Translation in Diaspora:
Sephardic Spanish-Hebrew translations in the sixteenth century

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Introduction

In 1492, when the Catholic monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella gave their Jewish subjects the choice between conversion to Catholicism or expulsion, many Sephardic Jews opted to leave their homeland, relocating to North Africa, the Ottoman Empire, or Western Europe. With the Expulsion, the Sepharadim,[1] who had always identified as a people living in diaspora from their Biblical homeland, now found themselves in a second diaspora from their native land where their ancestors had lived since before Roman times. Spanish, their native language they once shared with the Christian majority, became a diasporic Jewish language spoken alongside Turkish or Arabic or Dutch. As elsewhere in Europe, Africa, and Asia, Jews in Spain considered themselves to be living in Diaspora, descendants of those Israelites who were exiled from Judea first by the Babylonians and subsequently by the Romans. Their religious and literary culture expressed a diasporic consciousness. As Spaniards or Iberians they shared many of the aesthetic and cultural values of their Christian neighbors; as medieval Jews they understood their own history along prophetic lines: they were chosen to suffer the pain of exile, to keep God's law until the arrival of the Messiah. Sephardic poets such as Judah Halevi wrote passionately of returning to Zion (Scheindlin 2008), but at the same time these poets were also natives of the Iberian Peninsula, speakers of Spanish and other Romance dialects, and aficionados of local troubadour poetry, knightly Romances, folktales and ballads.

These two diasporas, from the Holy Land and from Spain would "echo back and forth" in the Sephardic imagination (Boyarin; Clifford 1994, 305). This double diaspora gave rise to a new historical consciousness formed in the crucible of Spain's imperial expansion and tinged with a new messianic urgency brought on by the massive changes afoot in the Early Modern Mediterranean: Protestantism, print culture, increasingly sophisticated trade networks, and the expansion of Spain's empire into Western Europe, North Africa, and beyond.

For centuries before their expulsion from Spain (1492) and Portugal (1497), the Sepharadim, or Jews of the Iberian Peninsula, had long used literary translation and adaptation as a way of mediating between the subculture of their minority religious community and the culture of the dominant Islamic and later Christian majority. In al-Andalus, Hebrew poets famously adapted Classical Arabic literary models in Hebrew, producing what are now considered the classics of Hebrew literature. (Drory 2000) Under Christian rule, the prestige of Andalusi literary culture continued exercise considerable

[1] I will use the Sephardic pronunciation of the Hebrew plural *Sefaradim* (sing. *Sefardí*) instead of the Anglicized Ashkenazi pronunciation, "Sephardim."

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influence on Jewish intellectuals such as Judah al-Harizi, who first translated the Arabic *maqamat* of al-Hariri into Hebrew before penning his own work in that genre, the *Tahkemoni*. (al-Harizi 2001) The teams of translators working under Archbishop Raymond in the twelfth century and King Alfonso X in the thirteenth included several Jewish translators who rendered Arabic texts into Castilian. (González Palencia 1942; Burnett 1994; Márquez Villanueva 2004, 179; Roth 1990, 58) Later, in the fifteenth century, Jewish and *converso* authors worked to translate texts from classical antiquity into Castilian, Catalan, and Hebrew. (Roth 2002, 186; Round 1993)

Here I will discuss three translations from Spanish to Hebrew made in the sixteenth century by Sephardic writers. All three originals are very well-known to students of Spanish literature: Fernando de Rojas' *Celestina* (1499), Rodríguez de Montalvo's *Amadís de Gaula* (1507), and Francisco López de Gómara's *Historia General de las Indias* (1552). Given the tremendous popularity of these works, the mere fact of their translation itself is perhaps not notable. However, when taken together as examples of diasporic cultural production of the Sepharadim, the Jews expelled from the Iberian Peninsula, we begin to see a different picture. Their translators sought to appropriate these texts and place them in the service of a Jewish literary culture, one whose values were often at odds with those of the original authors and readers of the Spanish originals. At the same time, the Sepharadim were deeply identified with Iberian vernacular culture, and these translations were a form of cultural capital upon which they traded in the broader Jewish context of Western Christendom and the Ottoman Empire. The lens of diaspora can help us to better understand Sephardic translation from Spanish to Hebrew by focusing on the significance of language use, cultural identity, and Jewish literary culture in the sixteenth century.

I'd like to begin by discussing the concept of diaspora and what it means for cultural production, then touch on the significance of the Sephardic diaspora from the Iberian Peninsula for our reading of these translations, then discuss the translations themselves, giving textual examples of how the translators brought these texts over from a national, imperial literary discourse in Spanish to a Jewish, diasporic literary discourse in Hebrew.

Diaspora

Diaspora is a Greek word that describes the broad scattering of a people as if they were seeds scattered across several furrows in a field. In its original usage it described the colonization of people dispersing from metropolis to colonies in order to reproduce Imperial authority in conquered lands. In the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible it came to mean the dispersion of the Jews from Zion throughout the Mediterranean and Middle East. Since then it has come to be applied to range of historical scatterings: African, Indian, Chinese, Armenian, and others.

Ultimately diasporic culture is a discussion about Here (the hostland) and There (the homeland). What did we take with us from There? What are we doing with it Here? When (and under what circumstances) are we going back There? And what happens when history conspires to make Here a new There? Or, as the anthropologist James Clifford puts it, "whatever their eschatological longings, diasporic cultures are not-here to stay. Diaspora cultures thus mediate, in a lived tension, the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another place." (1994, 311)

Jewish thinking about Diaspora (Hebrew *galut* or 'exile') is eschatological and providential. The dispersion from There to Here is not merely a story of human action; it is divine plan. It accepts as a given two prophetic ideas: the first, that the Jewish dispersion from Zion is divinely ordained, and the second, that their eventual return will announce the coming of the Messiah. These ideas, however, do not always correspond to the lived reality or material aspirations of historical medieval and early modern Jewish communities, whose fortunes are defined more by political vicissitudes and internal politics than by Messianic considerations real or imaginary. The question of galut does, however, play an important role in the literary practice of the Sepharadim, and to a certain extent the translations we examine here bear witness to both aspects: the historical reality and the diasporic imaginary.

For purposes of articulating a theory of double diaspora that spans pre- and post-1492 Sephardic culture, I find most productive the approach of Khachig Tölölyan, who has written extensively on the Armenian diaspora. He proposes a paradigm of diasporic culture based on the following elements:

1) a collective mourning for a trauma that shapes cultural production in diaspora
2) preservation of elements of the culture of the homeland
3) a rhetoric of turning and re-turning toward the homeland (but not necessarily an actual repatriation)
4) a network of diasporic communities that are characterized by difference between each other and over time. (2007)

Tölölyan's formulation respects the power of the symbolic homeland while still being sensitive to the dynamism and emergent nature of social systems in diaspora. Whereas traditional Jewish scholarship writes of a 'return' to the homeland, whether real or imagined, Tölölyan writes that diasporic people 'turn and re-turn' toward the homeland while recognizing that they maintain dynamic attachments to both homeland and hostland. For him, "the diasporic community sees itself as linked to but different from those among whom it has settled; eventually, it also comes to see itself as powerfully linked to, but in some ways different from, the people in the homeland as well." (2007) His approach is also compatible with this project because he seeks to draw connections between earlier and later diasporas, and in a broader sense to think about the social and cultural processes that obtain in diasporas as analogous to emergent forms of culture that grow from other transnational, globalizing experiences where identification with a nation state competes with other forms of identification:

> at its best the diaspora is an example, for the both the homeland's and the hostland's nation-states, of the possibility of living, even thriving in the regimes of multiplicity which are increasingly the global condition, and proper version of which diasporas may help to construct, given half a chance. The stateless power of diasporas lies in their heightened awareness of both the perils and the rewards of multiple belonging, and in their sometimes exemplary grappling with the paradoxes of such belonging, which is increasingly the condition that non-diasporan nationals also face in the transnational era. (1996, 7–8)

Engagement with theories such as Tölölyan's can be a corrective to the shortcomings of traditional approaches to the study of the Jewish diaspora(s), and in particular to the Sephardic diaspora. Theories of non-Jewish diasporas begin with the premise that diasporic cultures are a product of human actions and mundane material and social conditions that in turn generate symbolic, religious, or spiritual narratives. As such, they can help the scholar to respect the historical specificity of individual Jewish communities or individual Jews in their diasporicity, rather than attempt to adduce them to a broad collective diasporic consciousness that unites all Jews everywhere. With that, I would like to discuss the Sephardic diasporic difference and how it can help us better understand the signifcance of Sephardic translation from Spanish to Hebrew.

The Sephardic case: Double diaspora and Translation

Double diaspora is a term that refers to a group that has gone through two successive diasporas. Critics have applied it to a number of different populations and a range of experiences of migrations and transnational itineraries. New examples continue to emerge. (Alkalay-Gut 2002, 459; Gabriel 2004, 28–29; MacLean 2010; Nguyen Thi Lien Hang 1995; Parmar 2013; Gupta, Gupta, and Teaiwa 2007, 13; Pirbhai 2009, 75; Schwartz 2010)

Sephardic Jews lived for well over 1,000 years in Spain. After their expulsion from Spain in 1492 they formed a new, second diaspora, throughout the mediterranean and Europe, turning this time both to Zion and to Spain in their imaginations and longing for not one, but two homelands.

What is the role of translation in diasporic cultural production? Diasporic populations are by nature multilingual. They typically use one or more diasporic languages brought from the homeland in addition to one or more languages of the hostland. It follows that translation across these languages would be an important part of their cultural life. And yet, despite the vast scholarship on disaporic culture, we have paid very little specific attention to the role translation plays in the cultural life of diasporic peoples. The bibliography on Jewish translation, while ample, does not approach translation from this angle. (Singerman 2002)

A good starting point for the discussion of translation in diaspora is the national context, since diaspora as a theoretical framework is often presented as transgressing or correcting the project of national languages and literatures. Khachig Tölölyan notes that diasporic cultures provide historical models of strategies for negotiating the "post-national" or "transnational" globalized world": The stateless power of diasporas lies in their heightened awareness of both the perils and the rewards of multiple belonging, and in their sometimes exemplary grappling with the paradoxes of such belonging, which is increasingly the condition that non-diasporan nationals also face in the transnational era." (1996, 8) James Clifford argues that diasporic cultures can never be "in practice, be exclusively nationalist. They are deployed in transnational networks built from multiple attachments." (1994, 307) More recent scholarship has cultivated this approach. For example, Allison Schachter's study of modern Yiddish literature in diaspora promises "new avenues for theorizing the vexed relationship between modernism and national literary history." (2012, 15)

Lawrence Venuti has written on translation as part of a nationalist cultural agenda. According to him,

> Foreign texts are chosen because they fall into particular genres and address particular themes while excluding other genres and themes that are seen as unimportant for the formation of a national identity; translation strategies draw on particular dialects, registers, and styles while excluding others that are also in use; and translators target particular audiences with their work, excluding other constituencies. (2005, 189–190)

Here we might substitute *diasporic identity* for national identity in our discussion of the Sephardic case, but Venuti's observations are useful for our discussion of the Hebrew *Amadís*, *Celestina*, and *Historia de las Indias* in that the work of bringing over the text from one cultural setting to another is similar, even if the ideologies and structures of national and diasporic literary cultures differ. In both cases, there is a tension between the literary culture of the original and that of the translation, a tension the translator expresses, often in very direct and not particularly subtle interventions. A national literary culture draws boundaries, and there is a price for crossing those boundaries. Commenting on Victor Hugo's observations, Venuti notes that Shakespeare's French translator, Pierre Letourneur, needed to first abuse Shakespeare's text in order to assimilate it to French literary culture:

> [Victor] Hugo remarks that 'Letourneur did not translate Shakespeare; he parodied him, ingenuously, without wishing it, unknowingly obedient to the hostile taste of his epoch.' Letourneur's decision to translate Shakespeare deviated from contemporary French literary canon, but his discursive strategy unconsciously conformed to them. (2005, 181)

Our translators Tsarfati, Algaba, and Hakohen are not working within the bounds of a *national* canon as was Letourneur, but they are working within a literary tradition that functions in similar ways as a national canon in the creation of a diasporic cultural identity. While Letourneur's aim (at least according to Venuti) was to assimilate Shakespeare to the values of the French national canon, our Sephardic translators were doing something similar, appropriating the prestige and authority of Spanish best-sellers for a wider Jewish audience, one that the Sephardim came to dominate culturally in many of the communities where they settled following their expulsion from Spain and Portugal.

These Spanish to Hebrew translations, from a language of national and imperial culture into one of a diasporic language of learning, constitute a reappropriation of the text, an alignment with the values of the diasporic community. They were reauthorizing the works for consumption by the broader Jewish community, so their motives for translation were not to make the works in question intelligible to themselves, but rather to represent some version of Spanish or Sephardic culture to the broader Jewish world. In order to put this question in its historical linguistic context, a few words about language use in the Sephardic diaspora are in order.

Spanish as a Jewish language

Ladino or Judeo-Spanish, the vernacular of the Sepharadim, was not understood by most of its speakers as an enclave language, or as a stronghold of *Spanish* identity outside of Spain,

any more than Yiddish was viewed as a German tradition. Both are understood as Jewish languages, and as a vehicle for Jewish, minoritarian discourse. It's difficult to say when Spanish made this transition from Iberian to Jewish language in the Sephardic perception, but there was certainly a period when it was understood —however problematically— as both. Henry Méchoulan, in his study of a Ladino text from seventeenth century Sephardic text, Abraham Pereyra's *La certeza del camino* (The Certainty of the Path), comments on this split valorization of Spanish as both the language of the Sephardic community, and of the Spanish state from which the Sepharadim were expelled and excluded:

> While the Jews of Amsterdam loathed the Spanish inquisition and celebrated its martyrs, their identification with Spanish culture appears in the relatively pure version of Spanish they used both in their religious worship and in their writings. To them (and to many Jews in Italy) Spanish was a 'semi-sacred language.' As Menasseh ben Israel was to put it, it was the language of 'my fatherland.' (1987, 37 and 61)

This example, as compelling as it is, cannot be taken as representative. At any given moment Sepharadim likely espoused a wide range of beliefs and practices regarding the use of Spanish and their personal and collective relationships with Spain and Spain's current rulers. But the multivalence of the relationship, the ambiguity and tension in the valorization of Spanish and Spanish culture is a constant, and one that is worth thinking about as we take a closer look at the Hebrew translations of *Celestina*, *Amadís de Gaula,* and *Historia General de las Indias*.

Tsarfati's *Celestina*

Our first translation is, after *Don Quijote*, one of the most widely read and taught works of early Castilian literature: *Celestina,* first published in 1499. Fernando de Rojas, so the story goes, was a young law student in Salamanca when he sat down one Spring break to polish a rough draft of a story of a dopey suitor, his earnest love object, and a wily old ex-prostitute named Celestina. By the beginning of term he had a final draft, and his *Celestina*, went on to become a major best-seller, perhaps the first best-seller in Castilian. (Whinnom 1980, 193) De Rojas' book —neither theater nor novel— was translated in short order into a number of other languages, and in 1506 an Italian translation by one Alfonso Ordóñez, a regular at the Papal Court, appeared in Rome. In the following year Joseph Tsarfati translated De Rojas' work into Hebrew.

Tsarfati's biography is the product of a culture where Jewish intellectuals were perhaps even more integrated to the literary life of the dominant culture than they were in Spain (McPheeters 1966, 399–402; Bonfil 1994, 153). Italian Jews accomplished this high level of integration by constantly mediating "through adoption, adaptation, and modification." (Stow 2001, 68)

The mere fact that Tsarfati aka Galla (Tsarfati means 'The Frenchman') was on personal terms with the Pope himself, both as court physician to Julius II and Leo X and as host to Clement VII, who spent a few days living in Tsarfati's house, tells us that this was a man who was not only welcome at court but must have exercised considerable influence. (Carpenter 1997, 273)The fact that he was proficient in Latin likewise tells us a great deal

about the extent to which he was integrated into the dominant intellectual culture (though as a court Jew in Papal Rome such knowledge of Latin is less remarkable than it was in, for example, Isaac Abravanel's case in late fifteenth-century Spain). Latin was something approaching a state language in the Papal States.

The fact that Tsarfati translated *Celestina* into Hebrew is also not particularly astonishing. Though it predates by nearly half a century the publication of Jacob Algaba's Hebrew *Amadís de Gaula* and Joseph Hakohen's *Historia de las Indias*, if any Castilian best-seller were to be considered for translation into Hebrew, *Celestina* was a natural choice. It was, we should remember, the most-printed work in Castilian of the sixteenth century. (Whinnom 1980, 193)

Our reading of Tsarfati's translation is somewhat constrained by the fact that we don't actually have it. The body of De Rojas' work Tsarfati rendered into Hebrew is gone, and we have only Tsarfati's introductory poem. What is most interesting about this poem is they way in which Tsarfati subtly locates *Celestina* in Sephardic literary history, doing the work described by Venuti in his discussion of Letourneur's translation of Shakespeare. He authorizes *Celestina* for Sephardic audiences by emphasizing its continuity with medieval Hebrew books written by Sephardic authors and popular with early print audiences in the Sephardic world.

In order to do so, Tsarfati must shift the readers' focus away from the fascinating train wreck of a romance between Calisto and Melibea and onto the misogynous representation of Celestina herself, placing her in a tradition of literary go-betweens in Hebrew that depended heavily on classic tropes of misogyny. Michelle Hamilton notes that Tsarfati "underscores the misogynist aspect of *La Celestina*, backing it up with a series of misogynist images from the Judeo-Spanish go-between tradition." (2002, 332)

For Tsarfati, the *Celestina* is about the wiles of women and the lengths to which they will go to deceive men and entrap them. This is hardly how one might casually summarize De Rojas' work. The hapless suitor Calisto goes to great lengths and no little expense to woo Melibea, who, at least at first, has little use for his attentions. If anything it is Calisto who is pursuing Melibea – quite the opposite of the picture Tsarfati paints in his introductory poem, where he sings of "cunning crones" who "lay their traps e'erwhere." (Carpenter 1997, 278)

> David and Solomon attest
> to you of women's guile and bonds;
> In them reside angels of death,
> As well a devil and his throngs.
> Each day they carry off the sons
> Of men; all creatures they oppress.
> Escape their charms; discern their flaws,
> Polluted flesh in comely dress.
> (Carpenter 1997, 279, ll.39–41. Hebrew on p. 280)

Tsarfati thus focuses the readers' attention, predetermining the themes of the work as the base nature of women, the exemplarity of the protagonists as participants in a "war of lovers." This he achieves by setting the stage for De Rojas with a mixture of Gender polemic expressed in martial Biblical language typical of medieval Hebrew gender

narratives, the misogynous representation of the go-between character, and images of the traps and snares used by women to bind men.

Tsarfati's imagery here very specifically recalls two early twelfth-century Hispano-Hebrew works of misogynous narrative: Judah ibn Shabbeay's *Minhat Yehudah, Sone Hanashim*, and chapter six of Judah al-Harizi's *Tahkemoni*, that relates the story of a young man deceived by a wily old go-between. (Hamilton 2002, 336–339) All of these tropes appear in the Castilian *Celestina* but none is of central importance as they are in Tsarfati's poem. They are, however, central themes of a substantial body of misogynous narrative that flourished in Iberia, France, and Italy in the sixteenth century, and so Tsarfati's poem is a bridge between *Celestina* and the broader misogynous literature in the vernaculars at the turn of the sixteenth century. This is a bridge built from blocks of medieval Hebrew narrative that were circulating in print editions alongside vernacular works giving voice to precisely the same misogynous tropes and imagery found in works such as the Castilian *Corbacho* of Alfonso Martínez de Toledo, the Catalan *Somni* of Bernat Metge, or the French *Quinze joies de mariage*. (Archer 2004)

Through the Hebrew translation, Tsarfati is representing de Rojas' quintessentially Spanish fiction as quintessentially Sephardic as well. By framing his translation in the imagery and language of Sephardic literary tradition he is laying claim to the work as a *Sephardic* work of literature. This is a great example of the dissonance that was common in Western Sephardic literary culture of Early Modernity. Sephardic authors were very strongly identified with the vernacular culture of their ancestral homeland but often politically antipathic to the Spanish crown and to Spanish society in general.

Celestina is low-hanging fruit for such a readership. De Rojas' critique of the manners and sensibility of the nobility is quite plain. (Severin 1989, 23–24; Kaplan 2002, 106–128) His send-up of the noble protagonist would likely appeal to readers alienated from the Spanish ruling class. As is well-known, de Rojas himself was from a *converso* family. This is not to say that he was the bearer of any Jewish literary tradition —there is no evidence that he was at all knowledgeable of basic Jewish religion, let alone with difficult Hebrew literary texts. However, the discrimination and social scrutiny that were often the lot of educated *conversos* that fueled de Rojas' critique of the values of the ruling class would have resonated with Sepharadim living in diaspora from Spain.

Algaba's *Amadís de Gaula*

Another Spanish bestseller that found its way into Hebrew was Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo's chivalric novel *Amadís de Gaula*, translated into Hebrew by Jacob Algaba in Constantinople in 1554. The Hebrew *Amadís* is a significant cultural moment, a reappropriation of the values of the Spanish chivalric novel in an Ottoman Sephardic setting. It is a simultaneous deployment of Spanish culture as an engine of Sephardic prestige and a rejection of the imperial culture, substituting in its place a reading that reflects the values of a diasporic minority. In the face of the Sepharadim's rejection from the Spanish imperium, Algaba's *Amadís* duplicates aspects of Spanish cultural imperialism within Jewish communities of the Ottoman Empire.

One common strategy of Algaba is to de-Christianize the text, removing references that might offend Jewish sensibilities. (Armistead and Silverman 1965; Armistead and Silverman 1982, 138). It is noteworthy that in most of these cases he avoids substituting

specifically Jewish terms or concepts. Algaba's *Amadís* is the first major narrative work in a register of Hebrew that is largely free of the dense weave of *shibbutzim,* clever Biblical and rabbinical allusions that was characteristic of nearly every other work of Hebrew prose being published at the time.

In Algaba's translation, priests become laymen, oaths are secularized, and moralizing digressions (to which Montalvo was famously inclined) are simply omitted. (Piccus 2004, 187) Most of these examples are superficial and predictable. When Amadís exclaims "Saint Mary!" Algaba substitutes 'Long live my Lord the King!' (Rodríguez de Montalvo 1996, 235; Malachi 1981, 7). Montalvo has the Queen lead Amadís into her "chapel", which Algaba renders as "chamber" (Rodríguez de Montalvo 1996, 276; Malachi 1981, 28). Elsewhere, Amadís comes upon a wounded knight in the road who asks to be taken to an "hermitaño" (Anchorite) who might 'tend to his soul', which Algaba renders as 'someone who might heal me'. (Rodríguez de Montalvo 1996, 280; Malachi 1981, 29)

Most of the examples of Algaba's de-Christianization of the text are similarly predictable and routine, but some merit interpretation. When King Languines orders a traitorous woman burnt to death, Algaba instead has her thrown to her death from a high tower. His reluctance to depict her being burned may be out of respect to victims of the Spanish Inquisition. Instead he supplies a ready-made phrase from the Hebrew Bible describing the fate Jezebel meets as punishment for her sins.[2]

An important part of the appeal of Montalvo's Amadís was its representation of Arthurian chivalric manners and speech. Part of the fantasy that Montalvo was selling to his readers was to clothe the fictional chivalric hero in the courtly mores of Montalvo's time, to blend in his protagonist the imagined courtly world of the knights errant of Arthurian imagination with the speech and courtly culture of the Spanish élite.

This presented a particular problem for Algaba's readers, who were likely unfamiliar with the European traditions of chivalric behavior common to both chivalric fiction and to the social life of the Western European upper classes. His challenge was to render Montalvo's frequent representations of the chivalric imaginary intelligible to non-Sephardic Ottoman Jews while still retaining the cultural cachet and novelty of the world it represented to his readers. It stands to reason that non-Sephardic Jews, who had never lived in Christian Europe would be unfamiliar with the institutions and practices of chivalry that form the fabric of the social world of *Amadís*. You cannot, of course, trade on foreign *caché* that is totally incomprehensible to your audience. To this end Algaba tailors Montalvo's references to the institutions of chivalry, social conventions, and courtly practices that may have fallen outside the experience of his non-Sephardic readers. As in the examples of de-Christianization, some such examples are superficial, but telling of differences of expectations of what 'courtly' or 'chivalric' might mean to non-Sephardic, Jewish audiences. A character named 'la doncella de la guirnalda' ('the damsel of the garland'), so named because she always wore a garland of flowers to accentuate her beautiful hair, becomes in Algaba's version the 'damsel of the crown,' an accessory that ostensibly made more sense to the Ottoman readers to whom a garland of flowers might

[2] Montalvo writes simply "mandóla quemar" ('he ordered that she be burned'), while Algaba moralizes a bit, drawing on the context of the Biblical allusion to the death of Jezebel (1 Kings 9: 30-37: "'Drop this accursed woman!' And so they dropped her from a high tower and she died in all of her wickedness (*b'rov rasha`tah*)". (Rodríguez de Montalvo 1996, 301; Malachi 1981, 42)

have seemed more rustic than elegant. (Rodríguez de Montalvo 1996, 227; Malachi 1981, 1)

Algaba likewise interprets the Spanish vocabulary of social rank for his Hebrew readers. When Helisena appeals to the honor of King Perión's squire, she asks him if he is an *hidalgo* (nobleman of low rank); by this she means 'are you an honorable individual with whom I can trust my secret?' Algaba preserves the equation of high birth and good moral conduct implied by the word *hidalgo* but his Helisena asks the squire 'who are you and your family? Are they high born? (*me`olah*, literally 'superior' or 'fine'). (Rodríguez de Montalvo 1996, 235; Malachi 1981, 7)

In these ways, Algaba brings the world of *Amadís* the discourse of Montalvo over into the Ottoman Jewish world, simultaneously demonstrating an affiliation with and resistence to the culture it represents.

Hakohen's *Historia de las Indias*

The Sephardic interest in chivalric feats of arms was matched by a curiosity about real-world conquests. In fact, the two are linked in the Sephardic imagination. In the introduction to his translation of *Amadís de* Gaula, Jacob Algaba notes that one may learn much about how the world works by reading about the lives and deeds of great kings, whether fictional or real. (Rodríguez de Montalvo 1981, 2)

During the first half of the sixteenth century, Jewish writers began to write chronicles and histories that recorded events of importance to Jewish communities, wars, calumnies, expulsions, and so forth. While some historians of Jewish culture have explained this apparently sudden interest in historiography as a reaction to the trauma of the expulsions from Spain and from various Italian city states, it was more likely simply a sign of the times. (Bonfil 1988) In the age of print, exploration, and complex international trade networks, global politics and history was now part of the dossier of a good Jewish courtier or businessman. This is evident already in the historical writing of Isaac Abravanel, for whom history is not (contra Maimonides) a 'waste of time,' but rather a natural activity for the elite of any nation. Every nation, he remarks, desires to know its past and to chart the passing of time through a reminiscence of kings and their deeds. (Gutwirth 1998, 150–152)

Joseph Ha-Kohen was an Italian Jew of Sephardic background and author of a number of secular histories in Hebrew. He was author of *Chronicle of the Kings of France and of the Sultans of the House of Ottoman* (Sabionetta 1553), and *The Vale of Tears* (1560). In addition he translated Francisco López de Gómara's *Primera y segunda parte de la Historia general de las Indias* (Zaragoza, 1553) into Hebrew with the title *Sefer Ha-'Indias Ferando Kortes* (Sp. *Libro de las indias de Fernando Cortés*, 'Book of The Indies of Hernán Cortés,' 1557). (León Tello 1989, 25–35). In the introduction to his *Chronicles of the Kings of France and the Kings of the House of the Ottoman Turk,* he writes that it is good to learn of the deeds of great kings *against* the Jews so that "the remembrance thereof not pass away from among the Jews; and the memory of our wrongs shall not come to an end". (Hakohen 1835, 2: xx) But the Hebrew histories of the sixteenth century were more than updated lamentations of Jewish suffering; they were guidebooks to a globalizing world that negotiated between imperial contexts. This increased interest in international affairs should come as no surprise given Jewish involvement in diplomacy and international trade.

Neither should it surprise that the Jewish communities of the Mediterranean should have taken an interest in the Spanish conquest of the New World, and after Hakohen completed his chronicles of European and Ottoman history he turned his attention to that of the New World, bringing over into Hebrew the *Historia general de las indias* of Francisco López de Gómara, who published his second-hand account of the conquest of the Indies in Zaragoza in 1552. It was later decried as full of inaccuracies and overly rosy in its portrayal of the Spanish colonial enterprise, and particularly in its lionization of Cortés himself. Such objections notwithstanding, it provided readers with a detailed —if inaccurate— account of the geographic, political, and social realities of New Spain, by any measure an exciting and relevant topic of discussion in Spain and elsewhere.

We must keep in mind that Hakohen's *Historia de las Indias* appeared in 1557, five years after Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas' *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (1552) discredited López de Gómara's history as a blatant fabrication meant to validate Spanish conquest in the New World. Hakohen's treatment of Gómara's work, in the spirit of Venuti's description of Letourneur's treatment of Shakespeare, amounts to a seemingly paradoxical, simultaneous de-authorization and appropriation of cultural capital. Why translate a work only to criticize and undermine it all the while? Moshe Lazar, the modern editor of Hakohen's translation, notes that Hakohen embeds a critique of the Spanish colonial project similar to that voiced by Las Casas and Bernal Díaz del Castillo. (2002, xxv) Hakohen editorializes liberally in his translation of the events narrated by López de Gómara, a strategy roughly converse to that of Jacob Algaba's translation of *Amadís de Gaula*. Where Algaba omits the moralizing digressions that Montalvo applied liberally to the so-called 'primitive' *Amadís de Gaula*, Hakohen overlays his own ideological program into his translation of *Historia general de las indias*, freely glossing and emending López de Gómara's text to bring it in line with his own values and those of his audience.

In one striking example, López de Gómara recounts the triumphant return of Christopher Columbus to the court of the Catholic Monarchs, where he is given a hero's welcome. Gómara describes the coat of arms presented to the Genoese navigator, which he inscribes with a couplet celebrating his own achievements.

> Christopher Columbus put this inscription around the coat of arms that they gave him:
>
> For Castile, and for Leon.
> Columbus found a new world. (López de Gómara 2002, 22)

Hakohen, somewhat more critical of Columbus's project, glosses the couplet, first reproducing it in Spanish (with a slight variant) in Hebrew letters, followed by a poem of his own composition:

> For Castile and for Leon
> Columbus found *half of the world*
>
> And I, Joseph Hakohen, composed the following, saying:
>
> For Castile, and also for Leon

> Colon found a new world
> But with the passage of the sun through the sky,
> they crossed into the Valley of Ayalon[3]
> There he earned eternal fame
> For there he also found a colony
> Thus many nations were humbled
> In great reproach, contempt and dishonor,
> For this man crossed there,
> to become the mistletoe to their oak. (López de Gómara 2002, 20)[4]

Elsewhere he frankly contradicts López de Gómara's version of events, offering a counterhistory to the hegemonic narrative of the Spanish original. For example, López de Gómara's chapter on syphilis is plainly titled "Syphilis came from the Indies". (López de Gómara 2002, 36–37) He explains that Spanish conquistadors contracted syphilis by having sex with indigenous women from the island of Hispaniola, then returned to Spain. Subsequently they traveled to Naples to fight the French, where they infected Italian women with the disease:

> The inhabitants of that island Hispaniola are all syphilitic. And as the Spanish slept with the Indian women they then became infected with syphilis, that most contagious disease that torments one with fierce pains. Feeling afflicted and not improving, many went back to Spain to recover, and others to conduct business, by which they infected many courtesan ladies who in turn infected many men who went over to Italy to the War of Naples on the side of King Fernando II, against the French, and there they spread their disease. (López de Gómara 2002, 36–27)

Without any comment, Hakohen turns this narrative completely on its head, substituting a very different epidemiology of the Columbian exchange that runs counter to López de Gómara's official narrative. Hakohen's chapter is titled "Syphilis is a French sickness, that the Spaniards brought from there, and they also brought the *hordeolu* (orzuelo, 'stye') illness".[5] His version, reproduced in number nine in your handout, differs considerably from that of López de Gómara:

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[3] The Valley of Ayalon (*Emeq Ha-ayalon*) was where Joshua successfully called on God to stop the trajectory of the sun across the sky in order to afford the Israelite forces sufficient daylight to rout the Amorites: "Joshua addressed the Lord; the said in the presence of the Israelites: 'Stand still, O sun, at Gibeon, /O moon, in the Valley of Aijalon!'/ And the sun stood still /And the moon halted, /While a nation wreaked judgment on its foes." Joshua 10:12-13. The allusion is meant to describe a defeat so total that it seemed to be accomplished with divine assistance.

[4] Hakohen's Hebrew is *lehiyot mam'ir alon* (literally 'to be a briar of oak'), most likely a calque from the Italian *vischio di quercia*. The modern Hebrew for mistletoe is *divkon* ('clinging' or 'adhering' plant). I do not know of any other witness to Hakohen's elocution. Mistletoe is a parasitic evergreen plant with green foliage and yellow berries that grows on oak trees. It may be the botanical inspiration for the golden bough that serves as Aeneas' key to the underworld in the *Aeneid* (6:200-15). On the connection between the golden bough and mistletoe, see (Frazer 1927, 703–704).

[5] Hakohen uses the Hebrew term *holei ha-tavelei* for the Spanish *bubas*.

> The Spaniards brought syphilis to Italy from the Indies when they went to Naples, in the year 1494. They slept with women, and French also slept with them, and syphilis shone [first] in their foreheads and in time ate half of their flesh. . . . And the Spaniards also brought *hordeolu* (styes) and *morbili* (measles), which is called *jidri* in Arabic,[6] and smallpox, which the inhabitants of that land had never seen before that day; and many thousands of them died of those two illnesses. Their time of their [death] warrant had come upon them then. (López de Gómara 2002, 30–31)

The contrast is dramatic. Hakohen reverses the trajectory of infection, returning the origin of the pestilence to Europe and backing up his version by adding details and citing medical authorities absent in the Spanish original. He is clearly at odds with López de Gómara, particularly as regards the morality of Spain's colonial project.

This hostility to Spanish conquest is hardly unique to Hakohen. We have noted the well-known case of Las Casas. There were a number of Italian writers as well, the most prominent among them being Girolamo Benzoni, a Milanese whose bitter failures in his brief time in the new world engendered in him a vibrant hate of all things Spanish. Benzoni gives voice to this hatred unstintingly in his *Historia del nuovo mondo,* published in Venice in 1565, eight years after Hakohen finishes his translation of López de Gómara. (Collo and Crovetto 1991, 549–589)

The difference between Italian and Sephardic critiques of Spanish colonialism is of course the intimate and conflicted relationship Sehparadim had with Spain. Like Algaba and Tsarfati, Hakohen appropriates the Spanish text, putting into the service of his own literary sensibility and ideological program. Nonetheless, and as we have seen in all three cases, this gesture is complicated by the relationship between Sephardic authors and the Spanish literary culture they bring over into Hebrew.

When Sephardic authors write about Spain, or adapt works by Spanish authors, they are in a sense turning and re-turning toward Spain, but this symbolic orientation toward the diasporic homeland is different from the primary orientation toward the biblical Zionic homeland. It is not framed in terms of an eschatological trajectory toward redemption, except secondarily. That is, the Jewish sources do not officially *privilege* Spain as a homeland to be longed for. However, the cultural affiliation, the use of Spanish as a vernacular and as a literary language, and the strong attachment to the sense of Sephardic-ness that arose over the long Sephardic presence in Iberia all add up to a turning and re-turning to the Sephardic homeland that intertwines and alternates with the desire (if not the actual project) of eventual return to Zion.

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[6] *Jidri* is Andalusi Arabic for smallpox. The Classical Arabic form is *judari*. It is interesting that Hakohen is familiar with the colloquial rather than learned form, which suggests that he learned it in discussion with an Arabic speaker, rather than from consulting an Arabic book or a Latin or Romance translation of an Arabic book. (Corriente 1997, 91)

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