

COLLOQUIA



HUMANISTICA

Michael Studemund-Halévy

Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures  
University of Hamburg  
Hamburg  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3212-4182>  
[mihalevy1945@gmail.com](mailto:mihalevy1945@gmail.com)

## The Longing to Belong: Santo Semo the Language Convert<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

The paper focuses on Santo Semo's journey of linguistic migration, from his native language (Judezmo) to his adopted language (French), and his desire for another linguistic identity. He focused his energies on saving the world, bringing peace to the planet, and he was convinced of his mission until the dark end of his life, and subordinated everything to it.

**Keywords:** Santo Semo, Ottoman Empire, Bulgaria, France, Zionism, Young Turks.

---

<sup>1</sup> Despite his colorful personality and long service to the Young Turks and the Zionist movement, Santo Semo has attracted surprisingly little attention from scholars of Sephardic and Jewish history. This is the second part of an extensive monograph on the writer and political activist Santo Semo (1878–c. 1950). For their generous cooperation and assistance, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to numerous archives, libraries and their staff members at the following institutions in particular: National Library of Israel (NLI, Jerusalem), Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BN, Paris), Ibero–Amerikanisches Institut (IAI, Berlin), Zionist Archives (CZA, Jerusalem), Ladino Library (LB, Sofia), Yad Vashem (YV, Jerusalem), Yad Izhak Ben–Zvi (YBZ, Jerusalem), and the Zurich Jewish Community (ICZ).

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 PL License ([creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/pl/](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/pl/)), which permits redistribution, commercial and non-commercial, provided that the article is properly cited. © The Author(s), 2020.

Publisher: Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences

Editor-in-chief: Jolanta Sujecka

Conception and academic editing of this issue: Aleksandra Twardowska, Katarzyna Taczyńska

## In Search of Home

“We do not live in a country, we live in a language. A homeland is that, and nothing else” (Cioran, 1987, p. 2).

The linguistic convert, or *Sprachkonvertit*, and Francophile Santo Semo (not to be confused with the Austrian journalist Shem Tov Semo) (Studemund-Halévy, 2010, pp. 317–332) would have happily agreed. He saw the French language as his preferred home. For him, a Bulgarian from Ruse (Turkish *Ruşçuk*, German *Rustschuk*, French *Rousse/Roustschuk*) who had spent many years in Turkey, England and Germany, the French language was the most beautiful gift he should rightly have received and which he could never have done without. In this language he spoke and thought for the longest part of his life; in this language he wrote his plays, novels, and some academic works, mostly unpublished. And in this, his adopted language, he gave *countless lectures* to numerous bodies on *countless topics*, just as there were various types of listeners. For him, the French language became a promising linguistic landscape that did not take into account his origins. And, above all, French became a sacred and venerated language for him, a language of an elective affinity.<sup>2</sup> Santo Semo had a birthplace, but no affiliation. He was expelled from Turkey, of which he was a citizen, without ever receiving a passport from the country in which he spent most of his life. He was born a Jew and died a Jew. But when the Jews in his host country were sent to the gas chambers, he wrote letters devoid of empathy to the rulers in Germany and did not care about the fate of his Jewish relatives and friends in Paris or elsewhere. It may seem a paradox that, in the context of his literary and journalistic activities, Semo took virtually no notice of the literary and social life and the intellectual developments in France. He focused his energies on saving the world, bringing peace to the planet, and he was convinced of his mission until the dark end of his life, and subordinated everything to it.

---

<sup>2</sup> Relatively few Jews assimilated into the Ottoman or Turkish social environment. Knowledge of Turkish was far from widespread among Jews, and even less so among Jewish intellectuals. Throughout the period discussed, no Jewish writer was working in Turkish – whether poet, novelist, or playwright.



Fig. 1. Santo Semo as a student in Paris, c. 1905 Fig. 2. Santo Semo in Paris, c. 1940.  
Collection of the author

His break with the mother tongues of his childhood and youth was radical and permanent. At home, with his parents and members of the Sephardic community of Rusçuk,<sup>3</sup> he probably spoke the traditional Judezmo (Espanyol, Judeo-Spanish). However, his father and grandfather, convinced that service to France was also a service to humanity,<sup>4</sup> propelled the French language and culture to a state of almost cult-like reverence in his elitist and polyglot parental home. Judezmo, Hebrew, French, Bulgarian, German and Turkish were spoken or understood, but the French language and culture was worshipped. Nothing is known about whether his parents spoke French to the children, but growing up, he and his brothers spoke to each other in French.<sup>5</sup> In the parental house of this ambitious adolescent looking to the future, all windows looked toward Paris.

<sup>3</sup> Santo Semo, *Comment j'ai lancé Hitler contre Staline* (CZA, A178-7, 10). The Jewish community in Sofia as well as in the whole of Bulgaria conversed principally in Judezmo. Most Jews in Sofia did not know other languages. This language was sometimes considered a jargon and at times a foreign language by Alliance Israélite Universelle teachers.

<sup>4</sup> Santo Semo, *Comment j'ai lancé Hitler contre Staline* (CZA, A178-7, 1). See also the preface by Edouard de Navailles to Santo Semo's book *Israël et le Monde*: "tout lui fut prétexte pour manifester son attachement inébranlable à notre pays, à notre culture et à notre mentalité" (Navailles, 1945, p. 7). See also Navailles (1937-1942).

<sup>5</sup> Santo Semo, *La Lutte de ma vie – en voulant sauver le monde* [The struggle of my life – wanting to save the world] (CZA, A187-4, 1-2).

## Neither Turk nor Bulgarian

Santo Semo was born on June 18, 1878 in the Danubian port of Rusçuk. It was nicknamed the “Little Vienna” because of its architecture, which was principally Neo-Baroque and Neo-Rococo. He was an offspring of the well-known Spanish-Portuguese Jewish family *de Semo*.<sup>6</sup> He was the sixth child of 10 and the son of the well-to-do merchant Yohanan (Johann) Semo and his wife Sumbul (Zumbul), née Aftalion.<sup>7</sup> His parents, like him, were Ottoman Jews and *protégés français d’Orient*.<sup>8</sup> Members of his family, such as Haim Josef Semo (trading in glassware and dealing in money-lending), Jacquel Semo (working at a commission agency), and Isaac Semo (working at a commission agency, member of the management board of the Jewish Popular Bank), contributed to the economic development of Rusçuk after the liberation of Bulgaria from the Ottoman yoke (Kumanov, 1983, pp. 119-141). One of his ancestors, David de Semo, was one of the six representatives, or *sindici*, chosen in 1386 by the Council of Corfu to ask for the protection of the Doge of Venice as the Turks approached – which Santo Semo did not seek to withhold from his readers.<sup>9</sup> On his mother’s side, Santo Semo was connected to Spain, and in particular to Moorish Andalusia. His father left him an orphan without money when he was about nine years old. Young Santo Semo was, however, able to concentrate on his grades and was awarded many scholarships to support his studies. Later and not

<sup>6</sup> Letter to Dr. Henri de Rothschild, Paris, August 25, 1926 (CZA, A178–10).

<sup>7</sup> Despite his prominence, archival material on the Rusçuk-based Semo/Semoff and Aftalion families is relatively sparse. The export and import merchant Yohanan Semo died on March 25, 1887 in Rusçuk.

<sup>8</sup> His family, like many other Bulgarian Sephardim, continued to travel on Turkish passports. Some of the siblings, however, had acquired French citizenship and were married to French women, see Santo Semo, *Comment j’ai lancé Hitler contre Staline* (CZA, A178–7, 11, 38, 110). With the assistance of Paris’s Prefecture of Police, Santo Semo became a foreigner of Jewish nationality from the Levant (Nationalité Israélite du Levant). Until his death – probably in 1950 – Santo Semo was a Turkish citizen (“Je suis devenu citoyen turc”, Letter to “comrade” Stalin, Paris, October 6, 1944 [CZA, A178, 1]), which protected him from deportation after the Wehrmacht occupied France. For the status of the Ottoman Jews in France, see “Les israélites du Levant” (1922); Abrevaya Stein (2016); Guttstadt (2013).

<sup>9</sup> Santo Semo revealed only few and scant bits of information about his parents, siblings or his wife. The four-page foreword to his extensive and unpublished autobiographic text *La lutte de ma vie – en voulant sauver le monde, reposte à Mein Kampf de Hitler* contains a few notes on the history of the de Semo family from Corfu, Venice, Vienna, and Rusçuk (CZA, A187–4). See Mueller (2008, pp. 63–92 [esp. pp. 86, 90–91]). A four-page and confidential resumé for the Zionist organization in London, which he allegedly wrote himself, provides us with some facts about his stormy life and his literary work that are not very accessible today. (Communication strictement confidentielle sur Santo Semo, vers fin 1929), CZA, A178–1).

without a touch of pride, he would say that he had earned his considerable wealth by his own efforts.<sup>10</sup>

The flourishing import and export company of Yohanan Semo, which was later taken over by his sons (at times Santo Semo was also involved in the company from Paris and London), enjoyed a good reputation and the family defended it against all slander, for example in the trial against Michel Verne, son of the writer Jules Verne, who in his novel *The Golden Danube* had introduced a fictitious crook named Jackel (Jacob) Semo. The real Jackel Semo (a vacation acquaintance whom Michel Verne had met some time earlier during a trip to Belgrade), brother of Santo Semo,<sup>11</sup> objected to his name being used in the novel (and for a dishonorable character, no less), and sued the author and the publisher. Though Jackel Semo lost at trial, Michel Verne was still required to revise the entire edition.<sup>12</sup> The later Nobel Peace Prize winner and president of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, René Cassin, appeared as Semo's lawyer, and the later French President Raymond Poincaré as Verne's lawyer – further proof of the Semo family's excellent relationship with France (“Jules Verne et le Bulgare”, 1912, pp. 6–7). By the time this legal dispute was settled, Santo Semo had long since left his hometown, and nothing could move him to return to Ruse, at least not for a long time.

In his books, lectures and countless manuscripts, Santo Semo conceals information about his family, parents and brothers,<sup>13</sup> with the exception of his youngest sister Mathilde, to whom he dedicates his historical play *Don Isaac* (“A sa petite sœur Mathilde – L’Auteur”), his brother Bastien, and his wife Olga, as if he felt ashamed or embarrassed of his parents, his siblings and his quaint hometown.<sup>14</sup> Nor does he share information about his

<sup>10</sup> “[Santo Semo] réalisa une immense fortune alors qu’il n’avait hérité de son père, qui le laissa jeune orphelin, que des principes d’honneur, de probité et de générosité”, *La lutte de ma vie – en voulant sauver le monde* (CZA, A187–4, 3).

<sup>11</sup> Very little is known about his brothers, the active Zionists Isaac and Jackel Semo, see Covo (2002, pp. 79–80).

<sup>12</sup> *The Golden Danube* by Jules Verne, written in 1901 but published posthumously in 1908 under the title *The Danube Pilot*, was entirely rewritten and reworked by Michel Verne. See Dumas and Gondolo della Riva (2004–2006).

<sup>13</sup> Santo Semo, as the mythomaniac and fantasist he was, led a stormy life of adventurous addiction, with many extravagances about which he should have written a doorstopper novel or fictional autobiography. Fragmented biographical details, many of which do not stand up to scientific scrutiny, can be found in Santo Semo's book *Israël et le Monde* (1945; Semo, 1945), in his autobiographical sketches *La lutte de ma vie – En voulant sauver le monde* (CZA, A187–4), *Comment j'ai lancé Hitler contre Staline* (MS), and in numerous international press articles reporting on his multifarious activities. Some biographical data can be found on his marriage certificate of September 27, 1916 (marriage register, Berlin–Charlottenburg, No. 447).

<sup>14</sup> Semo was married to the Norwegian widow Olga Pollak, née Nilson, born December 18, 1879

youth in Ruşçuk or his brilliant university studies in Belgium and France. In later years, however, he would repeatedly and with ostentatious pride refer to his numerous university diplomas (“quatre fois universitaires”) in private correspondence and press releases. So it is not surprising that the few texts of his contemporaries contain the most adventurous, bizarre and misleading information about his multifaceted personality and dubious origin. For some, his father was Spanish, his mother Italian, others move his birthplace to a remote Balkan hamlet.



Fig. 3. In this photograph, in the middle in front of the table, we see Albert Lebrun, then president of the Republic, on his left Paul Reynaud, president of the Council, and on his right, with his left hand on the table, Santo bey de Semo. Collection of the author.

## Under Western Eyes

In the 1860s Ruse was a dynamically developing town that quickly detached itself from its Oriental customs and differed greatly from the sleepy atmosphere of other Bulgarian cities at the time. Ruşçuk was connected to Austria-Hungary by a well-developed road and rail network and by ship. Several consulates were opened in the city, making it not only the administrative capital of the Tuna Vilayet, but also the diplomatic capital of the northern Bulgarian territories. The Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU), founded in Paris in 1860, brought modern Western ideas to Bulgaria and opened the way to Paris for the Bulgarian Jews. In some ways, Ruşçuk was an outpost of Central Europe and lay in the backyard of history, and its inhabitants did not know exactly to which nationality they really belonged

---

in Kristiansand, Norway. The wedding ceremony was officiated by Rabbi Weiss [?] in the Fasanenstrasse Synagogue in Berlin, see Santo Semo, *La lutte de ma vie – en voulant sauver le monde* (CZA, A178–4, 177–178).

(Covo, 2002, pp. 79–80; Keren, 2002, pp. 67–82, 2011, pp. 196–201, 283–286, 2015a; Todorov, 1983, pp. 340–365). Rusçuk was a colorful multicultural and multiethnic border town and port where Jews, Bulgarians, Turks, Greeks, Albanians, Armenians and Romanians lived in different districts or quarters, where one could hear seven or eight languages in one day, as Elias Canetti, whose paternal grandfather is said to have mastered 17 languages, would later write in his memoirs (Canetti, 1989, p. 7). The children of rich merchant families received their education in Western Europe, and from 1862 there was also a pro-Palestine Jewish movement, founded by Abraham Rosanes (Abir) (Keren, 2015, pp. 340–460). Members of the Semo merchant family were also active in the Zionist movement. In 1903, at the sixth Zionist Congress in Basel, Santo Semo voted as the official representative of Bulgarian Zionist Jews against Uganda as a new homeland for the Jews.

The year 1878 marked the end of an era and the beginning of another. The Ottoman period had ended and the period of Bulgarian independence had begun. The advent of the new regime had a decisive impact on the education of Jewish children in Bulgaria. The Treaty of July 1878 established that the citizens of the minorities would enjoy full civil and political rights in the newly formed Principality of Bulgaria (as well as in the other successor states of the Ottoman Empire), and like any resident on Bulgarian soil they would enjoy freedom of worship and religious organization (Dogo, 2016, pp. 73–103). In 1878, the year in which Ottoman rule ended with the “Liberation War of Bulgaria,”<sup>15</sup> thanks to active Russian support, Ruse became the largest city in the former principality of Bulgaria, numbering over 26,000 inhabitants, and one of the key cultural and economic centers of the country. With almost 2,100 Jews, Ruse was the second-largest and most prosperous Jewish community in Bulgaria.<sup>16</sup> The AIU, which saw itself as the universal representative of all Jews, fought throughout the world for the equal rights and the moral progress of the Jews, and for the improvement (*régénération*) of disadvantaged Jews in Eastern and Southeastern Europe as well as in the Near East.<sup>17</sup> With the opening of an AIU school, a modern school education found its way to Rusçuk. The Alliance school for boys

<sup>15</sup> Russia’s most important goal in the war was to liberate the Slavs and Bulgarians from the Ottoman-Turkish administration. Therefore, some Bulgarian authors defined it as the “Liberation of Bulgaria from the Turkish Bondage of Five Centuries.” The war of 1877–78 changed the demographic, ethnic, religious and linguistic landscape of the Balkans.

<sup>16</sup> At that time the Jews comprised about 0.7% of the population of Bulgaria. In the following decades this would increase slightly, to 0.9%, and then stabilize at around 0.8%. Some 97% of these Jews were Judezmo-speaking Sephardim, and were almost entirely urban residents. See McCarthy (2007, pp. 51–78), Todorova (1994, pp. 287–298).

<sup>17</sup> «Appel à tous les Israélites», in *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, Paris 1860. The statutes and the changes they underwent can be found in Chouraqui (1965, pp. 412–416). See also Leven (1911).

in Rusçuk was officially opened on July 6, 1873, and the Alliance school for girls in 1874.<sup>18</sup> The school was attended by the children of wealthy and influential community members as well as foreigners (*notables*) such as the Canetti, Rosanes and Ventura families. The *notables* had mainly French citizenship (*protégé français d'Orient*), as opposed to the minority Bulgarian subjects.<sup>19</sup> The declared mission of the AIU was to make non-native French speakers adopt an almost blind loyalty as a mark of gratitude for what they had gained as ardent Francophiles. This was meant to ensure that a few acquired it perfectly and reproduced the same attitudes toward the French language and culture as those held by France's intelligentsia. Consequently, Judezmo usage also fell markedly due to the impact of the ideology and education system of the AIU, which discouraged Jews from speaking the language. All over the Balkans, social and economic advancement required that Jews adopt the dominant languages and relegate Judezmo to the domestic sphere. Also, the nationalist movements that emerged in these new countries insisted that all citizens speak the national language, and the fact that Judezmo had its detractors, even among Jewish journalists and intellectuals who wrote in the language, further compromised its standing.



Fig. 4. A Member of the Commission in 1911.

Fig. 4. Santo Semo as a member of a Turkish academic commission. Collection of the author

<sup>18</sup> The data provided by Mezan (1925, 2011) and Rodrigue (1991, p. 34) are incorrect, see Keren (2011, pp. 238–243).

<sup>19</sup> Many of the Jews of Rusçuk were protected citizens of European states with consular representation in the city.



Whether Yohanan Semo belonged to these *notables* is not clear from the sparse information about the Semo family. That Yohanan and Zumbul Semo sent their children to the AIU school is more than understandable, given their admiration for the French language and culture. It is not known whether the parents were able to raise the money for their children's private school education. Santo Semo would later repeatedly emphasize that he was always able to complete his school and student time with the help of scholarships and, sometimes, with the aid of his brothers.

The Alliance school was housed in a magnificent new building at 14 Gurko Street, financed by the German philanthropist Baron Hirsch.<sup>20</sup> And at this school the six-year-old Santo Semo, who had been inculcated with the advantages of the French language and culture in his parental home, became a fanatical and uncritical advocate of all things French. Later, in a speech at the AIU, he would thank his teachers for educating him in the French language and civilization:

[the school] where Mr. Santo Semo was raised himself and of which he gives emotional and grateful praise. He projects us inside these schools, maintained thanks to the generosity of the Sassoons and all those who have not forgotten what they owe them. (Cóblentz, 1925, p. 183)<sup>21</sup>

Later, after the end of the Second World War, on the invitation to his five-part lecture series *Quarante années d'activité et de Clandestinité, 1905–1945*, he would express his gratitude to the country which had been his home for 40 years and had provided him with access to further education.<sup>22</sup>

The mother tongue of almost all Bulgarian Sephardim, Judeo-Spanish, could do little to counter the overwhelming dominance of the French language. The *notables* agreed that Judezmo was no longer needed, that there was no reason to maintain the language of the former persecutors, and it was absolutely forbidden for students to speak Judezmo, except in the Hebrew class hour.<sup>23</sup>

The hypersensitive, highly intelligent Santo Semo, interested in both natural sciences and mathematics, then attended the Knyaz Boris I Bulgarian Gymnasium for Boys, where his friend and classmate was (allegedly) the later Bulgarian dictator Georgi Dimitrov.<sup>24</sup> After graduating

<sup>20</sup> The construction of the school began in 1876, see Keren (2011, pp. 248–250).

<sup>21</sup> All translations into English are mine.

<sup>22</sup> “[A]yant sacrifié quarante années de sa vie à la France qui l'éduqua”, Cycle de Conférence de Santo Bey de Sémo à la Société de Géographie, April 1945.

<sup>23</sup> *Bulletin de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle*, 1860–1913 (BAIU), <http://jpress.tau.ac.il/publications/Bulletin-fr.asp>; see also Rodrigue (1989, p. 115).

<sup>24</sup> Santo Semo, Letter to “comrade” Stalin, Paris, October 6, 1944 (CZA, A178,1); see also *Com-*

from high school with the highest grades,<sup>25</sup> he successfully completed studies in engineering in Ghent, and road and bridge construction and political science in Paris.<sup>26</sup> Santo Semo then worked in Paris and London as a financier and entrepreneur, sometimes together with his brothers. There he accumulated a considerable fortune.<sup>27</sup> In between, he worked for the Ottoman government as a bridge and road engineer for the Mesopotamia project of the English archaeologist William Willcocks, before settling in Istanbul for several years:

The Government of Kemal Pasha<sup>28</sup> entrusted him with an important mission, half technical, half political, to the illustrious engineer Sir William Willcocks<sup>29</sup> in Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq), from where he returned to Constantinople with thousands of photographs taken during the excavations of ancient Babylon and at several historical sites in the former Chaldea, Assyria, Syria ...<sup>30</sup>

Here he campaigned enthusiastically for the Young Turks, earning himself the nickname “John the Baptist of the Young Turks” – a title of honor that would not only give him pleasure, but would also expose him to ridicule.<sup>31</sup> And in Istanbul he probably began writing his historical play *Don Isaac* – his greatest literary triumph (Studemund-Halévy, in press).

---

*ment j'ai lancé Hitler contre Staline* (CZA, A178–7, 53). However, there is no evidence of this. The four years younger Georgi Dimitrov (1882–1949) was secretary general of the Comintern as well as the Bulgarian Communist Party, cabinet head and prophet of the “antifascist people's front.”

<sup>25</sup> “Si au point de vue linguistique notre auteur est une rareté [...] A l'école primaire, il remporte le maximum maximorum de points, ayant eu le maximum pour chaque objet [...] au lycée il passa premier au baccalauréat; au Génie civil de Gand (Belgique) il enleva la distinction; il obtint le diplôme d'ingénieur de l'École Nationale des Ponts et Chaussées de France”, *La lutte de ma vie – en voulant sauver le monde* (CZA, A187–4, 2).

<sup>26</sup> Santo Semo always kept his silence about his studies, but he mentioned his excellent exams in his chosen disciplines several times. In Paris he was one of the few southeastern European students to study bridge and road construction, see Kostov (2009, pp. 367–388).

<sup>27</sup> Santo Semo, *La lutte de ma vie – en voulant sauver le monde* (CZA, A187–4, 4).

<sup>28</sup> Kemal Pasha, commonly referred to as Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938), founder of the Republic of Turkey.

<sup>29</sup> An irrigation survey was accordingly carried out by Sir William Willcocks between 1908 and 1910, see Willcocks (1910). The name Santo Semo is not mentioned in a single report about the Mesopotamia project.

<sup>30</sup> Santo Semo, *La lutte de ma vie – en voulant sauver le monde* (CZA, A187–4, 4–5). The street and bridge construction engineer Santo Semo was commissioned by the Ottoman government to prepare a scheme for irrigation in Mesopotamia.

<sup>31</sup> Due to his journalistic efforts for the Young Turks, he was likewise often referred to as the “John the Baptist of the Young Turks” in the international press; see, for example, Stead (1909a, pp. 107–111, 1909b, p. 134).

## Born to Be a Polyglot

Santo Semo's abandonment of Bulgarian and Judezmo, and his unique assimilation into (or voluntary submission to) the French language led him to embrace the French language as an aspiration to fly to greater heights. In retrospect, therefore, it does not seem surprising that he decided not to write a single book or essay in his native Judezmo or Bulgarian, though he would occasionally give lectures in and about this language, at least at the beginning of his breathtaking career.<sup>32</sup> That career had started in Rusçuk, led on to a globally perceived stopover in England, Turkey and Germany, and finally ended, as expected, in Paris.<sup>33</sup>

His stupendous language skills and his almost accent-free French opened doors into French society to him:

[I]t would be quite pleasant to congratulate M. Santo Semo on his linguistic proficiency, lightly seasoned with an imperceptible touch of accent, with which he handles our language. A man who speaks twelve languages probably has but little sensitivity for that kind of praise. This Turkish engineer even wrote verse in French. (*L'avenir de la Turquie en Asie. Mission en Mésopotamie par M. Santo de bey Semo*, 1912, p. 80)

Many French people saw this handsome young man of entirely perfect manners and fine etiquette, who spoke and wrote in accurate, occasionally exaggeratedly correct French, as more of a Frenchman than an Ottoman Turk.<sup>34</sup> He dressed elegantly in suit and tie, and for many years added a fez to his daily attire. That is the way he preferred to be photographed as a student guest in Heilbronn, for press photos. He spoke in front of thousands of listeners, sometimes up to five hours, without notes,<sup>35</sup> and often with the visual aid of gas lantern slides.<sup>36</sup> But he found no friends in this society, only

<sup>32</sup> Santo Semo seems to have translated his *Don Isaac* into Judezmo, and he (sporadically) used Judezmo for his numerous lectures in Istanbul, see: "L'orateur parlera en judéo-espagnol et s'étendra davantage sur le passé, le présent et l'avenir du peuple juif dans les provinces du Tigre et de l'Euphrate" ("Les conférences de Santo Sémo bey", 1911, p. 3).

<sup>33</sup> «Le Judéo-Espagnol», Université Populaire Juive à Paris, May 28, 1905.

<sup>34</sup> "Car il est de ces Turcs dont on peut dire qu'ils sont plus Français qu'Ottoman" (Navailles, 1945, p. 7).

<sup>35</sup> "Il ne parla pas moins de trois heures, tout absorbé par son sujet et superbement indifférent à la fuite du temps" (*Le Journal d'Amiens*, April 20, 1923),

<sup>36</sup> Santo Semo could count on the help and advice of his brother Bastien Semo[ff], who had the necessary technical expertise and equipment. Bastien Semo, born July 17, 1867 in Ruse, married to Céline Vanderstraeten, born September 17, 1872 in Roubaix, was the owner of a photo studio in Roubaix.

admirers; no confidants, only acquaintances. He was a born outsider who became a self-proclaimed insider, who used his outsider-insider status to observe situations and diagnose problems, a role he knew how to play and which he did not take on involuntarily. Santo Semo was an individual of independent political judgement who not only caused a furor at Zionist conferences, the Peace Conference in The Hague and various conferences of the Young Turks with his ideas for Jewish settlement in Mesopotamia (Iraq) and the creation of an Ottoman Commonwealth based on the British model, but also met with approval.

Santo Semo, who is said to have mastered a hundred languages and dialects, took Herder's romantic approach to language literally as an expression of the soul's forces working in the poet in an astonishing way. In an interview with the Paris newspaper *Paris-Soir* in 1937, which was then reviewed worldwide in the press, Santo Semo confessed that the multilingual and multicultural adolescent could not help but have developed into a polyglot, and that he was convinced that those who are brought up in a particular linguistic and cultural tradition see the world in a different way from those who belong to other traditions:

The midwife who preceded my birth spoke Turkish. My parents talked to me in Spanish and our servant only answered in Bulgarian ... In my early youth I learned, without any trouble whatsoever, the old Slavic, Latin, ancient Greek, Hebrew, German, Bulgarian, French and Russian ... If you add to the fourteen languages I presented at the Exhibition, the fifteen languages I still know and the sixty dialects that are spoken from Constantinople to Kamchatka and those I know thoroughly, we will not be very far from the number one hundred. (Barotte, 1937, p. 7)

He was obsessed with his language skills and never forgot to make his listeners or readers aware of them. He was so convinced of the importance of his language skills that he considered them to be the most important thing of all. Contradictory statements were made about him during his lifetime, from mocking verses to hymns of praise, but he did not leave the praise to his friends and admirers, journalists and the inevitable *claqueurs*, but also gladly took over that task himself. He thus wrote the preface to his autobiographical novel *La Lutte de ma vie – en voulant sauver le Monde* himself, and then signed it as an anonymous publisher or editor. And in a kind of letter of application to the Zionist Association in London, Santo Semo presented himself without a shameful blush as follows:

In French, German, English, Spanish (Modern Castilian), Judeo-Spanish,<sup>37</sup> Italian, Bulgarian, Turkish and Portuguese [he] can make speeches freely without using

<sup>37</sup> Only in a few cases does Semo mention his language skills in his mother tongue Judezmo.

any checklist; in Russian, Romanian and Serbo-Croatian [he] can converse quite fluently and – if necessary – make public speeches using written notes; in addition, he has enough elements of Arabic and Hebrew,<sup>38</sup> which he reads easily and in which he could make himself understood after a short stay in the Arab countries and Palestine. He studied Old Slavic (Slavianski), Old Greek and Latin, and some Persian, which he also reads.<sup>39</sup>

And in the opening lines of a flattering, even unpleasantly fawning letter to Joseph Stalin, he presents himself as a linguistic genius, capable of serving the world and politicians in solving the most pressing problems of postwar Europe:

Little SANTO spent many years of his childhood listening to the Tzar's officers command them in Russian in primary school ... It is therefore not surprising that he now speaks 14 languages, that he understands several others with a multitude of Turkish, Slavic, German, Latin, Semitic dialects, etc. ... If my past of probity, my varied experience, my knowledge of peoples and countries, my general culture, the large number of languages I speak and write, including Russian ... can be of some use in preparing the future reorganization of Europe, I put them at your disposal with all my heart.<sup>40</sup>

It is not surprising, therefore, that Santo Semo not only wanted to win over an astonished lay public with the incredible number of languages he had mastered. He was chosen as:

World Champion for Modern Languages, having been ranked first in the international language competition held at the 1937 Paris International Exhibition, in which 450 of the world's best polyglot linguists participated.<sup>41</sup>

But he also wanted to impress scholars with his broadest knowledge of the languages spoken and spread throughout the world. In his last book *Israël et le Monde* (Paris 1945), he comments on other works whose publication will be announced in the near future:

Alongside a 500-page autobiographical novel entitled *La lutte de ma vie – en voulant sauver le monde*, you will find among my manuscripts: three volumes which, with

<sup>38</sup> “Que la paix soit avec vous, Rabbi, lui dis-je en hébreu” (Semo, 1945, 197).

<sup>39</sup> *Communication strictement confidentielle sur M. Santo Semo à l'Organisation Sioniste à Londres, fin 1929*, (CAZ, A178/1, 13).

<sup>40</sup> Letter to ‘comrade’ Stalin, Paris, October 6, 1944 (CZA, A178, 1).

<sup>41</sup> “Champion du Monde pour les langues vivantes, ayant été classé premier dans le concours international des langues, organisé à l'Exposition Internationale de Paris en 1937 et auquel participèrent 450 des meilleurs linguistes du monde”, Invitation au Salon et Tribune des Nations fondée par Santo Bey de Sémo, protégé spécial Français d'Orient (CAZ, A178).

this one, from another work, entitled “How many languages and dialects are there on our planet? Can one man understand them all?”<sup>42</sup>



Fig. 5. This is how Santo Semo wanted to be seen: as a world-renowned scholar. Collection of the author

## A French Writer

Santo Semo saw himself as a French author whose works were consistently published in French. With a few exceptions, neither French literary critics nor Sephardic critics ever took a serious look at his work. One exception is his historical play *Don Isaac*, which had its French premiere in Istanbul in 1910 and was performed in Hebrew in Jerusalem in 1911, and can be regarded as an important contribution to Jewish theater in Palestine (Studemund-Halévy, forthcoming) (see also Attias, 1996, pp. 127–155; Romero, 1979, pp. 495–508, 1992, 2006, pp. 183–218; Studemund-Halévy & August-Zarębska, 2020). This play, of whose literary value Santo Semo was convinced right up until his death, has been translated into several languages (such as Turkish, French and English), including a Spanish translation which Santo Semo may have produced himself.

There are indications that Santo Semo was the author of other literary works. In the book edition of his *Don Isaac* published in Istanbul c. 1909–1910,<sup>43</sup> he refers to two further book publications in French (published or in print): *Moréna* (a contemporary novel), which cannot be found in any

<sup>42</sup> (1) *Combien de langues et dialectes y a-t-il sur notre planète?* (2) *Un seul homme peut-il parvenir à les comprendre toutes et tout?* (CZA, A178–10, 11, 8). See also Semo (1945, p. 195).

<sup>43</sup> “Don Isaac, drame historique en langue française sur l’Exode des Juifs d’Espagne, traduit en Castillan, Hébreu (par deux traducteurs différents, dont l’un Mr. Almalech [!] ... en Anglais et en Judéo-espagnole”, *Communication strictement confidentielle sur Santo Semo, vers fin 1929* (CZA, A178–1, 13). It cannot be ruled out that Santo Semo himself translated his play into these languages.

library today,<sup>44</sup> and a collection of essays called *Recueil de discours politiques*.<sup>45</sup> Elsewhere, he mentions other manuscripts, plays, lecture texts, unpublished journal articles on religion, philosophy, etc. (Semo, 1945, p. 195). The Cairo-based magazine *L'Aurore* presented Santo Semo as a “conférencier de talent, auteur de diverses pièces de théâtre, entre autres: Don Isaac Abravanel, L’Affaire Dreyfus” (“Les carrières libérales”, 1926, p. 1). Two further plays or novels are mentioned elsewhere (*L’Exode des Juifs d’Espagne en 1492; Constantinople et les Balcans*). In her book *Bulgaria and Her Jews*, historian Vicki Tamir mentions some novels by an author named Semo, whom she may have confused with the Viennese author and journalist Shem Tov Semo (Tamir, 1979, p. 74). After Santo Semo’s death (in 1948 or 1950),<sup>46</sup> parts of his estate went to Israel (Yad Vashem; Zionist Archives) and Turkey.<sup>47</sup> However, parts of his literary legacy still circulate in mysterious milieus in Paris, especially among his followers, the “intrepid disciples of Santo Semo” (Bechtel & Carrière, 2014, p. 739; Fuligni, 1997, p. 174).

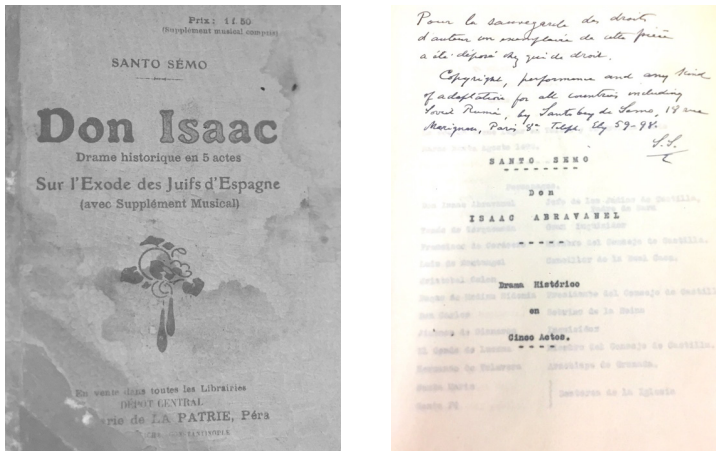


Fig. 6. *Don Isaac* (French edition, c. 1909-1910); *Don Isaac Abravanel* (Spanish translation, manuscript). Sources: collection of the author (left), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem (right)

<sup>44</sup> The Romanian-Jewish journal *Egalitatea* reports in an article on Santo Semo that this novel will soon be available: «D[omnul] Semo Bey va publica încurând un roman din viața [evreilor] spaniolilor intitulat *Moreno*» (“Santo Semo Bey”, 1910, p. 340).

<sup>45</sup> With his essay collection *Israël et le Monde*, truly cobbled together, Semo seems to have completed this project.

<sup>46</sup> According to the newspaper *Cumhuriyet*, he died on November 9, 1950.

<sup>47</sup> Some of the holdings in the Zionist Archives came to Israel as part of the private archives of former French Ambassador Jules Cambon, Bulgarian Knesset Deputy Benjamin Arditti (see Yad Vashem Archives, P37 Archive of Benjamin Arditti, Documentation Regarding the History of Bulgaria Jewry, 1850–1964), and the Zionist leader, translator and author Nahum Sokolow.

## A Utopian Fantasist

At the beginning of 1945, Santo Semo, by this time a sickly man nearly 70 years of age, struggling with mental problems, began a five-part cycle of lectures in the respectable Société de Géographie, for many years his most preferred lecture venue. These lectures should be regarded as a kind of final legacy: He, Santo Semo, the “John the Baptist of the Young Turks” and “Napoleon of Peace,” who had (allegedly) been offered ministerial posts in Turkey and Britain, had worked behind the scenes conspiring to bring about world peace for the previous 40 years. His missions were always secret, whether as a young Turk or a visionary Zionist. His global mission was to save the world, and to accomplish this it was necessary to move his field of activity from Ruse to Paris. To this conference cycle – he even demanded that French radio mention his lectures – he graciously invited General Charles de Gaulle, whom he had previously disqualified in his letter of invitation, describing him as a human being who would never be able to compete with a Santo Semo.<sup>48</sup> And in order to manifest this in writing as well, in 1945 he published his rather unsystematic and poorly organized collection of essays, *Israël et le temps*, replete with in part irrelevant, in part abstruse biographical details and anecdotes.

After 1945 Santo Semo only appeared in whimsical books in which serious authors were by no means willing to be included. In these books, Santo Semo has survived to this day, in reputation-damaging writings in which fantasists and lunatics, adventurers and secret bundlers come together. In his amusing book *Les nuits secrètes de Paris*, Guy Breton describes how after 1945 Santo Semo became the mockery of the Quartier Latin and the students, who made fun of him (Bechtel & Carrière, 2014, p. 739; Breton, 1963, pp. 177–193) – as they had done before with parliamentary journalist Ferdinand Samuel Lop, his Zionist comrade and brother in spirit, an eccentric Jewish and regular columnist for both *L’Univers Israélite* and *La Tribune Juive*.<sup>49</sup> Together with Lop, Santo Semo formed a mocked pair of twins and an amusing target for the Sorbonne’s students:

I do not know of a more picturesque fantasist at this time, and this more pleasant utopian who calls himself “the Napoleon of Peace” seems to me to be the least

<sup>48</sup> “Letter to Charles de Gaulle”, March 20, 1945 (CAZ, A178).

<sup>49</sup> Samuel Ferdinand-Lop (1891–1974), with whom Santo Semo was frequently compared, was a French journalist, draughtsman, English language teacher, writer, poet and humorist. He ran for the presidency of France in the 1940s on a promise to improve the air quality in Paris by moving the Boulevard Saint-Michel to the sea and to eradicate poverty after ten at night, see Breton (1963, pp. 177–193).



dangerous of all pacifists and all Napoleons. I even dream of a contradictory conference with Ferdinand Lop.<sup>50</sup>

Santo Semo's last lectures took place in front of a very small audience and were mocked by the Parisian press. But it would get worse, more embarrassing: Dressed in a martial military manner, the *Rayonnants* ("Enlightened Ones") pretended to be followers of the visionary Santo Semo, gathering every Saturday on the Champs-de-Mars, singing the solemn *Hymne du Triplíce*: "Celui [Santo Semo] qui a pendant quarante années / Gardé sa flamme dans l'Europe en feu ..." In the 1990s this hymn was still occasionally being played on French radio ("Hitleri mahveden adam", 1962, p. 2).<sup>51</sup>

### Someone Who Knew Why He Loved France

In view of the Holocaust and the official attitude of the Turkish government towards Sephardic Jews in Western Europe, from whom it had withdrawn or refused to renew Turkish passports, and in view of the Turkish government's unwillingness to stand up for the threatened Jews within sphere of power of Nazi Germany, Santo Semo was no longer proud to be a Turk (Santo, 1945, p. 165). He became an art dealer and middleman respectively who, due to his excellent connections to the Paris art market, satisfied the needs of the Nazi regime and its art robbers.<sup>52</sup> Towards the end of his turbulent life, Santo Semo himself must have been surprised to have survived despite all the catastrophes and not, like the majority of the Sephardim from the Balkans, been forced to make his way to a German extermination camp. He saw a trace of divine providence in his survival, as he confessed in a letter of justification to Prince Sabahaddin.<sup>53</sup> Throughout

<sup>50</sup> "Je ne connais pas, à l'heure présente, de faintaisiste plus pittoresque que celui-là et que ce plus plaisant utopiste qui s'intitule lui-même «Le Napoléon de la Paix» m'apparaît comme le moins dangereux de tous les pacifistes et de tous les Napoléons. Je rêve même d'une conférence contradictoire avec Ferdinand Lop" (Ravon, 1945, p. 6).

<sup>51</sup> Further reputation-damaging entries can be found in the following books: Breton (1963, pp. 177–193); Bechtel and Carrière (2014, p. 739).

<sup>52</sup> As a middleman, he acquired an ambiguous reputation for dirty business. In 1940/1941, for example, Santo Semo mediated through the notorious French art dealer André Schoeller, the oil portrait *Copy of a Self-portrait of Rembrandt* by Gustave Courbet. The painting was restituted after the war and is now in the possession of the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Besançon, see Koopstra et al. (2008, p. 288). On Santo Semo and the German art dealer, see *Post-war reports: Art Looting Intelligence Unit (ALIU) reports 1945-1946 and ALIU Red Flag Names list and index* (n.d.).

<sup>53</sup> "J'en déduis qu'il y a vraiment un bien, une Providence, et une justice immanente ou divine", letter to Prince Sabahaddin, Paris, August 18, 1946, apud *Santo Bey de Semo tarafından gönderilen mektuplar* [Letters from Santo Bey de Semo], Şehire-arshiv, Tara Toros archive.

his life, Santo Semo was convinced of the importance of his political ideas, which he successfully propagated at the beginning of the 20th century and which were also seriously discussed in Zionist and Young Turk circles. And he repeatedly pointed out that these ideas, if only they had been implemented, would have saved humankind from two Balkan wars and two world wars. And they would have given him, the class primus from Ruse, the recognition he so rightly deserved.<sup>54</sup>

He would have dedicated his life to the nation where the French language was spoken. Even if he was never to obtain French citizenship, Santo Semo refused to go to war and declared fearlessly before the Turkish-German military commission in Berlin that he would rather be executed by a firing squad than shoot a Frenchman:

I hereby verify that towards the end of 1917 (following three summons from the German-Turkish military authorities, with which Mr. Santo Semo had not complied), he would rather die than shoot at Frenchmen, his benefactors.<sup>55</sup>

And he, for whom France was his home country (*véritable patrie*) (Semo, 1945, p. 200) wished for nothing more than a nameless tomb with the following pathetic inscription:

If I were to die, this is my only and last wish: I want my body to rest in France, and that it be buried facing Germany, with this single inscription on my tombstone (without any name): “Someone who knew why he loved France”. (Semo, 1945, p. 195)

There is not a single biographical study or sketch about this strange will-o'-the-wisp that shone so brightly in countless Jewish and non-Jewish journals in the 1910s and 1920s, nor a single one critically examining his political and literary oeuvre that would deserve careful analysis. His name occasionally appears in biographical encyclopedias (Cikar, 2004, No.

<sup>54</sup> Santo Semo gave a “prophetic” speech at the Cercle International during the Peace Conference of 1907, see Eyffinger (1999, p. 231): “C’est le tribun Santo-Semo qui est à la tête de ces Jeunes Turcs. Il parle beaucoup aux conférences de presse, préconise l’adoption d’une constitution ottomane, la formation d’un parlement et la mise en place d’une administration décentralisée. Ces «Évolutionnaires», comme ils s’appellent eux-mêmes veulent réformer l’empire de l’intérieur”. See also (“Cemiyetimizin Diğer Bir Teşebbüsü” (n.d.), p. 12; “La liberté et la paix”, 1907, p. 3). Cf.: “It was Mr Semo who at The Hague Conference first astonished the world by proclaiming the coming triumph of the great popular movement that has recently transformed the Ottoman Empire” (*The Oamaru Mail*, April 10, 1909, 5). His further initiatives, however, were thwarted by Ottoman diplomats; see also Hanoğlu (2001, pp. 128–129, 403, ft. 531).

<sup>55</sup> Certificat: Consulat Général de Turquie à Berlin: “Je vérifie par la présente que vers la fin de 1917 (à la suite de trois convocations de la part des autorités militaires germano-turques, auxquelles M. Santo Semo n’avait pas obtempéré, se laisserait plutôt fusiller que de tirer sur des Français, ses bienfaiteurs”.

877; “Santo Semo Efendi”, 1993, pp. 98-99), in recent historical works on contemporary Turkish history (Hanioglu, 2001, pp. 128–129, 403, ft. 53), and in marginal footnotes in countless more-or-less scientific works, bearing witness to his erratic life and work, which should be rediscovered and appreciated scientifically.

## References

- Abrevaya Stein, S. (2016). *Extraterritorial dreams: European citizenship, Sephardi Jews and the Ottoman twentieth century*. University of Chicago Press. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226368368.001.0001>
- Attias, J.-C. (1996). Isaac Abravanel: Between ethnic memory and national memory. *Jewish Social Studies*, 2(3), 127–155.
- L’avenir de la Turquie en Asie. Mission en Mésopotamie par M. Santo de bey Semo (1912). *Bulletin / Union géographique du Nord de la France*, 30(1), 77–81.
- Barotte, R. (1937, May 6). M. Santo Semo guide officiel de l’Exposition. *Paris Soir*, 7.
- Bechtel, G., & Carrière, J.-C. (2014). *Dictionnaire de la bêtise: Suivi du Livre des bizarres*. Robert Laffont.
- Breton, G. (1963). Les rayonnants ou Disciples de Santo Semo. In G. Breton, *Les nuits secrètes de Paris*. Noir et Blanc.
- Canetti, E. (1989). *The tongue set free: Remembrance of a European childhood*. Pan Books.
- Les carrières libérales des Juifs orientaux de Paris. (1926, December 31). *L’Aurore*, 1.
- Cemiyetimizin Diğ er Bir Teşebbüsü: Monsieur Santo-Semo’ nun La Haye’de Konferansi. (n.d.). *Terakki*, n.d(14), 12.
- Chouraqui, A. (1965). *Cent ans d’histoire: L’Alliance Israélite Universelle et la renaissance juive contemporaine, 1860–1960*. Presses Universitaires de France.
- Cikar, J. (2004). *Türkischer Biographischer Index*. Saur. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110965773>
- Cioran, E. M. (1987). *Aveux et anathèmes*. Gallimard.
- Cóblentz, P. (1925). Au Pays de Sémiramis. *L’Univers Israélite*, 27(2).
- Les conférences de Santo Semo bey. (1911, February 3). *L’Aurore*, 3.
- Covo, Y. (2002). *Yehude Rusts’uk* [Jews of Rusçuk]. Ma’arekhet.
- Dogo, M. (2016). Loyalty sorely tried: The Jews and the Bulgarian state, 1878-1935. In T. Catalan & M. Dogo (Eds.), *The Jews and the nation-states of Southeastern Europe from the 19th century to the Great Depression* (pp. 73–103). Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Dumas, O., & Gondolo della Riva, P. (Eds.). (2004–2006). *Correspondance inédite de Jules et Michel Verne avec l’éditeur Louis-Jules Hetzel (1886–1914)* (Vols. 1–2). Slatkine.
- Eyffinger, A. (1999). *La Cour Internationale de Justice, 1946–1996*. Springer.
- Fulgini, B. (1997). *L’État c’est moi*. Les Editions de Paris.

- Guttstadt, C. (2013). *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hanioglu, M. S. (2001). *Preparation for a revolution: The Young Turks, 1902-1908*. Oxford University Press.
- Hitleri mahveden adam [The man who destroyed Hitler]. (1962, June 1). *Cumhuriyet*, 2.
- Les israélites du Levant protégés français. (1922, February 1). *Paix et droit*.
- Jules Verne et le Bulgare. (1912, January 5). *Le Monde*, 6–7.
- Keren, Z. (2002). The Jews of Rusçuk: Growth of a community in the capital of the Danube district. In M. Rozen (Ed.), *The last Ottoman century and beyond and the Balkans, 1808-1945* (Vol 2, pp. 67–82). Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center, Tel Aviv University.
- Keren, Z. (2011). *The Jews of Rusçuk: From periphery to capital of the Tuna Vilayeti*. Isis Press.
- Keren, Z. (2015). The journal of Rabbi Abraham b. Israel Rosanes. In Z. Keren, *Studies of Jewish life in Bulgaria: From the 16th to the 20th century* (pp. 340–460). Contento.
- Keshales, H. (1969–1973). *Korot yehudei Bulgariya*. [History of the Jews of Bulgaria] (Vols. 1–5). Hotsa'at Davar.
- Koopstra, A., Vogt, C., Böhmer, S., & Brink, P. van den. (Eds.). (2008). *Schattengalerie: Die verlorenen Werke der Gemäldesammlung Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum Aachen*. Hirmer; Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum.
- Kostov, A. (2009). Les Ponts et Chaussées français et les pays balkaniques pendant la seconde moitié du XIXe et au début du XXe siècle: Les cas de la Roumanie, de la Serbie et de la Bulgarie. *Quaderns d'història de l'enginyeria*, 10, 367–388.
- Kumanov, M. (1983). On the economic development of Russe, 1878-1913. *Godishnik / Annual*, 18, 119–141.
- Leven, N. (1911). *Cinquante ans d'histoire: L'Alliance Israélite Universelle, 1860-1910* (Vol. 1). Félix Alcan.
- La liberté et la paix en Turquie: Santo Semo au Cercle International. (1907, September 20). *Courrier de la Conférence de la Paix*, 1907(84), 3.
- McCarthy, J. (2007). The demography of the 1877–78 Russo-Turkish War. In Ö. Turan (Ed.), *The Ottoman-Russian War of 1877–78* (pp. 51–78). TDVY ayın Matbaacılık ve Tic. İşl.
- Mezan, S. (1925). *Les juifs espagnols en Bulgarie*. Amishpat.
- Mezan, S. (2011). *Les juifs espagnols en Bulgarie*. Alliance Israélite Universelle.
- Mueller, R. C. (2008). The status and economic activity of Jews in the Venetian dominions during the fifteenth century. In M. Toch & E. Müller-Luckner (Eds.), *Wirtschaftsgeschichte der mittelalterlichen Juden* (pp. 63–92). R. Oldenbourg. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110446494-007>
- Navailles, E. de. (Ed.). (1937–1942). *Dossiers biographiques Boutillier du Retail: Documentation sur Santo Semo*. Ministère du Commerce et de l'Industrie.
- Navailles, E. de. (1945). Preface. In S. Semo, *Israël et le Monde*. Le Pelletier.
- Post-war reports: Art Looting Intelligence Unit (ALIU) reports 1945-1946 and ALIU Red Flag Names list and index*. (n.d.). <https://www.lootedart.com/MVI3RM469661>

- Ravon, G. (1945, April 7). En écoutant Santo-Semo ou quarante ans de clandestinité. *Les Lettres Françaises*, 6.
- Rodrigue, A. (1989). *De l'instruction à l'émancipation: Les enseignants de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle et les Juifs d'Orient 1860 – 1939*. Calman-Lévy.
- Rodrigue, A. (1991). *Kol Yiśra'el ḥaverim yi-Yehude agan ha-Yam ha-Tikhon 1860-1929* [Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Mediterranean Jewry 1860–1929]. Ben Zvi Institute.
- Romero, E. (1979). Abravanel. In E. Romero, *El teatro de los sefardíes orientales* (Vol. 1, pp. 495–508). CSIC.
- Romero, E. (1992). *La creación literaria en lengua sefardí*. Mapfre.
- Romero, E. (2006). Nueva bibliografía de ediciones de obras de teatro sefardíes. *Sefarad*, 66(1), 183–218. <https://doi.org/10.3989/sefarad.2006.v66.i1.427>
- Santo Semo Bey. (1910). *Egalitatea*, 21(43), 340.
- Santo Semo Efendi. (1993). In *Tarih ve toplum: Aylık ansiklopedik dergi* (Vol. 20, pp. 98–99). İletişim Yayınları.
- Semo, S. (1945). *Israël et le monde*. Le Pelletier.
- Stead, W. T. (1909a). Semo, *le Saint Jean-Baptiste des Jeunes Turcs* nous fait connaître la Constitution du Nouveau Parlement. *The Review of Reviews*, 1909(39), 107–111.
- Stead, W. T. (1909b). Semo, *le Saint Jean-Baptiste des Jeunes Turcs* nous fait connaître la Constitution du Nouveau Parlement. *La Revue Mondiale*, 1909(79), 134.
- Studemund-Halévy, M. (2010). Shem Tov Semo, Sefardi Vienna and the cradle of Judezmo philology. In P. Díaz-Mas & M. Sánchez Pérez (Eds.), *Los sefardíes ante los retos del mundo contemporáneo: Identidad y mentalidades* (pp. 317–332). CSIC.
- Studemund-Halévy, M. (in press). *The marketing of a play: Santo Semo's Don Isaac*.
- Studemund-Halévy, M., & August-Zarebska, A. (Eds.). (2020). *La Boz de Bulgaria: Vol. 3. Don Abrabanel i Formoza*. Tirocinio.
- Tamir, V. (1979). *Bulgaria and her Jews: The story of a dubious symbiosis*. Sepher-Hermon Press.
- Todorov, N. (1983). *The Balkan City: 1400-1900*. University of Washington Press.
- Todorova, M. (1994). Population patterns in North-Eastern Bulgaria in the 1860s. In J.-L. Bacqué-Grammont (Ed.), *Comité International d'études pré-ottomanes et ottomanes* (pp. 287–298). Türk Tarih Kurumu.
- Willcocks, W. (1910). Mesopotamia: Past, present, and future. *Geographical Journal*, 35(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1777113>

---

---

## Das Streben nach Zugehörigkeit. Santo Semo – ein sprachlicher Konvertit

Mein Beitrag konzentriert sich auf Santo Semos sprachliche Migration, von seiner Muttersprache (Judezmo) hin zu seiner Adoptivsprache (Französisch) und auf seine Sehnsucht nach einer anderen linguistischen Identität. Semo konzentrierte seine Energien darauf, die Welt zu retten und dem Planeten Frieden zu bringen, und er war bis zum dunklen Ende seines Lebens von seiner Mission überzeugt und ordnete ihr alles unter.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Santo Semo, Osmanisches Reich, Bulgarien, Frankreich, Zionismus, Jungtürken.

---

---

## Dążenie do przynależności. Santo Semo – językowy konwertyta

Artykuł opisuje językową migrację Santy Semo – od jego języka ojczystego (*judezmo*) do adoptowanego języka francuskiego, oraz jego dążenie ku nowej językowej tożsamości. Całe życie poświęcił misji, w którą wierzył; poświęcił wiele energii na ratowanie świata, walki o pokój dla świata i planety.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Santo Semo, Imperium Osmańskie, Bułgaria, Francja, syjonizm, MłodoTurcy.

Przekład z języka niemieckiego  
*Izabela Olszewska*

### Note

Michael Studemund-Halévy, Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures,  
University of Hamburg, Hamburg  
mihalevy1945@gmail.com  
The preparation of the article was self-funded by the author.  
No competing interests have been declared.

### Publication History

Received: 2019-09-27; Accepted: 2020-12-04; Published: 2020-12-31