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Autor: Miller, Royce W.
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JUDAEO-SPANISH BALLADS ON CAPTIVITY

von Royce W. Miller, Wenham

The Judaeo-Spanish ballads on captivity merit study both for their literary and folkloric qualities and for their role in the Hispanic ballad tradition. Besides their characteristic Sephardic (Judaeo-Spanish) language and content, they reflect, in a very vibrant way, the people who sing them, the loneliness of exile, echoes of pre-exilic days, the joys of reuniting, appreciation of family ties, praise of virtue, dependence on God, and thanks given to Him.¹

The versions and variants of these ballads (romances) preserved by the Sephardim in exile from Spain are indispensable for studying Hispanic balladry, because they have kept traces of an original content now partly or totally lost in the Peninsular tradition. Simultaneously, the folk genius is at work in these ballads, introducing new emphases, creating new settings or otherwise stimulating the imagination of the reader-hearer, all the while following the folkloric process of recomposing and preserving at the same time.²

Don Ramón Menéndez Pidal, in his famous *Romancero judío-español*,³ makes a special category for "Romances de cautivos" (Ballads about Captives), including "Hermanas reina y cautiva" (Sisters, queen and captive), "Don Bueso", "Melchor y Laurencia", "El renegado" (The Renegade), "El Príncipe Francisco", "El Duque de Bernax", y "Peranzules". There are other ballads which deal with the theme of the captive as well: "Bernardo del Carpio"⁴ "Los Siete Infantes de Lara",⁵ (The Seven Princes of Lara), "El cautiverio (captivity) de Guarninos",⁶ certain ballads on Melisendra and Gaiferos,⁷ the classical ballads of "Hero and Leander",⁸ "Virgilios",⁹ and the Biblical ballads of "Moises",¹⁰ and "El Mar rojo",¹¹ (the Red Sea).

The ballad "Hermanas reina y cautiva" (Sisters, Queen and Captive) is derived from the ballads of "Conde Flores", found in Peninsular versions.¹² In the story, the Moorish queen, who herself had been a captive, had a Christian slave, who was mistreated by others of the household. Both women, mistress and slave, became pregnant the same day, and later on their children were born the same day. The

midwives exchanged the children, because the queen's child was a girl, and the slave's a boy. The queen heard the slave crooning to the girl child :

... Si tú eras la mi hija
otro nombre te metía,
le llamaba Sanjigüela,
nombre d'una hermana mía.¹³

(If you were my child,
I would give you another name,
Sanjigüela,
name of a sister of mine).

Recognizing her own name, the queen embraces her sister.

Other versions begin *in medias res*, so that the identifications and setting are subordinated to the narration and its impact. For example, the Danon version ¹⁴ begins :

Ya quedaron preñadas
todas las dos en un día,
la reina con la cautiva.

(The two women became pregnant
the same day,
Queen and captive).

Another version has reduced the slave's song to a mere lullaby, so that the content is largely lost.¹⁵

Benichou believes that the ballad ultimately derives from the French romance "Fleur and Blanchefleur", ¹⁶ in which the simultaneous birth and interchange of the children are included, but are secondary to the mutual recognition of the women. Both traditions, the Peninsular and the Sephardic, have preserved these elements.

The Sephardic versions have introduced interesting variations into the story. In one ¹⁷ it is the King who hears the song and decides to take the slave as his wife in order to have a male heir. At the same time he takes the queen's high position from her and makes her a slave again. In another version the two sisters leave for home.¹⁸ Typical Sephardic inclusions are the yearning for the homeland,¹⁹ the resistance of the Count when his wife is kidnapped,²⁰ two slaves instead of one,²¹ and the final note of joy.²²

One of the best known ballads of captivity is "Don Bueso". Some elements of this ballad are similar to those of "Conde Flores", such as the captivity by the Moors and the menial work done for the King's household. However, there are also distinct differences: the jealousy of the Queen who tries to destroy the girl's beauty, the younger age of the slave, the arrival of the brother, and the welcome back into the mother's home.

This ballad comes from the German epic poem "Gudrun" (or "Kudrun") written about 1210.²³ In the original story, Gudrun, daughter of Hetel, King of Ireland is kidnapped away from her betrothed, Herwig of Zeeland, by Hartmut, King of Norway. She refuses to marry him and is given the work of a slave. After many years her brother and lover rescue her and bring her back home.

The Sephardic versions have their own variations on this story, some doubtless being original elements, others Sephardic creations: memory of the mother in her kitchen,²⁴ memory of the family graves,²⁵ unsolicited advice from the slave to the queen,²⁶ the fifteen years of captivity,²⁷ the death of the mother from pure joy at seeing her daughter,²⁸ welcome home by the father,²⁹ the exclamation (unexpected in a Sephardic ballad) of gratitude to the Virgin Mary.³⁰

The ballad of the captives Melchor and Laurencia is less known and less Sephardic in its tone. It may be a combination of several ballads, e.g. the captivity of the daughter (cf. "Don Bueso"); the wedding arrangements prior to the captivity (cf. "Don Bueso"); the ambush (cf. "Hermanas reina y cautiva"); the seven year captivity (cf. "Virgilios"); the passion of the captor's daughter for Melchor who refuses to change his religion for her (cf. "Guarinos"); the escape and return home (cf. "Don Bueso"); the lover's arms used as oars ("Hero and Leander"); the role of the lover in Laurencia's rescue (echo of "Don Bueso"); the mole on the shoulder as a token of recognition ("Hermanas reina y cautiva").

Another lesser known ballad of captivity is "El renegado", (renegade). There is only one Peninsular ballad on this story, a segment inserted into "Los cautivos",³¹ one of the Melchor and Laurencia ballads (although there are many other ballads on renegades).

In this ballad the Moors capture a Christian and sell him. He is condemned to grind wheat, wearing a gag in his mouth. The mistress, however, takes pity on him and finally he flees with her to his own homeland.

The ballad of the "Captivity of Prince Francisco" is not known in Spain, according to Menéndez Pidal.³² Only two Sephardic versions

are known : one from Tangiers (Menéndez Pidal, 52) and the other from Tetuan (Larrea Palacín, 33). In its narrative Francisco (or Rondal) surrenders to the Moors when his sword breaks ; the queen hears his lament from prison and offers to set him free if he renounces his religion and becomes her lover ; he refuses her offer, saying he has a beloved in Paris.

The ballad may be a modernized version of the well known Carolingian ballad "Guarinos". Several episodes are similar : the way the captivity takes place, the sword, the mention of seven dukes, the queen's offer (cf. our discussion of "Guarinos" on page 9).

The "Duke of Bernax" also is unknown in Spain.³³ Among the Sephardim it is found only in two versions, one from Tangiers (Menéndez Pidal, 53) and one from Tetuan (Larrea Palacín, 34). The Duke is imprisoned by order of the king and is harshly treated ; his servant laments ; the Duke sends messages to his wife and mother ; finally he dies from his harsh treatment.

The "Cabalgata de Peranzules" also is a rare ballad. It is a short powerful poem of a father and seven sons tied together, marching behind their captor, a great warrior. Another son arrives and offers to ransom them or do battle if the ransom offer is refused. The ballad has some touches of the legend of the Infantes of Lara (see our discussion of "Los siete Infantes de Lara", page 9) : captivity of father and seven sons ; efforts of seventh son. This ballad has been found only among the Sephardim of Vienna and Bosnia.³⁴

The ballad of the folkloric hero Bernardo del Carpio³⁵ could also be called a captivity ballad because the hero is in prison while his wife is shut up with her son in a castle. In some versions the compassion aroused by her lament is the cause of the liberation of both Bernardo and his wife.

In the Sephardic ballad "Los siete Infantes de Lara"³⁶ (the seven Princes of Lara), the father, Gonzalo Bustios, is the captive. One day the King of the Moors invites him to a banquet and, after eating, shows him the heads of his seven sons and their tutor. The ballad ends with the father's lament. The narrative is similar to that in the corresponding portion of the epic poem preserved in prose form by Alfonso el Sabio and studied at length by Menéndez Pidal.

The "Captivity of Guarinos", a Carolingian ballad, has traveled throughout the world,³⁷ and therefore is well known. Its narrative begins and ends *in medias res* : Guarinos is in prison, the queen offers her love, he refuses, saying he has a wife in France.

Some of the ballads on Melisenda (or Meliselda) and Gaiferos include the captivity theme.³⁸ One, found in the Near East, sings of a game of dice between Charlemagne and Gaiferos (father and husband of Melisenda). Charlemagne wins the game, with the result that the reluctant Gaiferos has to go to the land of the Moors to rescue his wife. This ballad does not relate the rescue, the subject of well known companion ballads.

The classical ballad "Hero and Leander" is known in both Peninsular and Sephardic traditions. Hero is the captive, usually unnamed, on a solitary island. Her lover, Leander, crosses the water, using his arms as oars, in order to see her. The ballad always ends in tragedy.

Another ballad from the classical tradition is "Virgilios", an apochryphal episode in the life of the poet Virgil.⁴⁰ The poet falls in love with a relative of the king, who imprisons him, putting him into water up to his waist. A long time passes and everyone forgets him, except his mother, who brings about his liberation.

In the Biblical ballads "Moses" and "The Red Sea",⁴¹ the captivity is that of the Children of Israel, instead of individuals. The themes of liberation and praise to God become more important than the captivity itself. No one is surprised, of course, that the Sephardim have preserved ballads of their own exile.

The Biblical captivities have, then, a new life in modern times, both in the modern exiles and in the literature of the Sephardim. Hearing and singing these songs from Spain, the Sephardim have blended their own themes into the ballads: exile, longing for the mother land (Spain), a second Zion,⁴² mistreatment by the masters, family ties, joy over the return of the lost loved one, and the faithfulness of God during the difficult times of life.

¹ See my article "Los sefardíes hablan de si mismos", *Spanish Today*, Sept.-Oct., 1974, 16-17.

² See my article « The Classical Ballads of the Sephardic Jews », *Hispania*, Dec., 1972, 832-839.

³ Menéndez Pidal, Ramón, *Romancero judío-español*, in *Los Romances de América*, 6th. ed., Espasa-Calpe, Buenos Aires, 1948, 114 ff.

⁴ *Ibid.* romance 1.

- ⁵ Galante, Abraham, « Quatorze romances judéo-espagnols », *Revue Hispanique*, X (1903), romance 14.
- ⁶ Menéndez Pidal, *op. cit.*, romance 22.
- ⁷ Attias, Moshé, *Romancero sefaradí*, Instituto Ben-Zewi, Universidad Hebrea, Jerusalem, 1961, romanzas 26, 27.
- ⁸ Menéndez Pidal, *op. cit.*, romance 41.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, romance 46.
- ¹⁰ Attias, *op. cit.*, romanza 77.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, romanzas 79, 79a.
- ¹² See Menéndez y Pelayo, Marcelino, *Antología de poetas líricos castellanos*, IX, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid, 1945, 195-8 ; One version, at least, has kept the name of Conde Flores : cf. Gallent, Guillermo, « Cinco romances sefardíes », *Africa*, Instituto de Estudios Africanos, VIII (1951), romance 3.
- ¹³ Attias, *op. cit.*, romanza 11.
- ¹⁴ Danon, Abraham, "Recueil des romances judéo-espagnols chantées en Turquie", *Revue des Etudes Juives*, XXXII and XXXIII (1896), romance 21.
- ¹⁵ Algazi, Léon, *Chants Séphardis*, London : World Sephardi Federation, 1958, Chant 47.
- ¹⁶ Benichou, Paul, "Romances judeo-españoles de Marruecos", *Revista de Filología Hispánica*, VI (1944) and VII (1945), Romance VI ; the French narrative is summarized in Alvar, Manuel, "Cinco romances de asunto novelesco recogidos en Tetuán", *Estudios Romanicos*, III (1951-1952), 55-87, note 18.
- ¹⁷ Danon, *op. cit.*
- ¹⁸ Alvar, *op. cit.*, 60.
- ¹⁹ Ortega, Manuel, *Los hebreos en Marruecos*, Madrid, Ed. Compañía Iberoamericana de Publicaciones, 1929, romance 15.
- ²⁰ Larrea Palacín, Arcadio de, *Romances de Tetuán*, V, Madrid : Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto de Estudios Africanos 1952, Romance 29, four versions.
- ²¹ Galante, *op. cit.*, romance 7.
- ²² *Ibid.*
- ²³ Cf. Menéndez Pidal, "Supervivencia del poema de Kudrun", *Revista de Filología Española*, XX (1933) ; Cf. also idem, *Flor Nueva de Romances Viejos*, 13th ed., Buenos Aires : Espasa-Calpe, 1963, 214-5.
- ²⁴ Levy, Isaac, *Chants judéo-espagnols*, London : World Sephardi Federation, 1959, chant 10.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*
- ²⁶ MacCurdy, Raymond R. and Stanley, Daniel D., "Judaico-Spanish Ballads from Atlanta, Georgia", *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, XV (1951), Ballad H.
- ²⁷ Díaz Plaja, *op. cit.*, romance 2.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²⁹ Larrea Palacín, *op. cit.*, romance 30.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*

- ³¹ Santullano, Luis, *Romanceros español*, 5th ed., Madrid : Aguilar, 1961, 812.
- ³² Menéndez Pidal, *Romancero*, note to romance 52.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, note to romance 53.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 122.
- ³⁵ Cf. Larrea Palacín, *op. cit.*, romance 1.
- ³⁶ Galante, *op. cit.*, 605 ; cf. also Menéndez Pidal, *La leyenda de los Infantes de Lara*, Madrid : Ducazal, 1896.
- ³⁷ Erman, A., *Reise und die Erde durch Nordasien*, I, Berlin, 514 ; cited by Menéndez y Pelayo, *op. cit.*, XII, 176.
- ³⁸ See Attias, *op. cit.*, 26, 27.
- ³⁹ Menéndez Pidal, *Romancero*, 41.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.
- ⁴¹ Attias, *op. cit.*, romanzas 77, 79, 79a.
- ⁴² Cf. Bidjarano, Haim, "Los judíos españoles de Oriente", *Boletín de la Institución libre de enseñanza*, IX (1885), 25.