GUEST EDITORIAL

On behalf of all those of us working to promote the diffusion of Ladino studies, I would like to express our gratitude to Jonathan Magonet and the board of *European Judaism* for this opportunity to bring to a wider public the language and literature of those other Jews, the Sephardim.

In the opening article James Nelson Novoa presents an overview of the cultural significance of a unique collection of manuscripts from late fifteenth-century Spain. These manuscripts were written in *aljamiado* (Spanish in Hebrew characters), and include an incomplete version of the *Visión Deleitable de las artes y ciencias* (The Delightful Vision of the Arts and Sciences) by the converso poet Alfonso de la Torre. This primer on philosophy and metaphysics is analyzed in the following article by Harm den Boer, and especially its importance in the Western Sephardi diaspora. Den Boer includes an until now unknown report by the Spanish Inquisition including the work on its Index of forbidden books.

Ora Schwarzwald discusses the existence in the sixteenth century of two prayer books for women written in Ladino as they did not usually have any knowledge of Hebrew. These are the only known Ladino *siddurim* intended specifically for women and the second more detailed work in particular provides a fascinating insight into women's religious practices in the sixteenth century.

By the eighteenth century, knowledge of Hebrew and Jewish ritual had fallen into decline among the Sephardi population at large. Aliza Meyuhás Ginio outlines Rabbi Ya'acov Khuli's daring initiative of producing his monumental work, the *Me'am Lo'ez*, a detailed commentary on the Bible together with copious notes and annotation in Ladino rather than Hebrew. The first volume was printed in Istanbul in 1730 and additional commentaries continued to be written by a number of rabbinical scholars up to the late nineteenth century. A particular characteristic of the *Me'am Lo'ez* is that it targeted the whole populace and, for many women, it was their initiation into religious practice.

Ilana Tahan's contribution is a meticulous inventory of the Judeo-Spanish manuscripts in the British Library's Hebrew collection and it is to be hoped that it will promote scholarly interest in this precious resource. Most of the manuscripts date from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

It was the middle of the nineteenth century that saw a dramatic efflorescence of Ladino literary production prompted by the opening up of the Ottoman Empire to Western influences and the establishment of the Alliance Israélite Universelle network of schools. The introduction of the Ladino press

was particularly influential on the development of written production as many literary works were either included in these journals or were produced as supplements to them. Olga Boravaya traces the inception of the first Ladino journal, the *Sha'arei Mizrach* in Izmir, 1845-46, tracing the events leading up to its first issue and clarifying the identity of the first Sephardi journalist as Rafael Uziel. Yvette Bürki demonstrates how the Sephardi press continued to flourish well into the twentieth century and shows its vital role in transforming and modernising Ladino literature and, indeed, modernising the language itself particularly through its vocabulary.

One of the literary genres promoted by the Ladino press was the novel, often as weekly instalments although some works appeared separately. Michael Alpert traces the novel's development, its corpus, and the influence of foreign sources on it, stressing that many of these were adaptations of known European works, particularly French ones. Julie Scolnik describes a subset of this genre, the detective novel.

The creation and history of Ladino plays from the mid-nineteenth century onwards is the subject of María del Carmen Valentín's article. Valentín shows how the Judeo-Spanish theatre both adapted and adopted existing material or created new Sephardi/Jewish works.

Whilst it might be thought that Ladino literary creation came to an end with the annihilation of the main Sephardi communities during the Holocaust, there has been in recent years a renewal of literary creation. Shmuel Refael brings this volume to a poignant close with his powerful study of the poems composed by Sephardi women writing about the Holocaust.

Hilary Pomeroy
Guest Editor