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# COLLOQUIA HUMANISTICA

Sephardim, Ashkenazim  
and Non-Jewish Peoples:  
Encounters Across Europe



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es of the Polish Academy of Sciences approaches humanities from an interdisciplinary perspective, continuity and dis-continuity as a specific norm in culture, language, literature, and finally, but also in foreign, centers – it has the potential of becoming a showcase of Polish humanities and the status of the so-called minor cultures. This concept opens an area of research into culture as a periodical of high scholarly standards but at the same time of a lively nature; not in the se

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Ḥam Ribī Avram Finci's Ladino Translation  
of Selected Texts from the Zohar as a Rare Glimpse  
into the Methodology of Traditional Bosnian Sephardic  
Yeshivot (Adult Learning Clubs) and Its Relation  
to the Local Sufi Islamic Tradition of *Ders*<sup>1</sup>

Abstract

In traditional Sephardic culture, theoretical Kabbalah was an exclusive patrimony of the rabbinic elite. From the 17th century onward, many Sephardic laymen found even the Hebrew liturgical, and especially speculative, texts to be impenetrable and incomprehensible. Consequently, the rabbinic elite began to translate liturgical texts and halakhic works into popular Judeo-Spanish. However, the Zohar was usually not included in these projects of cultural intermediation. Consequently, a Judeo-Spanish translation of the integral text of the Zohar, or even of one of its volumes, does not exist to this day. At the same time, different Sephardic rabbis translated selected excerpts from the Zohar into the vernacular. This paper analyses one such anthology, Avram ben Moshe Finci's *Leket a-Zoar*, published in 5619 (1858/9) in Belgrade. The anthology contains 246 excerpts from the Zohar,

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121 of which conclude with Finci's own reflections and a resumé of the moral of the story. Many of Finci's discourses are masterpieces of the traditional Judeo-Spanish oral genre of *darush*. Finci was not interested in explaining theoretical kabbalistic terms and concepts. Rather, he reads the Zohar as if it were a work of Mussar. The traditional learning of Bosnian Sephardim seems to resemble, in both methodology and content, the learning traditions of their Muslim neighbours, showing once again that settled communities such as the Ottoman Sephardim cannot be researched only in the context of their affinity to the Jewish world. It is impossible to understand the way the Ottoman Sephardim developed Jewish concepts, practices and institutes without acknowledging the common Ottoman culture they shared with their Muslim and Christian neighbours.

**Key words:** Sephardic studies, Sephardic culture, Ladino literature, Ottoman Jews, Bosnian Jewry, Rabbinic literature in Judeo-Spanish, Sephardic Sermon, Judaism & Sufism, Balkan Culture, Balkan Jews.

## Introduction

In traditional Sephardic culture, theoretical Kabbalah was an exclusive patrimony of the rabbinic elite. Since the bulk of the classic kabbalistic literature is written in Aramaic, but in the familiar Hebrew square script, the overwhelming majority of Sephardic laymen were capable of reproducing excerpts from these texts, usually as part of pseudo-liturgical (or even prophylactic and magical) reading, mostly without understanding their content even on the most basic level, let alone the esoteric one. In most cases, the texts circulated amongst male Sephardic “commoners” for ceremonial readings of the Zohar at traditional *meldado*<sup>2</sup> or *lel shemurim*<sup>3</sup> ceremonies were taken from *Idrah Rabbah*, *Idrah Zuṭah* or *Tiqune ha-Zohar*. The participants of these rituals were not expected to be acquainted with the actual volumes of the Zohar, let alone to have them in their possession. Instead, many different authors prepared and published special booklets for these occasions, containing all the passages usually recited during a specific ritual. Every synagogue owned a substantial number

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<sup>2</sup> A commemoration service held at a private home or synagogue, also called *anyo* (“year”) or *peṭira* (“demise”).

<sup>3</sup> A vigil before the circumcision of a male child, on the eighth day of his life. Due to the widespread belief that the night before the circumcision was the “last chance” for Lilith to hurt the child, who from the next day on would be protected by the sign of the covenant with the Divine made in his flesh, traditional Sephardim used to organise a prophylactic magical watch, spending the entire night sitting around the new-born and reading sacred texts, including from the Zohar.

of copies of these booklets, and at a time of need they would be brought to private homes. Sometimes many people read the same text in its entirety, especially if the people involved in the ceremony were *hakhamim* (erudite persons) or *talmide hakhamim* (semi-erudite persons) used to long reading sessions. However, when the majority of the participants were *'ame ha-areš* (commoners), different portions of a single textual unit would be distributed amongst them and the text would be read only once, with everyone reading their own portions in unison. In order to make the distribution easier, the text of *Idrah Rabbah* or *Idrah Zutah* would often be divided into a few dozen volumes of two or three pages, each bound separately. If one of the readers present was a *hakham*, he might reflect on some of the concepts, ideas or stories mentioned in the Aramaic text. Otherwise, the sole purpose of the reading was for its merit to help the deceased in the better world. The same was true of the Aramaic passages from the *Zohar* read at *Lel shemurim*.

This sentiment is well presented in the approbation of Ḥam Ribī Ḥayyim Matatya Benaroya, a “pure Sephardi” from Filibe (Plovdiv) in Bulgaria, to Finci’s *Leket a-Zoar*.<sup>4</sup>

<p>... and we are in possession of a tradition that even its mechanical reading is advantageous, and how much more so when it is translated into the vernacular.<sup>5</sup></p>	<p>[...] דמסורת בידנו להיות לו סגולה אפילו בקורא להגיה, וכ"ש היות הדבר מתורגם בלשון לעז.</p>
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From the 17th century onward, many Sephardic laymen found even the Hebrew liturgical, and especially speculative, texts to be impenetrable and incomprehensible. Consequently, the rabbinic elite began to translate liturgical texts (including weekday, Sabbath and holiday prayer books, the Pentateuch, the weekly readings from the prophets, the Mishnaic treatise *Ethics of the Fathers* or the Passover Haggadah) and halakhic works (such as *Shulḥan 'Arukh*) into popular Judeo-Spanish. Many original works were also produced in Ladino (Lehmann, 2005), the most well-known of them being the Midrashic anthology *Me'am Lo'ez*. In a rare example of a 166-year-long literary dialogue between the learned elite and the common masses, this voluminous encyclopaedia of Jewish knowledge was produced in the vernacular by ten leading Ottoman Sephardic sages. Its name, *Me'am Lo'ez*, is taken from Psalm 114: “when Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language”. This title succinctly

<sup>4</sup> When Hebrew words appear in the title of a Ladino work, they are regarded and transliterated as Ladino Hebraisms.

<sup>5</sup> Translations are mine.

summarises the purpose of the work as perceived by its elite authors: “Judah was His sanctuary, and Israel His dominion”. To put it another way, the main aim of the book was to take the Sephardim out of Egypt (as a metaphor for barbarism and ignorance of the Divine Law) and out of their “strange language” (i.e. Ladino, which was viewed by the rabbinic elite of the time as non-Jewish, secular and mundane, in opposition to the Jewish, sacred and transcendental Hebrew), and to equip them with minimal knowledge of the Hebrew sacred text and maximal knowledge of its content and the ensuing concepts and practices. Only by translating Judaism into the vernacular could the vernacular be beaten and could the *Djudios* (“people of Judah”, i.e. Jews) be reconsecrated (“Judah was His sanctuary”) and re-subjugated to their Divine king (“and Israel His dominion”).

Written in the form of a commentary on 11 biblical books (the five books of the Pentateuch, together with Joshua, Isaiah, Esther, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs), *Me’am Lo’ez* anthologised traditional Sephardic knowledge (biblical commentary, Halakhah, rabbinical stories and folklore), creating a sort of “Sephardic Talmud”.<sup>6</sup>

## Ladino Translations of Selected Texts from the Zohar

However, while various volumes of *Me’am Lo’ez* quote passages from the Zohar (mostly stories or explanations of biblical verses), a translation of the integral text of the Zohar, or at least of one of its volumes, into the vernacular was not part of the Sephardic canon. To the best of my knowledge, there is a single manuscript of a Ladino translation of the Zohar’s commentary on an entire weekly Torah portion. This was produced (or, at least, copied) at a relatively early date by Moshe Suri ‘Asa’el, in the 17th century, and is presently preserved at Harvard University.

Following the tradition of translating liturgical and pseudo-liturgical texts into the vernacular, those excerpts from the Zohar that acquired this status in Sephardic tradition were of course translated integrally. Thus, there are two known late (19th-century) manuscripts of *Idrah Rabbah*, one from

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<sup>6</sup> Not unexpectedly, the first researchers to address the anthology in a monographic manner were Moshe David Gaon and Michael Molho, the pioneers of Sephardic studies (see Gaon, 1932; Molho, 1945). Luis Landau’s unpublished PhD thesis (Landau, 1980) opened the question of the content and form of the initial part of the midrash, produced by R. Jacob Khuli (i.e. *Me’am Lo’ez* on Genesis and the first two-thirds of Exodus). A series of subsequent studies on these two volumes has advanced our knowledge regarding the anthology and its initiator.



the circle of Salonica's Ma'aminim<sup>7</sup> and the other from Gibraltar,<sup>8</sup> as well as two late (19th- and 20th-century) manuscripts of *Idrah Zuṭah*, one from Gibraltar,<sup>9</sup> the other from Izmir.<sup>10</sup> In 1876 a printed Ladino translation of *Idrah Zuṭah* appeared in Izmir under the title *Petirat Ribī Shimon ben Yoḥay* (The Demise of R. Shim'on ben Yoḥay).

The provenance of the texts from the above-mentioned Salonica Ma'aminim circle is readily apparent from their peculiar Soletreo orthography, such as the spelling *tikun* with *ṭet* instead of *tav*, a practice found solely among partially Islamised Sabbatians. A translation of selected *tiqunim* from *Tiqune ha-Zohar* is also extant,<sup>11</sup> as is a very late (1938) manuscript of the Ladino translation of the *Pataḥ Eliyahu* passage from the Zohar.<sup>12</sup>

The first printed edition of selected excerpts from the Zohar, however, was published in the year 5600 (1839/40) in Salonica by Eliyau Djahun, under the title *Sefer mezake et a-rabim: Livro Ladino i son palavras de Zoar a-Kadosh*.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, Avram ben Moshe Finci's *Leket a-Zoar*, printed in 5619 (1858/9) in Belgrade, appears to have been better received by the Sephardic reading public, as can be deduced from its two subsequent editions: Salonica 5627 (1866/7) and Izmir 5637 (1876/7). The present article will concentrate on this particular anthology, which contains selected texts from the first two volumes of the Zohar: Genesis and Exodus. Its author, Ḥam Ribī Avram, was a scion of the famous Finci Bosnian<sup>14</sup> rabbinical dynasty.

<sup>7</sup> The National Library of Israel, Jerusalem, Israel, Ms. Heb. 917=8; approximately 5597 (=1836/37). The name of the scribe: Ya'akov Ha-Levi.

<sup>8</sup> Meir Benyahu, Ms. NA 396, microfilm F 72003, National Library of Israel, Jerusalem.

<sup>9</sup> Meir Benayahu, Ms. NA 397, microfilm F 72004, National Library of Israel, Jerusalem.

<sup>10</sup> *Petirat Ribī Shimon ben Yoḥay*, Ben-Zvi Institute 3566, Izmir 5628 (1967/1968).

<sup>11</sup> Ms. Heb. 919=8, National Library of Israel, Jerusalem (circa 5597 [1836/1837]). Scribe's name: Ya'akov ha-Lewi.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Krupp, Ms. 1449, microfilm F 71330, National Library of Israel, Jerusalem. Scribe's name: Yehuda Hizqiya Kareo. Concerning the method of transliteration of the title, see note 4 above.

<sup>13</sup> Concerning the method of transliteration of the title, see note 4 above.

<sup>14</sup> For a study of the history of the Jews of Sarajevo from the community's founding until the Austro-Hungarian conquest, see the pioneering work by Moritz Levy (1996, reedition) as well as the chapter on Bosnia by Yakir Eventov (1971). Levy's book was translated into Judeo-Spanish and published in 1932 under the title *Los Sefaradim de Bosna por Dr. Gran Rabino de Sarayevoy* by the Salonica newspaper *La Aksion*. It was also translated into Serbo-Croatian (Levi, 1969). For a more recent history of this community, see Maestro (1991) and Pinto (1987).

## The Fincis:<sup>15</sup> A Fine Example of an Ottoman Sephardic Rabbinic Dynasty

Avram ben Moshe Finci was a grandson of Ḥam Ribī Josef Finci, as mentioned by the author himself in paragraph 199 (misnumbered in the anthology as 201):<sup>16</sup>

<p>Yo me akodro kuando era kriatura, <i>mala-mata</i><sup>17</sup> el anyo de [5]573, <i>rosh hodesh Tamuz</i>, se fue mi senyor papu, Ḥa[ham] Josef Finci <i>a[lav] a[shalom] leir a-kodesh Yerushalayim, ti[bane] ve[timale] vi[meera] ve[yamenu]</i>...</p>	<p>I remember when I was a child, more or less in the year [5]573, by the beginning of the month of Tamuz, my grandfather, Ḥa[ham] Josef Finci, <i>pea[ce be upon] hi[m], to the Ho[ly] Ci[ty] of Jerusalem, [may it be] bu[ilt] and fi[lled with people] fa[st] and [in our own days]</i>...</p>
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He was also a younger brother of Ḥam Ribī Josef Finci, also known as *Waylaqet Yossef* (after the title of his alphabetic Hebrew compilation of rabbinic knowledge), who was the firstborn son of the family and consequently, according to Sephardic tradition, was named after his paternal grandfather, a fact mentioned in paragraph 15:

<sup>15</sup> On another famous Bosnian rabbinic dynasty, the Pardos, see E. Papo (2006).

<sup>16</sup> Finci's work is written in Ottoman rabbinical Judeo-Spanish, with some dialectal peculiarities typical of colloquial Bosnian Judeo-Spanish. In an introductory article to Samuel Romano's dictionary of colloquial Bosnian Judeo-Spanish, David Bunis summarised the history of research on this dialect and the literature written in it (Romano, 1995). Since the publication of this summary, research on Bosnian Judeo-Spanish has been advanced by several studies. See, for example, Bunis (2001); Nezirović (1988, 2002); E. Papo (2006—2007, 2007, 2008, 2013); I. Papo (1995); Quintana (1997).

<sup>17</sup> From the two Hebrew words מעלה (above) and מטה (below), the Sephardim coined the term מעלה-מטה which serves in Judeo-Spanish as the Hebrew equivalent of the Spanish *mas o menos* (more or less). This term is not attested amongst non-Sephardic Hebrew speakers. For the Hebrew component in written and spoken Judeo-Spanish in modern times, see Bunis (1993). For the Hebrew component in spoken Judeo-Spanish in Bosnia and Herzegovina, see I. Papo (1981). David Benveniste's dictionary focuses mainly on Hebrew words that were absorbed into the spoken language, especially in the Salonica and Jerusalem dialects. All the Hebraisms (including biblical verses quoted in Hebrew) and Ottoman Turkisms (of Turkish, Arabic or Persian origin) in the Judeo-Spanish translation of excerpts from the Zohar are presented in italics. However, since this article does not focus on philological issues and is not aimed primarily at scholars from the field of Sephardic studies, I have decided to spare the re-

Sigun vimos kon nuestros ojos en la Bosna, yi[shmor] a[lea] E[loim], ke avia un *gevir*, ke se yamava Ḥa[ham] Asher ben Shelomo, *n[uhato] e[den]*, ke non tenia ijios, i izo *yeshiva*, i asento a mi senyor ermano, *aḥi verosh, baal Vaylaket Yosef*, z[eher] ṣ[adik] ve[kadosh] li[vraha], por rosh *yeshiva*, i aparto de su mondea tantos fyori[nes] i avrio butika en desparte, i de akea ganansia se mantenía el *ḥaham* de la *yeshiva*, i el *She[m] Yit[barah]* le pago a ojos de todo el mundo, ke despues ke ya iva kazado kon segunda mujer i non tenia ijios, salvo ijas, i kuando ya le nasia algun ijo, no lo alkansava de destetar, ke se le morian chikos, i kuando izo la *yeshiva* ke se nombra *ad ayom*, “*measher shemena lahmo*,”<sup>18</sup> le nasieron dos ijios i los engrandesio...

As we saw with our own eyes in Bosnia, [may] G[od] p[rotect] i[t], where there was a rich man by the name of Ḥa[ham] Asher ben Shelomo, [may he] r[est in] P[aradise], who did not have any sons, and he formed a rabbinic academy, and he brought my master and brother, my brother and head, the author o the book *Waylaqet Yossef*, [may the] me[mory of the] ri[ghteous] and [a saint] be a b[lessing], to serve as the Head of the Academy, and he set apart from his money [an endowment] of so and so [golden] flori[ns], endowing also a store from which the Head of the Academy was sustained, and God, may He be blessed, paid him in the eyes of all the people, because after being married to the second wife with whom he had no sons, only daughters, and even when he would have a son, he wouldn't wean them, as they used to die on him while still very young, and once he established the academy, which is renowned until today, two sons were born to him and he brought them up...

ader dozens of footnotes on the etymologies of the non-Iberian strata of (Bosnian) rabbinical Judeo-Spanish. However, each such word is not only indicated by the italic typeface, but also fully accounted for in the accompanying English translation, so that interested readers will receive this etymological information.

<sup>18</sup> Based on Genesis 49:20, *וְיִתֵּן מֵעֵדְנֵי מְלֶכֶךְ, וְהָיָא יִתֵּן מֵעֵדְנֵי מְלֶכֶךְ* (Out of Asher his bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties).





Fig. 1. The front page of the book *Waylaqet Yossef*

In 1837, when Ḥam Ribī Reuven Baruh left Belgrade, Ḥam Ribī Josef Finci was appointed chief rabbi of Belgrade, a position he filled until his death in 1850 (Lebl, 1990, p. 37, 2001, p. 81). Josef Finci’s son, Ḥam Ribī Jeuda Leon Finci, the renowned author of *Tiqun Ḥaṣot*, spent some time with his father in Belgrade, but was later called back to Sarajevo (Lebl, 1990, pp. 37–38). In 1868, when Bosnian *Ḥakham-bashi* (Chief Rabbi) Avram Levi left for the Land of Israel, no Bosnian rabbi was willing to accept the position of chief rabbi of the community. Consequently, a *bet din* (rabbinical court) of three served as a collective “chief rabbi” until 1884. Ḥam Ribī Jeuda Leon ben Josef Finci was one of the three judges (Kamhi, 1966) who sat on this court, the others being Ḥam Ribī Bension Pinto and Ḥam Ribī Eliezer ben Santo (Shemtov) Papo.<sup>19</sup> According to his descendant Isak

<sup>19</sup> The most prolific Judeo-Spanish rabbinic author from Sarajevo, Papo was also the *spiritus movens* behind the establishment of the Hebrew press in Sarajevo. According to the instructions of the *Tanzimat* from 1865, district rulers throughout the Ottoman Empire were obliged to establish a printing press in the capital of their district, to print a newspaper in the local language and in the letters customarily used in it. The Bosnia *wazir* at that time, Topal Šerif Osman Pasha, applied the law, and in April 1866 the first printing press was opened in Sarajevo. Papo turned to the *wazir* in the name of the Jews of Sarajevo with a request that the new printing house obtain Hebrew letters so that the Jews, too, could enjoy it, as can be learned from a critical article published in instalments in *El Korreo de Viena*, issues 8, 9, and 10 (1872). His alphabetical collection of Sabbath laws, *Meshek Beti*, was the first Jewish book printed in Sarajevo (1871/1872). Katja Šmid recently published a scientific edition of the book with a thorough introduction and valuable critical apparatus (Šmid, 2012). For additional information about this author, see Bunis (1984) and Alexander & Papo (2006–2007).

Kabiljo, Ḥam Ribbi Jeuda Finci also served as a member of the City Council of Sarajevo and was known to all the inhabitants of Sarajevo as Hodža Finci (Lebl, 1990, p. 37).

While there seems to be no preserved photo of Avram Finci, the translator of the Zohar, his nephew's picture was preserved thanks to Ribbi Moritz Levy's monograph (Levy, 1996):



Fig. 2. Ḥam Ribbi Jeuda Leon Finci



Fig. 3. The front page of his book *Tiqun Ḥaṣot*

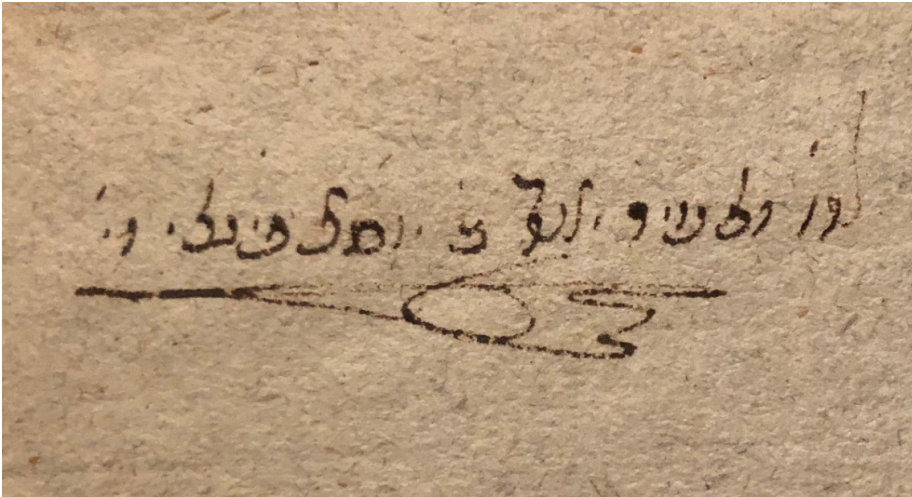


Fig. 4. Ḥam Ribbi Jeuda ben Josef Finci's signature (from my own collection)

## Reading Zohar as Mussar: Oral and Written Discourses on the Zohar in the Sephardic World

Originating from such a rabbinical and kabbalistic “dynasty”, Ḥam Ribī Avram was probably “the best person for the job”. Rather than dealing with cosmogony or theosophy, his *Leket a-Zoar* deals with Mussar, usually translated as Jewish ethics.

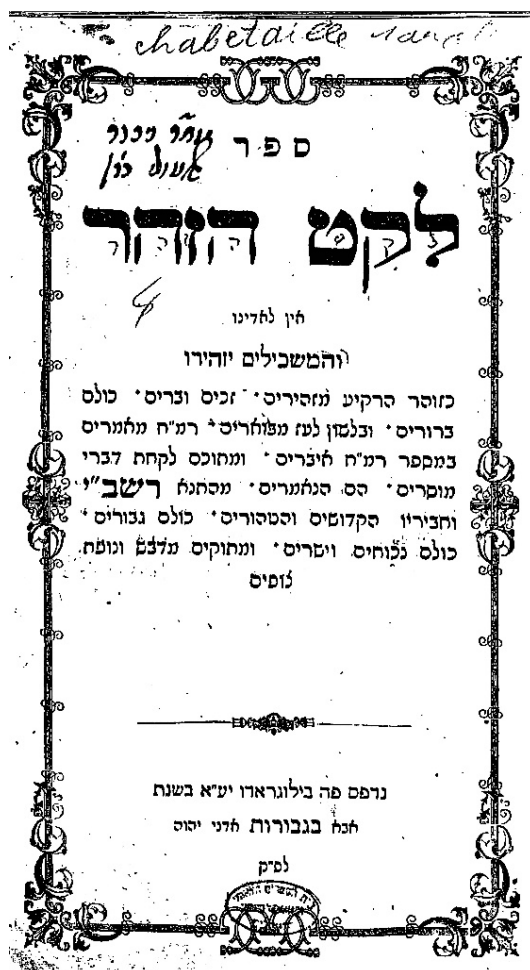


Fig. 5. The front page of the Belgrade edition of *Leket a-Zoar*

According to its front page, the anthology should contain 248 excerpts from the Zohar, in order to resemble the 248 organs ascribed to the male body by the sages of the Talmud:

Two hundred and forty-eight excerpts, according to the number of the organs, to learn from them words of Mussar (moral), spoken by Ribbi Shim'on bar Yoḥai and his friends, the holy and pure ones, all of them mighty men, and all their words pleasant and straight, sweeter than honey and nectar.

רמ"ח מאמרים במספר רמ"ח איברים,  
ומתוכם לקחת דברי מוסרים, הם הנאמרים  
מהתנא רשב"י וחבריו, הקדושים והטהורים,  
כולם גבורים, כולם נכוחים וישרים,  
ומתוקים מדבש ונופת צופים.

However, not only the numeration of the excerpts throughout the first edition is lacking, but also their total number.<sup>20</sup> In reality, in all three editions the anthology contains only 246 excerpts from the Zohar, 121 of which end with Finci's own reflections and a resumé of the moral of the story. Many of Finci's discourses are masterpieces of the traditional Judeo-Spanish oral genre of *darush*, used by the learned elite to convey values and *Weltanschauung* to the common masses. Both rabbis who wrote the traditional approbations for Finci's *Leket a-Zoar* took its Mussar nature for granted. Thus,

<sup>20</sup> The numeration of the paragraphs in all three editions is inaccurate. In the first edition, for example, up to paragraph 81 it is impeccable. Paragraph 82 lacks a number, but the subsequent paragraph is numbered as 83, indicating that paragraph 82 was not skipped in counting but only in numeration. Some numbers appear in the numeration twice, due to the fact that paragraph 89 is misnumbered as 80, 122 as 123, 125 as 135 and 132 as 133. From paragraph 144 (misnumbered as 147) to paragraph 246 (misnumbered as 199) that ends the anthology, the numeration does not reflect the reality of the order any more. The second, Salonica edition introduces its own mistakes in the paragraph numeration. It is accurate up to paragraph 145, but then the next paragraph is numbered as 149, thus creating a gap of three paragraphs between the numeration and the reality of the anthology. However, two subsequent paragraphs after paragraph 183 are numbered as 184, reducing the gap between the numeration and the reality of the anthology to two paragraphs only. Hence, the numeration ends with paragraph 248 (the number intended by the author), while this edition actually only contains 246 paragraphs. In this edition there is also some additional local misnumbering, which is subsequently immediately corrected. Thus, paragraphs 156 and 157 are both numbered as 156, but the subsequent paragraph is correctly numbered as 158. The same is true of paragraphs 223 and 224, which are both numbered as 224, but again the subsequent paragraph is correctly numbered as 225. It should be noted that the third, Izmir edition mirrors the second and not the first edition of the anthology. Consequently, its paragraphs are misnumbered in the same way as in the Salonica edition and not the way they are misnumbered in the Belgrade edition.

Benaroya (already mentioned above) calls it a collection of Mussar (morals) gathered from the Zohar:

<p>The Co[mplete] Sa[ge], our Ho[nourable] Tea[cher] and Ra[bbi], Ri[bbi] Avram Finci, [May The] Me[rciful] p[rotect] and [redeem him], the brother of the Head, the Righteous one, [Our] Tea[cher] and [our] Ma[ster] and Ra[bbi], Ri[bbi] Josef Finci, [may his] me[mory] li[ve in the] w[orld to] c[ome], the Su[preme] Rabbinic Authority in the] Ci[ty]of Belgrade, [may] G[od] p[rotect] i[t], and he showed me the Mussar [= morals] that he gathered and collected from the Book of Zohar, for the commoners who speak vernacular:</p>	<p>כי כן בא לפני הח[כם] הש[לם] כ[בוד] מ[ורנו] ור[בנו] ה[רב] רבי אברהם פינצי נ[טריה] ר[חמנא] ו[נפרקיה], אחיו של ראש, אותו צדיק מהרי"ף זלה"ה מ[רא] ד[אתרא] בילוגראדו, י[שמור] ע[ליה] א[להים], כה הראני מוסר שאסף וקבץ מספר הזהר ללועזות בלעז...</p>
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At the same time, the rabbi of the Sephardic community of Vienna, Ham Ribbi Reuven Baruh (also “a pure Sephardi”), the same one whom Ham Ribbi Avram’s brother, Josef Finci, replaced in the position of chief rabbi of Belgrade, states in his approbation that these “excerpts from the Zohar” are “speaking of requirements of the Mussar (= moral)”:

<p>Excerpts from the Zohar – collected sparks, enlightening dew from the Holy Book of Zohar, speaking of requirements of the Mussar, vital castigations, anthologised by our beloved Complete Sage, our Ho[nourable] Tea[cher] and Ra[bbi], Ri[bbi] Avram Finci, [May The] Me[rciful] p[rotect] and [redeem him].</p>	<p>לקט הזהר – נצוצים נקבצים טללי אורות מספר זהר הקדוש, המדברים בארש<sup>21</sup> המוסר, תוכחת חיים, עלו בקבץ ע[ל] י[נדי] אהובנו החכם השלם כ[בוד] מ[ורנו] ו[נרבנו] ה[רב] ר[בי] אברהם פינצי נרי"ו, ויעתק משם אברהם אל ארש אחרת<sup>22</sup> לשמוע כלמודים בלשון המהלך אתנו בעת כבודינו הורד בארץ ספרד, למען ירוץ הקורא.</p>
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<sup>21</sup> Based on Psalms 21:3, בל-מנעת סְלָה, וְאֶרְשֶׁת שְׁפִתָיו, וְנִתְתָה לוֹ; (in the King James version 21:2, Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not withholden the request of his lips. Selah).

<sup>22</sup> Based on Genesis 26:22, וַיִּחְפֹּר בָּאֵר אֲחֵרָת, וְלֹא רָבִי, עָלֶיהָ, (And he removed from thence, and dug another well; and for that they strove not...).

The following passage from paragraph 241 (misnumbered in the book as 243) is a good example of Finci's method of reading the Zohar as if it were Mussar literature:<sup>23</sup>

<p>Ribi Shimon se iva para Tevaryá,<sup>24</sup> enkontro kon Eliyau a-Navi. Le disho: “<i>Shalom</i> al senyor.”</p> <p>Disho a el Ri[bi] Shi[mon]: “En ke esta entremetido el <i>She[m] Yitba[rah]</i> en el sielo”? Le disho: “En korbanot, i disho palavras muevas de tu nombrado. Beata ti! I vini por akonantar a ti shalom. I demando de ti una koza, por ser maskim. En la yeshiva del sielo demandaron ke en <i>ola[m] ab[a]</i> non ay en el komer ni beber, i ya dize el pasuk: ‘Vini a mi guerta, mi ermana, novia, komi mi shara kon mi miel, bevi mi vino kon mi leche’ [Kant. 5:1].</p> <p>Disho Ri[bi] Shi[mon]: “I ke respondio el <i>She[m] Yitba[rah]</i>”? Le disho: “El <i>She[m] Yitba[rah]</i> disho: ‘Ya esta Bar-Yohay’, i vini por demandarte.”</p> <p>Disho Ri[bi] Shi[mon]: “Kuenta kerensia akerensio el <i>She[m] Yitba[rah]</i> a <i>Keneset Yisrael!</i> I de muncha kerensia</p>	<p>R. Shimon was travelling to Tiberias. He met Elijah. He (= Elijah) told him: “Greetings to the master”<sup>25</sup> R. Shimon told him: “What is G[od,] Ble[ssed be He,] engaged with in Heaven”? He told him: “He is engaged in sacrifices, and He [just] said new words in your name. Blessed are you! And I came to greet you. And there is one thing that I’d like to ask you to agree to. In the Heavenly Academy a question has been posed: In the Wor[ld] that is Com[ing] there is no eating or drinking, and yet the verse says: “I have come into my garden, my sister, bride: I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey, I have drunk my wine and my milk” [Song of Songs 5:1]. R. Shimon said: “And how did G[od,] Ble[ssed be He,] respond”? He told him: “G[od,] Ble[ssed be He,] said: ‘Bar Yoḥay is already there’, so I came to ask you”. R. Shimon [then] said: “How deeply G[od,] Ble[ssed be He,] loves the Assembly of Israel! Out of great love, He changes how He normally acts.</p>
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<sup>23</sup> [א] וזהו כרך ג (במדבר) פרשת פנחס (המתחיל בדרך ריג עמוד א). For a direct English translation of the Aramaic original, see *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition* (translation and commentary by Daniel Matt), Stanford University Press, vol. IX, ad loci.

<sup>24</sup> The traditional Sephardic pronunciation of the Hebrew name of Tiberias.

<sup>25</sup> In Matt's translation it is R. Shimon who greets Elijah first, and immediately asks him a question about God's present occupation. In Finci's translation, however, first the prophet greets the rabbi, and then the rabbi asks him the aforementioned question. The Aramaic original, of course, in its paucity, allows for both these renderings. Nevertheless, from Elijah's servile attitude towards R. Shimon in the rest of the story, Finci's reading strikes me as the more convincing.



troka sus echas de loke aze. Aun ke non su uzansa de komer i beber, por la kerensia suya, siendo i viene serka de eya, kome i beve. La novia entra a la *hupa* i kere komer. Non kale ke koma i su novio kon eya, aun ke non su uzo ansi? Esto es ke dize: ‘*Bati legani, ahoti, kala*’ – vengo onde eya, por entrar en la *hupa*.”

“I enbezamos de David a-Meleh, ke konvido al *She[m] Yitba[rah]*, i demudo sus echas de uzansa del *She[m] Yitb[rah]*, i el *She[m] Yitba[rah]* izo su voluntad. Konvido a el Rey i a la Se[nyora], ke dize: ‘*Kuma Adonay limnuhateha, Ata vaaron uzeha*’ [Salmos 132:8], por non apartarlos. Troko los kelim i los maasim del rey, ke dize ‘Koaneha yilbeshu sedek, vaħasideha yeranenu’. Kalia ke diga ‘Levieha yilbeshu sedek, velevieha yeranenu’ [Salmos 132:9, 10], porke el sedek i rina era de los Leviiym, i non komo dize sedek a los koanim i rina a los ĥasidim. Disho a el *She[m] Yitba[rah]*: ‘David, no es mi uzansa ansi’. Disho David: ‘*Baavur David avdeha*’ [Salmos 132:10], koza ke yo Te apronti, non demudes de eyo’. Disho a el: ‘Siendo me konvidates, kale ke aga tu voluntad’. I de aki enbezamos *dereh eres*: ken konvida a otro kale ke aga su voluntad, aun ke non uza ansi.”

Even though it is not his custom to eat and drink, because of His love, since He comes to her, He does eat and drink. When a bride enters the nuptial chamber, she wishes to eat. Shouldn’t the groom eat with her, even though it is not his custom? That’s [what the verse is] saying: ‘I have come into my garden, my sister, bride’ – I have come to her, to enter the nuptial chamber with her”.

“We learn from King David, who invited God, Blessed be He, and changed the actions to which God, Blessed be He, was accustomed, and God, Blessed be He, did as he (= David) wished. He invited the King and the Lady, as it says: ‘Arise, o Adonai, to your resting place, You and the Ark of Your Might!’ [Psalms, 132:8] – The King and the Lady, so as not to separate them. He changed the vestments and the practices of the King, as it says: ‘May your priests do righteousness, and may your pious sing of joy’ [Psalms, 132:9, 10]. It [the verse] should have said: ‘May your Levites do righteousness, and may the Levites sing of joy’, because righteousness and the singing of joy belong to the Levites, and not the way it says, righteousness to the priests and singing of joy to the pious. G[od,] Ble[ssed be He], said: ‘David, my custom is not that way’. David replied: ‘For the sake of David Your servant [Psalms, 132:10], the thing that I’ve prepared for You, do not differ from it’. He told him: ‘Since you have invited me, I should do as you wish’.

“Topamos en Yaakov, quando se fue onde Lavan, dize: ‘I tomo de piedras del lugar’ [Bereshit, 28: 11],. siendo ke vino el *hatan* onde la novia, aun ke su uzansa es a durmir en buenas kamas, i eya le aparejo piedras para ke se eche, todo ke resiva kon gusto. Esto es ke dize: ‘*Vayishkav ba-makom a-u*’ [ayi, en kontinuasion] – sovre akeyas piedras, aun ke su uzansa non es ansi. Tambien aki: ‘*Ahalti yaari im divshi*’, aun ke non uza ansi, ma por la kerensia de la novia. I esto en kaza de la novia. En su lugar, ni kome ni beve, en lugar de eya - kome, i esto es: ‘*Bati legani vego[mer]*’. Los malahim vinieron onde Avraam i komieron, aun ke eyos non komen, ni beven.”

Disho a el: “Ribi, por tu vida ke el *She[m] Yitba[rah]* kijo dizir esta koza, i por non agradeserse kon *Ke[neset] Yi[srael]* disho ke digas tu. Beata ti, ke tu Kriador se alava kon ti ariva. Sovre ti dize el pasuk: *šadik moshel be-yirat Eloim*’ [Shemuel II, 23:3].”

And from here we learn common courtesy, a person that invites a guest, the guest needs to do things the host’s way, even if he is not accustomed.”

“[Thus] We find in Jacob, when he went to Lavan, [the verse] says: ‘And he took of the stones of the place’ [Genesis, 28:11]. Since the groom came to the bride, even though his custom is to sleep in good beds, and she prepared stones to lie on – he should accept it with pleasure. This is what [the verse] says: ‘And he lay down in that place’ [ibid.] – on those stones, even though it is not his usual custom. And here also ‘I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey’, even if He is not accustomed, for the sake of the love for the bride. And this is so in the house of the bride [not in other places]. In His own place He neither eats nor drinks, in her place – He eats, and that is [the meaning of the verse] ‘I have come into my garden, my sister, bride’. The angels came to Abraham, and they ate – even though they neither eat nor drink.

He [= Elijah] told him [= R. Shimon]: “Rabbi, by your life, G[od,] Ble[ssed be He], wanted to say this thing – and in order not to take credit for Himself, in the presence of the Assembly of Israel, He consigned it to you. Blessed are you, for your Creator above prides Himself on you. [It is] Of you [that] the verse says: ‘The righteous one rules the awe of God’ [II Sam. 23:3].”

This paragraph is representative of Finci’s anthology as a whole on many levels. First of all, it shows what kind of Zoharic materials Finci chose to translate (the story itself contains practical moral guidance). No less importantly, it also illustrates Finci’s approach to the translation and explanation of the text. For example, since he is not oriented towards theoretical Kabbalah, he does not dwell on complicated kabbalistic concepts such as Matronita. He simply translates this term into Judeo-Spanish as *Senyora* (lady), without devoting even a single sentence to the term in his accompanying commentary. It is interesting to note that in the above-mentioned English translation of the Zohar, Daniel Matt feels a need to explain to his English readers that the words “invited the King and the Lady” actually mean that “King David invited King *Tiferet* and His Queen (or Matronita), Shekhinah, who is symbolised by the Ark” (referring in a note to Zohar I:148a-b, Moshe de Leon, *Sefer ha-Rimon*, 232-233 and Zohar I 36a). By contrast, Finci explains nothing here. His aim is not to educate his readership about theoretical kabbalistic concepts. Rather, he prefers to elaborate on the practical moral instruction already exposed in the story itself, by bringing in illustrative and convincing examples taken from the real life of the Ottoman (Bosnian) Sephardim:

De aki ke preve kuantu kale ser liviano en todo modo de *perat* kuando va en algun lugar *musafir* – o, *afilu*, *seudat mišva*, de non demandar i enfastiyar al *baal a-bayit*. Komo dizir, ay djente ke komen kon *piron* – i akel *baal abayit* non se le topa en su kaza tal koza, i non aparejo en la meza. Ke non sea ke se afishuge a demandar, ke se avirguensa akel *baal abayit*, i van a bushkar por los vizinos, siendo el non se sierve kon esto. *Veken al ze adereh ay* munchas kozas. Komo dizir, ay personas ke kaminan por sivdades, i le dan su *baal abayit* demanda loke non lo tiene ni visto ni oyido por sus kaza, i les dize: “Yo non esto ambezado a estas komidas, yo – mi komida es un poko de poyiko i un poko de *pilafiko*” – i akel *baal abayit* kale ke kite la kara de viruguensa. I kuando le

From here one should prove to oneself to what extent one is supposed to be easy-going in every single detail once one goes someplace as a guest – or even if one is only invited to a single obligatory festive meal that follows the completion of a religious duty. One should never impose on one’s host or harass him. For example, there are people who eat with a fork – but their host doesn’t have such a thing in his house and did not put one on the table. May it not be that one would annoy one’s host by asking, since that would shame the host and make him go and ask his neighbours, since he doesn’t use it. And there are many other things similar to this. For example, there are people who travel from city to city, and ask from their hosts things which they

dan otro *haham*, non kere sentir de la nombradia, kuantu mal kavza akeya persona.

Ma esto mos viene de non meter tino en loke meldamos. Ken non save esto ke los *malahim* non komen, i onde Avraam komieron? Afilu las mujeres ya lo saven esto, i tambien en boka de las kriaturas esta reglado: “En la sivdad ke estas, komo veras – ansi aras.” Ma todo viene ke mos keremos vender por muy delgado – i por esto pasa las palavras de los se[nyores] *hahamim*. El *She[m] Yitba[rah]* ke mos kongrasye de Su gracia para non salir del kamino verdadero! Amen!

haven't seen or heard of throughout their entire lives. And he tells them: “I am not used to this food, my food is a bit of chicken and a bit of pilau rice – and then that host needs to hide his face because of the shame. And when they mention another learned person in front of him, he can't stand hearing about him, how much evil such a person causes.

But all of this happens only because we don't pay attention to what we are reading. Who doesn't know the fact that angels do not eat, but that at Abraham's table they did so. Even women know that, and even in the mouth of children there is a customary expression: “In the city where you are, what you see is what should be done”. But it's all caused by the fact that we want to sell ourselves as very delicate – and because of that one finds oneself transgressing the words of the sages. May G[od,] Ble[ssed be He], give us grace so that we do not leave the right path! Amen!

The original story from the Zohar starts with the question: if there is no eating and drinking in the world to come (and if Song of Songs is to be understood as a metaphor for the relationship between God and the people of Israel), how is it that the Divine groom himself is engaged in eating and drinking? The answer is that God is adjusting Himself to his host. The story proceeds to say that Jacob also adjusted himself to the customs of his host Laban, ending with the example of the angels who visited Abraham, eating from what he offered them (even though they usually do not eat or drink), in order not to cause him shame according to his own cultural codes. Talking actually of snobbism, Finci describes its causes with the following words: “Ma todo viene ke mos keremos vender por muy delgado” (“it all comes because we want to sell ourselves as if we were delicate”).

Finci's example of putting the moral of the story into practice is fully immersed into his reading public's everyday life. In the latter half of the 19th century, Ottoman Jewry in general and Bosnian Jews in particular were exposed to an ongoing Western influence on all aspects of life. While some people were eager to accept Western customs and manners, others clung to their old Ottoman Sephardic ways. Typically for the Sephardic rabbinic elite, Finci is not opposed to innovations as such; rather, he is concerned with their ethical aspect. Western manners should not be used as a means of showing off one's own delicacy while putting others to shame and portraying them as backward and less cultivated. However, Finci does not chastise his public for its misconduct in an accusatory or finger-pointing manner. Rather, he uses the inclusive first person plural: We (all) want to sell ourselves for better than we actually are.

Finci's original and creative morals on stories from the Zohar certainly deserve their own separate study, but I hope that the examples given here suffice to illustrate the claim that Finci – whether as the selector of the texts included in his anthology or as their translator and commentator – is not interested in explaining theoretical kabbalistic terms and concepts (such as the Tree of Life, the *sefirot* or the *parṣufim*). Rather, he reads the Zohar as if it were a work of Mussar, offering practical moral guidance. And by practical moral guidance I mean not only a list of actionable and desired social practices, but also the nurturing of a set of beliefs that lend transcendental meaning and metaphysical context to otherwise theologically irrelevant social niceties.

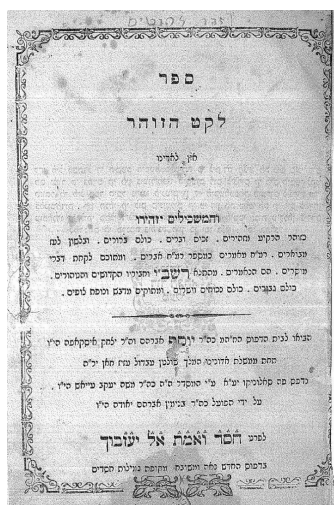


Fig. 6. The front page of the Salonica edition of *Leket a-Zoar*



Fig. 7. The front page of the Izmir edition of *Leket a-Zoar*

## Traditional Ways of Religious Learning in Bosnia: Sephardim versus Muslims

While Finci's methodology of teaching the Zohar to common folk in the vernacular may be similar to the ways in which the same literary corpus was taught in other Jewish communities with their respective vernacular traditions (Judeo-Arabic or Yiddish), there are also striking similarities between Finci's way of teaching the Zohar to Bosnian Sephardic commoners and the methodology used by his Bosnian Muslim counterparts to convey traditional Sufi texts such as Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī's *Mesnevi* to Bosnian Muslim common folk.

Sarajevo, the capital of Finci's Bosnia and Herzegovina, is renowned for its almost uninterrupted tradition of *mesnevihans* (public teachers of the *Mesnevi*) since the establishment of the Mevlevi tekke on Bentbaša in 1462.<sup>26</sup> In a traditional Bosnian Muslim *ders* (oral discourse, compare Hebrew *darush* – “sermon”) on the *Mesnevi*, the *mesnevihan* first reads a passage from the Persian original, then translates it into Bosnian, and lastly elaborates on it in a sermon that makes it relevant to his listeners' everyday moral conduct.

<sup>26</sup> It is hard today to restore a complete list of all the Sarajevo *mesnevihans*. Not all the sheikhs of the Mevlevi tekke on Bentbaša were necessarily *mesnevihans*, and not all Sarajevo *mesnevihans* were necessarily sheikhs or even dervishes of the Mevlevi order – but still, the two coincided most of the time. Here is a list of the sheikhs of the Mevlevi tekke in Sarajevo in the last 400 years: Atik-dede (end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th century), Tevekkuli-dede (first half of the 17th century, a known poet and *mesnevihan*), Sultan Ahmed (before 1662), Abdul Mahmut (before 1662), Sheikh Abdulfetah (died in 1709), Zuko Kablar (died in 1757), Sheikh Starac (died in 1757/58), Sheikh Ataullah (died in 1759/60), Sheikh Sarač Ahmed-eff. (died in 1770, at the age of 110), Mustafa Mlivar (died in 1777), Šeho Čelenger-Bravar (died in 1798/99), Sheikh Salih–dede/Osman-dede (died in 1813/14), Sheikh Lutvullah (died in 1860), Muhamed Sheikh Fikrija Šehović (died in 1879), Sheikh Ruhija (son of Sheikh Fikrija, died in 1923/24). The last Mevlevi sheikh of Sarajevo was not a *mesnevihan*, and in his time Hadži Džemaludin-eff. Čaušević started giving *ders* on the *Mesnevi*, first (from 1911 to 1917) in the Mevlevi tekke and later (1917-1928) in the special *dershana* that Hadži Mujaga Merhemić (he used to sign his verses as Hajri – “the good one”) established in his own home. Hadži Džemaludin-eff. served as *mesnevihan* for 17 years, but due to a bitter disagreement between him and the host of the *ders*, Merhemić, concerning the unveiling of Muslim women, the tradition was interrupted. It was reestablished by the same Hadži Mujaga in 1942. Just like his predecessor, Hadži Mujaga Merhemić served as *mesnevihan* for 17 years, until 1959. Following Hadži Mujaga's death, the tradition was again interrupted for few years. In 1965 it was reestablished by Hadži Fejzulah-eff. Hadžibajrić, the sheikh of the Kadiri order and one of Hadži Mujaga's students. Hadži Fejzulah-eff. served as *mesnevihan* for 23 years, until 1988. Still during his lifetime, he passed the *ders* into the hands of Hadži-Hafiz Halid-eff. Hadžimulić, who learned from both Hadži Mujaga and Hadži Fejzulah-eff. Just like his predecessor, Hadži-Hafiz Halid-eff. served as *mesnevihan* for 23 years, until 2011. Presently this noble tradition is kept alive by Hadži Hafiz-Mehmed Karahodžić, one of Hadži-Hafiz Halid-eff.'s students, who gives a weekly *ders* on the *Mesnevi* in the rebuilt Mevlevi tekke. For more information about each of the last *mesnevihans*, see Gadžo (2013).





Fig. 8. Manuscript of the *Mesnevi* produced by the dervish Muhamed Bošnjak in 1647/48 for the Sarajevo tekke of the Mevlevi order, presently kept in Bošnjakčki Institut – Fondacija Adilbeg Zulfikarpašić

While academic lectures on the *Mesnevi* are more concerned with philological, philosophical and intertextual issues, traditional *mesnevi*hans tend to concentrate on the moral messages, consequences and implications of the text.

On a few different occasions, I had the privilege of listening to a *ders* on the *Mesnevi* from the mouth of the famous Sheikh Fejzulah Hadžibajrić, better known in Sufi circles as Fejzi-Baba, the venerated sheikh of the Hadži Sinan's Tekke of the Kaderi order.<sup>27</sup> Unlike the sheikh, who was well-versed in Persian language and literature, his listeners were simple Bosnian Muslims, usually with no knowledge of Persian language and literature. As a rule, they showed great appreciation for the sheikh, for the text he was rendering accessible to them, as well as for its revered author. However, discussing Rumi's language with them, his possible sources or his philosophical concepts would not only have been futile but also highly inappropriate. Even Hadžibajrić's edition of his Bosnian translation of the *Mesnevi* reflects this orientation towards an easily applicable religious message (Rumi, 2000, 2002), albeit to a much lesser extent than his oral

<sup>27</sup> For the sheikh's intellectual biography, see Beglerović (2014).

*ders*. While the sheikh's reading public might be heterogeneous, belonging to different intellectual traditions, the audience of his oral discourses was composed exclusively of people from traditional circles, with a strong Sufi orientation, who came to the *ders* for moral guidance above all. They took the religious text seriously and were eager to let it improve them. The undeniable artistic beauty of the text was helpful, but it was a vehicle and not the goal. To their minds, the function of the text was to help them become better people or, more precisely, better practitioners of Islamic ethics.

Tragically, the Holocaust of the Bosnian Jews following the German attack on Yugoslavia and the Croatian occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina totally obliterated all the traditional ways of learning of the Zohar in this country. However, while reading Finci's translations of excerpts from the Zohar, pictures from my personal experiences in the traditional Bosnian Muslim *derses* on the *Mesnevi* continually came to my mind. The methodology of Finci's sermons on the Zohar is the same as that applied by Hadžibajrić in his *derses* – an approach he described in the following terms in his introduction to the first volume of his translation of the *Mesnevi*:

These lectures were a tradition of Sarajevo, and their structure looked like this: reading of the original text, i.e. of the verses, according to the rules of metrics, their oral translation, elaboration of harder passages and Sufi concepts. (Rumi, 2000, p. 13)

However, Haddžibajrić's own printed edition of the *Mesnevi* skips through the Persian original without presenting it in its original Arabic alphabet or in Latin transliteration. Rather, only Haddžibajrić's own translation of the original text is presented, followed by his explanations, elaborations and remarks. The author testifies that the printed edition of the translation evolved from the oral discourses:

The first discourse was given in my home, on 15 September 1966. Abdulah Fočak taped my translation and the *ders* from the *Mesnevi*. Later, he would type them on a typewriter. ... Oral translation is not the same as written. During oral translation, the translator is also led by his listeners and their level of education. The *Mesnevi* is one of the most important and voluminous works of Sufi thought and ethics. It is abundant with allegories, and this makes literal translation even harder. I paid special attention to the allegoric aspect, since this is the finesse of the *tasawuf*. ... The [series of oral discourses on the] first volume of the *Mesnevi* was completed on 21 April 1971. Abdulah Fočak typed all our *derses*, and it was then that I could dedicate myself to the separation of the text [of the translation] and the remarks. ... During the oral discourses, it was much easier to give comments during the translation itself, so this later separation was a complicated issue. (Rumi, 2000, pp. 14–15)

Similarly, Finci's own published discourses on the Zohar were probably originally delivered orally. During these oral discourses, the passages from the Zohar were apparently first read in their original Aramaic. Just as Hadžibajrić's Bosnian Muslim audience had a passive knowledge of Arabic as the language of their devotion and liturgy, while their command of Persian (the language of the *Mesnevi*) was basically non-existent, so Finci's Bosnian Sephardic public had a passive knowledge of Hebrew as their devotional and liturgical tongue, while their command of Aramaic was basically non-existent.

The reading of the text in the original mystical, revered but inaccessible language adds an aura of authenticity to the event and an aura of authority to the docent. Rather than being replaced by the translation, as in both printed editions, in the oral discourse the text in the original language is dominant. The process of learning and internalisation of the sacred text is not founded on the hypertext (the translation), but on the hypotext itself (the original Aramaic or Persian text). In the setting of a traditional oral discourse, the translation does not supplant the original text, but appears as a mere learning tool. The original text is a given, a constant waiting for the faithful to approach it with the assistance of a traditional mediator. The translation, on the other hand, is not a given; it develops spontaneously on the spot, is mixed with reflection on the insights and morals of the hypotext, and has the modest aura of the ephemeral.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> As an illustration of this tendency to keep the original sacred language in the oral discourse, but to skip it in the published transcription of the *ders*, compare the audio registration of one *ders* by Hadži Hafiz Mehmed Karahodžić (Feyzipaša, 2017) to his own transcription of another such *ders* (Karahodžić, 2013). Sometimes, when publishing transcriptions of their *derses*, some *mesnevi*hans do leave some of the original Persian verses in the discourse, probably in order to give it an aura of authenticity. However, this "sprinkling" of the discourse with some Persian verses is far from consistent as a methodology, as that would have to contain all the discussed verses in the original Persian script and/or their Latin transliteration, followed by a translation and elaboration. For an example of a transcription of a *ders* sprinkled with some Persian verses (only in the original Arabic script), see Hadžimulić (2013b). Until now I have only seen a published transcript of an oral Bosnian *ders* on the *Mesnevi* that contains Latin transcription of all the Persian verses elaborated in a discourse. Interestingly, these were notes taken by Hadži Hafiz Halid-eff. Hadžimulić (who would later become a *mesnevi*han himself) during one of the *derses* of his teacher and predecessor (as *mesnevi*han), Sheikh Hadžibajrić. It was published after Hadžimulić's death, by his students (Hadžimulić, 2013a). At the same time, a published transcript of a *ders* which elaborates on the Arabic introduction to the third volume of the *Mesnevi* does contain a Latin transcription of the Arabic text, probably because Arabic, as already stated, was much more accessible to the lay audience of the oral discourse as well as to the eventual readers of its published edition; see Hadžimulić (2013c). Interestingly, Hadžimulić also attended the *derses* of Hadžibajrić's teacher and predecessor, Hadži-Mujaga Merhemić, and took notes. Thus, Hadžimulić's transcript of one of Merhemić's *ders* was published by Hadžimulić's students (Merhemić, 2013). It seems that Hadžimulić's Persian was still not good enough to provide the transcription of the Persian verses elaborated by Merhemić, as he would do much later when taking notes on Hadžibajrić's *ders* (see above).

In both printed texts, Finci's edition of selected texts from the Zohar and Hadžibajrić's edition of the first two volumes (out of six) of the *Mesnevi*, the translation had to be disentangled from the insights, morals and elaborations. Interestingly, however, while Hadžibajrić himself testifies to the oral original of his translation and comments on it, in Finci's case, due to the lack of any disclosure of the methodology in the introduction, the originally oral character of the translation and the associated *derushim* must be deduced from the traces of orality preserved in the published text. The author's language is that of an oral discourse rather than of scientific speculation. Moreover, too many of Finci's excerpts are followed by a supplication related to the moral of the story (and a concluding "Amen"). This kind of interpolation would be quite unusual for the written Mussar literature or *Me'am Lo'ez*. However, in the context of an oral *darush* it is not only expected, but more of a requirement. As a rule, traditional Sephardic *darush* (just like a *khutbah* in a mosque or a *ders* in a tekke) concludes with the *darshan's* supplication for Divine help and guidance, for himself and his audience (hence the first person plural), so that they might be able to apply in practice the moral teachings of the canonical text that were touched upon in the *darush*. Even *derushim* which have a more theoretical or intellectual angle conclude with a supplication, but traditionally these supplications usually demand rapid redemption, the appearance of the Messiah or the restoration of the Temple service. While the latter supplications are usually short, being single-sentence formulas followed by a single "Amen" shouted loudly by the audience, the supplications asking for personal and collective guidance tend to be longer, and the audience interrupts the supplicant with loud "Amens" at the end of each unit.

Out of the 246 excerpts from the Zohar in Finci's anthology, 124 are followed by supplications related to the moral of the excerpt. While it is totally safe to say that supplications are much more typical of the paragraphs which contain a *darush* (which, one could argue, "invites" a supplication for Divine guidance in the application of the moral of the story) than of excerpts which include only the translation of the excerpt, the "supplication/no supplication" axis is not compatible with the "*darush/no darush*" axis. Out of the anthology's 246 paragraphs, 121 include *derushim* and 125 do not. Out of 121 paragraphs which contain a *darush*, 117 contain supplications. However, there are also four instances (paragraphs 120, 124, 125 and 129)<sup>29</sup> in which the *darush* concludes without a supplication.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> As mentioned earlier, the paragraphs in all three editions are misnumbered. The numeration used here does not follow the numeration of any of the editions, but rather the actual order of paragraphs, which is the same in all three anthologies.

<sup>30</sup> There are also three occasions (paragraphs 97, 181 and 216) in which a single excerpt from the

Out of 125 paragraphs which do not contain a *darush*, only seven paragraphs (153, 171, 172, 177, 185, 187 and 225) contain supplications.<sup>31</sup> Out of the remaining 118 paragraphs which contain no supplications, 77 conclude with a technical Hebrew abbreviation that indicates the end of a quotation: ‘a[d] ka[n] (u[ntil] he[re]),<sup>32</sup> while 41 do not contain such an indication. Not surprisingly, the overwhelming majority of supplications (119 out of 124), regardless of whether they appear immediately after the excerpt (7) or only after the *darush* (117), conclude with “Amen”. Most of them (97) conclude with a simple “Amen”,<sup>33</sup> but more elaborate formulas appear in some, such as: “Amen, ken yehi raṣon” (“Amen, may it be God’s will”, six supplications, paragraphs 6, 7, 8, 64, 174 and 200); “Ken yehi raṣon, Amen” (“May it be God’s will, Amen”, 10 supplications, paragraphs 31, 82, 117, 153, 185, 187, 225 and 232) or “Bimehera veyamenu, Amen!” (“Fast, in our own days, Amen”, four supplications, paragraphs 56, 136, 221 and 237).<sup>34</sup>

It should be noted that, unlike in various Christian denominational traditions, in which individual supplications may also end with an “Amen” uttered by the praying individual themselves, in the various ethno-confessions that ascribe to Rabbinical Judaism, this traditional formula of declaration of affirmation usually represents the response of the congregation or participants in the liturgical or para-liturgical utterances recited by the cantor or prayer-leader (in the case of communal worship), the rabbi or *darshan* (in the case of supplications ending public discourses and sermons), the head of the family (in grace after meals, Kiddush and Havdalah, and other home-based para-liturgical services), or the ordinary fellow Jew (on hearing another utter a formal blessing over food or some other situation). The appearance of such a large number of supplications at the end of Finci’s *derushim* (and/or his translations from the Zohar), all of them composed in the first person plural, strongly indicates that they were originally delivered in an oral setting such as public discourse. The fact that most of the prayers are accompanied by what in traditional Rabbinical Judaism constitutes a

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Zohar is followed by two *derushim*, and each of them ends with a separate supplication. All six of these supplications are sealed with “Amen”.

<sup>31</sup> In four of these seven paragraphs (153, 185, 187 and 225) the supplication is followed by the expression “Ken yehi raṣon, Amen”, while in the three remaining paragraphs (171, 172 and 177) the supplication does not contain any traditional formula of declaration of affirmation.

<sup>32</sup> As a rule, paragraphs which end with this technical mark do not contain any supplications.

<sup>33</sup> Only on five occasions (paragraphs 60, 102, 115, 156 and 208), the translation of the excerpt from the Zohar is followed by a *darush*, sealed with a supplication which does not end with any traditional formula of declaration of affirmation.

<sup>34</sup> There is a single occurrence of a *darush* (paragraph 13) which concludes with a supplication sealed with the words “Neṣaḥ! Selah! Va’ed!”, a formula of declaration of affirmation more typical of Judeo-Spanish magical incantations than of Sephardic liturgy, Hebrew or Judeo-Spanish.

public response to the supplication or prayer, further strengthens the case for the original oral character of the material presented in Finci's anthology. As already stated, this feature is typical of public oral discourses.

Interestingly, although all of Hadžibajrić's oral discourses that I have attended in person ended with such a *dovah* (prayer), he chose not to include this in his printed edition of the *Mesnevi*. Finci, on the other hand, preferred to preserve the traditional supplications at the end of his *derushim* in their printed version.

For an illustration of Finci's supplications, I present three of them: the supplication that concludes paragraph 241 (misnumbered in the anthology as 243), discussed above, and the supplications which appear in paragraphs 199 (misnumbered in the anthology as 201) and 123, discussed below:

241	Ma todo viene ke mos keremos vender por muy delgado – i por esto pasa las palavras de los se[nyores] <i>ḥahamim</i> . El <i>She[m] Yitba[rah]</i> ke mos kongrasye de Su gracia para non salir del kamino verdadero! Amen!	But it's all caused by the fact that we want to sell ourselves as very delicate – and because of that one finds oneself transgressing the words of the sages. May G[od,] Ble[ssed be He], give us grace so that we do not leave the right path! Amen!
199	Se veyi ke <i>grosh</i> non yeva a Yerushalayim, otro ke <i>zehut</i> . El <i>She[m] Yitba[rah]</i> ke mos mereska a mereser i gozar en eya, kon <i>mišvot</i> i <i>maa[sim] t[ovim]</i> .	It shows that it's not money that brings one to Jerusalem, but rather merit. May G[od,] Ble[ssed be He,] give us the privilege of deserving to enjoy it (=Land of Israel), observing in it the Divine commandments and doing good deeds.
123	I el Djidyó, ke se quadro a non komer, eskapo a su alma. El <i>She[m] Yitba[rah]</i> ke mos mantenga en el Djudezmo! Amen!	And the Jew, who kept himself from eating [non-kasher food], saved his soul. May G[od,] Ble[ssed be He], keep us in Judaism! Amen!

It should be noted, however, that the supplications in Finci's published anthology do not necessarily totally faithfully reproduce the oral supplications which follow an oral *darush* with moral/practical focus in a traditional Sephardic community. As stated previously, this type of supplication usually consists of a series of petitions specified by the *darshan*/supplicant, each of which is followed by a loud "Amen" from the public. The single-sentence supplications in Finci's anthology, followed by a single "Amen", are more like the one-phrase traditional formulas which follow more theoretically oriented *derushim*, or short *derashot* delivered by non-



professionals during festive meals or on similar semi-liturgical occasions. It seems that in the process of preparation of the text for print, Finci chose to reduce these prayers to a single sentence only.

### Beyond Shared Methodology: Common Concepts and Beliefs

The similarity between the Bosnian Sephardic and Bosnian Muslim traditions of learning religious texts is not limited to methodology. These texts often also disclose shared concepts and practices, or ideas and beliefs related to them. For example, Muslim, Sephardi and Orthodox Christian Bosnians all used to undertake demanding pilgrimages to their respective Holy Lands: Muslims to Mecca, naturally, and Jews and Orthodox Christians to the Land of Israel. For this pilgrimage, all three communities used the Arabic word *hajj* (itself a derivation of the Hebrew word *hag* – “pilgrimage festival”). All three communities used to honour the people who completed the pilgrimage with the title *hajji* (in Ladino and in Serbian, often pronounced without the initial *h*) added to their personal names, or sometimes to their family names. Occasionally in Bosnian Jewish tradition, and often in Bosnian Muslim tradition, this journey would be a miraculous instant one, as “witnessed” by Finci in paragraph 199 (misnumbered in the anthology as 201):

De aki ke perkure el onbre kon toda su fuerza i poder a prekurar de suvir a morar en *Ereş Yisrael* i azer su morada ayi. Kunto bueno su parte de akel ke es morador de akeas tieras, i komo mete mientes el onbre de morar ayi, el Dio ya le ayuda. Aun ke dizen la djente: “Yo, komo ago *mişvot* i *maa[sim] t[ovim]*, i en mi sivdad es *Ereş Yisrael*,” esto non es sevara, porke i ayi puede azer *mişvot* i *maa[sim] t[ovim]*, ke el lugar lo rekere. Basta tener zehut por ir ayi, ke se kere zehut grande. I non komo dizen la djente ke se kere *groshes*, todo es fantazia, ke el *grosh* non aze nada.

From here [it should be learned] that one should strive with all one’s strength to make it possible for oneself to ascend to live in the Land of Israel and make it one’s dwelling. How good is the destiny of the one who is an inhabitant of those lands, and as soon as a person sets his mind to go and dwell there, God helps him immediately. Even though people are saying: “Since I am observing the [Divine] commandments and doing good [deeds], being in my city is just like being in the Land of Israel”, that’s not a [commendable] thought, because he can follow the [Divine] commandments and do good [deeds] there also, since that place encourages it. It would be enough just to have the

Yo me akodro kuando era kriatura, *mala-mata* el anyo de [5]573 (= 1813), Rosh ḥodesh Tamuz, se fue mi senyor papu, Ḥa[ham] Josef Finci *a[lav] a[shalom] leir akodesh Yerushalayim, ti[bane] ve[timale] vi[meera] ve[yamenu]*. Akel zeman avia un ani ke lo yamavan Ḥa[m] Ri[bi] Shemuel. Era melamed, i vinia kada diya al *kal kadosh* por kantar las *bakashot* del Rav Nadjar *zi[hrono] li[vraha]*. I era onbre *meduke beyisurin*, i me parese ke era korto de vista. En mez de Elul *aniz[kar]*, despues ke se fueron los *adjis* de Bosna, disho el ke se va a ir a la kešira al kazal. Se tomo la talega de *teflin*, i se desparesio. Despues de Ḥanuka, ke vino arivada de los *adjis* ke partieron Tamuz, eskrive mi se[nyor] papu, *a[lav] a[shalom]*: “Vos dire, mi ijo, ke vinimos a kavos de Elul, i mos salio Ḥa[m] Ri[bi] Shemuel *aniz[kar]* a karshe.” Komo fue este Djidyó, i por onde se fue, non se supo. Se veyi ke grosh non yeva a Yerushalayim, otro ke *zehut*. El *She[m] Yitba[rah]* ke mos mereska a mereser i gozar en eya, kon *mişvot* i *maa[sim] t[ovim]*.

merit of being able to go there, and great merit is needed for that. And it's not like the people say, that you need money, it's all fantasy, since money doesn't do a thing.

I remember when I was a child, more or less in the year [5]573 (= 1813), at the beginning of the month of Tamuz, my grandfather, Ḥ[am] Josef Finci, pea[ce be upon] hi[m], to the Ho[ly] Ci[ty] of Jerusalem, [may it be] bu[ilt] and fi[lled with people] fa[st] and [in our own days]. At that time there was a poor man by the name of Ḥa[m] Ri[bi] Shemuel. He was a teacher in Jewish school, and he used to come every day to the Holy Synagogue in order to sing the religious poems of Rabbi Yisrael Nadjara, [may his] me[mory be a] bl[essing], [before regular prayers]. And he was smitten by all kind of Heaven-sent afflictions, and it seems to me that he was also short-sighted. In the mentioned month of Elul, after the hajjis from Bosnia had already left, he said he was going to a village for harvest. He took his phylacteries bag, and he left. After Hannukah, with the arrival of the hajjis who left in Tamuz, my Master and Grandfather, pea[ce be] u[pon him], writes: “Let me tell you, my son, that as we reached the end of Elul, the mentioned Ḥa[m] Ri[bi] Shemuel just popped up in front of us”. How that Jew got there, and via where, is not known yet. It shows that it's not money that brings one to Jerusalem, but rather merit. May G[od,] Ble[ssed be He,] give us the privilege of deserving to enjoy it (=Land of Israel), observing in it the Divine commandments and doing good deeds.

Finci's story, brought in the form of the testimony of his eminent grandfather, is meant to prove that it is not money that brings one to Eres Yisrael, but rather *zekhut*, one's metaphysical merits. Some people have money but never make it to the Holy Land and Holy City. At the same time, those who have *zekhut*, even if they live poor lives in the places where they are, can make it to the Land of Israel by way of Divine intervention. In those times, the *hajj* from Bosnia to the Land of Israel took approximately six months. It took the *hajjis* almost three months to get to the destination. They left Bosnia in the Hebrew month of Tamuz (which corresponds to the Gregorian June/July), arriving in Israel by the end of the Hebrew month of Elul (which corresponds to the Gregorian August/September). Obviously, they spent the holidays of the Hebrew month of Tishri (which corresponds to the Gregorian September/October) in the Holy Land, travelling back home for another three months, arriving in Bosnia already after Hanukkah, a Jewish holiday which ends in Tevet (December/January).

However, Ḥam Ribī Shemuel left Bosnia in Elul, arriving at the final destination of the Bosnian Jewish *hajjis* before they did. The author's grandfather had to travel back for almost three months, and it was then that he wrote his reminiscence. However, Ḥam Ribī Shemuel was probably taken back to Bosnia in the blink of an eye, the same way he arrived in the Land of Israel, by a Divine miracle.

This motif of a "magical journey" of an *evlija* (friend of God)<sup>35</sup> or *dobri* (good person) to the Holy Land, Holy City and Holy Sanctuary is one of the central motifs of the folklore of Finci's Muslim compatriots. In Bosnian Muslim tradition, many a time the *evlijas* are hidden righteous people who do not belong to the religious establishment, but have attained a high position in the Divine eyes. This high metaphysical level is not attained through ordinary actions such as regular prayers, fasts and charity, but rather through some extraordinary achievement in the *great jihad*, as it is described in Sufi tradition, the permanent war with one's own ego. One of the most famous cases in Sarajevo oral tradition is the case of Merdžan-kaduna:

Muž joj je bio veliki pijanica, te ju je uvijek tukao. Ona je to stojički podnosila i šta više štap kojim ju je muž tukao omotavala je mekom krpom da on ne bi ruku našuljio. Radi toga joj

Her husband was a great drunkard, so he always used to beat her. She endured it stoically, and she would even wrap the stick with which the husband beat her with soft cloth so that he wouldn't

<sup>35</sup> The Bosnian term *evlija* developed from the plural (ʿawliyā ʾأولياء) of the Arabic noun *walī* (ولي), usually used by Muslims to indicate an Islamic saint. For a detailed description and analysis of the phenomena, see Renard (2008, 2009).

<p>je Bog podario, da bude evlija. (Pričaju da žena može postati evlija za 40 dana, a muškarac ne može ni za 40 godina!!) (Smailbegović, 1991, p. 157)</p>	<p>blister his palm. Because of that God gave her to be an <i>evliya</i>. (They say that a woman can become an <i>evliya</i> in 40 days, and a man not even in 40 years).</p>
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This oral tradition does not perceive Merdžan-kaduna as a masochist who enjoys her husband's violence. Her husband is not even central to the story. It is all between Merdžan-kaduna and God. She subjugates herself to her husband because she believes that it is God's will. Even if her husband breaks the law of Islam by drinking alcohol, she does not rebel against him by claiming that he is not entitled to use the prerogatives of a husband, as set down in the traditional patriarchal Sunni Ḥanafī Ottoman interpretation of Islam, against her. She submits to him, as a way of submitting to God's will. Her total submission is reflected in the fact that she wraps that part of the stick which is in his hand in a soft cloth, so that he does not hurt himself while hurting her, and not the part of the stick that hurts her. Her husband is not impressed. He is probably too drunk to even pay attention. However, there is someone who is impressed: the Almighty God himself. Once the *dobri* or *dobra* annuls his or her will in order to subjugate themselves to God and his laws, God annuls the laws of nature for such a person, to show them his love and appreciation:

<p>Merdžan-kaduna. Ona je ukopana na Ravnim bakijama. I za nju su pričali da je bila onako vrlo poštena žena, čestita žena. Stanovala je na Gorici i pričale biše hadžije da su je vidale, u isto vrijeme kad su je vidale ovdje u Sarajevu, da su je vidali u Mekki.</p> <p>Jedan hadžija je, sad se neću sjetiti tačno kako mu je ime bilo, negdi je stanovao oko Bistrika, kako li. To sam slušao i od hadži Mujage, rahmetli, Merjemića.</p> <p>Otišo na hadž, i kako je prije bilo onih razbojnika, ovi, išlo se na devama pa</p>	<p>Merdžan-kaduna. She is buried at Ravne Bakije. It is said about her that she was an upright woman, an honourable woman. She lived at Gorica, and the <i>hajjis</i> would say how they saw her at the same time that she was seen (by others) in Sarajevo, they'd see her in Mecca.</p> <p>One such <i>hajji</i>, I can't remember now what his name was, he used to live someplace near Bistrik, something like that. I've heard this also from Hajji Mujaga Merjemić.</p> <p>[So that guy] Went to hajj, and before there used to be those robbers, you</p>
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biše razbojnici zastavljali one karavane i opljačkali. I opljačkan je bio i on. Osto bez novaca. Poslije, nit mu je ko stio pozajmit da se vrati, niti je imo, more bit da nisu imali. Samo, tražio je od koga da vrati se. Nije imo, osto iza njija. I kad su ove hadžije krenule, nije se, prije se išlo po nekoliko mjeseci. Kako su hadžije išle, on je osto iza njija i da je jedno jutro klanjo sabah u harem-Šerifu i vidio jednu ženu u bosanskoj odjeći, u feredži i u onome. I kad je ova žena, pristupio je njojzi i upito je. Govorila je bosanski, bosanskim jezikom, nije govorila arapski. Onda reko joj: “Pobogu, sestro, da mi pomogneš.”

I kako ga je ona dovela u Sarajevo. Kad je došo u Sarajevo, počeli su vikati – pa nije on ni bio na hadžu, jer mu nije niko vjerovao da je mogao tako brzo doć.

know, they’d go on camels, and the robbers would stop the caravans and rob them. He was also robbed. He was left without money. Later, nobody wanted to give him a loan, he had none, maybe the other [Bosnian *hajjis*] didn’t have any either. He was only looking to get some money from someone, to return. He didn’t find any, and he stayed on. When these *hajjis* left, and before they used to travel [back] for a few months. So the *hajjis* left, and he stayed on, and one day as he was saying the morning prayer in the Noble Sanctuary, he saw a woman in Bosnian clothes, in *ferejje* and everything. When that woman... he approached her, and he asked her. She spoke Bosnian, in the Bosnian language, she did not speak Arabic. So he told her: “Sister by God, would you help me”?

[And I also heard] How she brought him to Sarajevo. When he came to Sarajevo, they started saying “he didn’t even go to hajj” because nobody believed him that he could have returned so fast.

Similarly to Merdžan-kaduna, the hero of a Bosnian Sephardi hagiographical anecdote brought by Finci, a teacher in a local Jewish school smitten by all kind of Heaven-sent afflictions and short-sighted, strikes me as quite a marginal personality. However, while the representative of the religious establishment, the learned and honoured Ḥam Ribī Josef Finci the elder, needs to travel six months to earn the title of a *hajji*, the marginal *šadiq* is brought there in the blink of an eye, by direct Divine intervention. The most interesting part of this is that it is not an anti-establishment story developed and recounted in the social margins, but rather a story written down twice by the rabbinical elite, the first time being by Ḥam Josef, in a private letter to his grandson Ḥam Avram, to be included by the latter in his commentaries on the Zoharic stories.

One of the main principles of this “love affair” between God and his friends is that it is private and intimate, and it is supposed to stay so. Consequently, both sides try to keep it from the public eye, and God’s friends usually urge the people whom they help, and who become aware of their *keramets*, not to share this information with others:

<p>On nije htio ni raspravljat. Ali ga je ona zamolila da ne kazuje taj slučaj kako ga je ona dovela. I kad je ovaj, on je poslije dolazio njoj kao sestri svojoj i ona njemu, al' da je ona vrlo s mužem živjela u lošem. I kad je umrla, da je on nosio na groblje, nije dao drugom svijetu da nosi, nego reko: “Ja ću nju nosit. E, to je ona žena koja je mene vratila.”</p>	<p>He didn't want to discuss it. She asked him not to tell [anyone] that it was she who had provided for him. And later, you know, he used to visit her, like his own sister, and she'd visit him, but she had a bad time with her husband. When she died, [I heard that] he took her to the cemetery, he wouldn't let others carry her, rather he said: “I'll carry her, she is the woman who brought me back.”</p>
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Similarly, the hero of Finci's Jewish story of a miraculous *hajj* tried to obscure his future miraculous journey by telling everyone that “he was going to a village for a harvest.”

The motif of a miraculous journey, of course, is not unknown in pre-Islamic Jewish literature. *Talmud Yerushalmi* (Tractate *Ma'aser Sheni*, V: 2), for example, tells the story of an Israeli shepherd who, following his ox, found himself miraculously transferred to Babylon. The text connects the phenomena to biblical verse in Lamentations 3:9, which reads: *קָרַךְ עֲנָהּ תִּי נְתִיב תִּי עָנָה*, *דְּרָכַי בְּגָזִית*, (“He hath enclosed my ways with hewn stone, he hath made my paths crooked”). Thus, the phenomenon can be seen as *ivut ha-nativ* (curving the path), and is not necessarily a positive one. Rather than being a miracle performed on behalf of a worthy person, it is a kind of Divine sabotage.

The Babylonian Talmud (Sanhedrin 95), however, mentions *Qefisat ha-ares* (jumping of the Earth, i.e. shortening of the way) as an obvious Divine alteration of the natural order of things, which took place only three times in the entire Bible: once with Avraham's servant Elie'ezer (while he was on the sacred mission of bringing a wife for his master's son), another time in the case of the patriarch Ya'aqov and, the third and last time, in the case of Avishay ben Seruya, when reaching out to his uncle, King David, to save him from the revenge of Ishbi-benob, Goliath's brother:

Now that day was Sabbath Eve, and Abishai the son of Zeruiah, washing his head in four gribahs of water, remarked some bloodstains [therein]. Others say a dove came



and beat [its wings] before him. Thereupon he reasoned: Israel is likened to a dove, as it is written, ye are as the wings of a dove covered with silver [Ps. LXVIII, 14]; this must be an intimation that David is in trouble. So he went to his house, but did not find him. Now, said he, we learnt, one may not ride upon his [sc. a king's] horse, nor sit upon his seat, nor use his sceptre: but how is it in a time of danger? So he went and propounded the question in the schoolhouse, and was answered, "In time of danger, it is permitted". He then mounted his [sc. David's] mule and rode off, and the earth contracted under him. ...

Our Rabbis taught: For three did the earth shrink: Eliezer, Abraham's servant, our father Jacob, and Abishai the son of Zeruiah.

Abishai the son of Zeruiah, as has just been narrated.

Eliezer, Abraham's servant, as it is written, And I came this day unto the well [Gen. XXIV, 42], implying that he had set out on that day.

Our father Jacob, as it is written, And Jacob went out from Beer-sheba, and went to Haran [Gen. XXVIII, 10]; which is followed by and he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set [Ibid, 11]. For when he reached Haran, he said [to himself], "Shall I have passed through a place in which my fathers prayed, without doing so likewise!" He wished therefore to return, but no sooner had he thought of this than the earth contracted, and immediately he lighted upon the place. [the objective of his journey]

It seems that the Talmudic interpretation of the three biblical accounts is anthropocentric. The Earth jumps in a miraculous way on behalf of three extraordinary people: on behalf of Abraham (to make it possible for Eliezer to fulfil his master's will), on behalf of Jacob (absolving him of the need to return to a holy place and pray there before his long journey to Haran) and on behalf of David (to make it possible for his nephew, Abishai, to come in time to save him). The direction of the journey seems to be less crucial.

Bosnian Muslim saints are also known to undertake mystical journeys to places other than Mecca. However, the dominant motif is that of the mystical journey to the Noble Sanctuary. Finci's story reflects both these traditions, the older rabbinical one as well as the younger, local (Bosnian) Islamic tradition. Not only is Ḥam Ribī Shemuel's journey hajj-centric (the aim of the miraculous journey and its witnesses being exactly the same as in local Muslim traditions), but the very hero of the story resembles the marginal heroes of Bosnian Muslim hagiography more than the very central biblical heroes of rabbinic culture.

## What Did the Bosnian Sephardic Rabbinical Elite Know of Exclusively Muslim Concepts and Practices?

Before concepts, practices or beliefs become shared and common, there must exist a high level of information among the minority group regarding the majority culture (or knowledge among different minority cultures). Accordingly, the question of the level of information possessed by Bosnian Sephardim and their rabbinical leaders concerning the beliefs and practices of their Muslim neighbours becomes crucial.

Fortunately, the moral of paragraph 123 powerfully exposes the high degree to which Finci was familiar with Islamic practices:

Kontare un paso ke tengo oyido komo viene a eskapar de la muerte el non enkonar la boka. Savras ke en Anadol avia un lugar ke se azia una feriya. I akel kamino era muy perso en keunto de ladrones. Una vez se fueron de una sivdad para akeyas feriyas tantos goyim. Bihlal avia un Djidyó kon eyos. Le disheron los goyim al Djidyó: “Si keresh vinir kon mozotros, kale ke te trokes el vestido, ke non te konoskan ke sos Djidyó,” ke el Djidyó siempre somos afamados. I akel Djidyó se troko el vestido, ke ninguno lo konosia por Djidyó. Al diya tresero se salieron de sus kazas. Vinieron en el lugar ke dishimos de ladrones. Avia ayi un han, se echaron ayi, i a la manyana, a las 10 del diya, disheron: “Mos echaremos aki, ke non ay otro lugar onde a pozar.” Pasando una ora ke abasharon, se desho de vinir un djandar kon un koreo diziendo al handji ke aparejen un lugar, ke viene un dayan kon su djente, ke se va a ir para tal lugar, ke lo mando el rey.

I'll tell you [about] one happening how not defiling one's mouth can save one from death. You know how in Anatolia there was a place where they used to have a fair. And that road was very dangerous on account of robbers. One time many gentiles from a certain city went to that fair. Among them there was one Jew. The gentiles told the Jew: “If you want to come with us, you need to change your clothes, so that you would not be recognised as a Jew”. Because we, the Jews, are always known. And that Jew changed his clothes so that no one could tell he was Jewish. On the third day they left their homes. They arrived at the place of the robbers that we have mentioned. There was an inn there, and they slept in it, and in the morning, at ten o'clock they said: “Let's stay to sleep here [additional nights], as there is no other place to stay”. One hour after they came down [from their rooms to the main hall of the inn], a gendarme made an entrance with some post, telling the owner of the inn to prepare a place because a judge was coming with his people, on his way to such and

I luego el handji aparejo una uda del han. Paso un poko, vino un dayan kon sus djandares. Komo la regla vieja, se asento a englena kon akea djente merkaderes ke avia en el han. I de vez en kuinto sospirava. Le demandaron los merkaderes: “De ke sospira el se[nyor]?” Les disho: “Savresh ke ay 2 diyas ke sali de la sivdad i deshi a la se[nyora] mal enkamada! Non se ke avria. Keria tener un haber.”

Pasando un poko de ke estavan engleneando, vino un djandar otro i demando al handji: “Esta aki tal dayan?” Le respondio: “Si”! Entro en el han. Le demando: “Ke ay, ke no ay en la sivdad?” Le disho: “Todo bien”! Le demando: “Ke tal esta la se[nyora]?” Le disho: “El se[nyor] ke biva”!

Presto se alevanto el dayan i tomo abdes, i le kildeo el namas, komo sus uzansas. Denpues ke eskapo le disho al handji ke trayga miel i manteka, ke aga una halva por alma de la nifgeret. Ansi fue! Izo una halva, les trusho en la uda ke eran los viajantes, para ke koman djan-ichi.

Se arodearon todos, i el Djidy kon eyos. Eyos komian de la halva, el Djidy tomava el pan, azia ke metia la mano en el plato, a tomar halva, i komia solo el pan. Eskapando de komer, izieron la dova, komo sus uzansas, tomaron los chibukes, i el Djidy se fue a su lugar, i eyos, a uno, a uno, se fueron

such a place, where he had been sent by the king.

So the owner of the inn prepared a room at the inn. A little later, a judge came with his gendarmes. According to old custom, he sat down to converse with the merchants who were in the inn. From time to time, the judge would sigh. The merchants asked him: “Why is the ma[ster] sighing?” He told them: “You know, it’s two days since I left the city, and I left my la[dy wife] sick in bed. I don’t know what’s going on. I wish I had some news [about her]”.

Some time after their conversation, a gendarme came in and asked the owner of the inn: “Is judge so and so here”? He answered him: “Yes”! He entered the inn. He (= the judge) asked him: “What’s going on in the city”? He told him: “Everything is good”! He asked him: “How is my la[dy wife] doing”? He told him: “May the ma[ster] live”!

Immediately, the judge stood up, made ritual ablution before the prayer and made a funeral prayer for her, according to their customs. After he finished, he told the owner of the inn to bring some honey and butter and to make some halva for the soul of the deceased. So it was! He made some halva, and he brought it to the hall where the travellers were seated, so that they could eat it for her soul.

They all sat [on the ground] in a circle [around the table], and the Jew with them. They ate the halva, but the Jew would take bread, would make a gesture as if he was taking halva from the [common] plate, but he would eat bread only. When they finished eating,

durmiendo. El Djidy se sekleo de ver ke se van durmiendo, se salio a la puerta del han, de la vanda de afuera. Vido ke yamo el dayan a uno de sus djandares i le avlo. Vino akel a lado de akeyos i vido ke ya se durmieron. Le dio haber al dayan. Vino el kon la djente, i los enpesaron a deznudar. El Djidy ke era afuera, vido ke esta aziendo, se fuyo para un lugar poko leshos del han, i vido ke los kitaron a todos afuera, i los izieron pedasos, i los echaron en un pozo ke avia ayi.

A la manyana fue el Djidy a la sivdad i konto todo el paso a el pasha. I mando el pasha djente en molde de merkaderes, i les enkomendo ke non koman la halva. I por detras mando mas djente, por ver si ara ansi, ke lo apanyen bivo. I ansi fue, ke izo komo kontimos, i lo apanyaron bivo, i lo trusheron onde el mishne. Le pregunto por el echo, i le konto komo ay tantos anyos ke estava aziendo ansi, i les echava gueso de muerto majado dentro de la halva, i los adormesia a todos, i non sentian nada. I el Djidy, ke se guadro a non komer, eskapo a su alma. El She[m] Yitba[rah] ke mos mantenga en el Djudezmo! Amen!

they said a prayer according to their customs, took the pipes, and the Jew went to his place (= room) while they went to sleep one by one. The Jew was annoyed that they were going to sleep, and he took a walk outside the gate of the inn. He saw how the judge called one of his gendarmes and spoke to him. That one (= the gendarme) came near them and saw that they were asleep. He (= the judge) came with the people, and they started taking off their clothes. The Jew, who was outside, saw what he (= the "judge") was doing, and he ran away to a place some distance away from the inn, and he saw how they took all of them outside, and cut them into pieces, and dumped them into a well that was there.

The next morning, the Jew went to the city and reported the incident to the general. And the general sent people pretending to be merchants, and commanded them not to eat the halva. After them, he sent other people in order to see whether he (the "judge") would do the same again, in order that he might be caught alive. And so it was that he did [again] as we related, and he was caught alive, and they brought him to the King's representative. And he (= the general) asked him about the affair, and he (= the "judge") told him how many years he had been doing this, and how he was putting ground human bones into the halva, causing all of them to fall asleep and not feel anything. And the Jew, who kept himself from eating [non-kosher food], saved his soul. May G[od,] Ble[ssed be He], keep us in Judaism! Amen!

Besides being something of a late Bosnian Ottoman version of the biblical story of Daniel (who was also saved by eating kasher), this story is important because it reflects the high level of information that Sephardic rabbis had concerning the practices of their Muslim compatriots. Thus, Finci knows that some Muslim jurists<sup>36</sup> allow the Islamic funeral prayer to be performed even in the absence of the corpse. Bosnian Muslims call this ritual *dženaza namaz*. Just like any other *namaz* (an Ottoman Turkish word of Persian origin), this one also requires ritual ablution, called *abdest*. In Finci's Judeo-Spanish rendition (*I tomo abdes, i le kildeo el namas*), *abdest* becomes *abdes* and *namaz* becomes *namas*. However, the "Judeo-Spanish" verb used by this Bosnian *hakham* is even more interesting: *kildear*, "to make". It is an obvious Judeo-Hispanisation of the Ottoman Turkish verb *kılmak* (to make). It is not used on a daily basis, as Ladino speakers normally prefer the simple Judeo-Spanish (*fazer*), but it can be used in the context of describing Muslim practices, given that in such a context Muslims themselves would say *namaz kılmak* (to make a prayer). Finci's knowledge of Islamic law and its terminology strikes me as impressive. The subsequent description of Muslim folk practices upon the reception of the news of the death of a close family member, such as preparing and distributing *halva* for the soul of the deceased (*djan ichi*, in Finci's Judeo-Spanish rendition, *can-için* in Ottoman Turkish), is less impressive. I assume this must have been common knowledge among all Bosnian Sephardim, and not only the rabbinic elite.

## Conclusion

As explained earlier, Finci's anthology is not an integral translation of the Zohar. It is not even a mere translation of excerpts from the Zohar. Rather, it is a translation of a very specific selection of texts. Finci selected the texts which in his mind could help an individual already devoted to the Jewish way of life to achieve moral perfection, to become a better Jew,<sup>37</sup> better son,<sup>38</sup> better father,<sup>39</sup> better person,<sup>40</sup> better neighbour<sup>41</sup> and better citizen.<sup>42</sup> It is

<sup>36</sup> For example, Abū 'Abdullāh Muhammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī or Abū Muḥammad 'Alī ibn Aḥmad ibn Sa'īd ibn Ḥazm.

<sup>37</sup> By strengthening religious observance, both moral and ritual.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Finci's *derushim* in paragraphs 23, 45, and 220 (misnumbered in the anthology as 218).

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Finci's *darush* in paragraph 224 (misnumbered in the anthology as 226).

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, Finci's *darush* in paragraph 241 (misnumbered in the anthology as 243), discussed above.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Finci's *darush* on sexual morality in paragraph 205 (misnumbered in the anthology as 207).

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, the above-quoted and analysed *darush* from paragraph 123. By virtue

precisely this approach that transforms Finci's anthology into a traditional Mussar work. Most of the translated selections are followed by a traditional Sephardic rabbinical *darush*.<sup>43</sup> These *derushim* underline the moral of the translated story by making it even more relevant and practical for Finci's audience. Reading the anthology, it is difficult to avoid the sense that it most probably developed from oral discourses. There are testimonies of the existence of Sephardic *yeshivot* for *ba'ale batim*. In these "non-professional academies", common people would gather once (or a few times) a week in order to engage in Jewish learning. In larger centres these gatherings were usually instituted by *hakhamim* or by *talmide hakhamim*. Learning a weekly Torah portion, *Hoq le-Yisrael* (a compendium of Jewish texts designed for daily or weekly study by commoners)<sup>44</sup> or *Me'am lo'ez*, was part of the regular curriculum of such a gathering. Such learning could be initiated or conducted by almost anyone. However, reading the Zohar in a non-ritualistic manner, with understanding and explanation, required professional guidance. Bearing in mind the fascination of ordinary Sephardim with the Zohar, weekly Zohar classes given by *hakhamim* to laymen must have been a "spiritual treat". Finci's *Leket a-Zoar* is probably the closest window we will ever get to such traditional Sephardic gatherings and to what was read, thought, asked and answered there. Unsurprisingly, in methodology and content the traditional learning of Bosnian Sephardim resembled the learning traditions of their Muslim neighbours, showing once again that settled communities such as the Ottoman Sephardim cannot be researched

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of being a good Jew, the hero of the story was spared the violent death that was imposed on his Muslim friends by a criminal disguised as an Ottoman *dayan* (sic!, interestingly enough, Finci does not use the Ottoman Turkish equivalent of the Hebrew term *dayan*, namely: *kadi* – "judge"). However, the hero does not selfishly thank God for his own salvation and proceed with his life, having learned to avoid non-Jewish company in future. Rather, he acts like a concerned citizen. He reports the incident to the Ottoman pasha (general), who checks the Jew's claim and, after finding it trustworthy, arrests the criminals. Thus, not only the system is proven worthy of loyalty but also, thanks to a faithful Jew, a common threat is removed.

<sup>43</sup> Since Finci's notes clearly have an originally oral character, applying the methodology that Aldina Quintana (2004, 2006b, 2006–2007) developed in her research on *Mecam Locez* to Finci's anthology could further our understanding of the dynamics of the creation of Judeo-Spanish rabbinic works.

<sup>44</sup> Throughout the Sephardic world, *Hoq le-Yisrael* was used by businessmen and craftsmen who could not dedicate all their time to Torah learning. Immediately after morning prayer, while still wearing the *talet* (prayer shawl) and *tephillin* (phylacteries), they would start their day by learning different types of sacred texts arranged around the weekly Torah reading. This method was developed by MoHaRaHU (Morenu we-Rabbenu ha-Rav Ribbi Hayyim Vital / our Master and Teacher Rabbi Hayyim Vital) in his *Peri 'Eṣ Hayyim* ("The Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge"), following the example of his teacher ha-ARI (ha-Elohi Ribbi Yiṣḥaq, divine Rabbi Yiṣḥaq Luria). The digested texts were first issued in book form by Ham Ribbi Yiṣḥaq Barukh, but it was HYDA (Rabenu Hayyim Yossef Dawid Azulay) who brought the collection to its present form.



only in the context of their affinity to the Jewish world. It is impossible to understand the way the Ottoman Sephardim developed Jewish concepts, practices and institutes without acknowledging the common Ottoman culture they shared with their Muslim and Christian neighbours.

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Ladino prevod odabranih tekstova iz Zohara Ḥam Ribbi Avrama Fincija kao rijetki uvid u metodologiju rada tradicionalnih bosansko-sefardskih ješivot (obrazovnih klubova za odrasle), te veza te metodologije sa lokalnom islamsko-sufijskom tradicijom dersa

U tradicionalnoj sefardskoj kulturi, teoretska kabala je pretstavljala isključivo naslijeđe učene rabinske elite. Od sedamnaestog vijeka pa nadalje, mnogi pripadnici neobrazovanih sefardskih masa nalazili su i komplikovanije liturgijske tekstove (o spekulativnim da i ne govorim) teško razumljivim. Sljedstveno, rabinska elita je već tada počela sa obuhvatnim poduhvatom prevođenja osnovnih liturgijskih i pravnih tekstova na narodni jevrejsko-španski. Ipak, kao po pravilu, Zohar nije

predstavljao dio tog kulturno-posredničkog preduzeća. Upravo zbog toga, do dana današnjeg nikada nije napravljen integralni prevod Zohara, ili barem jednog njegovog toma, na jevrejsko-španski. Različiti sefardski rabini prevodili su na narodni jezik samo vlastite izbore najpoučnijih tekstova iz ovog ogromnog korpusa. Ovaj rad analizira jedan takav zbornik odabranih odjeljaka, čuveni *Leket a-Zoar*, Ḥam Ribī Avrama (sina Mojsijevog) Fincija, objavljen 5619 (1858/9) u Beogradu. Fincijeva antologija sadrži prevod 246 odjeljaka iz Zohara, 121 od kojih završavaju Fincijevim vlastitim osvrtima i komentarima na tekst. Mnoga od Fincijevih narvoučeniya predstavljaju remek djela tradicionalnog sefardskog usmenog žanra *daruš* (propovijed).

Kao komentator, Finci nije bio zainteresovan za razjašnjavanje zamršениh kabalističkih termina i koncepata. Radije, on čita i tumači Zohar kao da se radi o djelu iz musara (jevrejske etike). Izgleda da se u ovoj tački sreću tradicionalni bosansko-sefardski način čitanja, učenja i tumačenja Zohara sa lokalnom bosansko-muslimanskom tradicijom čitanja, učenja i tumačenja klasičnih sufijskih tekstova, pokazujući još jedanputa kako jevrejske zajednice dugo ukorijenjene u određeni civilizacijski kontekst ne mogu biti proučavane samo u svjetlu njihovih posebnosti u odnosu na ostatak jevrejskog svijeta ili njihovih podudarnosti s istim. Nemoguće je razumjeti razvoj sefardskih koncepata, prakse i institucija bez uzimanja u obzir zajedničke osmanske civilizacije, u stvaranju i dinamičnom održavanju koje su Sefardi učestvovali skoro pola milenijuma, zajedno sa svojim muslimanskim i hrišćansko-pravoslavnim komšijama.

**Ključne riječi:** sefardske studije, sefardska kultura, literatura na ladinu, osmanski Jevreji, bosansko jevrejstvo, rabinska literatura na jevrejsko-španskom, sefardska homiletika, balkanska kultura, Jevreji Balkana.

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Przekład Ḥam Ribī Avrama Finciego wybranych tekstów Zoharu na ladino jako rzadkie spojrzenie w metodologię pracy tradycyjnych bośniacko-sefardyjskich *jeszybot* (klubów edukacyjnych dla dorosłych) oraz jej związek z lokalną, islamsko-suficką tradycją homiletyczną

W tradycyjnej kulturze sefardyjskiej kabała teoretyczna była dziedzictwem wyłącznie uczonej elity rabinów. Od wieku XVII dla wiernych należących do niewykształconych mas bardziej skomplikowane teksty liturgiczne (nie wspominając o spekulatywnych) były niezrozumiałe, dlatego też elita rabiniczna podjęła się zadania tłumaczenia podstawowych pism liturgicznych i halahicznych na język żydowsko-hispański. Ponieważ

dzieła Zohar zwykle nie włączano do tego kulturalno-mediacyjnego projektu, do chwili obecnej nie powstał integralny, żydowsko-hiszpański przekład ani jednej z jego ksiąg. Różni rabini sefardyjscy przekładali na żydowsko-hiszpański jedynie własny wybór najbardziej pouczających tekstów pochodzących z tego ogromnego korpusu. Niniejszy artykuł analizuje jeden z takich zbiorów wybranych fragmentów, słynny *Leket a-Zoar* autorstwa Ҁam Ribi Avrama (syna Mojżesza) Finciego, wydany w Belgradzie w 5619 (1858/9) roku. Antologia Finciego zawiera przekład 246 fragmentów ksiąg Zoharu, z których 121 kończy się własnymi refleksjami i komentarzami Finciego. Wiele z tych wykładów Finciego to arcydzieła tradycyjnego sefardyjskiego gatunku ustnego *darush* ('kazanie').

Finci, jako komentator, nie był zainteresowany wyjaśnianiem zagmatwanych kabalistycznych terminów i konceptów. Chętniej czytał i tłumaczył Zohar jak dzieło *musar* – dzieło żydowskiej etyki. Jak się wydaje, w tym podejściu połączyły się tradycyjny bośniacko-sefardyjski sposób czytania, uczenia i tłumaczenia ksiąg Zoharu oraz lokalna bośniacko-muzułmańska tradycja czytania, uczenia i tłumaczenia klasycznych tekstów sufickich. Dowodzi to faktu, że wspólnoty żydowskie, zakorzenione w określonym kontekście cywilizacyjnym, nie mogą być studiowane jedynie przez pryzmat ich wyjątkowości wobec reszty świata żydowskiego ani przez pryzmat kongruencji z nim. Niemożliwe jest zrozumienie rozwoju sefardyjskich idei, praktyk i instytucji bez brania pod uwagę wspólnej osmańskiej cywilizacji, w tworzeniu i rozwoju której Sefardyjczycy przez prawie 500 lat brali udział razem ze swoimi muzulmańskimi i chrześcijańsko-prawosławnymi sąsiadami.

**Słowa kluczowe:** studia sefardyjskie, kultura sefardyjska, literatura ladino, Żydzi osmańscy, Żydzi bośniaccy, żydowsko-hiszpańska literatura rabiniczna, homiletyka sefardyjska, kultura bośniacka, Żydzi bałkańscy.

Przekład z języka serbskiego  
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