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The Ferrara Bible and the Amsterdam Jews

In previous studies on the so-called Ferrara Bible and its reception in Amsterdam I have focussed on the huge success of the Spanish Bible translation, manifest in six reeditions of the Bible, numerous editions of Pentateuch and Prophets (*Humashim*, and *Parashiot*), as well as Targum (to the Song of Songs, *Shir HaShirim*), and a continuous reprinting of liturgical works, that almost all stem from the first editions printed at Ferrara.¹ The acceptance of the Ferrara Bible was not unreserved, though. Already the editors of the *Biblia en lengua española* of 1553 were aware of the controversial nature of the translation they were about to publish; here I do not refer to Jewish-Christian polemics on the interpretation of the Scriptures, but to the question of language. According to Athias and Usque, before finishing their work, they had received criticism from "some persons who boasted about being polished" regarding the *Biblia*'s language, which appeared "barbarous and strange compared to the refined language used nowadays".² No doubt, the detractors referred to the translation practice "word for word from the Hebrew truth".³

¹ HARM DEN BOER, "La Biblia de Ferrara y otras traducciones españolas de la Biblia entre los sefardíes de Europa occidental", in *Introducción a la Biblia de Ferrara. Actas del Simposio Internacional sobre la Biblia de Ferrara, Sevilla, 25-28 de noviembre de 1991*. Ed. Iacob M. Hassan and Ángel Berenguer. Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas; Sefarad 92; Comisión Nacional Quinto Centenario, [Madrid], 1994. pp. 251–296; Idem. "La Biblia entre los judíos sefardíes de Amsterdam y otras colonias en Europa occidental". *La Biblia en la literatura española*, Vol. II. Siglo de Oro. Ed. Rosa Navarro Durán and Gregorio del Olmo Lete, Trotta, Madrid 2008, pp. 315–349.

² The passage reads:

"Y aunque a algunos paresca el lenguaje della bárbaro y estraño, y muy diferente del polido que en nuestros tiempos se usa, no se pudo hazer otro, porque queriendo seguir verbo a verbo y no declarar un vocablo por dos, lo que es muy dificultoso, ni anteponer ni posponer uno a otro, fue forçado seguir el lenguaje que los antiguos Hebreos Españoles usaron; que aunque en algo estraña, bien considerando, hallarán tener la propiedad del vocablo Hebrayco, y allá tiene su gravedad que la antigüedad suele tener" (Biblia, 1553, Prólogo: *2r).

And further on:

"De do nació que algunos que presumen de polidos quisieron desenquietar y hazer tornar atrás este tan provechoso trabajo, diziendo: sonarían mal en las orejas de los cortesanos y sotiles yngenios; pero, estimando sus pareceres como de personas malévolas y detractoras, la hize sacar a luz sometiendo siempre los yerros y faltas a la corrección de los que más saben" (Biblia, 1553, Prólogo, *2v).

³ As reads the title page: ("traduzida palabra por palabra de la verdad hebrayca").

The criticism of the language resulting from a translation method of the Scriptures with a centuries-long tradition reflects a trait of the culture of the Conversos who reverted to Judaism in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. With their profound rooting in Iberian culture, many educated conversos shared contemporary humanists' efforts to raise vernacular languages to classical standards, with an array of stylistic ideals, partially inspired from classical, Latin models. One could say that the choice between a strict adherence to Jewish truth, expressed through the literal rendering of Hebrew original – although as much a modern, humanist concept as a tradition – and the lure of the 'polished' language typical of the culture of renaissance society reflects the former converso's duality between connecting with Jewish tradition and their attachment to secular society. The first manifested itself in the need for vernacular texts that were an entry to the Hebrew bible and Hebrew liturgy, from which the conversos had been forcefully separated after the expulsion of the Jews in Spain in 1492 or the forced conversion of Portugal in 1497. Having access to a biblical translation as that realized in Ferrara was to approach oneself to the Hebrew truth through a Spanish language that reproduced the sacrality of the original. On the other hand, regarding the secular side of converso existence, this translation had many words which by the sixteenth century were not longer in use, words that in the Renaissance development of Spanish had been replaced by "modern", "refined" vocables.

The Ferrara Bible was not only about words, though: in its intent of reproducing the Hebrew source, its text clashed with the implicit norms of the Spanish used in the Early Modern Period. The technique of Ladino translations has been the subject of a considerable number of studies⁴, but its philosophy is perhaps best summarized as the result of an "abnormal" language use, where Spanish is instrumentalized as a material to speak Hebrew. Meanings and grammatical categories are no longer Spanish, but Hebrew.⁵ More than a language, Ladino is a technique, which originating as a temporary transfer – Busse employs the term "Lehnübertragung"⁶ – in its paedagogical use of approaching Hebrew developed into a liturgical function, where the technique became a kind of sacred language.

Typical examples of this technique are plural Spanish words for those Hebrew vocables that only appear in plural form (so-called *pluralis tantum*), such as "cielos" for *shamayim* or "fazes" for *panim*, typical lexemes of Jewish speech like "El Dio", instead of "Dios", with the purpose of excluding a possible meaning of plurality in the target language; or hebraisms as "Sabbat"; but also the conferring of new meanings to Spanish words with the intent of reflecting analogous, polyvalent, meanings in the Hebrew source: a good example is the Ladino use of "paz", not only for "peace" but also as a greeting, farewell, thereby conveying the general feeling of well being contained in Hebrew *shalom*.⁷ Moreover, when no Spanish words exist for a given Hebrew word, they are created, as in "acuñar" – from "cuñada" – to convey

⁴ In addition to the studies referred further on, the work by ORA R. SCHWARZWALD on <https://barilan.academia.edu/OraRSchwarzwald>.

⁵ WINFRIED BUSSE, *Zur Problematik des Judenspanischen*, Neue Romania, 12, 2003, pp. 37–90: p. 48.

⁶ *Ivi*, p. 48.

⁷ *Ivi*, p. 44.

yibbum, the marriage of one's brother widow.⁸ As for grammatical forms, the use of the Spanish present participle "biviente" to render tenses in Hebrew without a Spanish equivalent is characteristic for the Ferrara Bible and Ladino translations in general; more often than not, the participle is used in its archaic apocopated form.⁹ The systematic translation of Hebrew 'et through the Spanish preposition "a" is another typical feature, as are redundant occurrences of words or semes "tornar tornarás, bendezir te bendezirá" (Dt 24:13) or the repetition of articles in the combination of noun and adjective: "Y padres de tus padres, de día de su seer sobre la tierra hasta el día el este" (Ex 10:6), which in Spanish should be "hasta este día" but is explained as a literal translation of the Hebrew *hayom haze*.

One element of the Ladino translation of the Ferrara Bible merits special attention: the systematic occurrence of archaic words and archaic forms. Whereas the presence of the mentioned lexical, morphological and syntactical features becomes evident soon enough for the modern reader, the huge number of words which were no longer current at the time the Bible was printed (the sixteenth century), is perhaps not as easy to recognize for someone not trained in the history of Spanish. However, the continuous use of words and word forms which were outdated in Early Modern Spanish, such as "abiviguar", "fazes", "fasta", "fonsados", "fraguar", "fruchiguar", "hermollecer", "profundinas", etc., was perhaps the principal cause for the irritation of contemporary "polished" readers of the *Biblia*. Such archaisms have little to do with the Ladino technique and are perhaps a consequence of the sacralization of Ladino translations, that is, they survived from earlier, medieval, translations out of respect for tradition.¹⁰

The Ferrara Bible was old and modern at the same time: it was the continuation of a medieval practice¹¹ among Jewish students of Hebrew and of the Bible; it was modern in the sense that it was a humanist enterprise of word for word translation, as existed in Christian, humanistic circles, with the work of Santes Pagnino, *Veteris et Novi Testamenti nova translatio*, Lyon, 1527 as the best known example. As for the Ferrara Bible, the major novelty was that the translation reached a printed form, with two important consequences: first, its language became thereby anchored, and, secondly, the translation was addressed to an entirely new public, no longer limited to rabbis and scholars. The latter had, of course, an important effect upon reception: where in the former translation practice the target language was a tool to better understand the source language, the printed Spanish *Biblia* was largely read by a public no longer acquainted with this source. The Ferrara Bible offered a first vernacular experience of the Scriptures for 'new Jewish' Iberian readers, and as will be argued

⁸ Ivi, p. 44, quoting the example given by HAIM VIDAL SEPHIHA, Sephiha, "Creations lexicales en ladino (judeo-espagnol calque)", in *Estudios ofrecidos a Emilio Alarcos Llorach con motivo de sus 25 años de docencia en la Universidad de Oviedo*. (Univ. de Oviedo 1977, vol. II, pp. 241-255.

⁹ DAVID BUNIS, "Tres formas de ladinar la Biblia en Italia En los siglos XVI-XVII", in *Introducción a la Biblia de Ferrara. Actas del Simposio Internacional sobre la Biblia de Ferrara, Sevilla, 25-28 de noviembre de 1991*. Ed. Iacob M. Hassan and Ángel Berenguer. Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas; Sefarad 92; Comisión Nacional Quinto Centenario, [Madrid], 1994, pp. 315-346: p. 315.

¹⁰ W. BUSSE, op cit. pp. 49-50.

¹¹ I use the word "practice" to stress that this tradition was not transmitted through a fixed core of texts, as many variations exist between extant translations.

below, this experience was a strange one, caused by the otherness of its language: the translation was at the same time welcomed and rejected.

I have pointed at numerous examples of this ambivalence in my earlier studies on the reception of the Ferrara editions, although not as a linguist, and only in a broad, exploratory way: thus I have recalled the references and critiques of the Ferrara translation found in the prologues of Jewish authors of converso origin; and I have showed how many of them tried to modernize the text through a contemporary vocabulary, replacing words that were obsolete in Spanish; how they occasionally normalized syntax or other grammatical features, or added or commented the Biblical ladino-text in order to make it understandable.¹² None of these editions was really radical, and one can say that the Ferrara text survived in Spanish until the eighteenth century.¹³

On this occasion, I wish to examine the impact of the Ferrara Bible and Ladino (word for word) translation with some more detail, in order to address to main questions:

- 1) *how was the Bible used in Spanish and Portuguese Jewish literature?; and*
- 2) *does the Iberian literature produced by former conversos also offer productive examples in Amsterdam and other communities of the so-called Western Sephardi Diaspora? In other words, was Ladino technique still used during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries?*

The subject of the use of the Bible among the New Jews of the Western Sephardi Diaspora is really a desideratum for a proper research project, and I do not pretend to offer more than an exploratory approach. For this purpose, I have taken samples from a wide range of Spanish/Portuguese Jewish Literature, including: Bible paraphrases or commentaries; expositions or treatises on the commandments and Jewish law; treatises on the principal tenets of Judaism; ethical and moral treatises; works on Jewish history and the destiny of the Jewish people; Jewish-Christian polemics; and the vast corpus of Portuguese and Spanish sermons.

Taken together, these texts constitute the vast, monumental library of Jewish knowledge available in Iberian translation, mentioned by Yosef Yerushalmi in his study on Isaac Cardoso.¹⁴ With the exception of one example, I have not taken into account the huge production of Jewish Liturgy in Spanish, including both the traditional prayer books as well as occasional prayers, printed in the Netherlands, Italy and other communities of the Western Sephardi Diaspora; in their great majority these prayer books are editions based on the works published in Ferrara between 1552 and 1558: this corpus is also in need of further research. Finally, I have not

¹² Den Boer, *La Biblia de Ferrara*, pp. 256-264.

¹³ By the end of that century, however, both in Amsterdam and other Jewish communities of converso origin, the need for Spanish texts had largely disappeared, as members of those communities were now raised into a system of religious education and were taught Hebrew; or, if not, they had assimilated into the receiving societies, and read the Bible and liturgy in new translations in the language of the country where they resided (Dutch, English, German, French, and so forth).

¹⁴ YOSEF HAYIM YERUSHALMI, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto: Isaac Cardoso: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Marranism and Jewish Apologetics*, Columbia University Press, New York 1971.

taken into consideration a group of literary works, written in verse; although many Sephardi writers of converso origin also left traces of their use of the Ferrara Bible, the poetical form implies a liberty that does not permit more than general impressions on the reception of the Ladino translation.

In the survey on the reception of the Ferrara Bible and Ladino translation in the mentioned "Iberian Jewish Library", first the origin of the authors has to be taken into account. For instance, in *Obligación de los coraçones*, the Spanish translation of Bahya ibn Paquda's *Chovot HaLevavot* published in the Netherlands in 1610, David Pardo offers a text interspersed with quotations from the Ferrara Bible, but in addition, he also employs a lexicon which either stems from a translation technique of the Hebrew original; or, can be explained by Pardo's origin from the oriental Sephardi community of Saloniki; or perhaps, by the adaptation Pardo made from Isaac Formon's previous translation printed at Constantinople around 1568 in Hebrew characters. Words like "abazar" – "to learn, to get accustomed to" –, or "membración" – "memory" – that appear outside the context of biblical quotations, most probably stem from the Judeo-Spanish used by Pardo or Formon, the translator of the previous Constantinople edition. A similar case is present in Moses Altares' *Libro de mantenimiento de la alma*, Venice, 1609; the work is a shortened Spanish version of Joseph Caro's *Shulhan Aruch*, and again, based upon a work published before in Hebrew characters and in Judeo Spanish. In *Sendero de vidas*, the Spanish partial translation of Jonah Gerondi, made by Joseph Salom, printed in Amsterdam in 1640, a specific language use that seems Ladino is also present throughout the text, and not limited to biblical quotations. In this case, it is either the author's origin from Saloniki¹⁵ (hence his use of Judeo Spanish), or the quotation of large liturgical excerpts from previous Ladino translations, or a Ladino technique employed throughout the work, that explain the specific language present in the work.¹⁶ Already from this group of texts, a complex picture emerges, where the evident presence of the Ferrara Bible is accompanied by other linguistic features that require to be studied in detail.

The case of authors or translators of either of Portuguese or Spanish converso origin is more straightforward, as in their texts there is generally a clear distinction between the Spanish or Portuguese used in their own discourse and the Ladino quotations derived from the BF. Starting with some treatises in Portuguese language, in Abraham Farrar's *Declaração dos 613 encomendaças de nossa sancta Ley*, composed together with rabbi Saul Levi Morteira (Amsterdam, 1627), the commented biblical verses containing the commandments are quoted in Spanish and differ little from the text of the Ferrara Bible. The main text is written in current Portuguese, with the exception of a specific vocabulary, including Hebraisms (as "Dinim", "Misvot") or a specific "Jewish/Ladino" lexicon, present in such words as "El Dio" or "quatropea". In Menasseh ben Israel's *Thesouro dos dinim* ("Treasure

¹⁵ See HERMAN PRINS SALOMON, "Iets (meer) over de publikaties van de geleerde hazan Joseph Salom ben Salom Gallego", in Harm den Boer, et al. eds, *Een gulden kleinood. Liber amicorum D. Goudsmit*, Garant, Apeldoorn 1990, pp. 249-266.

¹⁶ To give an impression of this language, I have indicated in *italics* the words or constructions that are reminiscent of Ladino translations: "Y teniéndolo, no pecará, porque entonces se commoverá de temor del fuerte y se *aprimirá su cuello y altivez de sus ojos y cubrirá a sus faces vergüença y honestidad*, y no pecará". Spelling variations are considered of minor importance.

of *dinim*/commandments”), published in Amsterdam, in two volumes, in 1645 and 1647, the autor writes his exposition in Portuguese, again reproducing the Spanish text from the Ladino Bible and liturgical translations printed in Ferrara or its Amsterdam reeditions. These quotations are presented in italics, and thereby, clearly distinguished from the Portuguese main text. Menasseh’s case is interesting, as in the works he published in Spanish, the procedure seems identical, but differs nevertheless in significant details. In his exposition on apparently conflicting passages of the Hebrew Bible (Torah and Prophets), published under the title of *El Conciliador* in four volumes (Amsterdam 1632-1651), Menasseh again marks the biblical quotations in italics, distinguishing them from his own text. Although these quotations are taken from the Ferrara translation, they do not always follow the latter word for word. The rabbi did reproduce “El Dio”, and “A.” (not “Adonay”) literally in the biblical quotations, as opposed to his own use of “Dios” or “el Señor”, and he also reproduced the particular morphological and syntactical forms of the Bible translations, but he seems to have frequently changed specific words. Thus, where BF reads “escarnidores” he employed the more frequent “escarnecedores” (Engl. “mockers”), slightly modernizing BF’s archaisms –though not consistently. In other occasions however, he perhaps employed words that he thought of as better translations of the Hebrew original. This could be the case in Ps. 1:1 where Menasseh uses “consejo de impíos”, in stead of “consejo de malos” of BF¹⁷; or Dan. 12:2 where he employs “ignominia y hediondez perpetua”, in stead of “para repudios y para desprecio de siempre” of BF.¹⁸ In the last case, another important factor in the use of the Bible among Iberian Jewish authors of converso background becomes evident: the targeted audience of their works. Contrary to *Thesouro dos dinim*, addressed only at the readers of the Sephardi community and therefore published in Portuguese (the main language used in these communities), in *Conciliador* and many other works by Menasseh, a Christian reader was also taken into account. Perhaps, the author adapted archaisms of BF in order to present himself more “polished” and learned towards the latter in order to earn their admiration.

Remarkable examples of the adaptation to a wider, also Christian, audience are evident in Sephardi literature. In his *Discursos académicos*, published at the false address of Antwerp (really Amsterdam, 1685), in order to reach an Iberian non-Jewish public, Joseph Penso de la Vega explicitly stated his use of the (Latin) Bible translation by Arias Montano, in his eyes the most truthful rendering of the Hebrew original. In the works addressed to the Jewish audience, Penso however quoted directly from the Hebrew Bible, followed by Spanish translations where BF is hardly recognizable, if present at all: in my opinion, Penso was one of those authors who “boasted about being polished”, rejecting the literal translation technique established with the Ferrara Bible.

The question of audience is also relevant for the works of Christian-Jewish polemics. In such treatises as those written by Saul Levi Morteira, Isaac Orobio de Castro or in the various polemical genres cultivated by Abraham Gómez Silveira, the presence of the BF can easily be detected. In this genre the election of a Bible translation is not without importance: Levi Morteira observed that the harshness of the Ferrara translation had lead many former conversos to using the Spanish Bible by the

¹⁷ *Conciliador*, vol. IV, Amsterdam 1651, p. 11.

¹⁸ *Ivi*, p. 13.

“friar”, an allusion to the revised translation of Casiodoro de Reina’s *Biblia* (Basel, 1569) by Cipriano de Valera, published in Amsterdam in 1602. However, in works such as his *Treatise on the truth of the Law of Moses* (Tratado da verdade da Lei de Moisés), Mortera could not render courtesy to the Christian translation, as the goal of his work was precisely to strengthen former Marranos against the Protestant’s intents of conversion. The *Biblia de Ferrara* was thus a mark of Jewishness, and was clearly present through quotations. At the same time, from some samples I have gathered from the texts by Morteira, Orobio, Gómez Silveira and others, I surmise that they all adapted the Ferrara text to make it more understandable, and more “polished”, so that their audience would not be alienated from the Hebrew truth through an all too mysterious text.

One last example offers an additional dimension of the role of the targeted audience in the Iberian Jewish literature produced by Separdim of converso background, now considered in Jewish preaching. In the genre of the sermon, delivered in Portuguese and Spanish in the Western Sephardi communities, quotations were generally offered in Hebrew, followed by a translation into vernacular. In most of the cases, the base text of the BF is present in these sermons, although rarely in literal quotations; in the Portuguese sermons, the translation appears in Portuguese and is an adapted, probably, modernized version of BF. An example, taken at random from Joshua da Silva’s *Discursos predicáveis*, Amsterdam, 1688:

E guardaréys ao Sabbath, que sanctidade hé para vos, seus prophanantes matar serão matados, porque todo o que fizer nella obra, e será talhada essa alma de entre seu povo (p. 75).

Where BF reads:

Y guardaredes a el Sabbath que santidad él a vos, su abiltante matar será matado que todo el fazién en él obra, y será tajada la alma essa de entre sus pueblos (Dt. 31:14).

It is evident that Silva offered a Portuguese version of the Spanish translation with some syntactical and lexical normalizations, but without abandoning the character of a word for word translation. I think this applies for the whole genre, although the spectrum of adaptations to the BF is broad, not only between different authors, but also within printed sermons, where some quotations are literally taken from BF, and others are really adapted. The general, not detailed, survey I have made does not allow me to explain the variations, which could either be the reflection of a more perfect or faulty process of memorization, or are testimony of different attitudes towards the Ferrara translation, where some authors were more respectful and others decided in their intent of offering a more polished, or truthful version. A special case, and again a proof of the importance of the targeted audience is provided in a sermon by Samuel Mendes de Solla, *haham* of the Mikve Israel congregation of Curaçao. Mendes de Solla, known for his role in fierce quarrels in the community, was also known for his oratory skills, as becomes evident from a number of sermons that appeared in print, even posthumously. Whereas Solla follows the habit of quoting in Hebrew followed by a vernacular translation based on BF, in the sermon he delivered at the death of William IV he quoted from the Latin Vulgate Bible! Solla clearly had prominent Dutch guests in mind when he delivered this funeral sermon in the synagogue of *Mikve Israel*. The choice for a catholic Bible towards a supposedly protestant part of the audience remains, however, surprising...

In this brief survey of the use of the BF, I have until now mentioned the role of origin (local *ex converso* authors vs. Oriental Sephardim; Spanish or Portuguese); of language (original vs. translation); and of audience (Jewish vs. additional Christian). Chronology is also important: although the introduction of the Ladino BF initiates with an implicit controversy about the literal translation technique, the first, early seventeenth century reeditions of Bible and prayer books offer little changes with respect to the *Biblia* printed in 1553. The same holds true, I think, for a series of treatises published in the first half of the seventeenth century. With the pass of time, Sephardi communities well established, and perhaps due to the rise of the Sephardi elite at the latter half of the seventeenth century, the Ladino translation became, again, the object of increasing criticism. In a new edition of the Targum to the Song of Songs, the Amsterdam teacher Joseph Franco Serrano complained about the "old Spanish language" that was so primitive and faulty that instead of inspiring devotion it refrained from studying the extant translations; they were incomprehensible for Jews recently arrived from Iberia.¹⁹ Serrano's paraphrase of the Torah, *Los cinco libros de la sacra Ley*, published in Amsterdam in 1695, represents the dilemma of all those authors critically dealing with the existing translation: the work by Serrano reproduces the Ferrara translation, inserting (rabbinical) commentaries and explanations. In other words, although the author's dissatisfaction with the Ferrara translation was evident, he could not endeavour a totally new version.

Two distinguished rabbis further illustrate this point. In 1681, rabbi Isaac Aboab da Fonseca had offered his paraphrase on the Torah, *Paráfrasis comentado sobre el Pentateuco*, published in Amsterdam. Aboab's commentary is written in eloquent Spanish prose, but in his extensive quotations of the Biblical text, he of course relies on BF. It is evident, however, that the rabbi consistently modernized and normalized the linguistic challenge of the – in his eyes – excessively literal translation and of its antiquated vocabulary. Isaac de Acosta, a former pupil of Aboab continued the paraphrase, published in Bayonne in 1722 with a very explicit criticism of the BF:

Considering that our Nation [...] is accustomed to observe the daily reading according to our sages, using the Spanish Bible of Ferrara, and that its translator, excessively accurate, translated so rigorously from the letter, which resulted apart from his asperous style in a lack of proportion between adverbs and words between one language and another, that the sense of some parts became so obscured [...] I thought it would be in the service of God and my Nation to continue [...] the work initiated by] Haham Aboab.²⁰

¹⁹ HARM DEN BOER, *La Biblia de Ferrara y otras traducciones*, p. 255. The original reads: "En lengua española han sido hasta este año de 5443 [1683] tan toscas y defectuosas, que en lugar de mover a la devoción de meditarlas, provocaban a no leerlas, por no poder investigarlas ni entenderlas los iudíos resién venidos de España" (foreword of *Paráfrasis caldayca en los Cantares de Selomoh*, Amsterdam 1683, f. L4v).

²⁰ HARM DEN BOER, *La Biblia de Ferrara*, p. 261. The original reads:

Viendo yo pues que nuestra nación, si menos versada que otras en la lengua santa no menos religiosa, acostumbra cumplir jornalmente sus lecciones conforme a nuestros sabios, lo que hazen por la Biblia española de Ferrara; y que su traductor demasiado de exacto traduxo tan en rigor a la letra, que además del escabroso estilo que causa la improporción de algunos adverbos y términos de una lengua con otra, escurece de tal modo el sentido en algunas partes que o no puede entenderse la oración o se entiende muy diferente; me pareció haría servicio a Dios, y a mi Nación, prosiguiendo desde adonde paró el S[eñor] H[aham] Aboab; y a su imitación dar al público un género de paráfrase sobre los prophetas primeros, de modo que aclarándoles la lectura, les individualize

The examples can be multiplied and culminate in the new Spanish translation of Jewish Liturgy by Isaac Nieto, Rabbi of the Sephardi congregation of London, and published in 1740. In the preface to his new version, Nieto recalls that complaints about the previous Spanish translations were "very old" and that many thought these versions were accountable for a lack of devotion. Nieto did not hold back: he called the words [of the Ferrara translations] "improper, barbarous, antique, primitive, little understandable" and clearly recognized the differences – "distancia", in his words – between Hebrew and Spanish. Nieto completed an observation²¹ already made by *haham* Jacob Judah León Templo in his edition of the *Alabanzas de santidad*, Amsterdam, 1671, that is: that a translation had to convey not the words but the *sense* (Spanish "sentido") of the original. León Templo, caught between the "falseness" of the Christian translation by Valera – the protestant Spanish Biblia, printed in Amsterdam in 1602 – and the hardly understandable BF, searched for a third style ("tercero estilo"), which would offer both a truthful rendering of the Hebrew truth and an understandable Spanish. However, León did not go further than supplying verbs or articles where the Ferrara translation offered an excessively literal translation, and he modernized the vocabulary. The really new liturgical translation offered by Isaac Nieto in 1740 had not proved possible for the whole Bible, and time was running out: by the end of the eighteenth century, Portuguese or Spanish were no longer the principal language used in the Western Sephardi communities in Europe.

Returning to the first question posed in this essay, about the use of the BF among the Western Sephardim in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the short survey of Iberian Jewish literature where biblical texts were extensively used, offers a complex picture: when reducing the question to the Spanish and Portuguese Jews of converso origin – leaving out works from Oriental Sephardim –, and when taking into account the different targeted audiences – whether Jewish or both Jewish and Christian – the presence of the BF as a canonical text becomes overwhelmingly clear. This does not imply, however, that the authors and translators that followed this Ladino translation had a blind reverence for this translation. Even in the authors that held the Ferrara Bible in a semi-sacred status, changes in vocabulary and syntactical adaptations can be found. The most eminent among the rabbis (Mortera, Aboab, Menasseh, Abaz, Acosta, Nieto...) frequently adapted quotations from the BF. And although a thorough research on the subject is as much in need as I have argued before, I venture that the changes introduced by these rabbis are above all located in the area of vocabulary, and to a much lesser degree, in the grammatical structure of the Ladino translations. These scholars from the 17th and 18th centuries could no longer identify with archaic (medieval or not) terms that were no truer translation of the Hebrew original than a newer "polished" Spanish vocabulary, developed since the Renaissance. Perhaps under the influence of an increasingly rational spirit, they were not longer charmed by the "mysterious" qualities of the language, inherited by tradition.

The second question, if a *practice* of literal translation existed and is visible in Western Sephardi literature, is more difficult to prove. It appears clear that Ladino translations of the Bible and of, for instance, the Targum to the Song of Songs, were

la historia, y les resuelva las dificultades [*Conjeturas sagradas sobre los prophetas primeros*, Leide [=Bayonne], 1722, f. π4r.

²¹ *Orden de las oraciones de Rosashanah y Kipur*, Londres 1740. Nieto reflects on the importance of translating the sense on pp. 5-6 from his preface.

used in religious education; the successive editions of the *Paráfrasis sobre los Cantares de Selomoh*, printed from 1644 to 1816 in Amsterdam, were made by teachers of Ets Haim, who referred to their use in the class room. The existence of printed glossaries of so-called “ladinos” – fixed translations – by Moses Cordovero or Jacob Lumbroso, with several editions²², indicates that the practice of studying Hebrew and Torah through the technique of literal translation into Spanish was current. Vocabularies published by *haham* Solomon de Oliveira, teacher at Ets Haim, could indicate that a similar practice could have been current in Amsterdam, and even through the use of Portuguese in stead of Spanish, but I am not aware of translations made by Amsterdam Sephardi scholars using the ladino technique.

Such vocabularies are offered by rabbi Solomon de Oliveira, teacher at the Ets Hayyim academy of the Portuguese congregation of Talmud Torah, who published various of his works intended for the education between 1680 and 1688.

For school use he published: “*Ez Hayyim*,” a Hebrew-Aramaic-Portuguese lexicon (Amsterdam, 1682); “*Zayit Ra’anan*,” a collection of Talmudic and scientific Hebrew terms with some Hebrew riddles (ib. 1683); “*Ilan she-’Anafaw Merubbin*,” a Portuguese vocabulary, with additions to “*Ez Hayyim*” (ib. 1683); “*Yad Lashon*” and “*Dal Sefatayim*,” a Hebrew manual and a short Aramaic grammar (ib. 1688); “*Darke No’am*,” a dictionary of rabbinical terms, published with “*Darke Adonai*” (ib. 1688).

I want to end this brief overview of the resonance of the Ferrara Bible and translations with a very special case I recently examined, a manuscript extant at the library of Ets Haim/Montezinos of the Portuguese Jewish Community of Amsterdam. I refer to MS 48 D 20, titled “*Libro del Alcorán, traducido palabra por palabra de arábigo en español, diuidido en dos partes*”: a manuscript written in Amsterdam in the seventeenth century that presents a Spanish translation of the Qur’an. The manuscript which hitherto had not been studied represents one of first translations of the Qur’an in Spanish language, in a context where the Qur’an and Islamic literature were prohibited in the Spain and Portugal of the Inquisition, as Jewish Literature was.²³

Upon a closer examination it becomes clear that this translation was not made “word for word from Arab”, as its title announced, but is based upon the Italian translation of the Qur’an by Castrodardo, printed in Venice in 1547; and this Italian translation derives from the Latin translation published in Basel 1543 by Bibliander. Therefore this manuscript is really a retranslation.²⁴

With this knowledge in mind, and upon transcribing and editing this text, I was struck by some particular linguistic features that were not to be expected: the presence of words and in some cases also of the syntax, only to be found in the Ferrara translation of the Bible and other Ladino translations. A seventeenth century Spanish translation of the Qur’an, made by an anonymour Portuguese Jew, thus contains elements belonging to the domain of a semi-sacred language that I supposed to be reserved only for Jewish texts. I cannot go too much into details but the presence of words like “escuentra”, “fonsados”, “fazes”, “sombair”, “apartadura”, “tajamiento” and many other, are characteristic examples, and taken together: exclusive for the

²² See DAVID BUNIS, art. cit., p. 315-316.

²³ See HARM DEN BOER and PIER MATTIA TOMMASINO, *Reading the Qur’an in the 17th-Century Sephardi Community of Amsterdam*, Al Qantara 35.2, 2014, pp. 461-491.

²⁴ DEN BOER and TOMMASINO, *Reading the Qur’an*, pp. 468-471.

Ladino of the Ferrara bible. Also the form of the present participle, like in “resplandecién” (the apocopated or shortened version of resplandeciente, shining) is characteristic. Occasionally even the syntax has been affected when we read, for instance, “bos diciente” – a voice that spoke, which in normal Spanish would have been, “una voz que decía/dijo”; or “fuerte en sus ojos mucho” (very hard in his eyes), with an abnormal word order, where the Spanish normal form would have been: “muy fuerte a sus ojos”.²⁵

At this moment I can but guess why the anonymous translator would have chosen to dress his text with Ladino features. Perhaps he wanted to raise the authentic status of the Qur'an text by adopting a style that would sound mysterious – and in that sense: sacred – to his intended reader. However, at this stage it is difficult to establish which reader the translator had in mind. Perhaps he was so familiar with the Ferrara bible and Liturgy at Amsterdam that he, although a speaker of Portuguese (which is also manifest from the Spanish he used), could not think of other Spanish words for the Italian words and concepts he translated. Perhaps, he based himself on a Hebrew translation of the Qur'an; we know of one such manuscript that was equally based upon the Italian Qur'an translation. Then, he would somehow have continued to use the Ladino practice of re-translation.

In any case, this intriguing last example shows once more how profound the impact of that admirable project of reconnection with Judaism through the printing of the Spanish Bible and prayer books was at Ferrara, the city where this conference takes place. I cannot think of a better reason to celebrate the Festival of the Hebrew Book than to honour once more the endeavour of that group of Jewish emigres that found temporary shelter at Ferrara, but whose printed production had an enduring influence on the culture of the Western Sephardi Diaspora.

²⁵ Examples are given in Den Boer and Tommasino, cit, pp. 464-466, but will be amplified in the edition, together with an introduction of the manuscript, prepared by the two authors for publication in Brill's series *Heterodoxia Iberica*.