

## [A New Ladino Publication](#)

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*The Diario: The Daring Escape of Two Sephardic Jews from Turkey to America During World War I*, Albion Andalus Books, Boulder, 2023. Written in Ladino by Alfred Ascher, Translated and Introduced by Gloria J. Ascher

Professor Gloria Ascher has prepared this interesting little volume, a Ladino diary kept by her Uncle Alfred of his adventures as he escaped from Smyrna (Izmir) in 1915. Alfred and his older brother Albert were young single men who were caught up in the complicated rivalries of the time. Although they lived in Izmir, Turkey, they held French passports. Since Turkey was at war with France during World War I, the brothers feared they would be arrested by Turkish authorities. They decided to flee to Greece and wait there until the war ended and then return to Izmir. But as things developed, they ultimately decided to leave for the United States where they arrived in New York on December 25, 1915.

Professor Ascher, who taught at Tufts University for many years, has published her Uncle's diary not only as a scholarly contribution but as a loving tribute to her uncle and the Sephardic civilization of which he was part. As a linguist with a special love for Ladino, her introduction to the *Diario* comments on the special features of her uncle's use of the language.

Professor Ascher comments on the events recorded in the diary: "On their journey, Alfred and Albert face many challenges and dangers as Jewish refugees, from stormy seas to hostile Greek bandits. They survive by their resourcefulness, deception, intelligence, patience, persistence, hope, humor, faith and courage, the last of which becomes almost a leitmotif of the *Diario*, an ideal that must never be abandoned." She goes on to note: "At least as significant as the emphasis on courage is Alfred's compassion, his feeling of kinship with other human beings that transcends all differences of religion and nationality."

For those interested in Ladino, this volume is a real treasure. It is a pleasure to read an extended adventure story reflecting on the challenges faced by young Turkish Sephardic men during World War I. Even if one isn't entirely fluent in Ladino, Professor Ascher's lucid English translation is there to clarify words and phrases.

In her Introduction, Professor Ascher notes the growing interest in Ladino. Although there are few people for whom Ladino is their mother tongue, many are eager to participate in Ladino chatrooms, classes and concerts. The publication of the *Diario* is itself a contribution to the resurgence of interest in Ladino.

For those who know Ladino, even if imperfectly, the *Diario* will be a welcome addition to your home library. And for those who don't know Ladino, the English translation will shed light on a fascinating story of adventure and courage.