

“EL ARVOLE KE DA LA FLOR”  
(A JUDEZMO SONG IN EARLY-TWENTIETH-CENTURY SALONIKA)

MIRIAM ARDITTI, ADOLFO ARDITTI, AND DAVID L. GOLD

*1. Introduction by D.L.G.*

Miriam and Adolfo Arditti, native speakers of Judezmo born in Salonika, sent me the following song in the early 1990s, a short time before he died. I have prepared the material for publication as best I can, but at least two questions remain, which are given in section D.

My romanization falls somewhere between a phonemic and a broadly phonetic one. Certain allophonic features of Salonika Judezmo are not indicated.

“We” means ‘Miriam and Adolfo Arditti’.

*2. “El arvole ke da la flor”*

We remember the following song (Judezmo: **kantiga**) from Salonika of the interbellum period. The tune and the refrain were probably taken from a late-nineteenth- or early-twentieth-century Greek ballad. Members of A.A.’s family told him that his father, Elias Shem-Tov Arditti, who died in 1913, used to sing it. Since **El avenir** (a Judezmo newspaper in Salonika, to which the song refers) was published between 1897 and 1917, the song was presumably written between 1897 and 1913 or, if not, at least this version of it arose at some time during those seventeen years.

**Lyrics**

- 1 el árvolè ke da la flor  
 2 vjénè lájrè la éčã;  
 3 la mádre ke fízàs tjénè,  
 4 laz dan tjérràz ažénas.  
 5 marjéta, marjéta,  
 6 den magapáz iména,  
 7 marjéta, màrjetína mu,  
 8 den magapáz, agápi mu!  
 9 ožikos prétos tjénes tu,  
 10 por loz mavíz me mwéro;  
 11 kwándö vèò loz vedrulís,  
 12 ávrò fójãì mentérro.  
 5-8 marjéta...!  
 13 díme xanú si no me kjes,  
 14 me vóã vestír de préto;  
 15 en *lävenír* lo vo açár  
 16 ke embivdí mansévo.  
 5-8 marjéta...!

**Variants**

- 7 marjéta, màrjetínatínatína mu,  
 10 por loz mavíz me mwéro jo;  
 12 ávrò fójãì mentérro jo.  
 13 díme, bižú, si no me kjes.

**Translation**

1. The tree that gives the flower  
 2. comes the wind and blows it away;  
 3. the mother who has daughters,  
 4. gives them to foreign lands.  
 5. Marjeta, Marjeta,  
 6. you don't love me,  
 7. Marjeta, my little Marjeta,  
 8. you don't like me, oh my love!  
 9. Little black eyes do you have,  
 10. I die for the blue ones;  
 11. when I see a greenish glance,  
 12. I dig a pit and bury myself.  
 5-8. Marjeta...!  
 13. Tell me, beautiful one, if you don't love me,  
 14. I will dress in black;  
 15. I will put a notice in *El avenir*  
 16. that I've become a widower without ever marrying.  
 5-8. Marjeta...!

**Translation of the variants**

7. Marjeta, my little, little Marjeta,
10. I die for the blue ones;
12. I dig a pit and bury myself.
13. tell me, jewel, if you don't love me.

An acute accent mark indicates the primary stress of a word as it is pronounced in everyday Salonika Judezmo. That mark also indicates the primary stress of a word as it is used in this song, unless the word has a dieresis. The dieresis indicates the stressed vowel of the word as it is used in this song. For example, *éča* is penultimately stressed both in everyday Salonika Judezmo and in this song (hence it has no dieresis) whereas *kwándö* is penultimately stressed in everyday Salonika Judezmo and finally stressed in this song (hence its dieresis). The reason why the pronunciation of certain words in this song is different from their everyday pronunciation is that the music of the song sometimes requires an exceptional primary stress.

A grave accent mark indicates a secondary stress, which is not found in the everyday language. In some instances secondary stress is used to give the words a poetic quality and in some instances it is merely musical license.

The refrain is indented.

Seven words are contracted in the song. In everyday Salonika Judezmo they are not contracted. Here are those contractions, with the uncontracted, that is, everyday, forms in parentheses:

- 2 *lajre* (*el ajre*)
- 4 *dan* (*da en*)
- 12 *fojai* [pronounced /'fojaj/ in the song] (*foja i*)
- 13 *kjes* (*kjeres*)
- 14 *vóä* (*vo a*)
- 15 *en lavenir* (*en el avenir*)
- 15 *ačar* (*a ečar*).

*Den m'agapáz iména* is from Greek *den m'agapaz emena* (notice the difference in the first syllable of the last word: Salonika Judezmo has /i/ and Greek has /e/).

*Xanú* means 'beautiful woman' and is also an endearing address form to a woman. In its fuller form, *xanum* (finally stressed), the word is also found in the Salonika Judezmo ditty *xanúm dudún žolí ty e*, which we note here not because it is relevant to the song but so that it may not be forgotten.

The second word of the ditty is derived from a Turkish word meaning ‘pretty’ (in Salonika Judezmo, **dudun** is also a female given name) and the last three words are from French **jolie tu es** ‘you are pretty’ (with poetic word order). Except in this ditty, **žolí ty e** does not occur in Judezmo.

### C. Comments by D.L.G.

Line 1: For ‘tree’, contemporary Salonika Judezmo has both **arvol** and **arvole** (both variants are stressed on the first syllable).

Line 5: **Marjeta** is cognate with *Marieta*, which is one of the forms of the Spanish female given name *María* at least in Puerto Rico.

Line 12: Judezmo spelling requires **me enterro** (that is, two orthographic words, one spelled *mem yod* and the other spelled *alef yod nun tet yod resh resh vav*). In everyday speech, the two are contracted (as if we had one orthographic word, **\*menterro**). M.A. and A.A. did not indicate any contraction here because the contraction in the song is the same as in everyday speech, that is, there is no difference between pronunciation in the song and in the everyday language. Thus, their list of seven contractions is limited to those made in the song but not in everyday speech.

Line 13: **bižú** is a late-nineteenth-century borrowing of French **bijou**. In all varieties of Judezmo having the word, it is used only as an endearing address form, not as the word for ‘jewel’.

Line 13: Everyday contemporary Salonika Judezmo distinguishes **kerer** ‘want’ and **kerer bjen** ‘love’ (hence **kerer mučo bjen** ‘love very much’). Therefore, in line 13, we expect **\*si no me kjez bjen**, but since that would make for nine instead of eight syllables, **bjen** is dropped here.

Line 15: The name of the newspaper contains a gallicism, **avenir**.

### D. D.L.G.’s Questions

Line 12: In the text which M.A. and A.A. sent me, they wrote **ávrò fóyäi** (with a dieresis) and, among the variants, **ávrò fójai** (without a dieresis). Were that the only difference between the two versions of line 12, we could be sure that one version had a shift of stress and the other did not.

However, since the two versions of that line differ in that one does not contain **jo** and the other does, it is also possible that the omission of a dieresis in the second variant was merely an oversight on M.A. and A.A.’s part.

Line 14: I do not understand why M.A. and A.A. indicated a contraction in **vóä**. It is true that Judezmo spelling has two orthographic words here (**vo**

[spelled *vet vav*] *a* [spelled *alef he*]), but even if the two were spelled as one orthographic word, the pronunciation would not, so far as I can see, change or could it change (in certain varieties of Judezmo, *vo a* is rendered /va/ in everyday speech, but that does not seem to be the pronunciation which M.A. and A.A. wanted to indicate, for, if that had been their intention, they would have written *vä*). What, then, is the nature of the contraction?