

The Asmonean (June 27, 1856)

The boys attend private Spanish schools (similar to the Polish chedar), where they are taught Hebrew and a knowledge of the Bible, and to write the Spanish Jews dialect. The Talmud is not taught; the masters themselves appear to know but little of it. Hebrew grammar is there an unknown land. When the children are eight or nine years old, they are sent to Christian or to public Wallachian schools. The Spanish Jews communities have not any Jewish schools in which the children can receive secular and religious instruction; this does not arise from their community not being sensible of the value of such an institution. Some years since a portion of the members of this congregation decided upon it in principle, and they possess the necessary funds for its formation; but some of those members who where [sic] the most influential. because they were the richest, ruined this project less from fanaticism than contempt for knowledge. The Spanish ritual is that of the Sephardim. Their synagogues (there are two, the largest was consecrated about two years since) are well built with freestone, and the ceiling forms in the centre a kind of cupola. The seats are placed circularly along the walls as well as at the Almemer, which is in the centre of the synagogue. They have not, as in many old Polish-German Synagogues, pictures or ornaments of any kind.

The congregation is seated with decorum upon two rows of concentrical benches (some of the members of the old school, with their legs crossed and their slippers by their side); they pray in a low tone so that they can hear the reader's voice. The latter recites the prayers in a loud and solemn tone, occasionally diversified with some pretty original melodies, but at others in a monotonous Turkish psalmody. On holidays portions of the prayers are chanted by the congregation, who alternate with each other verse by verse. It is remarkably that in the oriental service, certainly very ancient. and which has never experienced the influence of modern ideas of reform, the principle of decided progress should be manifestly expressed, and the prayers as well as the songs should have been in the language of the country, understood by the people. For in these synagogues are heard portions in the Spanish language of oriental prayers suited to the events of the day. The women are separated from the men by a very thick balustrade, behind which they attend the service, and listed to the prayers, for they are not able to pray themselves, being in general unable to read.

In the domestic life of the Spaniard you find still more impressions of the East, and though the women do not pass their life closely shut up in a harem, they remain as much as possible in the house, and the men provide all that is required for the household; for with the Spaniard, as the Oriental, the whole management of the house belongs to the man. The Spanish wife consequently knows nothing of her husband's business, she does not trouble herself about it, nor with the education of her children. The intellectual apathy, common in the East, saves them from ennui, and still more to preserve them from it, they form parties to go in procession to the bath. It is a kind of pilgrimage of Spanish ladies to a Turkish vapour [b]ath; they bathe there together, divert themselves, eat dulscheze (sweatmeats), and pass the whole day there in true oriental enjoyment, which none can appreciate but those who have been initiated into the delightful mysteries of an oriental bath.

The Spanish type is purely southern and noble; the women are very beautiful; they have black and brilliant eyes, delicate complexions slightly bronzed. They want, however, grace and the art of permanently pleading. Their language is ⁱtilian; but in the course of ages, and after a long separation from their mother-country, they have corrupted the Castilian, either by altering the pronunciation, or by an admixture of Hebrew and even Turkish elements. The Spanish

where we know a strong antipathy exists for anything of a Western origin. Whatever the cause may be, the Spaniards but rarely intermarry with the Poles; they do not associate with each other. There is but one spot on which they meet in common--the cemetery [sic]. They have no objection to be together in death, although they do not wish to meet in life; but even in the cemetery [sic] there is a difference. The Spaniards place the tombstones at the foot like ancient Hebrews, while the Poles, like all Europeans, place them at the head.

The marriage ceremony among the Spaniards is so peculiar, so different to anything in Europe, that it deserves particular notice [sic]. The betrothment among the Spanish Jews is considered, almost, as a solemn union; the engagement is

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man [sic] undertake to value the trousseau, which they generally estimate a little above what it is really worth. The bride's marriage portion, in ready money, is laid upon the table, and afterwards the marriage contract is drawn up. Three days afterwards, and always on Wednesday afternoon, the union is celebrated. Instead of a Chupah, the couple are covered with a Taleth; the relations stand by the side of the couple, and in front the Chacham who blesses the union. He says the usual benedictions, reads the Ketubah, and signs it, as do also two other witnesses in the presence of the assembly; then succeeds the ceremony of putting the ring on the finger, breaking the glass, and that of the blessing with the goblet. But all is not ended; for them alone commence the marriage ceremonies, which last seven days. During this time the new married couple is seated upon an elegant raised seat (it belongs to the congregation and is lent to all the members), which has only room for two persons. For seven days, the pair, seated upon the marriage throne, receives visits of congratulation from friends and acquaintances. During the first year of the marriage the young woman is called a bride, and all the relations and friends consider it an honour to entertain the young couple once a week at their houses.

This solidarity of the Spanish Jews is equally shown in the mournful as in the joyful events of life. When a death takes place, all the old women of the community assemble at the house of mourning; the corpse is placed on a kind of barrow; the women stand round it in a circle, and chant in chorus mournful songs, in the monotonous rhymes of the East, in which a manner, that a stranger fancies he sees again before his eyes these weeping women (Mekonneth) of whom the prophets so often speak. During the first seven days of mourning, friends and acquaintances supply the family of the deceased with all the food required, a different family charges itself each day with this duty, and the family that supply the repast goes to the house of mourning on the same day, and partakes of the repast; if the afflicted family is influential and numerous, these funeral repasts present the appearance of a feast.

In conclusion to the details which I have previously given of the Spanish Jews of Wallachia, I can only say that it is not possible for them to progress unless they freely accept German civilisation; and for this they must cast off their prejudice and antipathy to their Polish co-religionists.

 Independently of Bukarest, there are small Spanish congregations of Cracowa, Ploeschti, Brayla, Kalarash and Giurgewo.



and sixty very poor, who live on charity. They have not any public instutions such as schools or hospitals. But since the German Jewish congregation has opened a shool [sic], the Spanish Jews send their children to them; this is perhaps the first mingling of the two antagonistic elements.

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