; ל = *l*; מ/מ = *m*; נ/נ = *n*; ס = *s*; ע = ' ; פ (with *dageš qal*) = *p*; פ/פ = *f*; צ/צ = *š*; ק = *q*; ר = *r*; ש = *š*; ש = *s*; ת/ת (with or without *dageš qal*) = *t*.

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