Paraliturgical Poems

Starting in the sixteenth century, Ottoman Sephardim composed Ladino paraliturgical poems to be used on religious holidays, such as Hanukkah, Purim, Passover, Ninth of Av, and others. Although these *coplas* (couplets), as they were called, were written by learned men and initially transmitted in writing, later many of them entered the oral tradition and were sung or recited in multiple versions.

Purim *coplas* were often composed to commemorate a near escape experienced by a given community that had its own “little Purim.” The dirges recited on the Ninth of Av were typically unrelated to current events but, instead, told midrashic stories or went back to the Iberian folklore. Passover *haggadahs* had a fixed script, but their content could be changed for a comic effect. Moreover, at the turn of the twentieth century all these genres began to be used by Ladino periodicals for satirical purposes. Here, we present, in the chronological order, an example of a dirge, Purim *coplas*, and a *haggadah*, all of which deal with the events of recent history witnessed by their authors and known to their target audiences.