Frauen Machzor (Holiday Prayer Book for Women), Berlin, 1841. General Collection. The women’s book par excellence, a retelling of the Pentateuchal narrative in Yiddish, made vivid by the use of midrashic tales and medieval commentaries, is the Ze’enah U-re’enah (Go Out and See). Written by Jacob ben Isaac Ashkenazi at the end of the sixteenth century, it has since gone through well over two hundred editions. (The second edition was published in Krakow in 1620; the place and date of the first edition are unknown.) It became standard reading for Jewish women in Central and Eastern Europe.

Judaeo-Spanish ladino should not be confused with the ladino or Ladin language spoken in part of Northeastern Italy, which is closely related to the Romansh language of Swiss Grisons (it is disputed whether or not they form a common Rhaeto-Romance language) and has nothing to do with either Jews or Spanish beyond being Romance languages, a property that they share with French, Italian, Portuguese and Romanian.

Modern Spanish j, pronounced /ʃ/, corresponds to two different phonemes in Old Spanish: /ʃ/ and /ʒ/, pronounced /ʒ/. Judaeo-Spanish retains the original sounds. Similarly, g before e or i remains /dʒ/ or /ʒ/, not /x/. The earliest Judaeo-Spanish books were religious in nature, mostly created to 28.

Nine other sixteenth-century manuscripts of various sizes that were written or copied in northern Italy and Germany are available. In 1595, Ku-Bukh (The book of cows) was published in Verona; it contains thirty-five fables that draw on the Aesopian and Arabic traditions as they were represented in medieval Hebrew fable tradition. The two books published in 1814 thus represent two distinct genres of Yiddish folktales told in the Jewish communities in the eighteenth century; and, though any causal relation between the two parallel movements is subject to debate, their influences are evident.

Two Ladino prayer books for women dating from the sixteenth century are compared in this article. The first of these (S1) is a manuscript and the second one (S2) is a printed book from Thessalonica. The comparison shows that although both include daily prayers as well as prayers for the Jewish year cycle, S1 includes many psalms that S2 lacks, whereas S2 includes the Passover Haggadah, Birkhot Hanehenim, and many other prayers that pertain to woman’s Jewish life that are missing in S1. S1 might have been used at home as well as in the synagogue, whereas S2 has been restricted to domestic use. S2 is very informative and instructs the woman in detail how to perform Jewish law, whereas S1 has very few instructions and they all relate to the prayers. It is clear that S1 has been written by a non-professional writer in a non-standard way, whereas S2 has been written by a learned rabbi who followed the Jewish law about requirements women need to fulfill. These prayer books had no continuation in Sephardi tradition in spite of their importance.


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