HISTORICAL AND LINGUISTIC NOTES ON THE LAICIZATION OF FOREIGN SACRED WORDS IN ROMANCE LANGUAGES: SPANISH *HALA* 'COME ON' AND ROMANIAN *AOLEU*, 'OH, WOE' FROM ARABIC *ALLAH*

CĂTĂLIN PAVEL[1], SIMONA GEORGESCU[2]

Abstract. We propose an etymological analysis of the interjections Sp. *hala* 'oh', 'come on' and Rom. *aoleu* 'oh, woe', for which the lexicographical sources do not offer convincing explanations. We argue that these words have a common etymological basis, the sacred name *Allah*, adapted into Spanish from Arabic, and into Romanian from Turkish. Through a detailed diachronic analysis within the corpora of Spanish and Romanian texts, we show that the phonetic evolution of these interjections entailed a similar process of loss of referentiality, secularization, and upcycling of the signifier. Our research is rooted in the concepts of 'lexical engineering' and 'othering', aiming to open a broader framework for the discussion of lexical laicization in the contact between two cultures of distinct religious persuasions.

Keywords: etymology, Romance languages, interjections, Sp. *hala*, Rom. *aoleu*, laicization, lexical engineering.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Lexical engineering, othering and laicization

The etymology of the interjections Sp. *hala* 'oh', 'come on', Sp. *hola* 'hello', Rom. *aoleu* and Rom. *văleu*, both 'oh, woe', has never been convincingly explained. We argue that these four widely used lexemes have a common origin. In our view, none of them are primary interjections of Romance origin, but are in fact based on a sacred word – the Arabic name *Allah*, taken directly from Arabic (in Spanish) or via Turkish (in Romanian). We have already discussed in detail the case of *hola* in Georgescu / Pavel (2024), and will argue elsewhere that *văleu* derives from the Arabic oath expression *wa'llah*. We will focus herein on Sp. *hala* and Rom. *aoleu*.

Investigations to some extent similar in method have been conducted before by e.g. Ghil'ad Zuckermann. In his discussion of sacred words, and the laicization thereof, in Judaism, Islam and Christianity, Zuckermann has resorted to the concept of lexical

[1] Associate Professor, Ovidius University, Constanța, Romania, Aleea Universității 1, Corp A, Constanța, Romania, catalin.pavel@univ-ovidius.ro.
[2] Associate Professor, University of Bucharest, Romania, Str. Edgar Quinet 5–7, sect. 2, Bucharest, Romania, simona.georgescu@lls.unibuc.ro.

engineering. He describes it (2006: 237) as "reflect[ing] religious and cultural interactions", whether conflictual or cooperative.

We will use this concept to describe the linguistic results of socio-cultural interactions between two communities of distinct religious persuasions, interactions during which the main sacred element from the source culture is borrowed by the target culture, laicized, resemanticized, and used liberally in daily communication.

Zuckermann, focusing on holy words, notes that lexical engineering "gives us a valuable window onto the broader question of how language may be used as a major tool for religions and cultures to maintain or form their identity" (2006: 237). However, the words studied by us, while remaining identity-builders, end up devoid of religious value. Sp. *hala*, as well as Rom. *aoleu*, express highly personal reactions of the speaker, private rather than official, secular rather than religious. Significantly, the speaker's identity as an individual and as part and parcel of a community is constructed in opposition to the Other, and more specifically, to the Other's religion. Indeed, Zuckermann (2006: 244) was already aware that "the most basic motivation for rejective lexical engineering is OTHERING, defining and securing one's own (positive) identity through (the stigmatization of) the 'Other'". The three words discussed by us below are, however, vastly ambivalent when it comes to determining their respective rationale for lexical engineering. As argued in detail in Georgescu and Pavel (2024), where we emphasized this process of interlinguistic laicization, for Spanish and Romanian speakers who appropriated the word *Allah*, the word-base *Allah* may have been in the beginning little more than a novel lexical tool to verbalize their own attitudes and feelings more expressively (see below, §5.1), but it may have also retained a political dimension, being tantamount, in some sense, to deriding the Other. Still, the concepts of lexical engineering, othering and laicization are worth bearing in mind as we proceed with our investigation.

In Georgescu and Pavel (2024) we have also discussed the Roman military ritual of *evocatio deorum*, a remarkable illustration of how sacred names can be used performatively by foreign speakers in political or retaliatory contexts. In our attempt to shed some light on the mechanisms of how the sacred is borrowed or wrestled from another culture, and how its power is laicized and harnessed for different purposes, we will proceed this time from an medieval case study. The 12th c. Romanesque cathedral in Le Puy (Auvergne, France) is in a highly unusual situation in France at the time of the Crusades. Its wooden doors on the west porch exhibit an Arabic – in fact pseudo-Arabic or pseudo-Kufic – inscription, featuring legibly the name of Allah, albeit in ill-shaped characters. The translations offered range from "There is no God but Allah" to "This is what Allah desired". While the repeated presence of the name Allah on a Christian building would appear, at best, malapropos and, at worst, blasphemous, its rationale is, in fact, primarily aesthetic. This was the case for all similar pseudo-Kufic decoration created since the 9th c. in Medieval and Renaissance Europe. The supreme elegance, in the eyes of Westerners, of imported Islamic material culture led to such artefacts being imitated by European artists fascinated by their geometry, particularly after the Crusades. The sculptor responsible for the doors in Le Puy, Gauzfredus, who signed his work in Latin, must have copied an ornament from an Arabic textile or glass vessel, possibly from Sicily, boasting elaborate pseudo-Kufic decoration. He had no reservations to carve this inscription around Christian scenes, e.g., the Massacre of the Innocents. The sacred name Allah could not be recognized as such by Gauzfredus/Geoffroi, and it remained camouflaged in the architectural and decorative fabric of the assemblage that borrowed it. This name was

therefore valuable for the 12th c. visitor to the cathedral strictly for its ornamental geometry, the way – as we shall argue below – a speaker resorting to a laicized interjection is no longer aware of its once sacred content, while still embracing its euphony. Granted, while the sacred Islamic name from Le Puy could not be read by the 12th French speaking churchgoer, the pseudo-Arabic script perhaps remained to her, to some extent, a vehicle for the sacred, in so far as it incorporated a Biblical allusion, because its Oriental exoticism may have constituted a nod to the Holy Land[3].

1.2. Laicization in language

We have seen above that Kufic calligraphy incorporating a non-Christian sacred message can become mere decoration. By the same token, a word which is in the process of being laicized has a content which can no longer (and needs not) be accurately unpacked by the speaker, but still benefits from being the vehicle of its original cultural discourse. To the speaker, the remembered original context still accounts for its potency, while its uprooting renders it innocuous. The loss of its original connection to the sacred, even if its linguistic function were to remain similar, can lead to two different types of upcycling the signifier: either as 1. a mere ornament, employed for its euphony, or as 2. a lexeme with a new signified, retaining only conceptual traces of what it has come to supersede. A few examples follow in order to illustrate how the sacred can be camouflaged in our vocabulary[4].

To category 1 belongs the Rom. interjection *ler*, with several variations: *ailerui, lerui, leroi*, usually in the formula *lerui ler* (cf. Cioranescu nº 190). Indeed, *ler* stems from *aleluia* (< Hebr. *hallelū Jah* "praise ye J<ehov>ah!"). This remains, to this day, an interjection typical in religious Romanian folk poetry (specifically, in Christmas carols), but its original function and underlying sacred substance are irretrievably lost on the speakers. The Rom. interjection *zău* 'my word', 'you bet!', presents with a similar trajectory: originally, this is a typical oath "(jur) pe (Dumne)*zeu*" (< Lat. *deus*) ("I swear to God") which has developed into a mere augmentation of whatever is being stated (cf. Cioranescu nº 9468; Dworkin 2020–2023 in DÉRom, s.v. */ˈdɛ-u/). It thus preserves to some extent its original function and ranks higher than just an ornament, but its original sacrality is equally concealed to the user. A similar loss of the primary referentiality can be noted, in synchrony, in the use of certain interjections now used to express surprise, but originally used as religious invocations: Rom. *Doamne!*, Eng. *God!*, *Gee!* and so on, all the way to becoming encrypted in the OMG abbreviation.

To further highlight the process of semantic laicization, ancient names of gods lost their sacred referentiality after the demise of paganism, but remained linguistically active, with altered referential values. Pagan *Juppiter* survived in Old French as the noun *jupiter* 'devil' (cf. FEW 5, 78b). Also malevolent is Neptunus (REW₃ 5894), recognizable in Old

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[3] Surahs from the Quran and various phrases including Allah's name feature in pseudo-Kufic on European textiles, glass, etc., including wall medallions and the frescoes of the Boeotian monastery Hosios Loukas (10th–12th c.), the 12th c. *Majestat Batlló*, a capital in Moissac, Giotto's paintings, Filarete's Doors of Saint Peter's and many more. For Le Puy and the larger context, cf. Fikry (1934: 263), Baltrušaitis (1997: 111), Foster (2022).

[4] Also see Zuckermann (2006: 237) who defines "historical 'camouflage linguistics'" as "the study of the various forms of hidden influence of one language on another".

French under the guise of deonomastic forms like *neitun* 'sea monster', *niton* 'satan, nightmare', also M.Fr. *luitin* 'night ghost, evil spirit', etc. (cf. FEW 7, 97b-98a). Similarly negatively charged remains Saturnus (REW₃ 7624; FEW 11, 253b), O.Tosc. *saturno* 'sad, gloomy', Trient. *soturno*, Port. *soturno*, Fr. *sournois* 'sly, deceitful'. The feast of Bacchus, *Bacchanalia*, associated with chaos, noise, and depravity (already in 186 BCE, cf. *Senatusconsultum de Bacchanalibus*), survives in It. *baccano* 'row, racket', Istriot *bukanaya* 'id.', while the verb derived from the god's name, *bacchare* (REW₃ 865a 'schwärmen') has engendered Venet. *bakar* 'to breathe heavily' and *bakán* 'raucous laugh, disarray' (cf. Georgescu 2013). To such examples, chosen from just a few Romance languages, one can always add the classic example of the origin, in Romance and Germanic languages, of week days. Their names come from pre-Christian gods (e.g. *Veneris dies* 'day of goddess Venus' > fr. *vendredi*, sp. *viernes*, etc. // *Frig* + the Germanic base of *day* 'day of goddess Frig' > Eng. *Friday*, Germ. *Freitag*, etc.) or – in Romance languages – from the name of God (Rom. *duminică*, Fr. *dimanche*, etc.).

As prolegomena to our discussion of how the name Allah was laicized as Romance interjections, it would be fitting to describe the avatars of the Arabic expression *'alā bab Allāh* 'under Allah's protection' in certain European languages, either under an agglutinant form, or as a result of wrong division (cf. FEW 19, 3a): Occ. *alababala* 'thoughtlessly, recklessly', also interpreted as *a la babala* 'sloppy, incautious', Cat. *a la babalà* 'baselessly, thoughtlessly' (DCVB), It. *alla babbalà* 'negligently, naively, fecklessly' (Pianigiani 1907), etc. The Arabic expression is also found camouflaged in the Romanian vocabulary: *alabala* – as used in the formula *ce mai alabala?* ('long story short') or in children's play and poetry – is indeed traced back by Cioranescu (nº 165) to *'alā bab Allāh*[5]. We can add to the same family Rom. *harababură*, with the same negative meaning 'mess', 'mishmash', an etymology not recognized so far, but which can be deemed certain. This is evidenced by several clues, such as the dialectal variation (Covasna County) *hara-bara* for *ala-bala* and the old form *alababula* (cf. Frollo 1869, [as a translation for It. *mescolatamente*, 'in a mixed way']; Damé 1900) / *alababura* / *arababura* (Damé 1900), Meglenorom. *alababura* / *arababura* (Pascu 1912–1913, 192). *Alā bab Allāh* must have been imported into South-East Romanian dialects via Italian or, more likely, from Ottoman Turkish (cf. *ana babulla*, a scene of noise and confusion, Tk. *allak bullak*, upside down)[6].

The constant back and forth between the sacred paradigm and that of mundane life is therefore reflected in the evolution of the common lexis, both within a certain language[7] and in language acculturation. Such cultural and cognitive interactions, expressed in the vocabulary via e.g. lexical engineering, is the foundation for the current lexical and semantic configuration of the interjections Sp. *hala*, *hola* and Rom. *aoleu*, *văleu*. Their origin must indeed be sought in the religious language of the Other.

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[5] Nevertheless, DELR s.v. does not give credit to this hypothesis (while referencing, with reservations, a potential Turkish origin and citing Cioranescu), and inclines towards the spontaneous origin as conjectured by DEX₂, or towards an origin in child language, i.e., reflecting the first few letters of the alphabet, as put forward by Iordan (1934).

[6] The classification of the word as a Greek borrowing from ἀλλαμπαμπούλλα (cf. Suciu 2006) is highly uncertain as the postulated MGk. word is not attested (cf. Μπαπμινιώτης 2002).

[7] For details about the penetration of Christian terms in the Romanian secular vocabulary, cf. Lupu (2014).

2. SP. *HALA*, ROM. *AOLEU*: SEMANTIC DESCRIPTION

We discuss in parallel the two interjections with a similar meaning, Sp. *hala* and Rom. *aoleu*, as they exhibit the same evolution patterns and obey similar rules.

The interjection Sp. *hala* (along with its variants *ala* and *alá*), is used, according to DRAE$_{23}$, to spur on or to rush, to express surprise, or to call someone over. This conative function of *hala* was recognized in its oldest occurrence (*Mio Cid*, cf. DCECH 3, 304, *¡ala! Pero Vermuez, el myo sobrino caro*).[8]

For the interjection Rom. *aoleu*, DA offers as translation the French exclamations *Oh, mon Dieu! Vraiment! Ma foi!* and defines it primarily as a "cry of pain". It is further considered to be, as opposed to other interjections with a shorter signifier, such as *vai!* or *ah!*, something other than "a short, reflex exclamation, uttered in the moment when pain is felt", being more elaborate: "a cry of lamentation or mourning, something like *woe is me*!". "It is often used jokingly or ironically" (DA, s.v.), and can also be uttered to express fear, astonishment, or surprise.

3. PREVIOUS ETYMOLOGICAL HYPOTHESES

For the interjection Sp. *hala / ala / alá*, current lexicographic research almost invariably upholds the hypothesis of an expressive creation (cf. García de Diego 1968; DCECH 3, 305; DRAE$_{23}$). Over time, there have been scholars who voiced different opinions. Thus, in previous editions of DRAE (from DRAE$_{14}$ to DRAE$_{21}$), the word lemmatized as *hala* is seen as borrowed from Arabic, from an interjection *halā* used as a call or command to horses. Asín Palacios (1920) argued, on the other hand, that *hala* and *ala* have diverging origins: *ala* would come from the interjection *yála*, meaning 'come on!', 'quick!' (used in several Arabic dialects), in turn deriving from *yálah* 'oh, (my) God!' (contraction of the syntagma *yā (a)llāh*). Palacios explains the phonetic form by apheresis, offering as an analogy Lat. *jejunare* 'to fast' > Sp. *ayunar*. At the same time, according to him, *hala* would stem from another interjection, also of Arabic origin, *halā*, with the general meaning 'come here!', 'get closer!', and, more specifically, being interpreted as a call or command to the horses ("para excitarlos a marchar, o para hacerles detenerse, o para que cambien de dirección").

Asín Palacios's conjectures were not well received. Thus, DRAE$_{22}$ abandoned the idea of an Arabic connection, deeming the interjection *hala* (considered identical to *ala* and *alá*) as simply of expressive origin, following the results of Corominas and Pascual (DCECH 3, 305). These two etymologists dismissed the suggestion of an origin in *yā llāh* as being "del todo inverosímil", seeing as the Arabic *y-* could not be lost when taken over in Castilian. While they agree that "el étimo ár. *halā* no es objetable en principio, puesto que otras interjecciones proceden del árabe", they feel obligated to reject it, first, due to phonetic reasons (the presence of aspiration, which is missing in the *Cid*), and second due to the existence of very similar interjections in other languages (Fr. *holà*, Eng. *hallo / hello / halloo / hollo / holla*, Germ. *hallo / holla*), which to them constitutes proof that, in all of these

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[8] The context alone does not make clear beyond any doubt the conative function. It may express equally well surprise or joy.

languages, including in Arabic, we are dealing with parallel expressive creations, unconnected genetically (DCECH 3, 305, s.v. ¡hala!). Recently, Corriente (2008: 44 n.110; 48, s.v. *alalimón*; 323 s.v.) argues unconvincingly for the origin of *hala* in an Arabic street cry meaning "Hey! Let everybody know!" (appearing to equate Sp. *hala* with Ar. *alā*).

Back to the Romanian language, *aoleu* is generally explained as a compound of the interjection *a(u)* and the noun *le(le)* – a form of address for a (usually older) woman (cf. DA; DELR). Another hypothesis belongs to Cioranescu (nº 315), who casts *aoleu* as a mere expressive creation, finding its justification solely in itself and making pointless any attempt to recover an etymology.

Both etymological explanations for *aoleu* fail to take into account, on the one hand, the internal logic of an interjection, and, on the other, the nature of a human being's authentic reaction in a crisis situation. The spontaneity invoked by Cioranescu would require the speaker's permanent availability to create new lexical tools, best suited to express their emotional experience. As will also be argued again below (§4), not even under normal circumstances are speakers able to easily come up with new modes of expression or with new phonetic shells for preexisting concepts, let alone when dealing with physical or psychological stressors. The hypothesis of a compound *au + lele*, as put forward by DA and endorsed by DELR, founders in our view on the total absence of the form which would then have to be the primary one, **aulele*, across the diachronic corpus of the Romanian language as consulted by us[9]. Moreover, a diachronic analysis of the phonetic variation demonstrates 1. that forms such as *alele / alelei* are attested way too late – in fact, no earlier than the end of the 19th c. – when compared to other variants, and 2. that their frequency is very low (cf. §5.3). Semantically, even though the participation of the interjection *au* to *aoleu* is not in itself implausible, the other alleged lexical component, *lele* ('old woman, aunt, prostitute', cf. DA s.v. *lele*) is manifestly out of place, given that, in its earliest testimonies, this term is used when addressing male interlocutors (*Alele, moș călugăr* "woe, old monk", Jarnic-Bârseanu 1885, *Alele, feciorii miei* "woe, my sons", Pop-Reteganul 1886, etc.).

To the best of our knowledge, no lexicographer or historian of the language has so far entertained the possibility that the interjection *aoleu* is, in fact, to be explained as a Romanian adaptation of the Turkish *Allah Allah!*, as we will argue in this paper.

4. ARE INTERJECTIONS EXPRESSIVE CREATIONS?

It has been customary in the past to assume, in the case of interjections, including those discussed herein, their spontaneous origin and their lack of semantic content as self-evident. In fact, were spontaneity a basic feature of interjections, we would expect, on the one hand, to encounter in any given language a larger number of phonetic forms acting as interjections, and, on the other, to ceaselessly create such vocables in our attempt to naturally express our emotions. Far from that, the narrow repertoire of interjections, together with their basic intralinguistic homogeneousness and interlinguistic heterogeneousness (as long as the languages are not in contact), testify to their strictly lexical, rather than spontaneous, nature.

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[9] This corpus is a comprehensive collection of digitized texts covering the 16th to the 20th centuries available as an internal resouce at the "*Iorgu Iordan – Al. Rosetti*" Institute for Linguistics, Bucharest, Romania.

That the spontaneity of interjections is just a myth becomes abundantly evident when one realizes that most of them can be assigned an etymology. This corroborates the fact that they observe the "axiom of linguistic continuity" (Pharies 1984: 171). For example, the interjection Eng. *whoa₁* (used in asking the identity of a person) goes back to the pronoun *who* (used to call attention from a distance), probably crossed with *what*, *wow* and based on the verb *I vow* (OED$_2$); *whoa₂* "used as a command to a horse to stop" < (prob.) *way* (OED$_2$); *oops* < *upsadaisy* < *up a daisy*, "used when assisting someone to get up" (OED$_2$); *jinx* "an exclamation used after two people utter the same word or phrase in the same moment" < *jinx* n. 'wryneck' (as the bird was used in magic practices) (Shipley 1984). Behind quite a few interjections are hidden grammaticalized verbs (Sp. *¡anda!*, *¡vaya!*, *¡jo!* [*joder*]), pronouns (eng. *whatever!*) or nouns (Sp. *¡hostia!*, *¡coño!*). We even witness the grammaticalization of agglutinated lexemes which, over no longer than a decade, can become unrecognizable for the speakers: e.g., Sp. *manque sea* (+ noun / adjective) 'even if it were' > Sp. Am. *manquesea* 'whatever!'. To sum up, interjections are not initially phonetic forms devoid of meaning or referentiality. They only relinquish their signified gradually, by dint of repetition and by loss of intentionality, and in so doing they end up becoming strictly functional.

It must also be borne in mind that interjections can migrate easily when languages are in contact. Van Sterkenburg (2011), in his historical analysis of the origin of swear words and their current use among Dutch speakers, not only notes the process of secularization of sacred words, but emphasizes the extreme appeal that certain English words of interjection value can have for non-native English speakers. Dutch speakers could easily resort to their own interjections, and in fact they did not resort to English ones before English established its worldwide dominance. Van Sterkenburg quotes a 1997 survey in which the most used curse by Dutch speakers is a fashionable four-letter English word. Still closer to our topic, Rom. *vai* is part of the Balkanic and Romance series to which also belong MGk. βαί, Alb., Bulg., Sb. *vaj*, It. *guai*, Tk. *vah*, MGk. βάχ (cf. Cioranescu nº 9131, who also relates it to Lat. *uae*). The similarities here are hardly coincidental. These are not spontaneous expressions which so happen to be very much alike, but undoubtedly represent a remigrant interjection within the *Sprachbund* and even beyond it.

In Georgescu / Pavel (2024) we have discussed in more detail why languages welcome the import of interjections, and only remind here the remarkable example of Sp. *ojalá* 'hopefully, may that happen!', coming from Arabic *wa sha Allah* 'may God be willing' (cf. Asín Palacios 1920)[10].

5. OUR HYPOTHESIS

As suggested above, it is highly unlikely that phonetically complex interjections, like Rom. *aoleu*, *văleu*, or Sp. *hala*, *hola* may have originated in spontaneous exclamations. Quite to the contrary, they observe the "axiom of linguistic continuity", being "traceable to pre-existent elements", more specifically to one particular element: the name *Allah*.

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[10] DRAE$_{23}$ explains this lexeme through Hispanic Arabic *law sha llah 'if God is willing'*, but, since ojalá has no conditional value, but a desiderative function instead, we would rather side with Palacios here. In fact, the loss of the initial l- would be rather hard to account for.

5.1. Why Allah?

Swear words are, just as much as interjections, automatized lexemes, resources readily available for instant verbalization. According to Bergen (2016) and Byrne (2017), swear words, regardless of origin, do not require the processing of actual meaning, which is of particular importance to our argument. Such words – even obscene terms, profanity or blasphemy – become rapidly devoid of signified, becoming functional signifiers, formulaic tools. Thus, they can fulfill basic needs, and their use is triggered by the instinctive need to assuage pain or to ensure resilience in a state of extreme tension or frustration. But they are also used to accomplish specific goals. In most societies, uttering swear words has a performative value (Austin, 1962). Uttering a holy name or a sacred word, now devoid of their primary meaning, has become a go-to device for instantly securing help.

Moving beyond these general remarks, *Atlasul Lingvistic Român* (ALR I/1, 141) provides us with important evidence. To the question "When you are really in pain (an arm, a leg aching), what do you say?", one third of respondents indicated the invocation *Doamne!* 'God!'. In a traditional environment, speakers are, however, often in a situation where they have to reconcile their natural need to alleviate tension through profanity and the commandment to not take the Lord's name in vain. This predicament sets in motion various coping mechanisms, such as the deformation of the taboo word, leading to the creation of euphemisms for God, e.g. *gog*, *'sblood* (for *God's blood*), *zounds* (*God's wounds*), *gosh*, *golly*, *Doggone* (*God damn*) (cf. Hughes, 2006)[11], Sp. *¡pardiez!* (intentional alteration of *¡par Dios!*), Fr. *corbleu* (instead of *cordieu < corps Dieu*). Over time, these phonetic sequences lose their semantic and linguistic rationale. An alternative solution, perhaps safer and more comfortable, would be to resort to the sacred of the Other: by uttering the name of a foreign god, or at least by saying that name in a foreign language, the sin might become venial or be forgiven. This gives us insight into the whys and wherefores of the adoption, by Romanians from the Turks, and by Spaniards from the Arabs, of the name *Allah*: a type of lexical engineering which may also have had to do, along with various linguistic and even political motivations, also with religious taboos (prophylaxis of sin).

The same performative value of profanity can be ascertained in the invocation of Allah by Muslims when preparing to attack, in order to secure divine support in fight. This type of use is probably at the origin of *hala*'s hortative function in Spanish. It is however not the place here to attempt to decide whether taking over such a word from the enemy was nothing more than adopting an exotic sounding utterance, arguably with magical powers, or an intentional attempt to steal the enemy's gods and coax them into being one's allies.

5.2. Sp. *alá*: origin and evolution

In Spanish, this interjection is attested as *ala / alá* (ca. 1140, *Cid*; cf. CDH) / *hala* (1525, cf. CDH) / *jala* (1889, cf. CDH). To identify its actual origin, we will first proceed with a discussion of the oldest attested variations, *ala / alá*.

We must note first that, as expected for such a word, by definition used mainly orally, it is rarely found in written texts before the 16th c. Also, we run into insurmountable

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[11] A long list is supplied by OED2, s.v. *by God*: *cock, dod, Gad, gar, Ged, Gog, goles, golly, gom, gosse*, but also *adad, adod, bedad, begad, ecod, egad, igad* etc.

difficulties in trying to ascertain which syllable was stressed: its occurrence in the *Cid* (whose only manuscript dates back to the 14th c.) is serendipitous, and in that context both syllables can be taken to be stressed, given that the rhythmic structure of the verse is not restrictive (Fernández / Brío, 2004). Besides, it is possible that the stress shift may have been irrelevant for the speaker in contexts where its value as an interjection was manifest. This also explains why the accentual variation was preserved in the Spanish language to this day.

The occurrences after the *Cid* are crucial in understanding the origin and evolution of this interjection. In documents from the 14th-16th c., *Alá* is used as a name (the Hispanic variant of the name *Allah*), in invocations uttered exclusively by Moors – the texts are careful to always be clear it is them[12]. The goal of such invocations is to request help from God during battle (1), as an accepted maneuver in medical practice (2), as plain exclamations to express negative feelings (3), or simply as a marker that the speaker belongs to the Muslim community (4):

(1) Lidiavan con muy gran saña:
los moros «**¡Alá!**» llamando (…)
Todos ivan bien lidiando, (…)
los moros **¡Alá!** llamando. (*Poema de Alfonso Onceno*, 1348)
They fought with fierce rage:
the Moors crying **Alá** (…)
They all fought well, (…)
The Moors crying **Alá**.

(2) otorgo á vosotros, pobladores moros, que haiades vuestras mezquitas en los ditos barrios, é fagades vuestra oración, ó vuestros alfaquines criden **Alá** Zalá (…). (*Documentos mudéjares*, 1370)
I shall allow you, Moorish inhabitants, to have your own mosques in the aforementioned neighbourhoods, and to perform your prayers, and that your clerics may shout **Alá** Zalá (…).

(3) e fuése la vía que llevaron los moros e fallólos e demandó por Muça (…) E Muça dixo:
– ¡O **Alá**, e cómo a culpa nuestra nos matan los canos de los christianos! (Corral, ca. 1430)
and he went down the road that the Moors had taken, found them and asked for Muça (…).
And Muça said:
– Oh, **Alá**, look how, because of our fault, the gray-haired Christians are killing us!

(4) Y como bolviessen hechos Morabitos, andavan por las calles dando vozes y diziendo **Alá, Alá**, que es el nombre de Dios (…). (Torres, 1575)
and, as they returned converted as *Morabitos*, they roamed the streets shouting and saying **Alá, Alá,** which is the name of God (…).

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[12] *Alá* 'Allah' is recorded by Nebrija in *Vocabulario español-latino* (1495, **Alá** *en lengua arauiga deus,i*, cf. NTLLE) and remains present in lexicographical sources until, and including, DRAE's 21st edition.

It is noteworthy that the same Arabic habit of loudly invoking the name of Allah, either as a simplex or with reduplication, has also been observed and documented on Italian ground:

(5) non favellano niente, se non che dicono solamente questo: **'Alla'**, che viene a dire 'Idio' (ca. 1350, *ap*. LEI-Orientalia 1, s.v. *Allah*);
they do not speak at all, but only say this, *Alla*, which means God.

(6) gridavano Alà, Alà, che nella lor lingua, significa Iddio (1570, *ibid*.);
they shouted Alà, Alà, which in their language means God.

(7) gli Arabi, mettendosi la mano sopra il capo e gritando 'Allà, Allà', che vuol dire 'Dio, Dio', gli fanno grand'onore (1579, *ibid*.).
The Arabs, placing a hand over the head and shouting *Allà*, *Allà*, which means God, God, show him great honor.

In all contexts listed above, the way the invocation is used foreshadows its evolution towards a purely interjectional value and charts its multiplicity of functions: one can already sense its future conative or hortative role, while also detecting the lexeme's typical locutionary intent, meant to make plain the speaker's intense response, whether negative or positive, to a given situation. Actually, as pointed out by LEI-Orientalia (1, s.v. *Allah*), the Arabs themselves often used God's name as an emphatical exclamation (see also Wehr, 1976).

From the 16th c. on, occurrences in Spanish written texts reflect *alá*'s status as an interjection. In other words, although obviously deonomastic, the lexeme must have lost its original connection to the referent and, consequently, also the speaker's original rationale for using it. The appearance in the written record of an alternative spelling, *hala*, coincides chronologically with this change of status reflected in the loss of referentiality and the transformation in a purely functional linguistic sign. From the very first occurrences of the lexeme with the new status we can recognize its role as a vocative interjection, which can also be interpreted as a formula of greeting:

(8) Pastor: ¡**Hala, hala**, gente honrada!,
¿queréis saber a qué vengo? (Sánchez de Badajoz, 1525–1547)
The shepherd: **Hala**, **hala**, noble company!
Care to hear what brings me hither?
(9) Justina: –**Hala!** ¿Quién anda sobre las paredes? ¿Entráys a hurtar fruta? (Rodríguez Florián, 1554)
Justina: **Hala!** Who walks on top of the walls? Are you coming in to steal fruit?

Numerous texts document the use of *alá* as an urge to action: in (10), for example, it verbalizes the encouragement to stand up (similarly to Eng. *up-a-daisy*). It was to retain this value until later, when the interjection also developed a variation with reinforced aspiration, *jala* (12). In (11), the same form occurs as an expression of astonishment. Both values are typical in Arabic for the invocation of the name Allah (Wehr, 1976).

(10) SALVADOR: Álcese.
JUAN: Dadme la mano.
¡Alá!
DENTRO **¡Alá!**
*Al irse a levantar dice «**alá**», y dicen dentro «**alá**» y vuélvese a caer.*
                                        (Quiñones de Benavente, 1634).

Salvador: Get up.
Juan: Give me your hand.
Alá!
From inside: **Alá!**
Upon getting up he says "alá", those inside say "alá" and he falls right back."
(11) De aquí viene que el pueblo ignorante se admire cuando ve convertida en odio la amistad
que tan pura y firme le parecía. «**¡Alá!**, **¡Alá!** —dicen— ¿quién creyera que aquellos dos se
separaran al cabo de tantos años? (Cadalso, 1774–1778).
That is why the simple-minded folk are surprised to see how a friendship which had seemed
so pure, so solid, has turned to hatred. «**¡Alá!**, **¡Alá!** they say, who would have thought that
those two would separate after so many years?"
(12) Me planto un abrigo y un velo... Me calzo... y **jala**. (Pardo Bazán, 1889).
I put my overcoat on and a head scarf... I put my shoes on... and **jala**.

With respect to forms, we can safely assume that the variant *ala*, with a stressed initial
syllable, may be both the result of a different acoustic interpretation, and a speaker's recourse to
avoid the homonymy with the adverb *alá* (a well attested variation for *allá* 'there',
cf. CDH, CORDE, from the 13th c. onwards). In hortative or conative speech, this homonymy
with the deictic adverb could have generated unwanted ambiguities. The variant *hala* only
appeared later, its first recorded occurrence being in the first half of the 16th c., in a poet from
Andalusia (Sánchez de Badajoz, cf. CDH), and in lexicography since Rosal (1611). The addition
of the aspiration is not an instance of hypercorrection, but, more likely, the false analysis of the
reduplicated invocation *Alla[hallah*. In Andalusia, the aspiration was preserved, emphatically,
leading to the spelling *jala* (not recorded before the end of the 19th c., cf. CORDE).

To sum up, *alá / ala / hala / jala* are variations of the same interjection. The hypothesis
of its provenance from Arabic holds water, but the etymon is none of those proposed by
DRAE or by Asín Palacios (1920), namely the interjections *yalah* or *hala*. More simply, the
solution is the very name *Alá* 'Allah', used in invocations: by loss of referentiality, it was to
slowly transition to the status of a mere interjection with conative and hortative value, or
bound to express a vast series of feelings.

5.3. Rom. *Aoleu*

In the Romanian language we encounter a surprisingly similar case to that of Sp. *hala*. As
we will show below, the origin of one of the most commonly used interjections in Romanian,
aoleu, is indeed the name *Allah*. In this case, lexical engineering worked so well that no historian
of the language has suspected this origin so far. The source language was, this time, Turkish, with
which the Romanian has engaged in linguistic exchanges over half a millennium. But it is
remarkable that, at the Western and Eastern confines of the Romance territory, we are witnessing
at work similar mechanisms of perception, adoption, and use of the sacred of the Other.

We will provide, at this point, a diachronic analysis of the forms and functions assumed, on the Romanian territory, by the interjection *aoleu*. In so doing, we will visualize its metamorphoses from the name of the god invoked by the Muslim Other, to a most banal and common interjection with a no longer recognizable origin.

To begin with, we must clarify that the phonetic form of this interjection exhibits remarkable variation both diachronically and diatopically, which would appear to be in keeping with the essentially oral nature of any interjection. However, even interjections normally undergo a process of standardization, and we would have expected a certain degree of phonetic uniformity, rather than the no fewer than sixteen variations listed by the DA as common: *aoleà, aoliò, aléu, aleo, auléu, auleà* and so on. To these yet more forms need to be added, grouped separately by lexicographers under the lemma *alei* (*alelei / aleleu*) and interpreted as spontaneous creations (DELR) or akin to Bg. *olele!* (DA). While this diversity of forms might suggest a variety of spontaneous oral productions, they in fact all arose from a single etymon, the same that produced Sp. *hala*, namely Ar. *Allah*, imported in Romanian via Turkish.

In the Turkish language, the utterance *Allah Allah!* may have various meanings: it can be the battle cry of attacking soldiers, an invocation of God to secure support in war,[13] or an exclamation of surprise or distress (Akalın, 2011, s.v. *Allah*). Romanian texts from the 17th–18th c. provide significant evidence in this respect, as they document the propensity of Muslim speakers – on Romanian territory – to invoke their god, particularly during battle. This evidence is key in ascertaining how Romanian speakers perceived such exclamations. The authors of Romanian historical texts from this period go to great lengths to associate Turkish speakers with the invocation, generally reduplicated, *Allah Allah*. Clearly this had already become a stereotype, so familiar to Romanian speakers that its transfer into their language seemed almost inevitable.

(13) Turcii, numai decăt au început a striga cu zgomot mare precum strigă ei la dovaoa lor seara şi dimineaţa: **alah**, **alah**, **alah**, apoi hu, hu, hu, după obiceiul lor. (Diichiti 1715)
At once, the Turks started to clamor loudly, as they do during the religious service in the morning and evening, **alah**, **alah**, **alah**, then hu, hu, hu, as is their custom.
(14) Şi aşa au început a zice: **Alah**, **Alah**, şi s-au întors toţi inicerii spre cetate şi pe la gazdele lor. (Axinte Uricariul 1730)
And so they started saying: **Alah**, **Alah**, and all janissaries returned to the city and to their hosts.
(15) turci, arnăuţi (…) cu toţi în mari glasuri chiotea şi ţipa: „**Alah**, **Ala**", da corajie cestora, carii aproape alergară. (Stoica de Haţeg 1826–1829)
the Turks, the Arnauts, (…) they all yelled at the top of their voice, bellowing: „**Alah**, **Ala**", and gave courage to them, so they gathered running.
(16) deodată cu răsăritul soarelui se repezi, ca un nor îngrecat de fulgere, călărimea turcească, învitîndu-se oştenii între dînşii cu răcnetul de **Alah**! (Asachi 1867)
the moment the sun rose, the Turkish cavalry stormed forward, like a cloud heavy with lightning, and the horsemen were spurring one another on by crying **Alah**! (Asachi 1867)

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[13] Proof of the continuity of this custom in modern times is offered by e.g. the memoirs of Venezuelan adventurer Nogales Méndez Rafael (1936, ap. CDH), who fought on Romanian land in a Turkish division. He recalls that Ottoman soldiers used to invoke the name of Allah from the very beginning of the fight to the very end („Tan pronto como se daba la voz de ataque partían los infantes gritando *Alá, Alá* hasta morir el último hombre").

In one of these documents, we find an instance of ironic "lexical othering". The invocation *Allahu akbar* 'God is most great' was replaced, as seen in (17) below, by *Alah ecmec* (where *ekmek* is Turkish for 'bread'), a made-up expression, obviously absent in the source language. The invocation must have been, therefore, very well known to Romanian speakers and notoriously characteristic of the Turks, otherwise the mockery in the text would have been a moot point.

(17) După amiază, cînd ieşea hogea să cînte pe scara geamiei „**Alah** ecmec, **Alah** ecmec", Iusuf trecea nepăsător şi sceptic, nu ca alţi turci, care se simţeau înfioraţi de evlavie. (Bacalbaşa 1965)
In the afternoon, as hodja came out to chant „**Allah** ekmek, **Allah** ekmek" on the mosque's stairway, Yusuf would pass by nonchalantly and skeptically, unlike other Turks, who would be rapt in reverence.

We should adduce here a testimony, from a 19th c. Italian newspaper, to the ubiquity of this invocation not only in Turkish speech, but also – very importantly – in the oral expression of Christians:

(18) Il nome di Allah è in tutte le circostanze in bocca de' Cristiani del Libano, come lo è in quella de' Turchi. (1823, ap. LEI-Orientalia 1, s.v. *Allah*)
Allah's name is in all circumstances on the lips of Christians in Lebanon, just as it is on the lips of Turks.

This testimony may provide a clue as to why this exclamation was adopted, and came to be widely used in various South-Eastern European languages, with the general meaning overlapping with the interjection 'God!' (cf. Ghirfanova *et al.* 2010, s.v. *Allah*). For instance, a Latin-Albanian dictionary from 1635 already attests to the use of *allaha allaha* as an "emphatical exclamation" (Blanchus, ap. LEI-Orientalia 1, s.v. *Allah*).

The evolution from *Allah Allah* to *aoleu* can be sketched by means of a diachronic analysis of the interjection's phonetic forms. The documented sound fluctuations have two main causes: 1. the diversity of successive phono-acoustic interpretations of an exclamation from a language to which Romanians were exposed, but which they did not speak, and 2. the alterations occurring in the process of adapting a foreign exclamation to one's own native tongue. At work may have also been some sarcastic intent, as seen above and as is often the case in lexical engineering, or a merely playful attempt to ape an exotic sounding word. More importantly, as will be seen below, the influence of existing forms in the source and target languages alike must have also played a significant role here.

A variant which may be the link between the repeated invocation *Allah Allah* and the actual interjection *aoleu* is *alalah*, whose explicit predecessor is probably the form *Alla-llallah!* (19). This exclamation is first recorded in a commentary by Alecsandri to a folk song, a *baladă* (20):

(19) Cine ştie dacă steaua noastră bună nu ne-ar fi deschis porţile unui harem, şi atunci... (…) ce lovituri îndrăzneţe. **Alla-llallah**! (Alecsandri 1834–1860)
Who can tell whether our good fortune wouldn't have eventually thrown open the doors to some harem, and then... (…) what bold strikes. **Alla-llallah**!

(20) **Alalah** ! cai arăpeşti,
Alalah ! cai tătăreşti (Alecsandri 1966 [1862])
Alalah! Arab steeds,
Alalah! Tartar steeds

An explanation is offered by Saineanu (1900):

(21) **alalah**! strigăt de admiraţiune entusiastă în baladele nostre şi care nu-i de cât forma reduplicată a lui Allah! strigătul războinic al Mahometanilor (Alexandri, 167: **Alalah**! cai arăpesci! **Alalah**! cai tătăresci!).
alalah! a cry of enthusiastic admiration in our ballads, which is nothing but the reduplicated form of Allah!, the war cry of Muslims (Alexandri, 167: **Alalah**! Arab steeds! **Alalah**! Tartar steeds!).

It cannot be excluded that the same form is found in DRLU (1822-1823), spelled *alala* and defined as "strigare oamenilor' turburaţi", "the cry of angry people", equated with Hung. *halolá*, perhaps a variation on the same prototype[14]. Suciu (2010) concurs that the interjection *alalah* is a borrowing and dates its adoption into Romanian between the second half of the 17th c. and the 19th c.

It is significant that, among other forms, the spelling *hala hala* is also recorded, as early as the first half of the 18th c. This testifies to the altered acoustic perception and, at the same time, to the loss of linguistic motivation, naturally leading, in turn, to very diverse phonetic interpretations and lexical remotivations. It immediately springs to mind that this phono-acoustic interpretation bears considerable similarity to that of Sp. *hala / jala* (see above §5.2.).

(22) Deci tătarii, după obiceiul lor, îndată s-au apropiiat de dînşii, strigînd: „**hala**, **hala**". (Pseudo-Amiras 1726–1729)
So the Tartars, as is customary for them, at once drew closer to them, bellowing: „**hala**, **hala**".
(23) acei (...) spahii petrec pe saraschiariul pînă la cortul lui şi stînd în rînd i să închină. Iară sara, după apusul soarelui, într-amurgu, strigă toţi: **hala, hala**, hu, adecă Dumnedzău miluiaşte-ne pre noi. (Axinte Uricariul 1730)
Those (...) *sipahis* accompanied their commander to his tent, lined up, and bowed to him. And in the evening, after sunset, they all chanted: **hala, hala**, hu, which means, may God have mercy on us.

Hasdeu (1972) states that this was the aspirated form of the cry (Rom.) *alah! alah!*, and to back his assertion he quotes Miron Costin (1675):

(24) Elagasi întâiu ca un leu singur, şi după dănsul toată oastea cu glas **hala! hala! hala!** au purces...
The Tartar *aga* led like a solitary lion, and the whole army followed him, yelling **hala! hala! hala!**

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[14] Mention must be made of *alalah*'s similarity to the interjection MGk. ἀλαλά "battle cry", discussed by Golescu (1840) and explained as "zgomotul ce fac ostaşii la războiu, strigînd dă bucurie sau dă năvălire, precum muscalii zic: Ura!" ("the cry of soldiers in battle, shouting with joy or when charging, the way the Moskals say: Hurrah!").

The intermediary variation between *alalah* and *aoleu* is in our view the form *aleoleo* (25), (26), which appears to have undergone one or two phonetic evolutions: either, through dissimilation, it became *aoleo* (one of the most common variations), or it became deconstructed, via wrong division, into *aleo* + *leo* (27). From there the variation *aleo* began to spread until eventually reaching significant circulation (28).

(25) – **Aleoleo**, sărdar Căline,
De ce mă faci porc de cîine (…) (Candrea/Densusianu/Sperantia 1906)
Aleoleo, boyar Călin,
What moves thee to call me a swine and a mongrel (…)
(26) **Aleoleo**, mîndruța mia,
Sai di-n liagî bîrnețu,
Cî-n tai capu hoțu. (Diaconu 1969)
Aleoleo, my fair maiden,
Up and buckle my belt
Ere the thief can cut my head.
(27) **aleo, leo**: interj, de exclamare arătând o durere. *Aleo, leo, cum îl durea*, *Aleo, leo, how that ached him* 251, 11. 99. Orlea, Romanați. (Păsculescu 1910)
(28) **Aleo**! valeo! rău mă dore. (Gorovei 1898)
Aleo! oh, woe! it torments me sore.

In its earliest occurrence, our interjection is spelled *ălió* (D. Val.-Lat., ca. 1650), and accompanied by the gloss *vox irridentis* "word [used by] the mocker". Behind this phonetism we are entitled to conjecture the same evolution described above, although in this particular case we do not have the written records to document it. Significantly though, in D. Val.-Lat. there are several other words of Turkish origin, among which a few from the same grammatical category: *hai*, *haida*, *aferim*[15]. The ironic usage posited by the definition is not at odds with current usage in Turkish, where both *Allah Allah* and *vallah* (see below) can be employed sarcastically.

Another variation recurring in the corpus of texts is *alelei*, which testifies to a slightly different evolution. It is relevant that this interjection is encountered in literary texts when Turks speak or when they are spoken to, in other words, it, too, is associated with things Turkish:

(29) Turcii afară ieșea
Și din grai așa grăia:
– **Alele**, moș călugăr (...) (Jarnic-Bârseanu 1885)
Outside came the Turks
And these were their words:
– **Alele**, old monk (...)

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[15] The presence of words of Turkish origin in Banat (in western Romania) in the 17th c. is to be explained by the Ottoman domination in the area for almost two centuries. After the Battle of Mohács (1526), when Suleiman the Magnificent defeated the Kingdom of Hungary, the Banat fell under Ottoman influence and was eventually incorporated into the Empire after the war of 1551–1552 as the Eyalet of Temesvár, conquered in turn by the Habsburgs after their victory in the Austro-Turkish war of 1716–1718. Generally, Feneșan 2016.

(30) – **Alelei**, măi turcule,
Turcule hainule (…) (Jarnic-Bârseanu 1885)
Alelei, you, Turk,
ruthless Turk (…)
(31) Popa sabia trăgea,
Mânecile sufleca
Şi la turci aşa răcnea:
– **Alelei**, tîlhari păgîni,
Cum o să vă dau la cîni. (Jarnic-Bârseanu 1885)
The priest unsheathed his sword,
rolled up his sleeves,
and shouted at the Turks:
– **Alelei**, you heathen rogues,
I shall feed you to the dogs.

The form *alei*, in turn, retained in popular parlance its conative value, which, semantically, can readily be paralleled to Sp. *alá* (see above §5.2.). The occurrences of *alei* are numerous, particularly in folk poetry and in plays from the second half of the 19th c. onwards. We note here only a couple entries from Păsculescu's folklore anthology (1910):

(32) **alei, alelei**: interj. *Alei, copilaş*, *Alei, my young'un* Roman, 223, 3, 26. Orlea, Romanaţi. 224, 3, 87, idem. *Alelei, taică Novace* (Păsculescu, 1910) *Alelei, Novac, Sire*

Aleo was most likely contaminated with *aleleu* in order to generate the variation *aoleu*. *Aleleu* is well attested in folklore anthologies. Hasdeu (1972) interprets it as an alteration brought about by rhyming needs (33), but in fact it also occurs in contexts unburdened by prosody constraints (35):

(33) Numai pentru trebuinţa rimei, într-un mod de tot excepţional, în loc de *alelei* figurează **aleleu** în balada bucovineană *Ioviţă şi fata Cadiului*:
Aleleu
Ioviţ-al meu! (Hasdeu 1972 [1887[1]])
Aleleu
my Ioviţă!
(34) Ce te vaiţi, „**Aleleu**", Că fuge norocul meu (…)
Why your lament, „Aleleu" ? For my fortune doth forsake me" (…)
(35) **Aleleu**, Şărguţa mea,
Mai poci tu la bătrîneţe,
Cît puteai la tinereţe ? (Folc. dobr. 1936–1977)
Aleleu, little buckskin mare of mine,
canst thou still do in your old days
what thou mightest do in your youth?

In order to document phonetic diversity and to grasp the multiple possible evolutions of our interjection, we also reference here the form *oleoleo*:

(36) **Oleoleo**, măi feţi de lele, Cum oi să vă rup de pele! (Millo 1851)
Oleoleo, you, sons of a gun, I sure will skin you alive

(37) Dară Ghiţă ce zicea? — **Oleoleo**, mîndruţa mea,
Noi, frate, de cînd ne-am luat,
Pe la socri n-am mai dat. (Rădulescu-Codin 1896–1913)
As for Ghiţă, what said he? **Oleoleo**, my fair lass,
Ever since we tied the knot – oh boy,
we haven't gone a-visiting to our parents-in-law!

(38) Cine vedea pe Stanca lui Vasile şi a Ioanei Guraliu din Craiova, la leturgie, dumineca, la monăstire, nu putea să nu gîndească — între două cruci ori două mătănii: — „**Oleoleo** ! ce mîndreţe de fată !" (Urechia 1891–1901)
Whoever laid eyes on Stanca, daughter of Vasile and Ioana Guraliu from Craiova, during the divine service on Sunday, at the monastery, couldn't help but think – between two signs of cross, or two prostrations – **Oleoleo**! what a fair maiden!

The variations *aoleu* / *aoleo* are recorded starting in the second half of the 19th century after which they will surpass in frequency all other forms[16].

6. CONCLUSIONS

Our detailed diachronic analysis has established that Sp. *hala* and Rom. *aoleu* are based – just as was the case with *hola* – on the name *Allah*, adopted into Spanish from Arabic over some eight centuries of contact, and into Romanian from Turkish over some five centuries of such contacts. The way a holy Arabic name has been camouflaged in Spanish and Romanian interjections, to the extent that it has become unrecognizable to the historians of the language and to lexicographers, speaks volumes about the similar linguistic mechanisms at work at the two opposite ends of the Romance world. From a linguistic point of view, we were able to prove that the basis for these interjections is the Arabic lexical prototype *Allah* . At the same time, we must anticipate here on what the comparison between these two interjections on the one hand, and Sp. *hola* / Rom. *văleu* on the other hand, has highlighted: as we argue in Georgescu / Pavel (2024), the latter two go back to the same Arabic name, but via another prototype, *wa'llah*, an oath expression literally meaning "I swear to God", "as Allah is my witness". It is our understanding that by conducting the two sets of demonstrations (for Spanish and for Romanian) in parallel, light can be shed on the linguistic patterns and each demonstration receives additional weight from the other. Our study enabled us to chart genetic links between words which had seemed to be "etymological orphans" (cf. Georgescu, 2021). In so doing, we were able to retrieve a lost etymological family, consisting of lexemes which were not, as previously postulated, expressive or spontaneous creations, but which had, in fact, aggregated organically around a core hidden in plain sight.

The underlying assumption of our etymological survey was that, in Glyn Williams's words (1992: 53) religion, "the primary evolutionary universal", in order to effectively fulfill its function, "must be implemented in action systems and must therefore involve

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[16] We will discuss elsewhere the unique (plural?) form *haolei/heoile*, attested only in *Descriptio Moldaviae* (1714–1716).

communication via the secondary primary evolutionary universal: language". Indeed, religious language develops precisely in order to offer human beings a predictable means to experience the sacred. The historical expression of this "mutuality of language and religion" (Spolsky, 2006), known in most, if not all, linguistic communities, is the vast number of references to the sacred in everyday language and their intra- and cross-community appeal.

We have eschewed expanding this article into a full-fledged sociolinguistic investigation of religion and language, although this precise type of scholarship is finally, and necessarily, coming to prominence after 2000 (Darquennes / Vandenbussche, 2011). The present case study, due to all of its extra-linguistic implications, illustrates the extent to which *faits du langage* are also social, political and religious facts. We only draw the reader's attention to Sinnemäki and Saarikivi's (2019) investigation into what religion and nationalism have in common in terms of language use and how language uses can assert or thwart any "threat to national identity and the unity of the state". The story of how Spanish and Romanian have historically absorbed an Arabic sacred word is certainly germane to that kind of discussion. Such an analysis must move, in the future, beyond its linguistic tenets, and into a socio-cultural perspective concerned with how religious notions can be laicized, between source and target languages, across various types of lexical engineering.

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