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# Diglossia among French *Sephardim* as a Motivation for the Genesis of ‘Judeo-Gascon’

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## Abstract

This article sheds new light on the linguistic identity of the so-called ‘Portuguese Jews’ of Gascony. According to the currently accepted historical reconstruction, after being Spanish-speaking during the first centuries of their settlement in France, these communities all adopted standard French towards the end of the 18th century. However, their linguistic legacy has been misinterpreted: Spanish was a mere written tongue, used by learned members of the communities until the 18th century, whereas Gascon, the local vernacular, was spoken. This situation of diglossia, paralleling that of the local Christian inhabitants, who wrote in French yet spoke Gascon, resulted in differentiation of the common language of both communities, with the emergence of a distinctive Jewish variety. Now mostly obsolescent, this ‘Jewish’ language is being recovered through intensive study of textual evidence – samples of which are provided here along with some of our theories.

## Keywords

France – Sephardi Jews – Gascon – diglossia – Portuguese Jews – Spanish – religiolect – code-switching.

ἀμάρτυρον οὐδὲν αἰίδω

CALLIMACHUS (FR. 612)



## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The linguistic identity of the *Sephardim* of Gascony (often referred to as ‘Portuguese Jews,’ French *Juifs portugais*) from Modern times up to the present day has hitherto received scant academic attention. When dealt with at all, the treatment has been limited to minor components of their linguistic profile, and never to the language as a whole. The most notable studies so far are probably those of Prof. Moshe Bar-Asher, whose investigations, undertaken twenty years ago, shed some welcome light on the patterns of usage of whole and merged Hebrew among these Jews.<sup>2</sup> Though in some ways partial, Bar-Asher’s work managed, through the study of Hebrew loanwords, to describe aspects of the linguistic heritage among these *Sephardim* of Southwestern France. This article outlines the results of our own recent fieldwork as well as archival research carried out in the past two years. We aim to contribute to the knowledge of this group’s linguistic history and profile by viewing it holistically and in context rather than focusing narrowly on lexical and phonetic characteristics. Our analysis reveals, *inter alia*, that the spoken language of this group was a variety of the local dialect, Gascon, whose main distinctive features can be explained by a peculiar situation of diglossia.

### Landmarks in the Linguistic History of the Jews in Southwestern France

#### *Historical Survey of Sephardi Judaism in Gascony*

Let us begin with the founding of these communities. The southwestern region of France, called Gascony (French *Gascogne*) or Aquitaine, was from the mid-sixteenth century to the mid-eighteenth one of the favored destinations of Iberian Catholics fleeing from the Inquisition, which regarded as potentially bad Catholics any individuals who supposedly had Jews among their ancestors. Such Catholics were referred to by the Inquisition as ‘New Christians’ and were never allowed to escape the suspicious eyes of that institution while in lands were under its jurisdiction. Historians such as Saraiva (2001), Netanyahu

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1 This article is a revised version of a paper delivered at the 6th International Conference on Jewish Languages, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, June 21, 2016. I am grateful to Dr. Isaac S. D. Sassoon for commenting on a previous version of it.

2 Most notably through the edition of several Hebrew liturgical manuscripts from Bayonne (see Bar-Asher 2006 and 2013, which take stock of most of the relevant material published in diverse papers during the previous two decades).

(2002), and Salomon (2007–2009) have argued persuasively that descendants of Iberian Jews who had converted to Christianity did not in fact retain any remnant of Jewish identity while in the Peninsula. Despite the diverse *récits des origines* later elaborated by their Jewish descendants, we may assume that they discovered Judaism only after settling in France, Holland, and the other countries of what was to become known as the “Western Sephardi Diaspora.” Not all of the New Christians who fled the Iberian Inquisition chose to be Jewish or practice Judaism. Those who did, learned Judaism from rabbis from Leghorn, Amsterdam, and the Orient, most of whom belonged to communities formed after 1492 by Spanish exiles who spoke (Judeo-)Spanish. It is difficult to determine whether or not the fact that the linguistic vehicle that brought them Judaism was Spanish contributed to the prestige of that language. But there can be little doubt about the role played by the famous Spanish prayer book printed at Ferrara (1552) and the Spanish Bible printed in that same city one year later. Indeed, it has been remarked that among the Iberian exiles, Spanish attained the status of a semi-sacred language, being the one in which the Bible and the prayers were accessible to the bulk of the congregants who did not know Hebrew (Roth 1959:299–308). By the end of the seventeenth century, Sephardi prayer books in Hebrew had been introduced and coexisted with forms of prayer in Spanish translation. In fact, while the Hebrew prayers were chanted by the reader, the congregation followed from prayer books in Spanish translation. This quasi-canonical status of Spanish was only reinforced as it continued to be the tongue used in the lectures and sermons of travelling rabbis who were regarded as authorities in matters of religion. All in all, then, Spanish acquired a solemnity that made it fit and proper for use in all congregational correspondence, synagogue minutes, and, by extension, all formal writing.<sup>3</sup> This practice ended only with the Revolution of 1789, when French was decreed the sole accepted tongue of the Nation.

### *Gascon or Spanish?*

Based on these written remains, historians assumed that Spanish had also been the spoken tongue of these Sephardi communities until they all adopted standard French as their vernacular at the end of the 18th century. This theory, which rested on works of a literary nature written in Spanish, now appears to be incorrect. For it can be demonstrated that the ex-Iberian New Christians spoke Gascon, the local Romance vernacular,<sup>4</sup> beginning soon after their

3 A wealth of documents of this kind can be found, for instance, in Nahon 1981.

4 For general information about the Gascon language and its place within the Romance dialectal variation of Western Europe, see Rohlfs 1970, Chambon & Greub 2002:473–495, and

arrival in Gascony. This section provides several pieces of evidence to support this argument.

First, the Spanish written by Gascon Jews for diverse purposes, mainly sacred and official, often appears to be a calque of Gascon and French phraseology, rather than any idiomatic Spanish. The use of such macaronic Spanish, a written, artificially hispanized form of their spoken tongue, or, rather, relexified Gallo-Romance with hispanoid morphology, demonstrates that those who wrote these texts were not at all proficient in Spanish. (A detailed study of this process, along with several analyzed examples taken from official and paraliturgical texts, is to be published in our forthcoming paper, Nahon forthcoming c.) Sometimes, the most visible traces of Gallo-Romance morphology left by the Jews in their written ‘Spanish’ can be found in spontaneous writings, such as, for instance, this sentence, found handwritten in an 18th-century prayer book from Bayonne that belonged to Abraham de Josué Léon: “Meldadura de la Pascua de sebuot apartenese à mi, el ebrayco mande oy 26 de mayo 1754 a mi hijo a la campaña de Sanguina” (‘Holy reading for the Holiday of *Sebuot*, belongs to me, I sent the Hebrew [version] today the 26th of May, 1754 to my son at the Sanguinat cottage’). *Apartenese* is French *appartenir* / Gascon *aparténi* v. ‘to belong’ (see *FEW* 25:34, *APPĚRTĪNĚRE*) with a Spanish conjugation (compare Spanish cognate *pertenecer*). Spanish *campaña* ‘campaign; open countryside’ is used here as a semantic calque of French *campagne* ‘country mansion,’ with the name *Sanguina*[t], which still refers to a locality in the nearby countryside of Bayonne where the Léon family had a mansion. The author of this semi-formal text, wanting to write it in the somehow sacred pages of his liturgical book, superficially ‘hispanized’ his mother tongue to give his *ex-libris* the appearance of Spanish. Further examples of the written and liturgical ‘Spanish’ of the Jews of Gascony are to be found in Nahon forthcoming c.

Another indication that Spanish was not their vernacular, is the fact that the study programs of the *Talmud Tora* of Bayonne (Nahon 1981:240–245) included courses in Spanish, based on the reading of the Ferrara Bible, for Jewish children. It is unlikely that a school, especially a traditional Jewish religious one, would offer a separate class about a language if that was the students’ native language. Another pointer to this same conclusion is the presence of *te’amim* (Masoretic accents) added to manuscript copies of the few ritual readings in Spanish included in their synagogue liturgy. Apparently, those Spanish passages had become so alien to the reader and the congregants, that some felt the

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Massourre 2012. For a full description of diatopic variation in Gascon, see the *ALG*. On Gascon in Bordeaux, see Bourciez 1928; in Bayonne, see Cuzacq 1941.

need to add *te'amim*, lest the readers' misunderstanding of the text interfere with the Spanish prosody crystallized in this unique 'neo-Masoretic' system (Nahon 2015:399–410 provides a study of one of these liturgical Spanish texts with *te'amim*; additional material about Spanish manuscripts with *te'amim* is to be published in Nahon forthcoming b).

Third, we have a large array of direct testimonies to the fact that Jews spoke Gascon, as did the overwhelming majority of the people of the region, until the mid-19th century. Such testimonies include folk poetry in Gascon written by Jews and once sung by them; theatrical literature involving Jews speaking Gascon; observations of people noting that Jews not only spoke Gascon, but spoke it with a peculiar accent, and with some Hebrew and Spanish loanwords used exclusively by them (a detailed survey of these data and the material itself can be found in Nahon forthcoming a). The latter report of linguistic idiosyncrasies unique to Jews permits us perhaps to postulate the existence of a Jewish variety of Gascon ('Judeo-Gascon,'<sup>5</sup> to adopt the terminology used by the 'Jewish languages' school). The textual evidence, of which samples are presented below, seems clearly to attest to its currency.

Finally, we turn to a more theoretical argument. People speaking diverse Ibero-Romance languages, from Catalan to Portuguese, upon being grouped together in Gascony, may naturally have dispense with their respective mother tongues in order to communicate in a common language. Moreover, it so happens that Gascon does not differ from Ibero-Romance dialects much more than does one Ibero-Romance dialect from another. Furthermore, the geographical distribution of the Jewish communities throughout the countryside strongly suggests that they were likely well integrated with the indigenous population.<sup>6</sup>

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5 Rather than 'Jewish Gascon.' The current trend emerging in 'Jewish language' research to distinguish glottonyms based on orthography (Kahn & Rubin 2015:3 propose referring to languages written with Hebrew characters as 'Judeo-X' and languages written with the local orthography as 'Jewish X') is not relevant here, since most of the texts in the Jewish variety of Gascon were committed to paper 'by accident' or by non-Jews, as we shall see *infra*. Moreover, this distinction does not work for all 'Judeo-languages': for instance, almost all the modern and contemporary written testimonies of vernacular Judeo-Italian, a group of varieties that no one has called nor would call 'Jewish Italian,' are written in Latin script (see Fortis 1989). Besides, however useful the standardization in language names used in 'Jewish linguistics' might be, we share the misgivings of Chetrit (1987:180–183, 187) concerning glottonym planning in this field.

6 The Portuguese Jews' propensity for integration into local society wherever they settled was outlined by de Pinto (1762:20) in his response to the reproaches made by Voltaire against the Jews: "Ceux qui connaissent les Juifs Portugais de France, de Hollande & d'Angleterre, savent que loin d'avoir, comme dit M. de Voltaire, une haine invincible pour tous les peuples

This impression of integration gains support from instances of intermarriage between Iberian Jewish men and local Christian women – whose offspring, incidentally, seem to have always been reared as Jews (Léon 1893:110 *et sq.*) It is hard, in these circumstances, to imagine such households maintaining a separate linguistic system.

As a note of comparison, Portuguese New Christians and their Jewish descendants, even in non-Romance-speaking environments, were prone to adopt neighboring vernaculars, even in lands where these differed from the written or official tongues. In Hamburg, we know that, while the *Aškenazim* had switched to Standard German, the Portuguese Jews had adopted the local *Plattdeutsch* dialect (Haarbleicher 1886:31; Freimark 1979:167, 176). In Amsterdam, the Portuguese Jews were fluent in Dutch from the 18th century onwards, although there was apparently still one family whose elderly members could speak a degraded vernacular form of Portuguese towards the end of the 19th century (Leite de Vasconcellos 1901:19–20; 195–196). In Curaçao, Jacobs (2016:8) notes that “Papiamentu [the local creole] had become the native language of large parts of the Curaçaoan Sephardic community prior to the end of the 18th century.”

In New York at the beginning of the 18th century, Portuguese had already yielded ground to English, to the extent that the Constitutions of the Portuguese congregation, written in a highly unidiomatic Portuguese influenced by colloquial English, were accompanied by their necessary English translation in the original manuscript of 1728 (Salomon 1995). And, here and there, too, Spanish served as a semi-sacred written tongue (Roth 1959:299–308; Roth’s assertions on the status of Spanish have been abundantly exemplified in Méchoulán 1998:353–372). While comparisons to other groups do not offer evidence regarding language use among Gascon Jews, they help to support the other facts presented above.

### *Jewish’ and ‘Christian’ Diglossia / Triglossia*

We now go a step further back and discuss the state of affairs that favored the development of this ‘Judeo-Gascon’ particularism. The Gascon adopted

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*qui les tolèrent, ils se croient, au contraire, tellement identifiés avec ces mêmes peuples, qu'ils se considèrent comme en faisant partie. Leur origine Espagnole Portugaise est devenue une pure discipline ecclésiastique* (“Those who are in any way acquainted with the Portuguese Jews in France, Holland, and England well know that far from their having, as he says, *the bitterest hatred for those nations who tolerate them*, they deem themselves, on the contrary, to form one people with them. Their Spanish and Portuguese extraction has become now a point merely of ecclesiastical discipline’).

by the first generations of immigrants was likely identical to the language spoken by the local inhabitants, since the Iberian New Christians did not have, at the beginning, a separate religious profile, differentiated from that of their neighbors.<sup>7</sup> At the very beginning of their settlement in Gascony, in 1637, a Spanish observer reports on “the confusion which prevails between the Christians and Jews of this nation, in that one cannot distinguish the one from the other.”<sup>8</sup> We propose that the origin of the separate development of a Jewish variety of Gascon is to be looked for in the situation of diglossia with Spanish, peculiar to the Jews.

We saw that the *Sephardim* kept on using rather archaic forms of Castilian Spanish for prayers and administrative purposes, while speaking in another vernacular language. This situation, of a high/written language coexisting with a low/spoken language, was shared by the co-territorial Catholics who spoke (and, to some extent, still speak) Gascon and wrote, every time they needed to write, in Standard French, since the law of the kingdom established, in the mid-16th century, French as the official language of the kingdom’s administration, and, consequently, of almost all written literature (Brun 1923:133–136, 144–145, 464). Thus the Jews’ situation of diglossia had its counterpart among the local Christian inhabitants – except that the latter’s written language was French whereas the Jews’ was Spanish. We could even refine this statement by positing that both Jews and Christians were in a situation of triglossia, having both, besides their low/spoken tongue and their respective high/written language, a third liturgical language: Hebrew for the Jews, Latin for the Catholics (Protestantism is almost non-extant in Bayonne and Bordeaux). However, it appears that, for both religious groups, these languages did not function as a full linguistic system, but rather as the non-understood medium used exclusively for liturgical purposes. It is worth mentioning that the Jews of Gascony did not produce any significant literature in Hebrew.

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7 The complex question as to how Jewish the so-called ‘Marranos’ were is beyond the scope of the present paper. We refer the reader to works such as Saraiva 2001 for Portugal, Netanyahu 2002, and Salomon 2007–2009 for Spain. On the appropriation of Jewish religion in Gascony by the Catholic newcomers from Iberia, see Graizbord 2006 and Israel 2002, who refers to the 17th century “theological war [...] between the crypto-Jewish and pro-Catholic factions dividing the Portuguese New Christians in France” (2002:255). Parallels can be made with the other Western Sephardi communities, which started out as New Christian settlements. On the Catholic identity of the Iberian ancestors of the Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam, see d’Ancona 1940.

8 Report by Licenciado Diego de Cisneros about the New Christians in Bayonne, Bordeaux, Peyrehorade, Dax, La Bastide-Clairence, Nantes, and Rouen, quoted and translated by Israel (2002:260).



This triglossia was the origin of the linguistic differentiation between the communities: while Christians became more and more subject to language centralization due to their early written use of French (Bourciez 1928:24–25), the Jews, lacking this medium of Francisation, could retain more faithfully the original linguistic identity of their region, while letting a few lexical elements of their ‘written Spanish’ penetrate their speech. The French Revolution put an end to the *Nation Portugaise* as an administrative unit, which led to the demise of the Jews’ separate written language. French translations of the prayers replaced the archaic Spanish ones, and the formal sermons in the synagogues had ceased forever to be in Spanish by the early years of the 19th century (Nahon 2015:409). It can be assumed that, even in earlier days, a proportion of the Gascon-speaking Jewish population was not conversant at all in Spanish: diglossic patterns, as noted by Fishman (1967:33–34), do not imply that the high language is known to the whole speech community falling into that pattern. By the early 19th century, it appears that the proportion of congregants who had some understanding of Spanish was small enough that leaders decided to begin presenting sermons only in French. French replaced Spanish in all its learned uses, but did not immediately replace Gascon in habitual informal speech. Yet, French ultimately became known to Jews, spoken by them when needed, leading more and more to a code-switching situation between the Jewish variety of Gascon and the southern variety of French, with retention, in both codes of speech, of the ‘Jewish’ lexemes of Ibero-Romance and Hebrew origin that had come into use earlier. According to the oral testimony of our informants, this *patois* continued to be the mother tongue of the Jews born in Bayonne in the early years of the 20th century, predominantly among the lower classes.

### Documentation

#### *A Sample of ‘Judeo-Gascon’ as Spoken in Bayonne in 1845*

To illustrate the use of this language, we shall now study a sample of how the Jews were speaking in Bayonne in 1845. It is a part of a comic exchange between two Sephardi Jews, taken from a series of humorous and witty dialogues about the people of Bayonne, published in the back section of a weekly newspaper, *L’Ariel*, that appeared in Bayonne from October 6, 1844 to February 19, 1852. Alongside these texts, it also printed, for instance, samples of dialogues between Basque-speaking shepherds from the nearby mountains trying to communicate in a broken Gascon with inhabitants of Bayonne. The editors of this newspaper sought to represent the speaking voices of every linguistically differentiated group living in the city, including the Jews, each

using its own distinct variety. The very realistic achievement of this text is enhanced by the characters both being Jewish, and it may have even been written by one of the regular Jewish contributors of this newspaper, in a moment of good-natured self-mockery.

For the sake of clarity, we set the French parts in roman, the Gascon in italics, the Ibero-Romance loans in bold, and the only Hebraism in bold italic underlined. The punctuation has been standardized, but the original orthography is kept.

Pan ! Pan !

- Entréss . . .
- *Que yo soy qué mé heis !*
- *Si m'abébi sabut quère tu, jé né t'aurais pas ouvert, là . . .*
- *A moi, à you né m'aoures pas oubert ?*
- *Qué fastidioso ques ; anem bian soqué mé bos ?*
- *Quenne harocho d'humou qué m'as. Tu t'as levé ce matin au coquerico ?*
- *Dachémé, né bos pas qué mé fachi ? L'ou Cadetot qué s'a binut per lou casamiento.*
- Bien.
- *Qué crédébi dé mé tiné lé courretage. Qu'à anat et qu'à binut ibe hore, de long en large . . . et puch qu'à partit.*
- *Et qu'à anat comme a binut ?*
- *Pré-ci-sé-men, chetss mé bailla l'ou piaillou.*
- *Bos qué té disi, l'ou Cadetot qué sa esprit, pero es un roñoso ! Jé véné t'announcer une ggrande nouvelle ! Lou nos papâ en l'aprénen qué sa trobat maou dé plési ! et lé meye pettilloune dé mouillé qué sé m'a embrassat !<sup>9</sup>*

#### *English Translation*

Knock! Knock!

- Come in . . .
- What a braggart you are!
- If I'd known it was you, I wouldn't have let you in . . .
- *Me*, you wouldn't have let in?
- How you pester people! But to the point: what do you want from me?
- What a bad mood you are in! Did you get up with the cock-a-doodle-doo?

<sup>9</sup> *L'Ariel*, 53, Sunday, October 5, 1845, 4.

- Leave me; you don't want me to get mad! Cadetot came to set up the marriage.
- Fine.
- I thought I had the broker's fee in hand. For a whole hour, he kept going in and out, and back and forth, and then he left.
- Did he leave the same way he came?
- Exactly, without handing me the money.
- Shall I tell you? Cadetot is witty, but stingy! I came to announce to you big news! Our dad, when he heard about it, nearly split his sides with joy! And my dear little wife, she kissed me!

### *Linguistic Analysis*

The Gascon element, which forms the bulk of the excerpt, well approximates the dialectal features of the variety spoken in the hinterland of Bayonne, around the villages of Bidache and Peyrehorade, more than it does the urban dialect of Bayonne. There is additional evidence for this, such as the comic poem written in Bayonne in 1837, *L'Inauguration d'un Temple* (published in Nahon forthcoming a), although this peculiarity also appears in the Gascon loanwords still used in the French of the Jews of Bayonne. A local scholar, Pierre Rectoran, noted in an unpublished study<sup>10</sup> that the pronunciation of Gascon among the Jews of Saint-Esprit is almost the same as that of the area around Bidache and Peyrehorade. A dialectological comparison, based on the extant texts and the *ALG*, confirms the fact.

This prevalence of rural dialectal features among the Jews can be explained by the fact that most of the Jews settled first in the nearby countryside before attempting to get closer to the port of Bayonne by way of its suburb Saint-Esprit. This slight dialectal distinction was apparently the chief non-lexical feature distinguishing the language spoken by the Jews from the one spoken by Christians in the city of Bayonne. Without entering into questions of interest only to Romance dialectology, we shall simply note that this difference appears to lie principally in the realization of certain vowels.

The French element, which is present here as a result of code-switching, occurs for emphatic purposes, with repetitions (*à moi, à you* 'to me, to me') where the same is said in Gascon only immediately after, or within emphasized segments of speech (*Jé véné t'annoncer une grande nouvelle* 'I came to

10 *Poésies et chansons gasconnes bayonnaises de Deldreuil, Lesca et autres auteurs bayonnais, traduites et analysées par un Bayonnais, cahier commencé le 5 avril 1929*, kept at the Municipal Library of Bayonne (Ms430).

announce to you big news') or stereotyped locutions (*de long en large* 'back and forth,' here too in a redundant pattern with Gascon *qu'à anat et qu'à binut* 'he went up and down'). We note that the graphic form of these parts reflects a pronunciation of French highly influenced by Gascon and typical of arrierated regional 'accent.' For instance, the above quoted segment would be in Standard French *Je venais t'annoncer une grande nouvelle*. The 'accent' consists in vowel switches according to Gascon phonology. <rr> in *grrande* apparently represents the apical trill [r], which has particularly strong articulation in Gascon, and is, in French, a substandard phonetic variant for [ʀ]. We also observe the apparent lack of [ə], replaced, in all its expected positions, by [e] (represented by *é*), as well as the substandard use of *avoir* as an auxiliary verb in *tu t'as levé*.

The Hispanic element, apart from sparse loanwords of a rather emotional nature (insults such as *yo soy* 'arrogant,' *fastidioso* 'troublemaker,' *roñoso* 'stingy,' all three borrowed from Spanish), consists in one iconic word taken from the language of communal religious administration: *casamiento* 'wedding.'<sup>11</sup> The only word of Hebrew origin is *harocho*, an adjective which here means 'bad, unpleasant' and is still used in the French of contemporary Jews of Bayonne and Bordeaux in the form *rharoche* [xa'ʀɑʃə], alongside its nominal form, which retains until today the original meaning of its Hebrew etymon *חרוסת* *ḥarōset* 'mortar-like fruit spread prepared for Passover.' This spread was apparently of unpleasant taste in the old days,<sup>12</sup> hence the metonymic use of this word in Gascon and, subsequently, in French.

In this all-too-short linguistic analysis of rich material, we can see how relatively pure the Gascon spoken by the Jews of Bayonne was in the mid-19th century, how it still bore traces left by Spanish diglossia, and how it was beginning to be slowly influenced by the national language, French, in its regional form. We also see how some Hebraisms were integrated into the Jewish variety of Gascon, although here the Jewishness of this speech clearly relies more on an antiquated aspect of the language, and on Hispanic influence, than on the scarce Hebrew component itself.

11 The French form of this word, *casamiento* [kazam'jɛntə], is still extant in the French spoken by the Jews of Bayonne and Bordeaux. There the presence of intervocalic [-z-] where [-s-] would be expected proves that this word was not borrowed by way of oral contact with Spanish, but rather from reading from written Spanish sources in accordance with French phonetic rules.

12 The Portuguese communities had the custom, first attested in 1618, of adding powdered brick to their *ḥarōset* (Salomon & Den Boer 1995:124).

*Some Living Reflections of 'Judeo-Gascon'*

What remains today of this Jewish variety of Gascon? Some elderly informants in Bayonne and Bordeaux can attest to their parents or grandparents having spoken Gascon better than French. Most of them still understand it, having a passive knowledge of what was once the language of their family. Their French retains a large number of substratal remnants of this language, whether they are fully Gascon sentences and words still used in French discourse, or isolated words of other origins that were borrowed while the Jews still spoke Gascon. Many of them are hybrid Hebrew-Gascon words. For instance, *abélous* [abe'lus] adj. 'in mourning, grieving' (feminine *abélouse* [abe'luzə]), is formed on Hebrew אָבֵל *'abel* n. 'mourning' with the Gascon suffix *-ous* (fem. *-ouse*) used to build adjectives (on *-ous* and its uses in Gascon, see Rohlfs 1931:68). This suffix, derived from Latin *-ŌSUS*, has cognates in almost all Romance languages and their Jewish varieties, in which these cognates often serve to build Hebrew-Romance hybrid adjectives: it can be compared with such words as Judeo-Roman *pachadoso* 'scared, frightened' from Hebrew פָּחַד *paḥad* 'fear' (Aprile 2012:50) or Bagitto (Italian variety spoken by the Jews in Leghorn) *cazzeróso* 'seriously ill,' from Hebrew חָזִיר *ḥazir* 'pork' (Aprile 2012:44). In the French variety spoken nowadays by the Jews of Gascogne, *-ous* is no longer a productive suffix as it used to be in Gascon, but is still found in 16 different adjectives, with diverse origins: Hebrew (*abélous*), Portuguese (*bafous* 'stinking,' from Portuguese *bafo* 'unpleasant smell'), French (*angonillous* 'wistful,' from Northern French *angonie* 'sorrow'<sup>13</sup>), and, evidently, Gascon, the latter being the most widely attested (*droumillous* 'sleepy,' *mouquirous* 'glanderous, snotty-nosed,' *léagnous* 'rheumy,' etc.).<sup>14</sup>

The dozens of Portuguese, Spanish, and other Ibero-Romance loanwords still used by Gascon Jews in their French, even when not morphologically hybridized with Gascon (like the aforementioned adjectives), all bear the phonetic traces of their use in Gascon. Even non-colloquial Spanish loans are rendered according to Gascon phonology. At the synagogue of Bordeaux, until recently the reader would say on Saturdays preceding a new moon, the first two words of the calque Spanish translation of the customary prayer beginning with Hebrew יהי רצון *iehi raṣon* 'may it be your will.' These two words, whose

13 On this word, see *FEW* 24:267b, *AGONIA*.

14 On all the quoted words from the language of the Jews of Gascony a wealth of additional material will be found in our book (Nahon forthcoming a), which contains a dictionary of more than 850 lexical forms intermingled into French in these communities until the present.

graphic form in Spanish is *Sea voluntad*, were articulated [sea bulun'tat], with adaptation of pretonic non-accented *o* to [u], as always in Gascon, betacism of the initial *v*- (originally as a bilabial voiced spirant [β-] adapted, at a later stage, to [b-]), and devoicing of the final dental, since word-final [-d] is impossible in Gascon (a good example is the name *David*, pronounced in Southwestern France as [da'vit]).<sup>15</sup>

### Conclusion

Today, the variety of French spoken by Gascony's Jews is the only living vestige of an otherwise defunct 'Judeo-Gascon.' A full description of this vestigial language is the subject of our forthcoming volume. The surviving documents in this language will also be published with their full linguistic analysis. Both subjects will constitute the material support of a critical linguistic history of the Jews of Southwestern France in particular, and of Southern France in general. Working with a minority language that has so far gone practically unnoticed in the academic world has taught us the following lesson (which can be applied to many other fields of language research): one needs to exercise particular caution when relying solely on literary texts and other written evidence when reconstructing the linguistic history of a given community.

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15 This pronunciation happens to be attested precisely as used by a Gascon Jew: Szajkowski (1956:119) mentions a Jew from Bordeaux whose name was written Davit de Molina in 1731.

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