

# THE CONSTANTINOPLE PENTATEUCH WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF SEPTUAGINT STUDIES

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**Abstract:** The paper presents an outlook of recent scholarship about the origin and main features of the Constantinople Pentateuch (1547). The historical background of the edition is outlined, and the text of its title page analyzed. The Greek and Judeo-Spanish Pentateuch of 1547 is further compared to the Judeo-Arabic and Persian Pentateuch of 1546. It is concluded that the former was an edition on its own right, and not a reworking of any previous edition. The author argues that the Greek text of Constantinople Pentateuch represents a *laaz*, that is, a popular “vulgar” translation, which functioned mostly orally. Editorial work, if any, was minimal and not viewed as particularly valuable. It is unlikely that the edition was sponsored by Ottoman authorities, neither was it based on any authoritative text. The primarily didactic function of the Constantinople Pentateuch is evident both in the physical features of the edition and the characteristics of its language.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

A polyglot Bible, commonly known as the Constantinople Pentateuch (CP), was printed in 1547 by Eliezer (Albert) Soncino, a member of the prominent Italian printers’ dynasty of Ashkenazi origin. Apart from the Hebrew text with parallel Greek and Judeo-Spanish (Ladino) translations, the Pentateuch also contains Targum Onkelos and Rashi. As happens with early prints, not all copies of this edition are absolutely identical.<sup>1</sup>

The interest of biblical scholars and translation specialists in this unique book takes its origin at least from the late-nineteenth to early-twentieth centuries. In particular, as early as 1924, D. S. Blondheim drew the attention of the learned community to the fact that the Greek column of CP may constitute a link in the long chain of Jewish Biblical translations starting in antiquity. Apart from CP, the landmarks of this tradition were, in his mind, a fragment of Greek Ecclesiastes found in the Cairo Genizah, medieval glosses in *Arukh* by Nathan ben Jehiel

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1. Julia G. Krivoruchko, “Textual Variants in the Constantinopolitan Pentateuch” (paper presented at the VIII European Congress of Jewish Studies, Moscow, 26 July 2006). The text of the paper is being prepared for publication.

(1101), later glosses of Aféda Béghi (1627) and modern Jewish translations into Greek that were still current in Blondheim's time.<sup>2</sup>

A major landmark in CP research was the publication of the full text of CP in Greek letters by D. C. Hesseling in 1897. The latter, being a neo-Hellenist rather than a biblical scholar, characterized CP as a translation totally independent from the LXX.<sup>3</sup> This understanding was questioned only very recently in the pioneering works of N. Fernández-Marcos.<sup>4</sup> In his opinion, "the agreements [of CP] with the LXX in the lexicon and in some constructions—sometimes against the 'three'—are . . . striking" and call for further investigation.<sup>5</sup>

An additional impetus to CP research came from the editorial practice. Since it was noticed that the marginal hand F<sup>b</sup> of Codex Ambrosianus provides in many cases translational equivalents similar to that of CP, J. Wevers included CP in the second apparatus of his edition of Exodus.<sup>6</sup> Thus, there seems to be an agreement as to the potential value of CP for LXX studies. At the very least, inasmuch as CP preserves the ancient readings, it may be used for their verification if not for reconstruction.

In order to make full use of CP, a Septuagint scholar would naturally want to have a reliable edition along with some basic information on the prehistory of the text. When and where did it originate? What personalities or groups shaped it? On which principles? What degree of preservation of Septuagint and Hexaplaric material should be expected?

The purpose of this paper is multiple. I will start with summarizing our current knowledge about the historical background and textual features of CP translations. The first attempt of this kind was undertaken in 1985 by N. Fernández-Marcos. The twenty years that have passed since then have been marked by significant developments in many fields, and a new summary is necessary to recapitulate recent advances. Next, I will address the accumulated data in order to draw some preliminary conclusions about the nature of CP and its relationship to the Septuagint. I am well aware that going over a number of highly specialized

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2. David S. Blondheim, "Échos du Judéo-Hellénisme. Étude sur l'influence de la Septante et d'Aquila sur les versions néo-grecques des Juifs," *REJ* 78 (1924): 1–14.

3. Dirk C. Hesseling, *Les cinq livres de la loi (le Pentateuque): traduction en néo-grec publiée en caractères hébraïques à Constantinople en 1547, transcrite et accompagnée d'une introduction d'un glossaire et d'un fac-simile, par D.C. Hesseling* (Leiden: van Doesburgh-Harrasowitz, 1897), II.

4. Natalio Fernández Marcos, "El Pentateuco griego de Constantinopla," *Erytheia* 6 (1985): 185–203; idem, "Some Thoughts on the Later Judaeo-Greek Biblical Tradition," *Bulletin of Judaeo-Greek Studies* 2 (1988): 14–15; idem, *The Septuagint in Context: Introduction to the Greek Version of the Bible* (trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson; Leiden: Brill, 2000).

5. Fernández Marcos, *Septuagint in Context*, 178.

6. John W. Wevers and Udo Quast, eds., *Septuaginta. Vetus Testamentum Graecum. Exodus* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 43–44.

fields makes exhaustiveness unachievable and imprecision inevitable. Still, I hope that this article will permit me at least to point out the problems that deserve further investigation.

## 2. CURRENT ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE CP AND COGNATE STUDIES

Uneven consideration has been given to different aspects of CP. Unfortunately, both the Hebrew text of CP with traditional Targum and Rashi's commentary have failed to attract the attention of researchers. Several notes on the CP edition interspersed with biblio-historical descriptions (see below) have remained essentially unknown to the researchers of the Greek text.

With few exceptions, Greek and Ladino translations of CP continue to be studied independently of each other. As for the Romance part, early monographs on the translation technique of CP by H. V. Sephiha, concentrating mainly on Deuteronomy, and L. Amigo Espada have not been superseded.<sup>7</sup> However, a full transcription of the Ladino version by M. Lazar made the material more accessible, and a large range of comparable texts has been made available for analysis, such as codex I.J.3 of Escorial and the Bible of Ferrara.<sup>8</sup> An introductory volume has been dedicated to the latter.<sup>9</sup> Ladino versions of traditional Jewish texts have been studied, notably Mishnaic tractate *Pirkei Avot* by O. Schwarzwald (Rodrigue).<sup>10</sup> An important contribution to comparative translational studies has been made by D. M. Bunis, who also brought to notice the oral biblical translations current in the Sephardic milieu.<sup>11</sup> The written Ladino translations of biblical

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7. Haïm Vidal Sephiha, *Le Ladino, judéo-espagnol calque: Deutéronome, versions de Constantinople, 1547 et de Ferrare, 1553: édition, étude linguistique et lexicque* (Paris: Centre de Recherches Hispaniques, Institut d'Études Hispaniques, 1973); Lorenzo Amigo Espada, *El Pentateuco de Constantinopla y la Biblia medieval judeoespañola: Criterios y fuentes de traducción* (Salamanca: Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, 1983). See also idem, "Una aproximación al Pentateuco de Constantinopla (1547)," *Estudios Bíblicos* 48 (1990): 81–111.

8. Moshe Lazar and Robert J. Dilligan, *The Ladino Bible of Ferrara, 1553: A Critical Edition* (Culver City, Calif.: Labyrinthos, 1992); Moshe Lazar, *Biblia ladinada: Escorial I.J.3: A Critical Edition*. (Madison: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1995).

9. Iacob M. Hassán and Ángel Berenguer Amador, eds., *Introducción a la Biblia de Ferrara: Actas del simposio internacional sobre la Biblia de Ferrara, Sevilla, 25–28 de noviembre de 1991* (Madrid: CSIC, 1994).

10. Ora Schwarzwald (Rodrigue), *The Ladino Translations of Pirke Aboth* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1989). (Hebrew)

11. David M. Bunis, "Tres formas de ladinar la Biblia en Italia en los siglos XVI–XVII," *Introducción a la Biblia de Ferrara: Actas del simposio internacional sobre la Biblia de Ferrara, Sevilla, 25–28 de noviembre de 1991* (ed. I. M. Hassán and A. Berenguer Amador; Madrid: CSIC, 1994), 315–45; the same, "Hebrew Elements in Sefer Hešeḡ Šelomo," *Vena Hebraica in Judaeorum Linguis: Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on the Hebrew and Aramaic*

and para-biblical books are actively perused by linguists researching the history of Spanish.

Meanwhile, the researchers of Greek CP continue to use D. C. Hesseling's transcription, although from time to time voices are heard urging the re-edition of the text.<sup>12</sup> In general, while a ritual bow in the direction of CP is performed in many general histories of Greek literature and language, the actual research on it remains rather limited.<sup>13</sup> Among the linguistic topics addressed with the help of CP material in recent decades were the history of the infinitive by B. Joseph and nominal derivation by E. Karantzola.<sup>14</sup> The recent dissertation by D. Arar does not deal with *strictu sensu* linguistic information.<sup>15</sup> The tendency towards decreasing use of CP data is understandable, inasmuch as Hesseling's edition itself became a rarity. Meanwhile, numerous early Modern Greek texts appeared in excellent editions, and old Demotic forms of CP, which sounded exotic to nineteenth-century western scholars, do not lift brows any longer. A few attempts to compare both translations were undertaken, albeit they were limited in scope.<sup>16</sup> The conclusion of C. Aslanov, made on the first chapter of Genesis, that CP represents a "revision of the Septuagint text in a more vernacular and literal way" would require a thorough reexamination of the totality of the text.<sup>17</sup>

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*Elements in Jewish Languages* (Milan, October 23–26, 1995) (ed. S. Morag, M. Bar-Asher and M. Mayer-Modena; Milano: Centro di Studi Camito-Semitici, 1999), 153–81.

12. Natalio Fernández Marcos, "Some Thoughts on the Later Judaeo-Greek Biblical Tradition," *BJGS* 2 (1988): 15.

13. E.g., Henri Tonnet, *History of Greek Language* (trans. M. Karamanou and P. Lialiat-sis; ed. Ch. Charalampakis; Athens: Papadimas, 1995; transl. of *Histoire du grec moderne*. Paris: L'Asiathèque, 1993), 110–19 (Greek); idem, "Writing Modern Greek with Hebrew Characters in the Constantinople Pentateuch (1547)," in *Proceedings of the International Symposium on Modern Greek Language, Sorbonne, 14–15 February 1992* (ed. Ch. Clairis; Athens: OEDB, 1992), 209–14 (Greek).

14. Brian D. Joseph, *The Synchrony and Diachrony of the Balkan Infinitive: A Study in Areal, General and Historical Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983; the same, "Processes of Spread for Syntactic Constructions in the Balkans," *Balkan Linguistik: Synchronie und Diachronie* (ed. C. Tzitzilis and C. Symeonidis; Thessaloniki: University of Thessaloniki, 2000), 139–50; Eleni Karantzola, "Morphological and Semasiological Aspects of Nominal Suffixation in Early Modern Greek," *Studies in Greek Linguistics* 24 (2004): 218–29 (Greek).

15. David Arar, "Le Pentateuque de Constantinople (1547): une traduction littérale?" (Ph. D. diss., University of Paris IV, 2005).

16. Micheline Chaze, "Remarques et notes sur les versions grecque et ladino du Pentateuque de Constantinople, 1547," in *Hommage à Georges Vajda* (ed. Gérard Nahon and Charles Touati; Louvain: Peeters, 1980), 323–32; Cyril Aslanov, "The Judeo-Greek and Ladino columns in the Constantinople edition of the Pentateuch (1547): A Linguistic Commentary on Gen. 1:1–15," *Revue des Études Juives* 158 (1999): 385–97; cf. Daniel Goldschmidt, "The Bible Translations into Greek by the Sixteenth Century Jews," *Qiryat Sefer* 33 (1958): 133 (Hebrew).

17. Aslanov, "Judeo-Greek and Ladino columns," 391.

Most significant progress has been achieved in understanding the historical framework in which CP was created. Several collections of articles have been dedicated to the cultural background and editorial activities of Italian printers and specifically the Soncino family.<sup>18</sup> Studies of early Jewish Ottoman society have proliferated as two major kinds of sources were perused: Ottoman archives and fiscal documents, and *responsa* literature. A veritable flood of literature enriched our perception of the economic and social history of the period, and its distinguished personalities included Moses Capsali, Eliyahu Mizrahi, Mordekhai Comatiano, Eliyahu Bashyadzi, Caleb Afendopoulo, Moses Hamon, Joseph Nasi, Grazia Nasi, Joseph Taitazak, among others.<sup>19</sup>

### 3. CP TEXT AND ITS HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

For the purposes of the LXX research, a critical edition of CP is a must. The latter presupposes a full list of *variae lectiones*, and to achieve that, it would be helpful to know how many CP exemplars have survived until today. Unfortunately, the exact number and location of CP copies is still unknown. Sixteenth-century editions are not fully catalogued, although they do not essentially differ from the *incunabulae* neither in their technology nor in their rarity. No records about the initial number of books produced by Eliezer Soncino remain, and we lack indirect information, such as time spent for printing, that would permit us to calculate the number. In very approximate estimation, of several hundred copies, less than a dozen complete or almost complete ones survived. It is indeed auspicious, since many contemporaneous Constantinople prints are known to us only by their names.

The scarcity of early Constantinople editions should perhaps be attributed to the extensive fire that devoured almost the whole Jewish quarter of the Ottoman capital in 1569. The few copies that might have found their way to the West would have also suffered, inasmuch as in 1568 the Venetian government collected and burnt Hebrew books. If our suggestion is correct, CP became a sought-after book in the space of less than one generation. Indeed, in Venice in 1588 Moses Cordovero justified the publication of *Sefer Heshek Shelomo*, a glossary of difficult biblical words, by the fact that Jews of moderate income (*medios modestos*) could not afford the complete biblical texts that appeared in 1540–1585 in Constantinople and Salonika.<sup>20</sup> Of course, Cordovero's lament might mean that the

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18. Giuliano Tamani, ed., *I tipografi ebrei a Soncino 1483–1490: Atti del convegno, Soncino, 12 giugno 1988* (Soncino: Edizioni dei Soncino, 1989); the same, *L'attività editoriale di Gershom Soncino, 1502–1527: atti del Convegno, Soncino, 17 settembre 1995* (Soncino: Edizioni dei Soncino, 1997).

19. The relevant bibliography is too large to be covered here.

20. Bunis, "Formas de ladinar," 315–16. Further evidence of the rarity and popularity of CP is supplied by Joseph ben Hayim of Belgrade in the introduction to his edition of

Pentateuchs were costly from the very beginning: it is hard to determine, as on the book itself no price was stated.<sup>21</sup> Yet it is important to mention that all the CP copies described in the bibliography are printed on paper, while with the dawn of printing other alternatives were available. We know about the existence of parchment copies of a Judeo-Arabic and Judeo-Persian Polyglot Pentateuch produced by Eliezer Soncino in 1546.<sup>22</sup> Parchment exemplars were normally less damageable, and one would be tempted to conclude that this luxurious technology was not implemented in the case of CP. Possible reasons for such a decision will be discussed below.

It has been suggested that the Masoretic text, which was typeset for the polyglot Pentateuch in 1546, could have been reused for a new edition a year after, thus resulting in an economy of printers' time.<sup>23</sup> However, the more texts that are printed in parallel, the more complicated the page layout becomes. So, if Judeo-Arabic and Judeo-Persian translations happen to be shorter or longer than Greek or Ladino, a different arrangement of Torah, Rashi, and Onkelos would be in order.<sup>24</sup> As a result, complex rethinking and rearranging of individual pages would be needed, so that planning a new layout from scratch might be an easier solution. Whatever the case may be, M. Lazar has measured the letters used for

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Hamisha Humshey Tora in Wien, 1813: "ansí tupí in una akdamá ki.trai in anyu de SH"Z si instanparun in.Kustantina Arbá Viisrim kun targum sifaradí shpaniol i gregu i.no dizi kén lus istanpó . . . I di.todus estus no.vimus nada i si.topan de eyus in la livviría di il rey di Prusia" ("I also encountered in a preface [an information] that in year 307 (1547) the Twenty Four [books of Torah] were published in Constantinople with Ladino and Greek translation without mentioning who published them . . . We have not seen anything of all these, but in the Library of Prussian King there should be such [books]") (quoted after Bunis, "Formas de ladinar," 341 no. 17). Cf. also the note on the rarity of Constantinopolitan Soncino prints, made by either N.-C. Fabri de Peiresc or Salomon Azubi between 1630 and 1632, in Peter N. Miller, "The Mechanics of Christian-Jewish Intellectual Collaboration in Seventeenth-Century Provence: N.-C. Fabri de Peiresc and Salomon Azubi," in *Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe* (ed. Allison P. Coudert and Jeffrey S. Shoulson; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 82–83.

21. This practice was generally rare.

22. Aharon (Aron) Freimann, "Die Hebräischen Pergamentdrucke," *Zeitschrift für Hebraische Bibliographie* 15 (1911): 36.

23. Nicholas R. M. de Lange, "The Greek Bible in Byzantine and Ottoman Judaism" (paper presented at the "Touching Base: A Joint Seminar of the IOSCS Hexapla Project and the AHRC Greek Bible in Byzantine Judaism Project", Cambridge, 17 August 2006).

24. The examination of copies shows that layout is adapted to the length of translation, and not *vice versa*. Also, corrections in CP, although they change the length of the text, do not aim to fit the text in the available space.

both multilingual Pentateuchs and discovered that they differ in size.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, we should assume that each of them was produced individually.

Currently the largest number of CP copies is to be found in Jerusalem (Jewish National and University Library and Schocken Institute).<sup>26</sup> Other publicly accessible copies are preserved in the National Library in Paris, the Bodleian, the British Library and the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary. D. C. Hessel-ing mentioned also a copy in Modena (n.v.).

A number of pages of CP were retrieved from Cairo Genizah; they are currently preserved in the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Collection in the Cambridge University Library.<sup>27</sup> All the five books of Pentateuch are represented, albeit by insignificant fragments: Gen 4:25–5:3; 5:11–16 in Misc. 32.22 and NS 291.6; Gen 37:2–38:11 in Misc 32.54 (three leaves), Exod 17:12–18:10, as well as 20:25–21:10 and 33:21–34:26, in Misc. 32.54 (two leaves); Lev 21:5–17 in AS 190.105 and AS 190.106; Num 1:1–6, 13–20 in AS 191.427 (few Greek prepositions only); Num 6:22–7:28 in Misc. 32.54 (two leaves); Deut 7:5–19 in Misc 32.36; Deut 9:20–10:6 in Misc 32.54 and AS 190.281 (few Greek words only). The fragment AS 192.7 is tiny, and the precise Biblical reference cannot be established; AS 190.334 seems also to belong to CP, but it does not contain any Greek or Ladino text. Most probably, all the Cambridge fragments originate from a single copy, as no biblical text occurs twice.

Regrettably, the directory of surviving Constantinople prints composed by A. Yaari in 1967 mostly concentrates on the libraries of Israel and the USA and includes only limited data about European collections.<sup>28</sup> No newer work has replaced his list.

When compiling a new catalogue, close attention should be given to each CP copy, as they may comprise pages from more than one original print.<sup>29</sup> Very early CP copies must have been chased by collectors, some of whom were illiterate in Hebrew and could only judge the completeness of the copy by the number of pages in it. Therefore, to cater for such clients, random pages of more poorly preserved Pentateuchs would have been bound into other incomplete copies to create presumably complete ones. Individual leaves must have been traded as fillers, while the absence of modern page numbering made it easier for book traders

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25. Moshe Lazar, "The Judeo-Spanish Translations of the Bible," *Sefunot* 8 (1964): 344, no. 26 (Hebrew). A thorough comparison of both editions should further clarify the issue.

26. The copy owned previously by I. Mehlman is now preserved in the JNUL (Jerusalem).

27. I am grateful to Prof. N. de Lange who brought this information to my notice.

28. See Joseph R. Hacker, "Constantinople Prints in the 16th Century," *Areshet* 5 (1972): 459 (Hebrew).

29. J. Hacker believes that some pages in the beginning of the book were replaced close to the printing time, and connects this change to the revision of the text. However, in a Jerusalem exemplar checked by us the same pages appear twice, which would suggest that they were supplied rather than replaced.



to conceal these tricks. The existence of chaotically blended exemplars emphasises the need for full collation of all existent CPs.

In order to position the CP among other Greek Jewish biblical translations, information about the provenance of its text is crucial. Unfortunately, in our case no direct evidence of such a kind seems to be available; Eliezer Soncino did not leave us any testimony that would shed light on the motives for his choice. Thus, a researcher is faced with the thankless, but not wholly impossible, task of deducing the qualitative characteristics of the published text from the way in which it was published. Apart from the physical appearance of the book, our only source of information about the edition is a brief declaration of its scope and purposes placed on the title page. Further on we would like to profit from the achievements of historical and philological science to extract every possible bit of information from this concise passage. It is customary among the researchers of early Hebrew prints to refer to it as colophon rather than title page, and we will adopt this practice further.<sup>30</sup>

In the copies of CP preserved in Jerusalem, the main colophon runs as follows:

השבח למחוייב המציאות אשר העיר אותנו להדפיס ספר כלו מחמדים חמשה  
חומשי תורה כתובים בכתב אשורי עם הפטרות וחמש מגלות וכדי להועיל לנערי  
בני ישראל ולשונם תמהר לדבר צחות ראינו להדפיס בו תרגום המקרא בלשון יוני  
ולשון לעז שתי הלשונות המורגלות בבני עמינו גלות החל הזה שועי יהודה וישראל  
השוכנים בארצות תוגרמה. ולהיות כל בר ישראל מחוייב להשלים פרשיותיו עם  
הצבור שנים מקרא ואחד תרגום ראינו להדפיס בו גם כן תרגום אנקלוס ופרוש  
רש"י ע"ה: והאל יעזרנו חיל בהדפסת הספר הזה ויוכנו להדפיס ספרים רבים  
להרביץ תורה בישראל: והיתה התחלת הספר הזה בראש חדש תמוז שנת ה'ש"ז  
ליצירה פה קושטנדינה בבית צעיר המחוקקים אליעזר בכ"ר גרשום שונצין ז"ל.<sup>31</sup>

"Praise be to the Provider of Benefit that enlightened us to print the book, "altogether lovely" (Cant 5:16), five parts of Torah written in Assyrian script with *haftaroth* and five *megilloth*. And in order to aid the young of the house of Israel, "and their tongue shall be ready to speak plainly" (Isa 32:4), we decided to print in it the translation of Mikra into the Greek tongue and the foreign tongue, two tongues widespread among the sons of our people, "the captivity of this host"

30. CP possesses also an actual colophon, i.e., short record marking the end of the venture. This final note contains traditional blessing formula together with the names of two printers: נותן לעיף כוח ולאאע"י יוסף כהן ב"ר יצחק כהן ז"ל: אביגדור בן הר"ר אליעזר צריט אשכנזי שליט ברוך.

The Arabic-Persian Polyglot has been reported to have different text of final colophon in different copies (see Hacker, "Constantinople Prints," 482), but nothing similar is known about CP.

31. Unfortunately, this important evidence was often imprecisely transcribed and translated. For inaccuracies in Abraham Yaari, *The Jewish Press in Constantinople* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967) (Hebrew), see the review of Hacker, "Constantinople Prints," 482.



(Obad 1:20), noblemen of Yehuda and Israel dwelling in the country of Togarmah. And since every son of Israel must complete his weekly readings with the congregation twice in Mikra and once in Targum, we decided also to print in it Targum Onkelos and the commentary of Rashi, peace be upon/with him. And let God give us strength to print this book and grant us to print many [more] books to spread Torah among [the people of] Israel. And the commencement of this book was at the beginning of the month Tammuz in the year 5307 of the creation, here in Constantinople in the house of the youngest of printers, Eliezer, son of honourable R. Gershom Soncino, of blessed memory.”

Generally, the minimalism of the title page of CP surprises those familiar with the florid and verbose style of the epoch; “the Constantinople prints are noted for their long colophons.”<sup>32</sup> While it is definitely not the shortest of the Soncino colophons, it includes no poems, no acrostics and no rhymed prose. The biblical allusions are minimalist and self explanatory. To compare, the colophon of the polyglot Pentateuch printed a year earlier is two and a half times longer.

From the opening phrase we learn that the book in front of us is **ספר כלו מחמדים חמשה חומשי תורה**. The Soncino family, as well as local Constantinople printers produced numerous editions of Torah, Prophets and Writings, so that rich material for comparison is available. Bibles were printed in different formats to serve different needs and readership, and the choice of format by the publishers was often explained at length. For example, small pocket Bibles (32° and 16°) in Rashi script allowed to follow the reading during the synagogue liturgy:

כוונת המדפסים היתה לשלושה סיבות האחת להועיל ליראי ה' ולחושבי שמו  
ולישירים בלבבותם בהיותם בבית תפלתם חגים ושבתם יביטו וישמעו הקריאה  
מפי שליח צבור ואל ישעו בדברים בטלים כי אפילו בדברי תורה אסרו רז"ל  
לספר בעוד שליח צבור קורא וכל שכן בדברים בטלים.<sup>33</sup>

The printers were drawn by three considerations: first, to aid worshipping God, and to support those, who revere His name, and those honest in their heart, [so that] when they are in their prayer houses on holidays and Shabbat [days], they will watch [the text] and listen to the reading of the emissary of congregation, and not indulge in idle talk, since our rabbis of blessed memory forbade to utter even the words of Torah, when the emissary of congregation is reading, and much more so the idle talk.

*Folio*, as a less portable format, would be intended for group or family usage rather than individual reading. Indeed, the very formulation **וכדי להועיל לנערי בני ישראל** suggests it was intended primarily for an educational setting.

32. Joseph Jacobs and Richard Gottheil, “Colophon,” *JE* 4:171.

33. Yaari, *The Jewish Press in Constantinople*, 79.

As we move further in the colophon, the CP is advertised as printed in square letters (בכתב אשורי). Today square letters are perceived as default and mention sounds superfluous. Ironically, this very perception derives historically from the aesthetic and marketing choices made in the late-fifteenth–early-sixteenth century by Soncino, when the options that we nowadays consider closed were still open. As pioneers of printing, Soncino commissioned graphic designs and occasionally created letter-shapes adapted to the content and prospective readership of the book, for example, characteristic Ashkenazic font for a prayer book inspired by Ashkenazic semi-cursive.<sup>34</sup> However, since the Pentateuch was addressed to a mixed audience, its fonts needed to be universally acceptable. Soncino square letters were precisely of this kind. Morphologically Sephardic with slight influences from Ashkenazic handwriting style, they aspired to be deprived of regional associations.<sup>35</sup> Instead, they were superbly functional from the viewpoint of printing technology and readability.

It is remarkable that Sephardic semi-cursive, ordered earlier by Soncino themselves in Italy and further popularized in Constantinople by the publishers of the Ibn Nahmias family, was *not* chosen for the CP translations. Moreover, both Greek and Ladino texts are vocalized throughout, which makes them easy to read even for complete beginners; the outer appearance of the book hints again at its didactic function. Obviously, pointing Judeo-Spanish would make it more accessible for Greek speakers and vice versa. This however appears to be a consequence of the initial layout choice rather than a purpose in itself.

Further on, the title page of CP promises *haftaroth* and *megilloth*, but in all the preserved copies none is found. It is believed that title pages were normally prepared at the beginning of the printing process, so changes made under the pressure of circumstances would not be reflected in the colophon, as it would have already been executed.

Several options should be considered here. First, one may suggest that the *haftaroth* and *megilloth* were printed out, but circulated independently, not bound with the rest of the Torah. In Soncino's time, the works of religious content were issued in weekly portions and sold in the synagogues. The practice was so widespread in Constantinople that intellectuals felt sorry for simple Jews who could not withstand social pressure and had to buy books without really needing

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34. It has even been suggested that the peculiar way the letters were decorated could be related to the content of the weekly readings (*parashiyot*) executed with these letters, see Adri K. Offenberger, "The Speckled Letters of Joshua Solomon Soncino (1487)," *The Library* 19:2 (1994), 138–44.

35. Malachi Beit-Arié, *The Making of the Medieval Hebrew Book: Studies in Paleography and Codicology* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1993), 259; Mordechai Glatzer "Early Hebrew Printing," in *A Sign and a Witness: 2,000 Years of Hebrew Books and Illuminated Manuscripts* (ed. Leonard S. Gold; New York: New York Public Library, 1988), 88.

them.<sup>36</sup> To be sure, it is very probable that the Arabic-Persian Pentateuch was executed to be distributed book by book.<sup>37</sup> As to CP, there is no evidence that it was intended for sale in installments; the known copies consist of sixty-five quires of six pages each.<sup>38</sup> However, even if the Torah was meant to be sold as a whole, there is still a possibility that *haftaroth* and *megilloth* would be bound into a separate volume. Such division would be justified by the fact that different communities, for example, Rabbanite and Karaite, required different texts for the relevant parts of their liturgy.<sup>39</sup>

A second possibility, which seems to be favored by most scholars, is that *haftaroth* and *megilloth* were actually never printed.<sup>40</sup> If so, some *force majeure* must have prevented the book from being properly executed.<sup>41</sup> An unfinished edition might have been caused by a variety of circumstances from minor technical problems to the conscious decision of the publisher, or even his death. As to the technical reasons, it was customary among the printers of that time in general and Soncino in particular, that a publisher would hire a distinguished scholar to create a layout, edit a text, and proofread it. There was no shortage of educated people or craftsmen in Constantinople at that time, so an editor or even a printer could have been replaced, should the need arise. It is more probable, therefore, that the enterprise was terminated because of the personal circumstances of E. Soncino.

We do not know how old Eliezer Soncino was on the day when the title page appeared, first of Tammuz 5307 (= 11 June 1547), as no relevant personal records survived. The expression *צעיר המוחוקים* at the end of the colophon should by no means be understood as reference to real age or experience. It is a relic of an old tradition originating from manuscript copyists who humbly called themselves

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36. Joseph R. Hacker, "The Intellectual Activity of the Jews of the Ottoman Empire during the 16th and 17th Centuries," *Jewish Thought in the 17th Century* (ed. I. Twersky and B. Septimus; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 103.

37. J. Hacker ("Constantinople Prints", 482) observed that quires in the beginning and end of each Pentateuch book differ in size from the middle quires, so that each book starts with a new quire. A separate colophon marks the end of Genesis, see Lazar, "Judeo-Spanish Translations," 344, no. 26. The existence of a copy of this edition comprising *haftaroth* and *megilloth* was mentioned in the bibliography, but the accuracy of the statement was doubted (see Lazar, "Judeo-Spanish Translations," 344–35, no. 26 and Hacker, "Constantinople Prints", 482).

38. Goldschmidt, "Bible Translations," 131; Hesseling, *Cinq livres*, II; Yaari, *The Jewish Press in Constantinople*, 103.

39. According to Alexander Marx, ("Bemerkungen zu: Die Druckereien in Konstantinopel und Salonichi," *ZHB* 12 (1908): 29), the Pentateuch produced in 1522 was available in the Karaite and the Rabbanite versions, cf. Yaari, *The Jewish Press in Constantinople*, 84.

40. J. Hacker even suggested that A. Yaari should have noted it as a sure fact, see "Constantinople Prints", 471, no. 102 and 483.

41. It is unclear, whether partial revision of Genesis and Numbers, with which we dealt in Krivoruchko, "Textual Variants," 2–6, has something to do with the fact.

“apprentices,” “pupils,” and so on. This habitual rhetoric of self-denigration was much favored by the printers of the epoch, including, for example, D. Bomberg.<sup>42</sup> Gershom Soncino, “Nestor of Hebrew printers,” used this phrase often, indeed until his death at a relatively advanced age.<sup>43</sup>

By the time of the execution of our text, Eliezer Soncino had worked in book production for at least thirty years, and there are reasons to suspect that at that time he already had health problems.<sup>44</sup> In fact, it is quite possible that Eliezer Soncino tried to elude his fate by wishing to himself *וּיִזְכְּנוּ לְהַדְפִּיס סְפָרִים רַבִּים*—if we are permitted to extrapolate from a standard *topos* about real biographical content. CP might well be his swan song, since the next book, published just a few months later at the end of Elul of the same year, *Responsa of Rabbi Itshak ben Sheshet*, states in its colophon that it was produced by Moshe Parnas in the printshop of Eliezer Soncino, but not by E. Soncino. The respectful praise of Eliezer *מְצִינוֹ גָּדוֹל שֶׁשָּׁמַשׁ תְּלִמְדֵי חֻכְמִים בְּפֹעָלָיו בְּכָלֵיו וְהָאוֹתוּיּוֹתָיו מֵאַל־ף וְעַד תִּי״ו זֹאת נַחֲלַת אֲבֹתָיו* (“who served the Torah scholars through his deeds, his possessions and his letters, from *alef* to *tav*, [which are] the heritage of the God’s servants, heritage of his forefathers”) found in this colophon might therefore be read as his eulogy. Deteriorating marketing conditions and/or the inferior personal skills of the remaining associates must have led to the situation that the work was left unfinished.<sup>45</sup> Naturally, other explanations of these facts may be offered.

Further on, the CP colophon explains that the edition includes translations into *לשון יוני* and *לשון לעז*. It has been suggested that the very idea of printing a Polyglot Bible, first attempted by Aldus Manutius in 1501, belonged essentially to Gershom Soncino.<sup>46</sup> The particular choice of the languages, that is, pairing Greek with Ladino versus Arabic with Persian, could have been conditioned by the issues of promotion and authorship to be discussed below. It may also witness E. Soncino’s perception of cultural affinity of Jews from Islamic countries,

42. Giacomo Manzoni, *Sefer ger-sham ovvero Annali tipografici dei Soncino, contenenti la descrizione e illustrazione delle stampe ebraiche . . . , greche, latine ed italiane . . . con introduzione e tavole scilografiche* ([Farnborough, Eng.]: Gregg International Publishers, 1969; repr., Bologna: Gaetano Romagnoli, 1883–1886) II, 2:8.

43. The expression belongs to Aharon Freimann “Die Soncinen-Drucke in Salonichi und Constantinopel (1526–1547),” *ZHB* 9 (1905): 21.

On the date of Gershom Soncino’s death see Moses Marx, “Contributions to the History of His Life and His Printing,” *Sefer Ha-yovel: A Tribute to Professor Alexander Marx* (ed. D. Fraenkel; New York: Alim, 1943), IX. In his opinion, Gershom left Italy in 1527 about the age of sixty, “poor and concerned for his livelihood.” See “Gershom (Hieronymus) Soncino’s Wander-Years in Italy, 1498–1527: Exemplar Judaicae Vitae,” *HUCA* 11 (1936) 473.

44. Marx, “Soncino’s Wander-Years,” 467.

45. On the decline of Constantinople printing after the death of E. Soncino see Hacker “Constantinople Prints,” 468.

46. Marx, “Soncino’s Wander-Years,” 456.

as well as frequency of contacts between the groups. However, we would rather refrain from ascribing to him any “ecumenical” intention of bringing the Greek and Spanish communities close together.”<sup>47</sup> The edition might have contributed to rapprochement, whose major stimuli were obviously socio-economical rather than ideological, but we would suggest viewing it as an indirect consequence rather than a goal.

The reader of the title page would assume that pride of place in the edition would be given to the Greek, since it is mentioned first. This would make good financial sense. According to Ottoman taxation documents, Romaniotes, who arrived earlier, were better off in 1547 than their Sephardic brethren and therefore would make better buyers.<sup>48</sup> The order of languages also reflects the historical priority of Romaniote Jewry, a consideration of importance in Judaism. Inside the book, the expected hierarchy is reversed: Greek is set on the outer part of the page, to which modern tradition attaches less importance. This is, however, entirely consistent with the requirements of design. The widespread impression of the “subservient” position of the Greek text is misleading: to create the impression of visual integrity, the right part of the page should look full rather than holed. And since translation into Greek takes more space, it is the Greek text that wraps the MT from outside, while the internal Judeo-Spanish half of the leaf is filled with decorative letters (graphic fillers).

Notably, no individual reference to any of the two languages is made in the colophon, which obviously does not distinguish between the status of Greek and Ladino, connecting them into one syntactic unit. Both are characterized in a succinct text of our colophon as **שתי הלשונות המורגלות בבני עמינו גלות החל** **הזה שועי יהודה וישראל השוכנים בארצות תוגרמה**. While it is logical to notify the reader from which language into which the text was translated, the information about the dispersal or usability of these languages is not of direct relevance, and researchers tend to ignore it as a redundant rhetorical embellishment. The deeper sense of E. Soncino’s statement seems to have escaped them, as it is only evident in the background of contemporary writings. The introductions to the books of that period abound in excuses by authors and translators, who justify themselves for applying a gentile language to Jewish content. For example, Rabbi Zadik ben Josef Formon introduced his translation of *Hovot Halevavot* printed in Constantinople in 1567 in the following words: **בגלל הסיבות הללו אני צדיק** **בכמה”ר יוסף פורמון נר”ו תרגמתי ספר זה מלשון הקודש ללאדינו משום שלשון זו** **נפוצה ביותר בינינו בעוונות** (emphasis added) (“for these reasons I ... translated this book from Sacred Language [Hebrew] into Ladino, as this language is

47. Nicholas R. M. de Lange, “Greek and Spanish Judaism in the Ottoman Empire: The Conflict of Cultures,” *BJGS* 11 (1992): 33.

48. Stéphane Yerasimos, “La communauté juive d’Istanbul à la fin du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Turcica* 27 (1995): 117.

widespread in our times *because of [our] sins*").<sup>49</sup> Serious writing on religious, theological, and legal matters seemed acceptable only in Hebrew, while the use of other languages was but a lamentable and essentially unwelcome compromise. In particular, translating the Bible was far from being a commendable or natural activity—it was a “disgrace to the Scripture” (ביזיון לתורה).<sup>50</sup>

Interestingly, not all the languages were judged as equally bad and uncalled-for. הללו הסיבות (“these reasons”), to which Rabbi Formon alludes in the above explanation, consist in the precedent of Ibn Pakuda, who turned his back on Hebrew. Similarly, when Rabbi Meir ben Shmuel Benveniste of Thessaloniki intended to translate the *Shulhan Arukh* into Ladino, he tried to argue that translations into Arabic have previously been done. His opponents objected that Arabic is similar to Hebrew, while Ladino is not; that Oral Torah was not meant to be written down, much less so to be translated; and in general there is a tradition of Arabic writing and translating, while hardly any in Ladino.<sup>51</sup> Quite consistently with the ideological climate described above, no explanation about the popularity of the Arabic language is found in the colophon of the 1546 Polyglot; the legitimacy of Judeo-Arabic was unquestionable.

We may imagine that exactly the same arguments, that is, lack of genetic connection and established authoritative texts of Jewish content, could be used against translating into Greek. Yet, in terms of Halachic status, Greek language was superior, as Talmudic sages had repeatedly shown their preference for Greek over other means of conveying the Divine message.<sup>52</sup> Thus, in stricter terms, the covert justification in our colophon refers rather to Ladino than to Greek, but conveniently covers both.

In all probability, Eliezer Soncino was too much of a secular rationalist and too much of a skilled marketer to burden his readers with their “faults” and “sins” straight from the title page. Finally, it was he who published the famous knight errantry tale *Amadis de Gaula* (1539) along with the sensual poetry of Imanuel of Rome (ca. 1535), and it was his father who published *Sefer Habakuk Hanavi*, a parody on the Talmud, and an illustrated—and thus illegal—*Mashal Hakadmoni* (ca. 1490). Religious allegiances and Halachic subtleties were never too important for them. Under the name Hieronymus, Gershom Soncino produced many Christian books, including those with anti-Jewish content, and put into type the first Karaite work ever printed, Bashyadzi’s *Adderet Eliyahu*, in 1531. But the turn

49. Quoted after Aldina Quintana, “The Use of Hebrew and Gentile Languages among the Sepharadim in Ottoman Empire During the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries” (paper presented at the 2nd International Congress of the Center for Studies of Jewish Languages and Literatures, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, June 26–29, 2006), 4 (Hebrew).

50. Ibid. 5.

51. The discussion is well documented, see *ibid.*, 3–6.

52. See Meg. 9a. Some sages even tolerated Greek studies in their own households, e.g., Rabban Gamliel (Sotah 49b).

of phrase הלשונוֹת המורגלוֹת בבני עמינו resounds a gentle excuse—at least for those of his contemporaries who were expecting such—in which the blame for using gentile languages and profaning the Scripture is conveniently put not on lazy or otherwise imperfect Jews, but on the inauspicious historical conditions of the exile (גלות). The details of the Sephardic exodus are well known and there is no need to repeat them. To complete the picture, it should be added that Ottoman records from 1540, showing only congregations established before 1492, list about fifty communities transferred by the authorities from every corner of the empire to populate the plundered Constantinople.<sup>53</sup> Most Greek-speaking Jewish communities were destroyed or decimated because of this forced resettlement policy. In Constantinople in 1547, every Greek or Spanish speaker was a refugee or a son of a refugee, and would therefore feel comforted by Soncino's words.

However, most interesting about the CP colophon is what is omitted from it rather than what is said. First, no author or source of either translation is mentioned. This is highly unusual. Although the sixteenth-century copyright was substantially different from the modern, even an insignificant contemporaneous author or his descendants would want a credit. It was quite common for family members to subsidize the publication of the works of their deceased relatives in order to see their names printed. Generally, the PR potential of printing was recognized very quickly in the epoch, which did not appreciate fake modesty. For example, humanist Lorenzo Abstemio, who was employed by G. Soncino, exhorted all owners of good and previously unpublished Latin manuscripts “to insure immortality by sending them to him for publication.”<sup>54</sup>

On the other hand, should the author be a personality of some prominence, it would make sense to have his name mentioned if only for publicity purposes. For example, in the Arabic-Persian Pentateuch, no recommendation is deemed necessary for Saadia Gaon, but Rabbi Jacob ben Joseph Tavus is introduced with a standard laudation “intelligent and wise man”: ותרגום ערבי לרב סעדיה גאון: ופרסי אשר באר לנו איש נבון וחכם כ"ר יעקוב בכ"ר יוסף טאווס. At times, even the merits of unknown authors were praised; for example, the editor of *Heshek Shelomo* could not but express his admiration of the author: “Este livro . . . no save kyén fwe el awtor mas se ve por la ovra ke era gran savio” (p. 2b) (“I do not know who was the author, but it can be seen from the work that he was a great scholar”).<sup>55</sup>

53. Yerasimos, “La communauté juive d’Istanbul,” 109–11.

54. Cecil Roth, “Jewish Printers of Non-Jewish Books in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries,” in *Studies in Books and Booklore: Essays in Jewish Bibliography and Allied Subjects* ([Farnborough, Eng.]: Gregg International Publishers, 1972), 51. Repr. from *JJS* 4 (1953): 102–32.

55. Bunis, “Formas de ladinar,” 340 no. 13.



Not surprisingly, printing worthwhile texts was considered conferring glory on the publishing house. Since competition among printers was fierce, even relatively minor advances in text-critical quality were advertised. For example, introducing the *Iqarim* of Rabbi Joseph Albo, edited in 1522 in Rimini, Gershom Soncino underlines that his grandfather Israel Nathan, who was the first to publish this work thirty-seven years ago, possessed a text left behind by its author, which is therefore superior to that of his competitor Don Solomon Valid (Gualitti).<sup>56</sup> When Aldus Manutius issued his Petrarch supposedly on the base of the autograph, Gershom argued that in order to compile his edition (Fano, 1503), he collated three privately owned manuscripts containing more material, and it was therefore more complete.<sup>57</sup>

Manuscript sources of good quality were explicitly appreciated even when the published matter had no individual authorship and therefore no autograph existed, for example, a prayer book from Ferrara (1552) was printed, according to its colophon, “after the most ancient copies” (“según ejemplares mas antiguos”).

The publisher often functioned as the editor and prepared the text for publication on the basis of several manuscripts. Such cases were considered an opportunity to extol editorial insights and knowledge. For example, in the Rashi edition of 1525 (Rimini), Gershom Soncino claims that he removed from the text numerous errors introduced by generations of ignorant scribes, who erroneously believed they had clarified Rashi, but essentially only obscured him. That editorial capacity was of importance for him can be seen from the colophon to *Mikhlol* by David Kimkhi, his last book, where he summarized the main achievements of his life in the following words: והוצאתים לעין השמש הזאת יזהירו כוזהר הרקיע “יגתי ומצאתי ספרים היו סתומים וחתומים מאז” (“With great labour I have found books which have, since days of old, been concealed dark and obscure, and I have made them as clear as the light of day, so that they shine like the brightness of the firmament.”)<sup>58</sup>

Meticulous and attentive proofreading was regularly praised in Bible editions, for example, the Pentateuch with *haftaroth* and *megilloth*, published by E. Soncino in 1544 or 1545 is characterized as prepared עיון מוגה ומדויק בתכלית הדיוק “with great care, proofread and checked most thoroughly”, while in the Arabic–Persian Polyglot the text is אמרת י”י צרופה שבעתים בהשגחת דיוק על כל לשון ולשון ביד אל”ינו הטובה “Divine word, perused seven times, attentively checked word by word as appropriate.”<sup>59</sup> The absence of the comparable men-

56. Marx, “Soncino’s Wander-Years,” 479–80.

57. Ibid., 445–56.

58. Text quoted after Yaari, *The Jewish Press in Constantinople*, 92; transl. by Marx, “Soncino’s Wander-Years,” 485.

59. Ibid., 102.

tion in CP may be, of course, just accidental, but may also reflect the lack of the publisher's confidence as to the quality of his final product.

Remarkably, CP was not supported by any commendatory rabbinic reference. Neither does it contain any *herem* against potential violators of the editor's copyright, such as the one issued by the Roman Rabbinate in 1518 in connection with *Sefer Habahur* by Elijah Bahur, or the one accompanying the 1579 Bragadin's edition of Abravanel's commentary to Pentateuch. The Arabic-Persian Pentateuch is very different in this respect: it appears to be recommended by a person of high social standing: הביא אדונינו ... חכם הרופא המובהק שר וגדול בישראל מורנו ודודל ... ("brought . . . by our master, the wise man, the distinguished doctor, the minister and leader of Israel, our teacher and master, his honour, our teacher (sic, repeated) R. Moshe Hamon, let his Rock (= God) protect him and preserve him, let his name remain in eternity, amen, and let there be His (= God's) will").<sup>60</sup>

No less notable is the absence of Ottoman authorities. Our book does not contain habitual wishes of good health to Suleiman the Magnificent. To compare, in the Pentateuch of 1544 or 1545, the place of publishing (Constantinople) is described as אשר למלך אדוננו האדיר שולטן ירום הודו ותנשא מלכותו בימיו ובימנו "belonging to the King, Our Mighty Ruler Sultan Suleiman, let His glory be extolled and His kingdom be hailed in His and our days." The same formula appears almost without changes in *Shirim ve Zmirot*, the collection of liturgical poems printed just before the multilingual publications under analysis: עם כבוד המלך שולטאן שולימאן ירום הודו ותנשא מלכותו בימיו ובימנו. Given the fact that rulers of every scale and denomination were commonly lauded in Soncino colophons, we would question the possibility that CP was commissioned by the sultan.<sup>61</sup> If this were the case, much more articulate thanks would be in order and the absence of any mention whatsoever would be inconceivable.

Naturally, printers were under no obligation to produce colophons, and some early prints lack them. But given the practice of Soncino editions and their historical background—and we could have adduced dozens of examples similar to those above—it is more than surprising that CP is so hermetically silent about its Greek and Ladino versions. Absolute orphans, they emerge from nowhere: no authors to praise, no authorities to rely on, no pristine manuscript heritage to uncover, and no textual criticism to boast. All these four deficiencies, being unusual, require attention and bring out specific premises as to the text to be published.<sup>62</sup>

60. Ibid., 102.

61. Fernández Marcos, "Some Thoughts on the Later Judaeo-Greek Biblical Tradition," 15.

62. Cf. the assumption of D. Goldschmidt ("Bible Translations," 131–33), who believes that the Greek translation was made specifically for printing.

Again, a closer look at historical context suggests an explanation. As is evident from contemporary writings, the intellectuals of the empire were becoming more and more conscious of the importance of translation into a living language. An essentially Renaissance vision of religious education with its strong preference for rationality and creativity rather than blindly following established prototypes has already made its appearance. Rejection of established translations is clearly heard, for example, in the voice of Rabbi Issachar ben Mordecai ibn Susan, famous for his activity in Safed and later in Thessaloniki, an author of a *sharh* on the Torah:

the great Gaon, R. Saadia . . . compiled a commentary . . . Reading it was difficult for some people speaking Arabic . . . and even teachers found it bothersome . . . It was eventually almost forgotten, so that even their Torah scholars were not properly familiar with even single Torah pericope in Arabic . . . I swear I heard from a great veteran scholar how this situation developed. "We do not benefit from R. Saadia's translation because we do not understand its language," I was told by this leader of great community. And if this is his opinion, what can we say of the others? . . . On the other hand our brethren, our Spanish teachers, whose teachers teach them Torah word for word as it is written in their Ladino tongue, and they know both. They have only few unlearned amongst them, except for the *conversos* who have only recently returned to Judaism, and they too have produced a number of wise and educated scholars . . . because they were familiar with the language in which Torah was studied.<sup>63</sup>

In Sephardic studies there is a consensus that in the epoch of CP there was no universally accepted authoritative Torah version in Ladino. Instead, numerous oral versions, unstable and ever-changing by their very nature were produced and occasionally written down. They scarcely had an authorship, since every qualified male member of the community was supposed to be able to produce such, and could be easily challenged, as every oral performer/composer had his own slightly different understanding of the source. They were, however, modernized when needed, and have indeed survived until modern times.<sup>64</sup>

As every product of chronologically remote oral culture, medieval and early modern Torah translations are not immediately accessible for the researcher. Yet the characteristics of those that were committed to writing or to print bear witness to the oral mechanisms of their generation. In particular, the observations of

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63. Published selectively in David S. Sassoon, *Ohel David: Descriptive Catalogue of the Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscripts in the Sassoon Library* (2 vols.; London: Oxford University Press, 1932) 1:63–66; transl. by Hacker, "Intellectual Activity," 108.

64. See David M. Bunis, "Translating from the Head and from the Heart: the Essentially Oral Nature of the Ladino Bible-Translation Tradition," in *Hommage à Haïm Vidal Sephiha* (ed. W. Busse and M.-C. Varol-Bornes; Berne: Peter Lang, 1996), 337–57.

L. Amigo Espada on the exegetical character of the Ladino text of CP show it to be a typical spontaneous translation:

Los traductores han conservado su libertad y creatividad frente a la tradición judía y frente a las versiones castellanas ya existentes. Su actitud ha sido bastante ecléctica. Conocedores de la exégesis, han traducido cada pasaje según su buen entender, sin tener demasiado en cuenta las autoridades. La tradición es algo consustancial en ellos, y no necesitaban estar consultando a cada momento las diversas interpretaciones, que debían conocer de memoria, aunque no siempre supiesen de donde procedían.

The translators preserved their freedom and creativity both against Jewish tradition and already existing Spanish translations. Their activity was quite eclectic. Being knowledgeable in exegesis, they translated each passage according to their common sense, without considering the authorities too much. Translation was something inherent to them, and they did not need to consult every time different interpretations, which they remembered by heart, often without knowing their origin.<sup>65</sup>

A similar opinion about CP and post-exilic Ladino versions in general is held by O. Schwarzwald, who insists that the latter were not based on already-existing texts brought by the Spanish emigrants to their new homelands, but were new compositions developed on traditional principles.<sup>66</sup>

The very juxtaposition of the Greek translation with the Ladino one, as well as the fact that neither of them was paired with Saadia Gaon or Jacob Tavis, is already indicative of their typological similarity.<sup>67</sup> Both of these latter texts were attributed to prominent scholars, while the Ladino and Greek texts were not. Printing on cheaper material might also show the less-authoritative character of CP translations in comparison with Judeo-Arabic and Judeo-Persian ones. Thus, it is possible to suggest that Greek CP was an example of an oral translation, or, as M. Banitt put it, a “popular version” (*laaz haam*) or a “common version” (*laaz haolam*) normally recorded only in the form of glossaries.<sup>68</sup> As with every

65. Amigo Espada, *Pentateuco de Constantinopla*, 237.

66. Ora Schwarzwald (Rodrigue), “Proper Names in Ladino Translations: Problem of Source and Jewish Identity,” *Peamim* 84 (2000): 66–77, esp. 67 (Hebrew).

67. The researchers disagree about the place and time of composition of the Judeo-Persian translation (see Lazar, “Judeo-Spanish Translations,” 345; Uriel Heyd, “Moses Hamon, Chief Jewish Physician to Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent,” *Oriens* 16 (1963): 152–70), but nobody seems to question the fact that it was firmly associated with the name rather than being anonymous.

68. Menahem Bannit, “L’Etude des glossaires bibliques des Juifs de France au moyen âge,” *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 2 (1968): 188–210. For comparable Greek glossaries see Nicholas R. M. de Lange, *Greek Jewish Texts from Cairo Genizah* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996) 79–84, 155–63.

anonymous *laaz*, CP was not associated with any authority, or rather might be associated with too many authorities at once. This type of Greek text would leave plenty of space for various equivalents inherited from Byzantine and ultimately Hellenistic tradition, as well as those invented *ad hoc* or even reintroduced through contacts with Christian tradition.

Anonymity of Greek and Ladino texts would make sense for yet another reason. As we have already seen, the didactic superiority of a modern translation could not be divorced from its suspicious novelty. The conservative part of the rabbinic establishment would oppose each new version as yet another “disgrace.” On the other hand, intellectuals, differently motivated, would like to test or even to confront it, because publication of a book in the mid-sixteenth century Ottoman capital was an important event often accompanied by public polemics. Some scholars were intimidated by this atmosphere to such extent that they even considered renouncing their intellectual pursuits.<sup>69</sup> Given such social climate, no author would like to expose himself to virtually endless showers of criticism, since too many places in the Pentateuch are open to various interpretations, and almost everybody was sure to have his favorite explanation and defend it vigorously. Dishonor loomed over sophisticated exegetes, but also *a fortiori* over those who dared to pronounce their opinions on the *peshat*. Remaining anonymous was by far a wiser option allowing the safeguard of personal opinions, however eclectic.

Our discussion of CP in light of its colophon would not be complete without commenting on the officially proclaimed purpose of the edition, to serve as a language aid: להועיל לנערי בני ישראל ולשונם תמהר לדבר צחות. Didactic activity was very much a part of the self-image of Soncino.<sup>70</sup> Throughout his life Gershom Soncino perceived education as a major social function performed by printers and was understandably very proud of it, often mentioning it in his colophons. While still a teenager, he composed a manual *Introductio perbrevis ad hebraicam linguam* (1501), further reprinted by Aldus Manutius.<sup>71</sup> In that epoch, knowledge of language was perceived quite mechanically as knowledge of individual words in their precise context rather than an analytical or productive ability. Dictionaries, or rather, in modern terms, contextual glossaries, were the main tools for Hebrew study, certainly the most effective of them, and frequently the only tools available. In agreement with the spirit of the time, Gershom endeavored to produce didactic aids that would give their users the precise picture of each and

69. Hacker, “Intellectual Activity,” 98–101.

70. On didactic texts, mainly in Romance languages, printed by G. Soncino, and their importance for the studies of educational practice see Ennio Sandal, “I libri scolastici,” *L'attività editoriale di Gershom Soncino, 1502–1527: Atti del Convegno (Soncino, 17 settembre 1995)* (ed. G. Tamani; Soncino: Edizioni dei Soncino, 1997), 99–109.

71. This work was also reprinted under the title *Introductio utilissima hebraice discere cupientibus*, while Gershom in his edition of 1510 refers to it as *Introductio ad litteras hebraicas*.

every word's meaning. Enlightening insight into this type of instruction is found in the introduction to the multilingual edition of Psalms (1510):

Deinceps psalorum codicem hebraice, graece, et latine . . . excusum expectato, a divo Hieronymo de verbo ad verbum secundum veritatem hebraicam traductum, additis nonnullis nostris glossis, loca plurima a scriptoribus indoc-tis corrupta aperientibus. Adde et lector candidissime, hic psalorum codex poterit tibi ad linguam hebraicam, graecam et latinam *pro diccionario succurrere*. (emphasis mine – J.K.)<sup>72</sup>

Having complemented himself for the technically difficult achievement of printing in three different scripts, Gershom adds the final and weighty praise: the book is a highly usable study aid. It is worth perhaps mentioning here that L. Amigo Espada, who was hardly aware of the above passage, in the concluding chapter of his book characterised CP as “continuous glossary of Biblical text” (“un glosario continuado del texto bíblico”) and “a most useful instrument for the analysis of Hebrew text” (“un instrumento utilísimo para el análisis del texto hebreo”).<sup>73</sup> The above characteristics are equally applicable to the Greek counterpart of CP. Indeed, Eliezer Soncino could not have implemented the didactic ideas of his father more precisely.

#### 4. SUMMARY

Should we rely on the published findings of biblio-historians, CP is to be defined not as a reworking of another edition, but as an edition on its own right. It is unlikely that it was initiated or sponsored by Ottoman authorities, but must have originated as an answer to the internal demand of Constantinople communities, who wished to provide basic education to their younger members. The book's format and script suit this purpose perfectly.

If any translations of *haftaroth* and *megilloth* existed, they were printed to be sold as a separate installment. However, it is highly probable that they were not executed because of the publisher's death.

On the basis of available evidence, there is no reason to suspect that the 1547 edition is a printed version of a manuscript cherished for its antiquity, or even of a recent manuscript that was deemed to represent some important interpretative tradition. Editorial work, if any, was minimal and not viewed as particularly valuable.

All the above considerations permit us to place both Ladino and Greek texts in the category of *laazim*, that is, popular versions, which functioned mostly orally, but could be committed to writing should the need arise. In all probability,

72. Manzoni, *Sefer ger-sham*, III: 257.

73. Amigo Espada, *Pentateuco de Constantinopla*, 235.

both Greek and Ladino texts were created *ad hoc* on the basis of oral performance, although the use of translation aids (e.g., glossaries and continuous texts) during their production cannot be excluded. Greek oral tradition and its relevant translation aids might have integrated the echoes of ancient versions, including the LXX and Hexapla.

Further investigation of the *raison d'être* and the background of CP is a demanding task that will require the cooperation of scholars from many disciplines. First and foremost, a biblio-historical description of CP is needed. It should include full collation of the existing copies and establishment of *variae lectiones* in all the texts, as well as the reconstruction of the order in which the copies were produced.

It would be useful to check whether the version of Rashi's text that appears in CP coincides primarily with the Sephardic tradition represented in the Híjar and Lisbon editions, or with the Franko-Ashkenazic version found in the earlier prints of Rome and Bologna etc.<sup>74</sup> This information would be of value, since it may provide some clue about the background and identity of the polyglot editor.

A revision of D. C. Hesselning's edition may enrich our understanding of the basic Greek *laaz* and its relationship to earlier *laaz* materials. The next stage should be a philological comparison between Ladino and Greek translations, and the level of *peshat* might be of particular interest. Students of rabbinics would undoubtedly find it helpful to assess the relationship of Greek and Ladino translation on other levels of exegesis. Taken together, the results of these inquiries will reveal a fine interplay between tradition and innovation in the fascinating cultural milieu of early Ottoman Constantinople.<sup>75</sup>

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74. Cf. Yeshayahu Sonne, "On Textual Criticism of the Rashi's Commentary on the Torah," *HUCA* 15 (1940): 1–56.

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Melvin K. H. Peters

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Atlanta

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