



Inna al-Kirama Qalilu

(Indeed, Nobility [by definition] is Rare)

The Motto of the Don Isak Navon Order of the Chevaliers of Ladino

The motto of the Don Isak Navon Order of the Chevaliers of Ladino is actually the most famous verse of al-Samaw'al ibn °Adiya al-Yahudiy (Al-Samaw'al Son-of °Adiya, the Jew), the most renown Jewish author in Arabic poetry of the Jahiliyya period.

Following a usual Arabic façon d'écriture, of answering the rebuke of an imaginary or real rival, al-Samaw'al first complains *tu'ayyiruna 'anna qalilun °adiduna* (She [was] reproaching us, that we were few in numbers), immediately answering (*fa qultu laha / so I said to her*) the critic in a way that converts the defect into a merit: *Inna al-kirama qalilu* (Indeed, nobility [by definition] is rare).

In Don Isak's mind, this verse of al-Samaw'al resonated strongly with the traditional Sephardic interpretation of the verse in Obadiah (1:20) *Galuth Yerušalayim ašer bi-Sfarad* (and the captivity of Jerusalem which is in Sepharad), according to which the Ladino-speaking descendants of the 1492 expulsion are actually the only remnant of the Jerusalemite lay and sacerdotal aristocracy. Whenever faced with dismissive remarks concerning the insignificance of the handful of Ladino-speaking Sephardim amongst the two big Jewish ethnic groups in Israel, the Oriental and the Ashkenazi Jews, each of which accounts for around half of the Israeli Jewish population, Don Isak would recruit al-Samaw'al's verse: *Inna al-kirama qalilu* (Indeed, nobility [by definition] is rare).

In order to underline the organic connection of Ladino culture to its (often forgotten) Judeo-Arabic roots, to reclaim one of the most famous chivalry songs ever written in Arabic language, and to reflect Don Isak's special affection for the quoted verse, the Order of the Chevaliers of Ladino that carries Don Isak's name decided to adopt al-Samaw'al's verse as its motto.

