FIRST NAMES
IN SEPHARDI COMMUNITIES[1]

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First names constitute a unique lexical grouping that differs substantially from regular linguistic structures. Ordinary dictionaries do not list first names unless their meanings are in some way special (for instance, Hebrew dictionaries ascribe the meaning of "anonymous, first in a list of unknown people" to the name *Re'uven*, or "rich man" to *Koraḥ*[2]). Nonetheless, in my study of the Hebrew-Aramaic component of Judeo-Spanish (henceforth JS), I have found that Hebrew first names can be analyzed in much the same way as other JS Hebrew words. It should be noted that (a) some Hebrew first names have never been used by Sephardi Jews and that first name choice is partially dependent on historical and cultural variables (section 1 below); (b) over time first names have fused phonologically and morphologically as is the case with many other Hebrew-Aramaic words (section 2 below); (c) first names have often undergone broad semantic shifts and are also frequently used in proverbs and idioms (section c below).[3]

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[1] This is an updated revised version of my paper "Hebrew proper names in Judeo-Spanish," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore* 10 (1988): 95–109 [Hebrew].

[2] I have used the following conventions for first name transliteration: *ḥ* represents the Hebrew letter *ḥet*, pronounced as [x] (*ch* in German *Buch*) in the eastern Sephardi communities and as [ħ] in Hakitia of North Africa; *kh* represents *kaf rafa*, also pronounced as [x], *s* stands for *samekh* and *sin*; *ṣ* indicates the Hebrew *tsadi* pronounced as [s] in Judeo-Spanish; *k* stands for *qof* and *kaf*; *sh* is used for *shin*; *alef* and *'ayin* are marked by ', although in general these are not pronounced in Judeo-Spanish. The Spanish sound [ž], as in French *journal* is transcribed as *j*, and the Judeo-Spanish [g], as *g* in English George, is transcribed as *dj*.

[3] See T. Alexander and Y. Bentolila, "Personal names in Judeo-Spanish proverbs from Northern Morocco (Hakitia)," *Jerusalem Studies for Jewish Folklore* 19–20 (1997–1998): 147–87 (in Hebrew), and their paper in English in this volume.

Research into Hebrew first names is an area of limited scope within onomastics. The socio-historical choice of first name usage and the rejection of others indicate cultural trends in the society that adopts them. Phonetic and morphological name changes illustrate that these are words that closely follow the linguistic structure of JS. Semantic name changes and the usage of names in proverbs and idioms reflect communal literary awareness, on the one hand, and folkloristic creativity, interpretive attitudes, and societal beliefs (in this case Sephardi) on the other.

The data were collected from a variety of written sources, as well as from oral interviews with mother-tongue JS speakers.[4] The written sources include novels and historical descriptions relating to everyday life in a number of Sephardi communities,[5] as well as academic articles and books relating to the Hebrew-Aramaic component of JS.[6] This paper will examine only the use of Hebrew first names in Sephardi communities, i.e., it will not discuss the use of family names (although this too is an interesting topic worthy of special study).[7]

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[4] The informants included, among others, the late Aron Roussau, Shaul Malachi-Angel, and my own parents, Ester and Nisim Rodrigue.

[5] The novels and historical descriptions appear in Y. Yehoshua, *Yaldut Bi-Yrushalayim Ha-'atiqa [Childhood in Old Jerusalem]*, 1–6 (Jerusalem, 1965–1969); idem, *Yerushalayim Tmol Shilshom [Jerusalem Formerly]*, 1–3 (Jerusalem, 1977–1981); D. Benvenisti et al., *Saloniki: Ir Va-'em Be-Yisrael [Salonique: Ville–Mère en Israël]* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, 1967); Y. Samokoblia, *Ben Aviv Le-Aviv [Between Springs]* (Jerusalem, 1982); D. A. Recanati, *Zikhron Saloniki: Grandeza i Destruicion de Yeruchalayim del Balkan*, 1–2 (Tel Aviv, 1972).

[6] The articles and books are listed in detail in D. M. Bunis, *A Lexicon of the Hebrew and Aramaic Elements in Modern Judezmo* (Jerusalem, 1993). They include articles on the Hebrew component as well as books and dictionaries on Judeo-Spanish, and collections of proverbs and idioms. I have added some names from the following articles that dealt recently with Sephardi first names: L. Bornstein-Makovetsky, "Jewish names in Istanbul in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: A study based on bills of divorce," in *These Are the Names: Studies in Jewish Onomastics*, 1, ed. A. Demsky et al. (1997), pp. 13–26; idem, "Jewish first names in Smyrna in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: A study based on the bills of divorce and the community gravestones," in *These Are the Names: Studies in Jewish Onomastics*, 3, ed. A. Demsky et al. (2002), pp. 21–63 [Hebrew]; idem, "Personal names of Salonikan Jewry in recent generations according to marriage certificates and gravestones," in *These Are the Names: Studies in Jewish Onomastics*, 4, ed. A. Demsky et al. (2003), pp. 23–49 [Hebrew].

[7] Some of the Hebrew names appear in the above mentioned sources in footnotes 2 and 4–5. See also Y. Kerem, "On Sephardic and Romaniotic names," in

1. The Choice of First Names

The decision to use Hebrew words in non-Hebrew-speaking communities is not an unusual linguistic event.[8] Sephardi communities have chosen to name their children with Hebrew first names (often using the same name within families, from grandparent to grandchild, and so on) for many hundreds of years and have always favored giving the classical names of Jewish heroes, rabbis, and other influential personalities to their children. Names with negative connotations have fallen out of use. The following description classifies first names used by Sephardi communities according to the literary sources from which they were chosen.

1.1 Males Names

BIBLICAL NAMES

(1) Names of outstanding personalities in the Pentateuch, e.g., *Avraham, Isḥak, Ya'akov, Isra'el* (Patriarchs), *Asher, Binyamin, Efrayim, Isakhar, Levi, Menashe,*[9] *Naftali, Re'uven, Shim'on, Yehuda, Yosef,* (the names of the Tribes of Israel, the sons of Jacob), *Aharon, Amram, Beṣal'el, Gershon, Moshe, Pinḥas, Yehoshua* (names connected with the story of Exodus).[10]

(2) Names of prophets and kings: *Azarya, David, Eliyah(u), Elisha,*[11] *Hoshea* (rare), *Ḥizkyah(u), Menaḥem,*[12] *Natan, Naḥum, Ovadya, Ṣefanya, Sha'ul, Shelomo, Shemu'el, Yeḥezkel, Yoshiyahu* (rare), *Zekharya, Yeshayahu, Yona, Yo'el.*

[8] See for instance, M. Weinreich, *History of the Yiddish Language,* translated by S. Noble (Chicago, 1980); U. Weinreich, "'Al ha-'ivrit ha-'ashkenazit ve-ha-'ivrit she-ba-yiddish: beḥinatan ha-ge'ografit" [Ashkenazi Hebrew and Hebrew in Yiddish: Geographical study], *Leshonenu* 24 (1960): 242–52; 25 (1961): 57–80, 180–96.

[9] *Menashe* is also the name of a king.

[10] All the names here are given according to their Sephardi Hebrew pronunciation. The English versions may differ slightly.

[11] The name is pronounced *Elishaḥ* in Salonika and in some other places.

[12] *Menaḥem* is also a noun meaning comforter. See the discussion below in 3.2.3.

(3) Other biblical Hebrew names: *Avshalom*, *Azri'el* (rare), *Barukh*,[13] *Dani'el*, *El'azar*, *Eli'ezer*, *Elimelekh* (rare), *Eliṣafan* (rare), *Elkana*, *Elyakim*, *Ezra*, *Gamli'el*, *Gavri'el*, *Gedalya*, *Gershom/n*, *Hillel*, *Ḥanan*, *Ḥanan'el*, *Ḥananya*, *Ḥanokh* (rare), *Immanu'el*, *Meshullam*, *Mikha'el*, *Misha'el*, *Mordokhay*, *Neḥemya*, *Noaḥ*, *Pereṣ* (rare), *Rafa'el*, *Ṣion*,[14] *Ṣuri'el* (rare), *Shabetay*, *She'alti'el* (~*Salti'el*, *Salti*), *Shemarya*, *Shemaya*, *Tuvya* (rare), *Uri'el*, *Ya'ir* (rare), *Yedidya*, *Yeḥi'el*, *Yehonatan*, *Yekuti'el* (rare), *Yishai* (rare), *Yo'av* (rare), *Yoḥanan*, *Yonatan*.

I have found that the names *Dan*, *Gad* and *Zevulun* (three of the sons of Jacob) have historically not been utilized by Sephardi Jews. The first two contain only one syllable each (monosyllabic first names were extremely rarely), but I could not find a reason why *Zevulun*, a very positive personality according to the Midrash, was not used as a first name (see section 3.1 below).

The name *Yirmiya* (the prophet) was infrequently given to babies as it was associated with the phrase *Yirmiya el yoron* "crying Jeremiah; pessimist; someone easily reduced to tears,"[15] probably because the authorship of the book of Lamentations is attributed to him.

The following names of prophets are either rarely or never used as first names in Sephardi communities (although some of them may have been used as family names): *Mikhayhu*, *Amos*, *Micha*, *Ḥagay*, *Malakhi*, and *Ḥavakuk*.[16]

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[13] *Barukh* is also a noun meaning blessed. See c below.

[14] The name *Ṣion* changed from being toponym in the Bible to an anthroponym at a later stage. The names *Ṣion* and *Ben-Ṣion* were assigned to sons in families that had lost many of their children. The name *Shabetay* was assigned especially to children born on Sabbath, see M. Molho, *Traditions and Customs of the Sephardic Jews of Salonica,* translated by A. A. Zara, edited by R. Bedford (New York, 2006), p. 56. See also the discussion of this name by N. G. Cohen, "The name 'Shabtai' in the Hellenistic-Roman period," in *These Are the Names: Studies in Jewish Onomastics* 1, ed. A. Demsky et al. (1999), pp. 11–29 [Hebrew].

[15] Another proverb related to this name is *Yirmiya el marido, Yirmiya la mujer,* "the husband is Jeremiah, the wife is Jeremiah; very pessimistic people." Compare the English noun jeremiad, "a long mournful lament."

[16] The name *Ḥavakuk* is considered by some to be an insult, used when someone has done something repulsive, as in "*No seas Ḥavakuk,*" "Don't be Habakkuk" (Ester Rodrigue). This name was also used in the half Turkish expression, "*Ḥavakuk sinin olsun,*" "Habakkuk will be yours; let's not fight, I am ready to give up" (Roussau).

POST–BIBLICAL NAMES

A few Hebrew names originated in Mishnaic-Talmudic and Geonic times and do not occur in the Bible, e.g., *Abba* (rare), *Akiva* (rare), *Avigdor* (rare),[17] *Ḥasday, Matatya*,[18] *Me'ir, Naḥman, Se'adya* (~*Sa'adi*).

Many biblical proper names are also common in Mishnaic Hebrew (e.g., Rabbis *Elazar, Eli'ezer, Hillel, Naḥum, Shim'on, Yehuda*, the angels *Gavri'el, Rafa'el*). Therefore, the choice of the names could be echoed in some cases by either the biblical name or the later identical ones.

COMMON NOUNS OR ADJECTIVES

Barukh,[19] *Bokhor, Ḥaviv, Ḥayim*,[20] *Mallakh, Maṣliaḥ, Mevorakh* (rare), *Meyuḥas, Na'im, Neḥama, Nisim, Raḥamim, Ṣadik, Sason, Simḥa, Shalom, Teshuva* (rare), *Yakir* (rare), *Yeshu'a*, (meaning respectively blessed, first-born, pleasant, life, angel, successful, blessed, distinguished, pleasant, consolation, miracles, mercy, pious, joy, happiness, peace, repentance, notable person, salvation). To these the name *Menaḥem* "comforter,"[21] which was listed above as the name of an Israelite king, can also be added. Some common first names are composed of two words: *Shem-Tov, Siman-Ṭov, Yom-Tov* (meaning respectively good name, good sign, and holiday). All these names have positive connotations.

Naming babies after Hebrew words for animals was extremely rare in JS-speaking communities, e.g., *Dov*,[22] *Ṣevi* (=*Tsvi*),[23] *Ze'ev, Aryé*[24] (respectively, bear, deer, wolf, lion). These first names were far more

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[17] The phrase *'avi gədor,* "father of Gedor," occurs in 1 Chr. 4:4, but the use of *Avigdor* as a first name started in Midrashic Hebrew, as one of Moshe's names (*Psikta Zutarta* [*Lekaḥ Tov*], Shemot 2.

[18] This is the traditional Sephardi pronunciation of the name *Matityahu*.

[19] *Barukh* is also a person's name in the Bible.

[20] *Ḥayim* can also mean "somebody," as in the proverb: *lo ke kuze mi tiya Perla en un anyo, lo deskuze mi tiyo Ḥayim en una noche,* "What my aunt Perla sews over the course of one year, my uncle Chaim unpicks in one night"—it is easier to destroy than to build.

[21] See Alexander and Bentolila (n. 3 above).

[22] The Spanish word *lonso,* "bear," is used as a curse denoting stupidity in Sephardi communities.

[23] Bornstein-Makovetsky, Istanbul (n. 5 above), p. 24, found one occurrence of the name *Ẓevi*, but I am not sure of the Sephardi identity of the person to whom it refers. Of course it appears in the name of Shabbetai Zevi.

[24] These names are typical of Ashkenazi Jewry, see Bornstein-Makovetsky, Smyrna (n. 5 above), p. 51; Izmir, p. 51.

common in the Ashkenazi Diaspora.[25] There are many other names found throughout classical Hebrew sources that were not used as first names in Judeo-Spanish. Some of these may not have been popular because they were the names of evil characters or personalities with negative connotations, for example *Koraḥ*, *Datan,* and *Aviram*, who rebelled against Moses in the desert and were punished as a result, or *Naval the Carmelite*, who did not help David while escaping from King Saul. The following names of biblical kings were never used as first names because of their negative biblical associations: *Aḥ'av*, *Ba'asha*, *Ela*, *Omri*, *Reḥav'am*, *Yarov'am*, and *Yehu*.[26] Furthermore, Sephardi communities did not name their children with the first names of biblical personalities with non-Jewish origins, e.g., *Balak*, *Bil'am*, *Yitro*. The biblical names *Esav* and *Yishma'el*,[27] in spite of being sons of Patriarchs, were eponyms of foreign nations hostile to Israel and were also not used. The names of other biblical personalities were not given because they featured in the Bible infrequently, e.g., *Aḥaz*, *Avihud*, *Ivṣan*, *Ḥani'el*, *Shama*, and *Taḥash*.

It is interesting to note that although there were many biblical judges, only the name *Shimshon*, the brave hero, was used as a first name by Sephardi communities, and that names such as *Otni'el*, *Ehud*, *Gideon*, and *Yiftaḥ* were not given to children. The name *Yiftaḥ* occurs only in the proverb: *Ben kakh u-ven kakh guay de (~bolo) la iža de Yiftaḥ* "In the meantime, woe for (~was lost) the daughter of Jephthah." This proverb refers to *Midrash Tanḥuma Be-Ḥukotay* 7,[28] whereby it is suggested that Phineas, the high priest, had the opportunity to annul Jephthah's vow to sacrifice

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[25]   See B. C. Kaganoff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Names and Their History*, New York 1977, p. 110. These four animal names are the same or substitutes for those associated with the four sons of Jacob who are blessed with animal traits in Genesis 49. While found in Ashkenazi nomenclature from the sixteenth century, one or two like Yehudah Leone (Abarbanel) or Benjamin Zeev might have been found among Sephardi (as in the case of Benjamin Zeev the name of an early sixteenth-century Greek Jewish responsum) or Italian Jewry since they were derived from two consecutive words in the Bible.

[26]   The choice of names was motivated by the biblical verse: *zekher ṣadiq livrakha ve-shem resha'im yirqav,* "The memory of the righteous shall be for a blessing, but the name of the wicked shall rot" (Proverbs 10:7).

[27]   *Yishma'el* was a name that continued to exist into Mishnaic Hebrew (e.g. Rabbi *Ishma'el*).

[28]   All the post-biblical citations henceforth are based on the Responsa Project 15, Bar Ilan University 2007. *Midrash Tanḥuma* is cited from Buber's edition.

his daughter but because each of them refused to go to the other owing to considerations of honor the result was tragic.[29]

Because of secular trends in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially in those communities under French and Spanish influence, many Sephardi boys were given foreign names that came to represent the Hebrew names, e.g., *Albert* (*Avraham*), *Enrique*, *Anri* (*Aharon*), *Muiz*, *Moiz* (*Moshe*), *Pepo*, *Papo* (*Yosef*), and *Jako*, *Jak* (*Yaakov*).

1.2 Females Names

The number of female names found in the classical Hebrew sources is less than a tenth the number of male Hebrew names.[30] Although far fewer women than men are mentioned in the Bible and the Mishnah, their number must have been equal in the population. In many cases women are not mentioned by their names, e.g., *meneket Rivka,* "Rebecca's wet nurse," or *shifḥato shel R. Yehuda haNasi,* "Rabbi Judah's maid." In the book of Judges, for instance, only three women are mentioned by name— *Devorah*, *Yael,* and *Delilah* the Philistine—while only two prominent queens are listed in the book of Kings, *Atalyah* and *Jezebel*, both of Phoenician origin and negative personalities.[31] While men need a Hebrew name for ceremonial purposes (e.g., circumcision, being called to the Torah in the synagogue, etc.), women do not. As there is only a small inventory of female Hebrew names, the choice of Hebrew first names that any parents could give to their daughters was relatively limited.

Hebrew names for women came from the following sources:

BIBLICAL AND MIDRASHIC LITERARY HEROINES

The Matriarchs—*Sarah*, *Rivkah*, *Raḥel*, *Le'ah*, and *Zilpah* (rare);[32] and later figures—*Avigayil* (rare), *Bat Sheva*, *Bityah* (rare), *Beruryah* (rare), *Devorah*, *Dinah* (rare), *Esther*, *Ḥanah*, *Ḥavah* (rare),

[29] Unless mentioned otherwise, all the proverbs and idioms were selected from the written sources mentioned in notes 4 and 5.

[30] I examined first names starting with the letters *aleph, ḥet, 'ayin* and *tav* in S. Mandelkern, *Veteris Testamenti Concordantiae*[5] (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, 1962), and found that of these there were about 500 male names (93%), and only 37 female names (7%).

[31] Of course there were the Queen Mothers, mostly of the Judean kings, the best known being Bathsheba.

[32] The name *Bilhah* was not given to girls. Instead, the phonetically similar name *Bélla* was used, denoting beautiful.

Ṣiporah, *Miriam*, *Ruth* (very rare),[33] *Tamar* (rare), *Ya'el* (rare), *Yehudit*,[34] *Yokheved* (very rare).

COMMON NOUNS

Berakhah, *Bokhorah*, *Ge'ulah*, *Malkah*, *Mazal*, *Mazaltov*, *Neḥamah*,[35] *Simḥah, Tovah, Yafah, Yonah* (meaning respectively: blessing, first born, redemption, queen, luck, good luck, consolation, joy, good, beautiful, pigeon).

A high number of foreign female first names were used in Sephardi communities: *Anet*, *Ermoza*, *Estrea*, *Eva*, *Fortuna*, *Izabel*,[36] *Janet*, *Klara*, *Lina*, *Luna*, *Oro*, *Reina*, *Roza*, *Suzan*, *Suzana*, *Violet*, and others.[37] Some of these names are Hebrew name equivalents, e.g., *Fortuna* = *Mazal*, *Reina* = *Malkah*; others became Hebrew in Israel during the twentieth century, e.g., *Estrea* = *Kokhava* or *Ester*, *Luna* = *Levana*, *Oro* = *Zehava* or *Ora*, *Reina* or *Sultana* = *Malkah*, *Roza* or *Suzana* = *Shoshanah*, *Vida* = *Ḥayah*, and *Palom(b)a* = *Yonah*.[38] As with boy's names, there is strong tendency to avoid naming girls with names that have negative connotations, e.g., *Avishag*, *Hagar*, *Orpah* (see 3.1 below), *Vashti*, or with rare names like *Ḥagit*, *Ḥuldah*, *Oholivah*, *Tirṣah*.

2. Hebrew Name Fusion

Some Hebrew names were adapted into the Judeo-Spanish phonetic system with minor changes, e.g., *Avram* for *Avraham* (*he* is not pronounced in many Judeo-Spanish communities), *Besalel* for *Beṣal'el* (*Ṣadi* is pronounced as *s*, *alef* is deleted), *Khayim* for *Ḥayim* (eastern JS communities pronounce *ḥet* as *kaf rafa*), *Mordokhai* is pronounced with the vowel *o* after *d*, because of the *ḥataf kamaṣ*, *Ambram* for *Amrám* (with epenthetic *m*),

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[33]   This is a monosyllabic name. See Bornstein-Makovetsky, Izmir (n. 6 above), p, 63.

[34]   Although mentioned in the Bible as Esau's wife, I believe that this name primarily refers to the Jewish heroine of the Book of Judith, who in Jewish legend is connected to the story of Hanukkah.

[35]   Bornstein-Makovetsky, Izmir (n. 6 above), p. 60, mentions this name in connection with *Na'amah* and *Nahamah*, both of which were rarely given as first names.

[36]   Both the biblical queen and the Spanish queen who expelled the Jews from Spain were considered negative in Jewish tradition. The appearance of this name in the twentieth century is due to French influence.

[37]   Many of these names are originally French in origin.

[38]   Some resemble foreign names in meaning, some in sound.

Raḥél, Nisím, Shaúl, Neḥamáh, all of which are pronounced with a stress on the final syllable.

Some other Hebrew names changed for the following reasons.

2.1. Frequency of Use

Because of the frequency of use, some names were shortened: vowels, semi-vowels, and final consonants were deleted, and middle consonants became voiced, e.g., *Eli'ezer > Liezer, El'azar > Lazar,*[39] *David > Davi, Yehudah > Yuda, Yehoshua > Yeshua, Yeḥezkel > Ḥaskel, Ya'akov > Yako, Iṣḥak > Izak, Yeshaaya > Shaya (Shekhaya* in Salonika), *Shimon > Simon.*[40]

2.2. Addition of Suffixes

The addition of Turkish or Spanish suffixes indicating diminution or affection changed the names into typical Judeo-Spanish forms:

Avraham > Avramache, Avramachi, Mache, Avramiko, Avramucho, Avramino, Mamo

David > Davi, Daviko, Daviche, Davichon, Dacha, Dacho

Eliyahu > Eli, Eliko, Liya, Liyau, Liyaito, Liaicho

Ester > Istirina, Esterina, Esterika, Esterka, Esterula, Esterulachi, Esterluka, Esterucha, Esterulika, Strea[41]

Ḥanah > Ḥanucha (Khanucha), Ḥanula, Ḥanulika

Immanu'el > Manuel, Mano

Moshe > Moshiko, Moshon[42]

Refael > Rafaeldji, Rafaeladji

Rivkah > Rikula, Rika, Rifkula, Ribula[43]

Sarah > Saruta, Sarula, Sarucha, Sarina

Simḥah > Sunḥa, Simḥula, Sunḥula, Simḥalika

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[39] The changes in these two names have already been attested to in reliable Mishnaic text, See Y. Kutscher, *"Leshon Ḥaza"l"* (The Language of the Sages), in *Henoch Yalon Jubilee Volume,* ed. S. Lieberman, S. Abramson, E.Y. Kutscher, and S. Esh (Jerusalem, 1963), pp. 255–57.

[40] *Shin* is pronounced as *s* in some communities, such as Salonika.

[41] Perhaps this is the realization of the Spanish name *Estrea* (see above the end of 1.2).

[42] See discussion on *Moshe* (b) in 3.2.3 below.

[43] See more varieties in Alexander and Bentolila (n. 3 above).

2.3. Influence of Foreign Equivalents

The pronunciation of some names was influenced by their foreign equiv-
alents, e.g. *Djaki*, *Jako*, *Jaki*, *Djako* for *Yaakov* (cf. Jacques in French),
Ruben for *Reuven*, etc. (see more examples above).

3. Expanded Meanings of Hebrew First Names

Names with positive connotations and names of literary heroes (Patri-
archs, prophets, kings, leaders, and so on) who played a positive role in
Jewish history were widely known to members of Sephardi communities
from weekly liturgical readings of the *parashah*, the *haftarah*, the *megillot*
read on special holy days, and the study of Ethics of the Fathers (*Pirkei
Avot*), reviewed from Passover to Pentecost, and these were therefore fre-
quently chosen as first names. Names of foreigners or enemies, names
bearing negative connotations, and rare names were not given by
Sephardi community members to their children. Some names, however,
were associated with special, additional meanings. I will first discuss here
Hebrew names that were not assigned to people but have special mean-
ings (3.1) and continue to describe names that might have been given to
people, but that also have special connotations and are found also in prov-
erbs and idioms (3.2).[44]

3.1 Additional Meanings of Names that Were Not Assigned to People

As stated in section 1, there are a number of Hebrew names that Sephardi
communities did not utilize as first names because of negative connota-
tions due to the evil deeds of these biblical personalities, because of the
misfortune of the original bearers of the name, or because of the unfa-
vorable view in the midrashic commentary. Here are a few examples:

> *Aḥ'av*: "rich and dishonest man," originating from the biblical
> king who, in spite of his wealth, coveted Naboth's vineyard (I
> Kings 21). The idiom *riko komo Aḥ'av,* "as rich as Ahab," was used
> in Hakitia, whereas in the eastern communities the equivalent
> expression was *riko komo Koraḥ,* "as rich as Korah."

> *Aḥitofel*: "someone pretending to be too wise," originating from
> the biblical counselor Ahithophel who betrayed David (II Samuel
> 15–17).

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44 See Alexander and Bentolila's distinction of the types of names (n. 3 above).

Bil'am: "glutton and drunkard." The biblical prophet Balaam son of Beor who wanted to curse the Israelites when passing through the desert is perceived as being evil (Mishnah Avot 5:19); hence the idiom *malo komo Bil'am,* "evil as Balaam," was used in Hakitia.[45] Eastern Sephardi communities also associated the name *Bil'am* with gluttony because of the midrashic and homiletic association of this name with the Hebrew verb *bala',* "swallow," as if Balaam wanted to swallow Israel (TB, Sanhedrin 105b). The name *Bil'am* also appears in the idiom *ojos de Bil'am,* "Balaam's eyes," someone who can see well from far away, originating from the biblical story in which Balaam saw the Israelites camps from far and was requested to curse them but blessed them instead (Numbers 22–23).[46]

Efron (pronounced *furon*): "exuberant about money," especially in the idiom *ojo de Furon:* "Ephron's eye; greedy person," based on Genesis 23. Ephron seemed to offer Abraham the Machpelah Cave for free but he actually demanded 400 silver shekels (Bereshit Rabba 58:7).

Gideon (pronounces as *Khadayon*): "a simple naïve person," based on the *midrash* that attributed good faith to him even in actions that were considered heresy (*Devarim Rabba* [Lieberman's edition], *Parashat Ekev* 3, siman 2, dibur hamaṭhil *"ve-haya 'ekev"*).

Haman: "evil person" (see 3.2.1)

Iyov: "miserable man, suffering from catastrophe and tragedy," based on the biblical story in the Book of Job. This name is common in idioms such as *los males de Iyov,* "Job's tragedies"; *povre komo Iyov,* "miserable as Job."

Koraḥ: "rich man," especially in the idiom *riko komo Koraḥ,* "as rich as Korah," based on rabbinical and midrashic sources (TB Pesaḥim 119a).[47]

Lavan: "miser and robber," used in Hakitia, originating from the biblical stories in Genesis 24: 29–32) about Laban and on the

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[45] Hebrew Rabbinical sources contain over two hundred occurrences of the phrase *Bil'am harasha',* "Balaam the evil" (based on the Responsa Project 15, Bar Ilan University 2007).

[46] It is also implied by the interpretations of Hebrew *šǝtum ha'ain*.

[47] See Introduction and discussion of *Aḥ'av* above.

midrashim that followed (*Bereshit Rabba, Parasha* 63; *Vayikra Rabba, Parasha* 23).[48]

Naval: "scoundrel, stupid," based on the Hebrew noun *naval* which means a vile person, as well as on Nabal, the biblical character (I Samuel 25) who stupidly refused to assist David while his wife Abigail helped him behind his back.

Og: "very tall person," originating from the Midrash (*Devarim Rabba* 1:24; TB Niddah 24b).

Orpah: "witty woman." Orpah was Naomi's daughter-in-law who did not join her when she returned to Bethlehem. As the Midrash does not suggest that Orpah is particularly clever, it seems to me that the meaning of this name originates from the phonetic resemblance between *Orpah,* the Hebrew word *orma,* "cunning," and the Aramaic *ḥurfa,* "wittiness."[49]

Vayzata: "feeble tall man," relating to how this name is spelled with a long letter *vav* in the list of Haman's sons (Esther 9:9).

Yarov'am: "evil and sinner," originating from the story in which Jeroboam sinned and provoked the people of Israel to sin (e.g., I Kings 16:2; Mishnah Avot 5:18).

Yirmiyah: "pessimist; crying," see 1.1a above.

Zevulun: "unidentified man; funny person; early comer to a meeting or a party." The concept of Zevulun as meaning "unidentified man" is perhaps derived from the fact that the names Reuben, Simeon, and Levi (three of Zevulun's brothers) are commonly used to list unknown people. The concept of Zevulun meaning a funny person could be related to the biblical phrase *śemaḥ Zevulun bə-ṣetekha,* "Rejoice (be happy and laugh), Zebulun, on your journeys," Deut 33:18). I have no explanation for the third meaning.[50]

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[48] Theodor-Albeck and Margaliot editions, respectively; see the Responsa Project.

[49] Perhaps the wittiness is connected to Orpah's decision to turn her nape (Hebrew *'oref*) to Naomi.

[50] Aaron Demsky adds the explanation that Zevulun might have sounded like Senor Fulanu, the Castilian term for Mr. So-and-So, an unidentified person. He may be a stranger, therefore "funny." The Spanish term is derived from the Arabic *fulaan*

3.2 Hebrew Names in Proverbs and Idioms

Some Hebrew names have special meanings when found in proverbs and idioms. The proverbs and idioms associated with *Abraham*, *Eliyahu*, *Hillel*, *Reuven*, *Shimon*, *Moshe*, and *Yosef* are derived from biblical or rabbinic sources (3.2.1). Proverbs and idioms associated with names such as *Ḥannah* and *Ḥasday* are innovative, indicating positive folk characters (3.2.2). Some names that are used in proverbs and idioms are based either on classical sources or are innovative in nature (3.2.3).

3.2.1 Proverbs and Idioms with Hebrew Names Derived from Classical Sources

Avraham: *Por el Dio de Avram,* "For Abraham's God, an oath (like for God's sake)." Abraham was the original Father of the nation and the precedent he set is apparent in this idiom.[51]

Eliyahu: (1) *Eliyahu ha-navi,* "the prophet Elijah (a cry for help)"; (2) *la meza de Eliyahu ha-navi,* "Elijah the prophet's table; a table full of food"; (3) *Eliyahu ha-navi pase su mano de refu'a por (~para) el/ eya,* "The prophet Elijah will send his healing hand for him (the sick man) / for her (the woman in labor) (good wishes for a sick person or for a woman giving birth)." The last of these idioms is used in Hakitia.[52]

Hilel: *Pasensiozo komo Hilel,* "patient like Hillel," based on the legend that describes Hillel's patience (TB, Shabbat 30b–31a).

Re'uven i Shim'on: "unidentified men," based on the common usage of the expression in halakhic literature.[53]

Yosef: (1) *Onrado komo Yosef,* "respectable as Joseph" (in Hakitia); (2) *Yosef bovo no ay,* "there is no stupid Joseph"; Joseph cannot be stupid"; (3) *Todos los Yosef son bovos,* "all Josephs are stupid." Both

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where it has that meaning. Of course, it is related to Hebrew *pəloni*, West Semitic *plaan*, and sometimes used pejoratively. Interestingly, the Spanish uses the Arabic to indicate an outsider whereas in Arabic it was used to indicate the Christian outsider.

[51]   The Patriarchs Isaac and Jacob do not appear in this context. Perhaps the frequency of *Elohe Avraham,* "Abraham's God," in the Bible facilitated the use of this idiom.

[52]   Another proverb in Hakitia for a woman in labor: *Eliyahu hanavi se lo sale i fasilite,* "The prophet Elijah will get it out and easily."

[53]   See another proverb in 3.2.3 in the discussion on *Pinḥas* (b), and the discussion above regarding *Zevulun* in 3.1.

the latter two contradicting idioms refer to Joseph's biblical behavior.

Haman: (1) *Mozotros tenemos un padre raḥaman ke mos apiada i a Haman lo mata* "We have a merciful Father who has mercy on us and kills Haman," meaning that God saves the people of Israel; (2) *meoyo (~kavesa) de Haman* "Haman's brain (head)," a witty person who has bad intentions; (3) *fuersa de Haman,* "Haman's strength" to do harm; (4) *la pikurina de Haman,* "Haman's worthless thing"; (5) *malo komo Haman,* "as bad as Haman"; *ojos de Haman,* "Haman's eyes," nodes on the pieces of wood that children used to hit when hearing Haman's name during the reading of *Megillat Esther,*[54] perhaps the nodes on the wood are also a reference to the tree on which Haman was hung; (6) *ḥokhma tinia Haman i el sekhel flako,* "Haman had wisdom and a lean brain," he tried to be smart with no luck.

3.2.2 Proverbs and Idioms with Hebrew Names that Carry Innovative Meanings

Ḥana: (1) *Bendicho El ke adjunto Ḥana kon Simanto(v),* "Blessed be He who joined Ḥana with Siman-Tov (in good sign)," a blessing for suitable match-making. This proverb is a pun based on the double meaning of *Siman-Tov*: it is a man's name, but it is also a blessing said on happy occasions.[55] (2) *kokijo Ḥana su mantel,* "Ḥana gathered her coat; she is about to leave" (in Hakitia).

Ḥasday: *Enkasha (~frega) Ḥasday, ke la nochada ez grande,* "put in (~rub), Ḥasday, for the night is long; you can speak as much as you want, since it is known that you are a liar."

Siman-Tov: *Ni tan kurto komo Horsi ni tan luengo komo Simantov,* "Not as short as Horsi and not as long as Siman-Tov"—extremes are not good. These names do not refer to actual people.[56]

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[54] The *Megilla* is one of the five biblical scrolls read on Jewish Holidays throughout the year—these are: The Song of Songs on Passover, Ruth on Pentecost, Lamentations on the Ninth of Av, Ecclesiastes on Tabernacles Feast (Sukkot), and Esther on Purim.

[55] Another version of this proverb is *Bendicho El ke adjunto Mazalto(v) kon Simanto(v),* "Blessed be He who joined Mazal-Tov [woman's name or greeting] with Siman-Tov [man's name or greeting]."

[56] See the discussion about *Siman-Tov* in *Ḥana* above.

3.2.3 Proverbs and Idioms with Hebrew Names Either Derived from the Classical Sources or that Are Innovative in Nature

Moshe: a. the biblical reference: (1) *Moshe murio, Adonay kedo,* "Moses died but God remains"—no reason to despair; (2) *Moshe murio, ley kedo* "Moses died, the Torah remained"—no reason to avoid duties for false reasons; (3) *por la ley de Moshe,* "for Moshe's Torah!"—an oath; (4) *akontentose Moshe kon la parte ke le dio el Dio,* "Moshe should be satisfied with the share that God gave him"— Moshe was satisfied with his share and so should everybody, based on the verse "*yiśmaḥ Moshe bematnat ḥelqo,*" "Moses should rejoice in the gift given to him" said during the Saturday morning prayer service; (5) *kavezbasho komo Moshe Rabenu,* "low-headed like our Rabbi Moses"—a humble person (in Hakitia).

b. anybody: (1) *Moshe fue a Sefat, mas negro vino de lo ke se fue,* "Moshe went to Safed, he was worse on his return than before," a man tried to improve his manners with no luck[57]; (2) *en ke se le va al tiyo Moshe el dia? En kitar i sakudir la barva,* "How does Uncle Moses spend his day? In taking out and shaking his beard," a reference to an idle, lazy person; (3) *empeso Moshiko de Vayishlaḥ,* "Moses started with *Parashah Vayishlaḥ,*" a man continues talking about a subject already cleared up; (4) *torna Moshiko por el paliko,* "Return, Moses, for the stick"—one who deserves a punishment; (5) *ya me lo disho Moshiko de Djoyo,* "Moses of Geoyo's family has already told me," don't make up a story about this.

Pinḥas: a. a name of a rabbi (*Pinḥas ben Ya'ir*): (1) *komo la mula de Pinḥas, ke a lugar de ir por delantre, va por atras,* "Like Pinhas' mule, that instead of going forward, goes backward," a reference to someone who does not listen to good advise and deteriorates;[58] (2) *la mula de Pinḥas no va ni adelantre ni atras,* "Pinhas' mule does not go forward or backward," a lazy person.

b. unidentified person: *lo ke sako Pinḥas del luban i Shimon de las kafiteras,* "Whatever Pinhas gained of the resin and Simon from the coffee pot," one who has no success in his business (in Hakitia).

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[57] *Safed* is perceived to be a holy city by rabbis and kabbalists.

[58] The story about the animal going backward rather than forward fits Balaam's she-ass rather than Pinhas." According to the story, Pinhas's she-ass refused to eat barley before tithing (TJ, Demai, chapter 1, page 22a; TB Hullin 7a; Zohar, volume 3, Parashat Balak, page 201b). The person's name, the animal and the situation itself in this proverb have all been changed.

Shimshon: a. the biblical hero (Samson): (1) *fuerte komo Shimshom,* "strong as Samson"; (2) *aki muereria Shimshon kon kuantos son i no son,* "Samson will die here together with whoever is there," one needs to carry out one's duty in spite of the concern of any consequences, a clear reference to Samson's last act in the book of Judges (16: 28–30).

b. unidentified person: *Todo tiene Shimshon, solo le manka saran y sarampion,* "Samson has everything, he only didn't get a skin disease and rubella," he has many troubles.

Menaḥem[59]: unidentified person, many times used in a negative context: (1) *Menaḥem el korkovado echa piedra i eskonde la mano,* "Menahem the hunchback throws a stone and hides his hand," someone who does something bad and denies it; (2) *se ulvido Menaḥem de su mujer,* "Menahem forgot his wife," the husband does not support his wife financially; (3) *Menaḥem en ayuno ke nunka dezayuna,* "Menahem is in a never-ending fast," he is extremely poor; (4) *el bien va al bien i el sisko a Menaḥem (~en la karvonera),* "Good goes to the good and the coal powder goes to Menahem (~to the charcoal)"—good joins good and bad joins bad; (5) *Ḥen de Menaḥem (~Menaḥen),* "Menahem's grace"—total awkwardness.

Conclusion

I have described the way in which Sephardi Jewish communities utilized Hebrew first names. Individuals were given Hebrew names, some of which also had additional meanings and appear in idioms and proverbs, thus adding a layer of complexity to the nature of the meaning of the names.

Names with positive connotations, either Hebrew personal names or Hebrew nouns, were chosen as people's names. Names of people associated with negative actions in the Hebrew sources, as well as names of foreigners, were not used as first names. This trend is universally common among all Jewish religious communities throughout the Diaspora.[60]

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[59] See detailed discussion in Alexander and Bentolila (n. 3 above), and T. Alexander-Frizer, *Words Are Better Than Bread: A Study of the Judeo-Spanish Proverb* (Jerusalem and Beersheba, 2004), p. 232.

[60] See n. 25 above. This custom no longer exists in secular Israel. The use of names like *Hagar, Omri,* and *Nimrod* has become widespread over the last few generations.

Hebrew names in proverbs and idioms can have either positive or negative connotations. Very few first names come from later Hebrew periods. It seems that midrashic and rabbinical homiletic literature has greatly influenced parental choice of children's first names, as well as determining additional meanings and concepts relating to Hebrew names in general. The folkloristic use of Hebrew names in idioms and proverbs is relatively limited.

Biblical first names mostly originate from the weekly *parashah*, the *haftarah*, or the *megillot*. Names from less common passages in the Bible were hardly given to babies. The stock of names among the Sephardi communities did not increase during the generations because of the custom to name newborns either after their grandparents (even when they were still alive) or after dead relatives. This custom has been practiced for generations, although, as mentioned above, French and Spanish colonial and cultural influences affected parental choices of Hebrew first names in the past century.

It seems to me that similar trends relating to the choice of giving children Hebrew names can be found in other Jewish communities; Hebrew names are far more likely to come from Hebrew classical sources than to originate from the adaptation of Hebrew nouns. Similarly, first names are far more likely to be biblical than names from later post-biblical sources. There are far more Hebrew names for men than for women.[61] As for the use of names in proverbs and idioms, since these are mainly based on midrashic literature, they are most likely found in other Jewish communities as well, but each community has used these differently.

[61] See Kaganoff (n. 24 above), the articles in *These Are the Names*, 1–4, and the following sources: M. Ohana and M. Helzer, *Masoret ha-Shemot ha-Ivriyyim ha-Ḥuẓ-Miqra'iyyim* (The Tradition of Hebrew Names Outside the Bible) (Haifa, 1978); A. Arazi, *Ve-'ele Shemot Bene Israel* (These Are the Names of the Children of Israel) (Tel Aviv, 1982); D. Rozen, *Pesoq li Shimkha* (Give Me Your Name) (Jerusalem, 1966); M. Sambation, *Shemon Ivri* (Hebrew Name List) (Tel Aviv, 1939); D. Corcos, "Reflexions sur l'onomastique Judéo-Nord-Africaine," *Folklore Research Center Studies* 1 (1970), pp. 1–27.