The Ninth of Av Dirge

The Ninth of Av is a fast commemorating the destruction of the first and second Jerusalem Temples (586 BCE and 70 CE). On that night (and sometimes the next morning), at the synagogue or at home, Sephardim would sing the *kinot* (paraliturgical lamentations), sometimes called *endechas* (dirges for the death of a person), as they often lamented a tragic death. While some of the dirges spoke of the destruction of the Temple and other events of Jewish history, many others narrated stories unrelated to the Jews. Among the oldest *kinot* are *Los syete ijos de Hana, La madre ke komyo a su ijo, Ya se van los syete ermanos,* and *La muerte del Prinsipe Don Juan.*

The dirge presented here exists in several versions. The one transcribed and translated below was recorded by Sephardi historian Moïse Franco in the 1890s in Istanbul. It relates one of the most tragic events that struck the Ottoman Jewish community. Between 1819 and 1926, five powerful Jewish financiers were executed on the sultan’s orders. The last two of them were murdered in July 1826 in Istanbul. They were Isaac Carmona, known as Çelebi Behor Carmona, and Isaiah Ajiman (Aciman), both of whom had business ties with the Janissary corps liquidated by the sultan a few weeks earlier. (The Janissaries were massacred following their revolt mentioned in the dirge.) After Carmona had been strangled in his mansion, some of his family members were exiled. A few days later, Ajiman was beheaded.

Although the dirge mentions both Carmona and Ajiman, it speaks mainly about the former and includes elements of the eulogy praising the virtues of the deceased. The poem
clearly depends on traditional kinot, particularly *Los Syte ijos de Hana*, a story of seven brothers killed by King Antiochus Epiphanes for refusing to renounce Judaism. There are obvious similarities between the two *kinot*. Thus, Ajiman is referred to as *el segundo* as if the two were brothers. One of the versions of *Los syete ijos de Hana* talks of the mother witnessing the violent death of one of her sons. Finally, the king sends his people for each of the brothers: *le mando gente enriba*. In our dirge, we find: *mishné de tyera le mando*.

The dirge ends as a typical Ninth of Av lamentation, expressing the hope that the Temple is soon rebuilt and the Messiah liberates the Jewish people.

The dirge has 22quatrenswith the *aba* rhyme. As is common for the *coplas*, the first letters of the first line of each stanza form an acrostic that follows the Hebrew alphabet. But, since Ladino did not use all 22 letters, the author had to insert certain Hebrew words. The need to have a particular sequence of letters apparently affected the logic of the narration. Thus, quatrens 15 and 18 are clearly switched.

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ii See Minna Rozen, *The Last Ottoman Century and Beyond : The Jewish Communities of Turkey and the Balkans 1808-1945*, vol. 1 (Tel Aviv, 2004), 53-57.