We do not know whether Jews in Sefarad 1 spoke or wrote Basque

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"A pesar de la nutrida y bien documentada presencia judía en territorio vascófono[4], hasta el momento no se ha encontrado evidencia documentada de textos escritos por judíos, total y parcialmente, en esa lengua. La ausencia de tales documentos se debería, seguramente, a que los textos literarios en vasco –y de mano cristiana– más antiguos de los que yo tengo referencia se remontan al siglo XVI y que, además, los judíos de esta zona lingüística desconociesen totalmente el euskera debido a que residieron en núcleos urbanos de cierta importancia, donde la penetración y arraigo del romance fue más acusado –si no total– que el del euskera, más vivo éste en ambientes rurales (caseríos) y marineros. Los únicos vestigios aljamiados que puedo aportar proceden de los documentos hebraicos de Navarra y se trata de antropónimos y topónimos vascos muy abundantes y comunes en aquel antiguo reino[5]" (Magdalena Nom de Déu 1993: 74, where footnotes 4 and 5 read respectively "F. Cantera Burgos: 'Las juderías medievales del País Vasco', *Sefarad* 31 (1971), pp. 313-317" and "Algún investigador ha propuesto la existencia del 'judeovasco' o 'Jewish Basque' (cf. la revista *Jewish Language Review*, Haifa, 1981, p. 127), pero se trata de una realidad lingüística dada en el seno de la comunidad judía de Bayona varios siglos después de la expulsión de 1492. El texto que aporta Luis Michelena: *Textos arcaicos vascos*, [Biblioteca Vasca VIII], Madrid, 1964, [3.2.3 Los funerales de don Jacob de Guevara] pp. 144-146, es tardío (siglo XVI), corrupto y de dudosa procedencia (es copia de un original perdido)".

The foregoing passage merits comment:

1. The sentence "La ausencia de tales documentos se debería, seguramente, a que los textos literarios en vasco –y de mano cristiana– más antiguos de los que yo tengo referencia se remontan al siglo XVI [...1" rests on the assumption that Jews do not write a language before Christians (or, in general,

non-Jews) do. That assumption is unjustified not only in theory (A and B) but also in light of known facts (C):

A. Non-Jews never having forbidden Jews to write this or that language, they may write whichever ones they want to.

B. Jews having cultures of their own, whatever factor within Jewish society impels them to write this or that language will result in their doing so, regardless of whether non-Jews have already written it.

C. Are not the earliest known literary texts in Spanish from the pen of Jews writing in the Jewish alphabet and Muslims writing in the Muslim alphabet (= the xarğahs)?

Consequently, if no texts written in Basque by Jews living in Sefarad 1 have been found, either Jews never wrote the language; or they did, but the texts have not survived; or, they did and the texts have survived, but we have not yet found them[1]. Unable to decide, for lack of evidence, which of those possibilities is right, we must leave all three open.

2. Regarding the sentence "Los únicos vestigios aljamiados que puedo aportar proceden de los documentos hebraicos de Navarra y se trata de antropónimos y topónimos vascos muy abundantes y comunes en aquel antiguo reino", if the authors of those texts were recording Navarrese personal and place names of Basque origin, that would be no evidence of Jewish contact with Basque. If, however, they are names of immediate Basque origin, we might have circumstantial (or direct?) evidence for contact. The important question here, therefore, is whether those names are of immediate or of non-immediate Basque origin.

3. *Jewish Language Review,* 1, 1981, pp. 127-132, contains a "Jewish Basque Bibliography" (which is continued in 2, 1982, pp. 95-97, and 3, 1983, pp. 181-182). Because that bibliography appears in a journal devoted to the inner and outer history of the speech and writing of Jews, one might assume that *Jewish Basque* here is a glottonym. However, as noted in Prager 1986:227, what starts on pape 127 is "a bibliography of publications of Jewish and Basque interest", that is, each of the publications is both of Jewish and of Basque interest. Most of them, in fact, deal with subjects other than language.

The introduction to the bibliography on page 127 begins "Jews have had a long history on Basque-speaking territory. The most famous Jew born in the Basque country was Benjamin of Tudela and we may assume that his native language was Basquic"[2]. Today I would be more cautious by saying: we know that he wrote in Hebrew; what language or languages he spoke remains to be seen; his written Hebrew should be examined for the possible influence of other languages.

[1] *Sefarad 1* is a cover term for the Jews living on the Iberian Peninsula before the expulsions during the last decade of the fifteenth century (from Castile and Aragon in 1492, from Navarre in 1497, and from Portugal in 1498). Because there were three expulsions, "las expulsiones" would be better than "la expulsión" in the title of Magdalena Nom de Déu, 1993.

[2] When I wrote that unsigned introduction, I was still using the glottonym "Basquic", which I later abandoned in favor of *Jewish Basque.*

Thus, whether Jews ever spoke or wrote Basque in Sefarad 1 remains to be seen.

4. Whether or not Jews in Sefarad 1 ever spoke or wrote Basque, it is certain that at least in Bayonne (a community in Sefarad 2*)* some did, as José Ramón Magdalena Nom de Déu agrees ("se trata de una realidad lingüística dada en el seno de la comunidad judía de Bayona varios siglos después de la expulsión de 1492")[3]. It would be good to know, if possible, in what ways their Basque differed from that of non-Jews, that is, to what extent it was Jewish Basque. However corrupt and unsatisfactory "Los funerales de don Jacob de Guevara" may be in other ways, it at least shows that at some time Jews were speaking Basque.

5. It invariably turns out that when traditional Jews speak or write a language, it has Jewish features sui generis. Consequently, the glottonym Jewish *Basque* is justified on the basis of either of the two data mentioned in the previous paragraph, all the more so on the basis of both of them.

In sum, let us keep open the question of whether Jews in Sefarad 1 spoke or wrote Basque.

The abstract of Magdalena Nom de Déu 1993 reads: "This paper deals with the different languages used by the peninsular Jews before 1492. The peripheral Romance dialects, such as Catalan, Aragonese, Navarrese and Galaic-Portuguese, were also vernacular and liturgical *media* of the Jews in these countries during the Late Middle Ages. A wide selection of records in *Aljamiado* (Hebrew script and Romance text) seems to prove the existence of such *Judeolanguages*" (p. 73). It elicits these comments:

1. It would be better to call Aragonese, Galaico-Portuguese (sic recte), Catalan, and Navarrese languages, for, if they are dialects, to what languages do they belong?

2. Do we have evidence that Jewish Navarrese was used liturgically?

3. It would be good to try to see whether there were Jewish varieties of Bable and Leonese.

4. Because of the often wholesale mistreatment of Jewish languages on the part of people who have called them by names beginning with the combining forms (English) *Judaeo- Judeo,* (French) *judéo-,* (Spanish) *judeo-,* and so on, those forms have become shibbolethic in Jewish linguistics (the study of the speech and writing of Jews), so that objective students avoid them, the preferred morpheme for expressing the seme 'Jewish' being *Jewish*, *juif, judío,* and so forth. Hence, for instance, *Jewish language*, *langue juive*, *lengua judía; Jewish Portuguese*, *portugais juif, portugués judío;* and so on.

5. Since one can write any language in any writing system (Russian in the Roman alphabet, English in the Cyrillic alphabet, and so forth), the fact that a text is in the Jewish alphabet –a better term than "Hebrew script" (Gold 1982)– does not necessarily mean that it is a text in a Jewish language. Inversely, a text not in the Jewish alphabet may be in a Jewish language (most Jewish English texts are in the English alphabet; because speakers of Jewish Georgian consider the Jewish alphabet holy, they use it to write only Hebrew

[3] *Sefarad 2* is a cover term for the communities founded by Jews who left Sefarad 1.

and Jewish Aramaic, as a result of which the Georgian alphabet is always used for writing Jewish Georgian; many Judezmo texts are in the Roman alphabet; and so on). The foregoing notwithstanding, it usually turns out that a text in the Jewish alphabet is in a Jewish language. Which is to say that use of the Jewish alphabet is a characteristic but not a necessary feature of a Jewish-language text and it is not a sure sign that a text is in a Jewish language.

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LABURPENA

Jakin badakigu juduak lurralde euskaldunetan 1492. urtea baino lehen egon zirela, baina ez da hitz egiten zuten/zituzten hizkuntzaren/hizkuntzen ebidentziarik. José Ramón Magdalena Nom de Déu zalantzan dago euskara hitz egiten ote zuten. Hala ere, ebidentzi gabezia eta ebidentzi negatiboa gauza bera ez direnez, ohar honen egileak nahiago du eztabaida irekita uztea "ez dakigu" baten bidez.

RESUMEN

A pesar de que no existe duda sobre la presencia de población judía en territorio vascoparlante antes de 1492, no existe evidencia sobre la lengua o lenguas que hablaban. José Ramón Magdalena Nom de Déu duda que hablaran euskera. Sin embargo, puesto que la falta de evidencia es algo diferente de la evidencia negativa, el autor de la presente nota, prefiere dejar esta cuestión abierta diciendo "no se sabe".

RÉSUME

Bien qu´il n´y ait pas de doute sur la présence de population juive en territoire parlant le basque avant 1492, il n´y a aucun évidence sur la langue ou les langues qu´ils utilisaient. José Ramon Magdalena Nom de Déu met en doute qu´ils aient parlé le basque. Cependant, étant donné que le manque d´évidence n´est pas la même chose que l´évidence négative, l´auteur de la présente note préfère laisser cette question en suspens et dire «on ne sait pas».

ABSTRAC

Whereas no one doubts the presence of Jews on Basque-speaking territory before 1492, we have no evidence about what language or language or languages they spoke. José Ramón Magdalena Nom de Déu doubts that any spoke Baske. However, since lack of evidence is different from negative evidence, the author of the present note prefers to leave that question open by saying "we do not know".