The Jewish Heritage of Spain. (On the Occasion of Américo Castro's España en su historia)

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THE JEWISH HERITAGE OF SPAIN.
(ON THE OCCASION OF AMÉRICO CASTRO'S ESPAÑA
EN SU HISTORIA)*

In addition to the famous Hispanic maurofilia ably described by Georges Cirot in one of his last essays, there has existed in Spain and in Portugal, over a shorter period of time and a bit less vigorous in its manifestations, a partly nostalgic, partly remorseful preoccupation with the Peninsula’s Jewish heritage, centuries after its deliberate destruction, thoughtless and wanton squandering, or else secret submersion. This partiality, traceable to A. Herculano’s and J. Amador de los Ríos’ predominantly romantic accounts of the rise and fall of the Sephardim, is either overtly in evidence or perceptible as a subtle overtone in a great many works of art and learning alike, written at various levels, for different purposes, and addressed to sharply divergent groups of readers: from Menéndez Pidal’s romancero studies and some of Unamuno’s most sparkling pages all the way down to Blasco Ibáñez’ Luna Benamor. Yet at no time, perhaps, has the rôle played by Jews in the shaping of Spain’s history been assessed quite so highly by a mature and experienced scholar, never has the impact of the precipitate political, economic, and cultural infiltration of countless converts into Spain’s national body and of the equally violent enforced secession of Jews faithful to their religion from a millennial symbiosis with Christians received so warm an attention as in Américo Castro’s new book España en su historia: cristianos, moros y judíos, the fruit of a decade of meditation.

Sr. Castro’s book is based throughout on existentialist philosophy. He is explicit in disclaiming any dominant interest, this time, as a culture historian or a literary critic, much as those preoccupations may have colored his earlier writings. Ancient Hispanic literature, fine arts, theology, military exploits, political stratagems, trivial human reactions in everyday happenings are all analyzed as multifarious manifestations of a single fundamental attitude in, or toward, life. This fixed pattern of behavior is believed to have crystallized as a result of the course which distant ancestors of Spaniards have decided to steer in the face of one of the greatest catastrophes in world history: the collapse of the Visigothic king-

* See HR, 1950, XVIII, 184.
dom in 711, burying, under its ruins, the Hispano-Latin civilization, distinctly more deep-rooted and far-reaching in breadth. Because the invasion of Arabs created that emergency which gave rise to an entirely new scale of standards and values in Spanish life, and because the Jewish minority intervened quite actively in the osmotic process which, over a period of seven centuries, took place between the Christian and the Muslim civilizations, both these ethnic and religious groups, of Semitic stock, are part and parcel of the early history of Spain; hence the subtitle of the book.

The author's position marks a significant and, on principle, entirely justified—and morally fair—return to the classical pattern of Alfonsine legislation, which consistently reckoned with the presence of three heterogeneous groups equally worthy of human esteem, even though unequally sharing in the power. In spite of Sr. Castro's sincere efforts bent in this direction, particularly noteworthy in view of his occidentalist training, a degree of complete parity in the treatment of the three groups has presumably not been achieved. Moors and Jews are admirably shown to intervene in the history of Spain to the extent to which they have helped to shape Christian life—hence the deliberate emphasis on converts and mudéjares. Yet, by the year 1000, when Almanzor devastated Northern Spain, and even a century later, it was by no means certain whether Christians or Moors would be the ultimate masters of the Peninsula, barring the possibility of a stalemate. There is a danger for all moderns that, from the vantage point of present knowledge, through hindsight, we may be inclined to prejudge a conflict which, to contemporaries, was in suspense. Medieval Spain, down to 1250 or thereabouts, involved not only Moors and Jews stranded among Christians, but also Christians and Jews surrounded by Moors. If one goal was the reconquest of the Peninsula as the legitimate Hispano-Gothic patrimony and the return to Toledo, Seville, and Cordova, the counter-goal was the mopping up of the centers of local resistance in the inhospitable north and the completion of Tarik's task, as seen by the eyes of Moorish statesmen. Granted the validity of the existentialist approach, it would have been interesting to learn more about the program or vital issue of the northbound Hispano-Arabs, in their own right, within the total picture of Mohammedan history. What, in other words, did Santiago, León, Oviedo, Burgos, Huesca, and Pamplona look like in the dreams of ambitious potentates residing at Cordova, Badajoz, Seville, Granada, or Medina, Damascus, and Bagdad? A third, to be sure, utterly dissimilar scheme might be worked out for the
Jewish share of medieval Spain’s population. Spanish history between, say, the years 700 and 1200—after that there could be little doubt as to the ultimate outcome of the conflict—would then appear as a clash of three different aspirations or vital programs, out of which the Christian master plan, and with it the Catholic way of life and all its implications, eventually emerged as victorious, after having been profoundly affected and modified by the defeated and submerged, but hardly ever wholly effaced, Islamic and Judaic civilizations.

Specifically, there was a curious oscillation in the life of Jews between inside and outside, which precluded their partaking of the Hispanic integralismo—to use Sr. Castro’s favorite term—and which may yet be more clearly brought out in the forthcoming revised edition. To serve as dragomans and translators of learned treatises; to perform medical and surgical services; to collect taxes for monarchs either too idle or too busy with other work; to earn their living as skilled craftsmen or as sedulous, honest shopkeepers was but one facet of the life of medieval Jews—the one subject to observation by outsiders, hence most easily identifiable through Christian sources, on which Sr. Castro mainly relies. Yet Jews, too, had a vital issue to cope with and adopted a basic attitude which is the key to their behavior: theirs was the problem of surviving, completely engulfed by an environment at best indifferent, but in most cases openly hostile, until the radiant day of reunion with other scattered remnants of Israel, under divine guidance, through the return to Zion, a theme of hope which, like a red thread, passes through their medieval liturgic poetry. On weekdays and on Sabbaths every orthodox Jew in the diaspora has been traditionally two different persons, as was shrewdly observed by Heinrich Heine, in the possibly finest poem of his Hebräische Melodien, a collection of verse so strongly bearing on Jewish Spain. Long before Christian Spaniards had grown aware of their occidentalismo, Yehuda Halevi sensed it by measuring mentally—and, as the legend has it, even physically—the long distance between his native Andalus and Zion, for which his heart was beating. Whereas to the rugged Castilians survival meant fighting back, it connoted to the Jews faithful to their tradition an exceptional measure of flexibility and power of adaptation in their contacts with the outside world, strangely coupled with unshakable inner steadfastness of moral precept and poetic vision.

Sr. Castro’s argument in the chapters dealing preëminently with Spanish Jews—which, the reader must be forewarned, cannot
properly be consulted without constant reference to the rest of the book—may be summarized thus. In the Middle Ages, Jews were organically integrated into Spanish life, mediating intellectually between Christians and Moors and filling an important gap in the socio-economic structure of the country as the class, or caste most capable of producing merchants and artisans. Their influence at the court of Alfonso the Learned is pictured as exceptionally great: they are said to have prevailed upon that monarch—who was intellectually alert, but hardly keen—to have the entire stock of knowledge, at that time available largely in Arabic, translated into the Castilian vernacular rather than into medieval Latin, the clergymen’s favorite medium of expression. Their adroitness as practitioners of applied scholarship, with special stress on polyglot accomplishments, astrology, surgery, and medicine; as financial experts, including the traditionally unpopular activities as usurers and tax collectors in the employ of kings, noblemen, religious orders, and even church dignitaries; and as royal emissaries and negotiators, is then sketched on the basis of documents sifted by Baer and of historical research ranging from Grätz to Neuman. Next the scope of contact in every-day life between Christians and Jews is tentatively reconstructed with the aid of the scant data extant. The active and in part aggressive participation of Jewish converts in Spanish cultural life, especially after 1390, is the subject of the following chapter. At this juncture, the crucial question is raised to what extent the Jewish heritage—as whose unconscious carriers the converts are implicitly assumed to have behaved—has penetrated into the organism of Christian Spain. The excessive preoccupation with purity of blood, pushed to the degree of insanity, is characterized as an extraneous graft on the ancient trunk of Spanish culture and subsequently ascribed to reverberations of rabbinical tradition. As an apex in a climactic series of largely undesirable innovations for which assimilated Jews are held responsible by the author, the Inquisition—again portrayed as incompatible with the trend of earlier authentic Spanish institutions—is squarely laid at the doors of the cristianos nuevos. There is a chapter on the specifically Jewish traits in Šem Tob and in several writers descended from converts. Supplementary bits of information on the experiences of Jews in Portugal and Aragon conclude this section.

Some of the fundamental contentions of this interesting chapter lend themselves to discussion. Sr. Castro’s implied premise that an individual of Jewish ancestry is inescapably a Jew in mentality and behavior is shared by a few representatives of Hebrew orthodoxy,
who are prone to consider even a renegade and his progeny as subject to divine retribution. It is also shared by a great many adherents of racial doctrine, with whom, of course, the author cannot be accused of being in sympathy. Most scholars, in an effort to be equitable, are likely to attempt to find the right balance between the forces of heredity, education, environment, and self-determination in classing an individual as pertaining to a given group. Aside from this general reservation, it may appear dubious whether the Spanish Inquisition can wholly or even largely be traced to Judaic influence, to say nothing of the menace of a new *leyenda negra*, this time aimed at Jews, which may possibly originate among superficial readers of a book written with brilliancy and designed for wide circulation. It is an incontrovertible fact, in whose acceptance M. Bataillon felicitously concurs with Sr. Castro, that numerous converts were an active element, even a propelling force, in the body of the Spanish Inquisition instituted toward the close of the fifteenth century. From this, however, it seems hazardous to conclude that Judaic spirit or its perverted product, as it were, suddenly began to permeate Spain’s national body at its most vulnerable spot. The picture presented by the process of the absorption of a minority, under dramatic circumstances, has two dissimilar sides: the obverse includes unusual artistic sensitivity and humane broad-mindedness, the reverse spells repulsive aggressiveness, fickleness, and ruthless opportunism. Both are manifestations of the basic insecurity—in some cases, at least, mixed with a feeling of guilt, remorse, and fear of retribution, divine if not human—besetting any person, of whatever parentage, astride two irreconcilably conflicting cultures, or, more accurately, oscillating between two mutually opposed religions. In other words, what has left such a visible imprint on some phases of inquisitorial procedures may very well have been the traits of the social climber, of the overly ambitious rootless upstart rather than of the slightly mythical eternal Jew. Is there an adequate foundation for speaking of peculiarly Talmudic or Semitic attitudes on the part of inquisitors, as Sr. Castro does in a few daring passages, scattered among others, excellently worded, which deal with the machinations of the *malstín* in the tense atmosphere of the collapsing *judería*? To validate such a sweeping claim, particularly in the case of an institution founded far from Spain and with a record of smooth functioning in many countries demonstrably immune to direct or indirect Jewish influence, it would have been requisite to provide crushing evidence rather than a few similarly sounding contexts.
Sr. Castro's observation that the Inquisition of the late fifteenth century had no basis in Peninsular tradition remains valid and his insistence on the rôle of converts in its complex machinery retains its full usefulness if they are divested of any inevitable connection with Judaism. We are here touching upon the very nucleus of the entire structure of Sr. Castro's doctrine. The initial assumption of the author was that a unique vital situation developed in the Peninsula as a consequence of the cataclysm associated with the Moorish invasion, which, in due course, conditioned all phases of life and alienated Spain from the rest of the Occident. Could it be that around 1400 this basic vital pattern itself was undergoing a profound change, with the long-present fear of further Moorish advance virtually dissipated and plans for the reconquest of the Kingdom of Granada indefinitely delayed? Sr. Castro's scheme is, of course, not quite rigid; he has written some admirable pages, in another section of his book, on the contrasts between the atmospheres at the time of Alfonso the Tenth and of Alfonso the Eleventh. But his existentialist doctrine, unfortunately, is not explicit in determining the time limits of the chosen "vital situation." Yet such a pattern necessarily has its lifespan; it reached its crest between 711 and, say, 1250 and, shortly thereafter, was subject to rapid change. One such profound modification, without precedents in Peninsular history, was the initiative arrogated by the populace in the late Middle Ages, as Sr. Castro himself clearly points out; incidentally, it was the lower clergy which, to the discomfort of king and higher nobility, led the mobsters in their attacks on Jewish quarters and thus directly contributed to mass conversions and, indirectly, to the infiltration of converts into Spanish life. The essential point of Sr. Castro's argument: the Inquisition is unprecedented in the earlier pattern of Spanish life and culture, therefore it must have been imported from outside, may thus be countered by the question: why should new and novel things not have developed spontaneously if the pattern of the vital situation—prevalent for over five centuries—was visibly breaking down, the fall of Granada being only the last link in a long chain of events? Viewed in this perspective, the Jewish converts cease to appear as a powerful primary force suddenly thrusting upon Spain institutions not germane to its age-old ideals, and are reduced to the less conspicuous rôle of agents and victims alike of a nascent new pattern of life, in a "situation" produced by forces which they have not materially helped to unleash.

The author is, of course, entirely right in choosing the year 1391, memorable on account of a well-organized chain of massacres,
planned destruction of property, and forcible large-scale conversions, as the turning-point in the history of Spanish Jews, especially so far as the facet of their relation to the Christian environment is concerned. The next two centuries were the truly tragic climax of a long period of suffering, not only in view of the handicaps inflicted on the crumbling body of Spanish Jewry, but as a result of rifts within individual families and communities, with numerous rabbinical scholars of note indecorously espousing the faith of their age-old opponents and turning the weapons of theological erudition against their erstwhile coreligionists. In this, incidentally, the events which took place in Spain and Portugal half a millennium ago differ singularly from the nightmarish happenings recently witnessed in Europe: while the extermination this time was carried out with incomparably superior efficiency, the victims, through the indiscriminate verdict of believers in a doctrine excluding the exercise of free choice, in most cases were saved the added torture of seeing their kinsfolk siding with their enemies. Sr. Castro, who, as a sympathizer of existentialist philosophy, places such heavy emphasis on the fact that the Spanish Christians, of their own free will, decided on a policy of resistance and reconquest, might possibly have brought into sharper focus the equally significant circumstance that the more or less spontaneous choice between honorable death or exile and the reluctant acceptance of a faith which bade fair to open an easy road to tangible success, is precisely what adds a unique touch of anguish and temptation to the drama of Spanish Jewry.

With many historians, Sr. Castro surmises that after 1391 the Sephardim were divided into two groups: the shrinking kernel of those stubbornly faithful to the ancestral religion and the widening fringe of those who could be prevailed upon to cross the dividing line between the precincts of the juderias and the tempting outside world. Actually, this reader ventures to submit, one might distinguish, at least theoretically, between three groups, since those cristianos nuevos—particularly of the second and third generations—who in good faith were striving to be Catholics, whatever the motivation of that attitude, and those who were resorting to baptism as the most readily available protective cloak, yet inwardly remained true to Judaism—including a few of its less obtrusive practices and many of its restrictions—hardly deserve to be lumped together. That there existed protracted secret tensions and violent but hushed clashes between parents and children in regard to the sincerity with which Christianity was accepted in those circles, can be divined, being in the very nature of the painful process of gradual
assimilation under duress. What, of all these conflicts, has reached posterity through confessions extorted by inquisitors or else through frank admissions of refugees, is but a slightly perceptible ripple on the surface of a deep sea strongly agitated in its lower reaches.

Sr. Castro's inquiry into the Jewish and Muslim strains long after the disappearance of organized minority groups from an authoritarian Spanish monarchy is, in a way, comparable, to the currently flourishing studies in the various substrata of the Mediterranean zone, which, at least in the field of the archaic Ægean culture, have led to startling results. As the Spaniards of the declining Middle Ages, on their way toward the southern prong of the Peninsula, absorbed an increasingly large number of Moors and Jews, first into their socio-economic system and eventually, on a minor scale, into their national and religious community, a steadily swelling flood of beliefs, superstitions, legends, literary themes, artistic preoccupations, technical skills difficult of acquisition, and, as the author emphatically states on many occasions, above all, of characteristic reactions of the mind and patterns of behavior poured into the heretofore impoverished, austere, and undeveloped country. On many of these adoptions and adaptations in the late Middle Ages we may lay our fingers at the initial phase, while the process of merger was still under way. These have generally been known before, but Sr. Castro has singled out some of them—e.g., the rôle played by Jewish translators at the court of Alfonso the Learned—for more detailed discussion. In other, more elusive cases, the new trait traceable to Spain's oriental strain emerges at the surface after a long delay, sometimes as late as the middle of the seventeenth century—as in the case of B. Gracián's El Criticón—even when the moriscos, let alone unbaptized Jews, no longer were residents of any part of Spain. On principle, the assumption of a century-old subterranean existence of Jewish and Moorish traditions among marranos and mudéjares and of their slow, long imperceptible infiltration into the dominant strata of the society is unassailable in every respect. To cite a similar case of cultural incubation, etymologists are familiar with the fact that words introduced into the Spanish language during the Roman domination and even earlier (terco, maraña, desmoronar, to quote at random), have not infrequently made their first appearance in written records or, at least, in fine literature, as late as the siglo de oro, which presupposes that at earlier stages they were consistently spurned by the literate. Yet, in practice, it is difficult to furnish proof positive of Judaic or Muslim background in such cases of intermittent, rather than con-
tinuous, flow of ideas, which lacking a material body, reveal less perceptibly than words, anchored in measurable forms, the successive stages of their development. This is true no matter whether scholars, in orthodox fashion, are in search of source material, or focus their attention on the ancient writers' and historical figures' outlook on life, as Sr. Castro, with adamant insistence, asserts that he does. Readers will sympathetically follow his invariably stimulating interpretation and unfailingly appreciate its originality, but not each link in the chain of his arguments is bound to be regarded by them as equally convincing. At least a few readers may feel that some portions of Sr. Castro's book mark a hazardous advance into a province previously unexplored and even deemed to be inaccessible. This is an inspiring intellectual adventure, in which the writer's and the discerning reader's intuitions and conjectures, the only guide left, must be judged on their own merits, as are works of art, rather than by means of acid tests, as are works of science and most works of objective scholarship.

Sr. Castro is emphatic in claiming that he is not engaged in a literary inquiry, and the tone of his remarks on research in comparative literature, including some of his own earlier studies, rises occasionally to a pitch of impatience and irritation. His readers, understandably enough, will nevertheless be most interested in his literary judgments, based on extensive reading, inborn acumen, and carefully developed sensitivity. Within the Judaeo-Spanish field, from which he deliberately leaves out those Sephardim whose families abandoned Spain in 1492, Sr. Castro centers attention around a great number of writers. As he de-emphasizes the literary aspect, his remarks are scattered somewhat haphazardly, a few of the shrewdest, along with asides, are hidden away unobtrusively in footnotes, and, regrettably enough, the index of names which precisely in a long book of somewhat loose structure should by all odds have been exhaustive, has been planned by Sr. Castro's coworkers on a basis of such broad selectivity as to offer insufficient aid to the inquisitive reader. Within the galaxy of literary figures briefly characterized or discussed in some detail, writers and translators of Jewish faith known by their names form a minority, partly because the author has paid slight attention to writers who used medieval Hebrew, in prose and verse, as their vehicle of expression. Distinctly more attention, and on good grounds, given the objective of the book, is paid to converts whose impact on Spanish letters, particularly from the late fourteenth to the early sixteenth centuries, has been unique in occidental civilization, with the possible excep-
tion of Austria in recent decades: Pedro Alfonso, formerly Rabí Mosé Sephardí, the author of the widely imitated Disciplina clericalis (p. 479); Pedro de Toledo, who prepared an (unpublished) translation of Maimonides’ More Nebukim (p. 502); Fray Diego de Valencia, contributor to the Cancionero de Baena, whose compiler, incidentally, is no longer considered as of Jewish descent (p. 580); the bishop Pablo de Santa María, until the age of forty famous as Rabí Salomón Haleví, and his progeny, distinguished on many accounts (pp. 538, 553–554), including Alonso de Cartagena (pp. 503, 541, 552, 569–570); Juan de Mena, whose long-concealed status as a cristiano nuevo has not long ago been established by María Rosa Lida (pp. 503, 541, 572, 575–576, 595); Juan de Lucena, the intimate friend of the Marqués de Santillana (pp. 503, 569); Jerónimo de Santa Fe (formerly José Lurqui), author of a viciously intolerant tractate Hebraomastix (p. 557), and his confederate Pedro de la Caballería, of similar background and comparable merits (p. 586); Fray Alonso de Espina, who cut short his rabbinical career to rise to the rectorate of the University of Salamanca (pp. 555–556); Rodrigo Cota (pp. 541, 572–574); Antón de Montoro (p. 569); Hernando del Pulgar, astonishingly sensitive to the Guipuzcoans’ aloofness from converts (pp. 538, 546, 574–575); Fernando de Rojas (pp. 541, 569, 572, 575, 581); Alonso de Palencia (p. 569); Jorge de Montemayor (p. 577); Gaspar de Grajal (pp. 573, 631), the co-defendant with Fray Luis de León (pp. 541, 559); Padre Diego Lafnez, co-founder, with Ignacio de Loyola, of the Jesuit Order (p. 616); the scepticist Francisco Sánchez (p. 581), and Mateo Alemán (pp. 541, 569, 576–578).

Perhaps the most original pronouncements (involving, as the author is ready to concede, a considerable margin of risk) are those on writers of dubious ancestry and on anonymous works. No limits are set here to the ingenuity of the critic. The unidentified translator of the Bocados de oro is thought of as a Jew (p. 482) because in one passage greater emphasis seems to be placed on synagogues than on churches and mosques. The three anonymous works Coplas de ¡Ay, panaderal!, Coplas de Mingo Revulgo (whose distinctly rustic language, in many ways anticipating the parlance of shepherds in late fifteenth-century farces and eclogues, does not tend to strengthen Sr. Castro’s surmise), and Coplas del Provincial are provisionally attributed to converts on account of their mordant satirical tone, familiar from Cota’s acrimonious poetry (p. 569). Mosén Diego de Valera is believed to have revealed his ancestry through his defense, too eloquent to be impartial, of the nobility of
converts (pp. 570–571, 573). Álvar Gómez de Castro, the humanist best remembered as a biographer of Cardinal Cisneros, has left no directly incriminating clue, but his ancestor Álvaro de Castro is a suspect as a practitioner of medicine equipped with an astonishing command of Arabic and Hebrew (p. 505). The case of Luis Vives, opened by a controversy between Amador de los Ríos and Bonilla y San Martín, is discussed in considerable detail (pp. 682–685): his family-name, the presumable profession of his father, his reluctance to return to Spain, the choice of Bruges as his residence abroad, the austerity of his style, and his suspicious recourse to an apologetic treatise in defense of Christianity are all quoted as bits of evidence. Finally, the Lazarillo de Tormes is traced to the environment of conversos (p. 569). The future may show how many of these intuitively grasped connections can be validated by incontrovertible documentation and thus transformed into solid knowledge. Meanwhile, at least in one case Sr. Castro’s adumbration seems to have been borne out by an archivist’s finding (see RFE, 1946, XXX, 243).

Sr. Castro correctly observes and motivates the general aversion of Jews to Latin; he also draws attention to the clumsiness of Jewish translators at the court of Alfonso the Learned, whose redaction, in true twentieth-century fashion, had to be polished by editorial experts along lines suggested by the monarch himself, to whom portions of the treatises are known to have been read aloud. This awkwardness Sr. Castro attributes to the fact that the majority of Jews, refugees from the fanatic rule of the Almorávides and the Almohades in Muslim Spain, were second-generation speakers of Castilian. Possibly the handicap under which Jews were suffering in the late thirteenth century on the as yet rare occasions of their participation in the literary activities of their environment may be formulated somewhat differently. The odds are that the Jews living on both sides of the Christian-Muslim frontier as it was traced (disregarding minor fluctuations) before the sweeping conquests of Ferdinand the Third were fully conversant with local colloquial forms of Ibero-Romance, including Mozarabic which was then near extinction, as has precisely in recent years been made plain by a close study of the Hispano-Hebrew payetânim (e.g., by S. M. Stern in a recent issue of Al-Andalus); cf. the Romance words capriciously incrustated in Ibn Quzmân’s divan.

What the Jews were lacking was a sustained literary tradition in the Romance vernacular, with the possible exception of highly conventional Bible translations. For them, the romance remained strictly a medium of convenient, unpretentious oral communica-
tion with the nearest neighbors of the aljama, the topics being trivial
day-to-day business transactions and irresponsible chatter. Jews,
from the cradle, learned to speak the local dialects of Zaragoza,
Soria, Hita, Seville, and Jaén (as their Ashkenazic cousins mastered
those of Lodz, Lwow, or Minsk); those that moved north may easily
have given up their original Mozarabic speech and, endowed with
unusual flexibility and adaptability, may have imitated the speech
of their new neighbors with considerable, though hardly ever con-
summate, skill. Yet all of them, it may safely be claimed, were
immune to the koinê which was being shaped in less “provincial”
environment, e.g. at the courts, in chancelleries, in notarial offices,
and in monasteries, where clerics were trained by seasoned masters
in the crafts of writing, copying, poetizing, prosifying, condensing,
and amplifying. This essentially provincial character of Judaeo-
Spanish, its seclusion from leveling influences—traits retained by
exiled Jews, with the added complication of inevitable mixture of
heterogeneous dialect features through the commingling of different
groups of speakers in the Ottoman Empire’s and Morocco’s newly-
founded juderías—deserves strong emphasis; it has been made
patently visible by the newly-discovered oldest versions of Šem
Tob’s Proverbios morales, now brought within our reach through the
efforts of Dr. I. González Llubera, which make distinctly more
arduous reading than the smoother, diluted late transcripts hereto-
fore known. As Šem Tob’s poetry was more and more enjoyed by a
select Christian circle of readers, its peculiar language was gradually
approximated, by successive copyists, to the prevalent standard and
was thus deprived of its original flavor, both as poignancy of
thought (or exoticism of imagery) and quaintness, in part sheer
backwardness of sounds, vocabulary, and sentence structure are
concerned. Hence the hopelessness of the attempt to reconstruct
something remotely deserving the label of Proto-Judaeo-Spanish:
there was no initial unity to begin with, the cleavage existed through-
out the Middle Ages, and only after the exile did the divergent
tendencies begin to be counterbalanced by speech mixture conducive
to convergence.

Sr. Castro has intended to write what French scholarship dubs
“un livre très personnel” and in this he has fully succeeded. The
importance of his book lies not only in the content, in the originality
of the perspective, and in the novelty of many views, whether
acceptable or disputable, but also in its stimulating effect on a wide
circle of competent readers. It is bound to win instantaneous ap-
proval in some quarters and to raise heated controversy in others.
These ensuing debates, if conducted with the earnestness which the fascinating subject matter warrants, bid fair to elicit valuable statements from acknowledged specialists and thus to contribute to further acquisition of knowledge. In a revision of this first version, Sr. Castro will doubtless spare no effort to portray the Spanish Jew not schematically, but in rich color, as he does the contemporary Spanish Christian. Would it be immodest to ask him to essay a contrastive picture of Jewish life and culture in medieval Spain and in medieval France (in the latter domain, the researches of A. Darmesteter and D. S. Blondheim have blazed the trail)? Comparison between the Elegy of the Jews of Troyes and the Proverbios morales may yet prove possible and lead to observations as keen as those made by the author, in some of the best pages of his book, by contrasting the Chanson de Roland with the Cantar de Mio Cid.

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