CHAPTER 4

Beautiful Damsels and Men of Valor: Ladino Literature Giving Us a Peek into the Spiritual World of Sephardi Women in Jerusalem (Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries)

Ahi [la oría de la mar] te contaré mis dertes
Que te metas a llorar
[* Translation : There [on the sea-shore] I shall tell you my troubles
That will make you shed a tear.]

…

Ven kerida ven amada
Kantiga lirika (Turkia)

Ven kerida ven amada
Ven al bodre de la mar
Ay te kontare mis penas
Ke te metas a yorar

Matilda Koen-Sarano, Vini kantaremos. Kalekson de kantes djudeo-espanyloes
(Jerusalem: Édisión de la Autora, 2006), 154.

…”

Ladino Books Kept by Nona Flor

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, written literature in Ladino burgeoned. Newspapers and books in it appeared in the main cities of the Ottoman Empire, where there were Sephardi communities. The press in Ladino in particular as well as books – some of which appeared as supplements in
Ladino newspapers – served as unmistakable agents for the dissemination of process of *moderna* among its reading audience.\(^1\) Adaptations were made of novels originally written in foreign languages, mainly French, by editors and publishers such as Eliya Karmona (Carmona), Aleksander (Alexander) Ben Guiat, Ben Tzion Taragán, Moshe Azriel,\(^2\) and Shlomo Israel Cherizli (Shirizli) (1878–1938) – who was known by an acronym of his name, *shin, yod, shin* (ShaYi”Sh) – an editor, publisher, and owner of a printing house in Jerusalem, who even had and operated a lending library, for the benefit of the readers. The Ladino books ShaYi”Sh translated, edited, and printed in his city, Jerusalem, were accessible to women readers among the Sephardi Jewish women also thanks to his lending library. This meant that, at the time, they constituted part of the Ladino reading audience, who were nourished by ShaYi”Sh’s Ladino literary endeavor.\(^3\) At the heart of the discussion in this chapter stands Mrs. Flor Pisanti née Ginio (Chinillo) (1885–1958) of Jerusalem. Fortuitously, after the passing of Mrs. Flor Pisanti, her granddaughter, Mrs. Flora Tessone Ben Amram, found in her cupboard, the place she hid objects of value to her – clothing, jewelry, linens – five books, all in Ladino. They consisted of separate booklets that had been bound into five volumes in amateur binding, consisting of thirteen novels and novellas. The format for all was the same: 14 cm long by 11 cm wide. They had been printed on cheap paper yellowed over time.\(^4\) I have


\(^2\) On him, see ch. 3, n 2, above.


\(^4\) Below is a list of the five volumes that Flor Pisanti kept in her cupboard and the titles of the books contained in each volume. To prepare this list, I had recourse to the card catalogue of the Makhon Ben-Zvi Library in Jerusalem. I thank Dr. Dov Hacohen, deputy