

The Importance of Transliteration in the Hebrew Amadís de Gaula

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Abstract: This article inquires into the specifics of transliteration in the 16th century Hebrew translation of Amadís de Gaula (Book I). The Spanish original version was considered a bestseller in the 16th century, it was translated into several European languages, and later became one of the main inspirations for Miguel de Cervantes' masterpiece Don Quixote. The Hebrew version of the first book of Amadís de Gaula was produced around the third decade of the 16th century by a Sephardic Jew, Yaakov de Algaba, and printed by Eliezer Soncino in the Ottoman Empire. The unique function of transliteration in the Hebrew Amadís – specifically, its rare employment in the text – indicates a translational tension: violation of the norms of the target (i.e. Jewish) culture on the one hand and preservation of its contemporary literary and linguistic restraints on the other hand. A close analysis of this phenomenon, I argue, may shed a light on our understanding of the developments of the Hebrew language in the 19th and 20th centuries, as well as the transition of Hebrew literary centers from Europe to Israel after World War II.

Introduction: The Hebrew Language in Europe and Beyond

The Second World War is known as a crucial milestone in Jewish history. The devastating consequences of the Holocaust for Jewish communities in Europe jeopardized their very foundations and marked a new chapter in their demography. In many European countries Jewish communities lost the majority of their members, including spiritual leaders and intellectual elites. Jews from various countries and distinct ethnic groups settled in shattered post-war communities gradually taking control of what was once a prospering Jewish life. According to Bernard Wasserstein, in 1937 the Jewish population in Europe consisted of 9,648,100 people (viii). In 1946 only 3,898,350 were left and by 1994 the number declined almost by half (1,980,000) (Wasserstein viii). The sluggish resurrection

of Jewish existence in Europe coincided with the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. The stabilization of the latter inspired some scholars to label that new era the end of Jewish Diaspora.[1]

Among these drastic transformations of Jewish communities in Europe, their language of communication changed dramatically. Up until World War II (WWII), Hebrew served as an ethnic language for Jews around the world and was used for a wide variety of publications such as original literary works, local newspapers and magazines, and translations. In Vienna, for example, the community of Sephardic Jews, which existed there since 1730, established its own printing business for local demands in Ladino and Hebrew and exported books in both of these languages (Studemund-Halévy 437-8).

Although Hebrew literary centers in Europe – which consisted of Jewish printers, publishing houses, newspapers, magazines, authors, and translators – showed substantial signs of deterioration even before WWII, it was only after the Holocaust that the Hebrew language in Europe became officially minor, not to say marginal in its cultural sense. The need to translate foreign texts to Hebrew vanished completely and shifted from the European political entities where Jews lived to the state of Israel, which became one of the main host countries for European Jews after the war.[2] In the state of Israel Hebrew strengthened its status as a vernacular language and a diverse translation activity, including of *belle-lettres*, reached unprecedented levels in Jewish history.[3]

When examining cultural effects of major events in Jewish history, we should bear in mind the expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492. The subsequent collective trauma brought about a major change in literary production by the expelled Jewish communities. Like the post-Holocaust trauma, the 1492 expulsion forcefully put many Jews in a situation that centuries later would be described as that of “displaced persons”. [4] Despite the expulsion, in their correspondence Spanish Jews still regarded Spain (*Sepharad*) as their genuine homeland, conceptually converting the “Land of Israel,” or Zion, to a mythic native soil, one that should be aspired to return to only upon the arrival of the Messiah. Unlike diasporas today, most Spanish Jews in the 16th century had a new host country as their political entity, Spain as their cultural entity, and the messianic Zion to imagine and yearn for.

After the expulsion, many Sephardic Jews decided to migrate to the Ottoman Empire, which offered them relative freedom and autonomous means to conduct their lives, mostly so that they could expand their commercial activities so much desired by the Ottoman authorities. Despite the sudden break from their second homeland, Spanish Jews continued to maintain not only commercial contacts with Spain, but long-lasting cultural ties as well.[5] As part of preserving their traditions, such as reestablishing their former congregations in their new diaspora in the Ottoman Empire, preserving (in some cases) the names of the former local places of origin (Aragon, Castilla, etc.), and passing on to their offspring the languages and dialects of Spain, they also continued to read and admire Spanish *belle-lettres*, some of them in the original language, others in Hebrew translations.[6]

Among the texts translated to Hebrew in the 16 th century was *Amadís de Gaula*,^[7] the most famous and representative work of the Spanish books of chivalry, a literary genre that shook the 16 th century book industry in Spain and other European countries, such as Portugal, Italy, France, Netherlands, England, and German speaking regions, and became, not so long after the invention of the printing machine, a necessary commodity for printers and book consumers alike.^[8] Like other books of this kind, the text deals with a Christian knight who fights against injustices in the confines of a Christian feudal society in order to gain fame and eventually the hand of his beloved.^[9]

In this article I focus only on one aspect of that unique Hebrew translation, i.e., *transliteration*. I propose that the transliteration in the Hebrew *Amadís* is much more than merely a technical tool used by the translator and that it has implications for our understanding of the later development of the Hebrew language in the 19 th and 20 th centuries. I argue that we could consider that translation also as an experiment to violate and, at the same time, to preserve the existing literary and linguistic norms of the time. I will support my argument with Claudia Rosenzweig's brief analysis of a 16 th century's Yiddish translation of *Buovo D'Antona*, which is contemporary to the publication of the Hebrew *Amadís* and pertains, by and large, to the same literary sphere.

***Amadís de Gaula* in the “Original” and in Translation**

Amadís de Gaula, originally written in prose back in the 14 th century by various anonymous writers, reappeared in Spain thanks to Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo, an official of the city of Zaragoza, who – as he admits in the preface to the book – deliberately “corrected” it from another text, and in so doing deleted and added many words.^[10] The best-known printed Spanish edition was published sometime between the late 15 th century and the early 16 th century. The oldest and complete print version of the first four books, which have survived in a unique copy, is dated 1508.^[11] *Amadís de Gaula* is widely considered the most popular and, no doubt, successful bestseller of the 16 th century. Copies of its prototype (i.e., parts 1-4) were bound together as one book and sold to book merchants across Europe and even shipped to the New World (see Leonard).^[12] From 1540 onwards, it was translated to several European languages.^[13] *Amadís de Gaula* was also among the pioneers in the 16 th century book industry in setting new standards for what we would today describe as entertainment literature. Its success encouraged other authors (Spanish, French, Italian, and German), even long after Montalvo's death, to create continuations of the adventures of Amadís' descendants.^[14]

Unlike the Spanish *Amadís*, the Hebrew *Amadís* was considered by some as a sort of adaptation of the Spanish edition and by others as the oldest and most accurate existing version of the original work.^[15] It was translated by Rabbi Yaacov ben Moshe de Algaba – we know practically nothing about his life but his name, his profession (he was a physician), and that he was most likely a Sephardic Jew.^[16] It seems that the incentive to publish *Amadís* came from Eliezer Soncino, the printer and publisher of that translation, a descendant of a renowned family of printers originally from Germany whose main printing activity concentrated in Italy. Gershon, Eliezer's father, became known in various Italian towns and cities (Fano, Pesaro, Ortonomare, and Rimini) as a printer not

only of religious Hebrew books, but also of a great variety of around hundred books in Latin and Greek. Due to a legal dispute with the Italian authorities, in 1526 Eliezer's father and his family had to leave Italy for Salonika. Gershom could find new business opportunities in his new diasporic land. In the 16th century the Ottoman Empire was considered, right after Venice and Italy, the most important source of the Hebrew book's industry. In 1530, Gershom left Salonika to Constantinople where he died in 1534. Aside from many prayer books, the Hebrew Bible, and exegetical literature, Gershom published books of grammar, philosophy, and even what was then considered entertainment literature. Eliezer, who was gradually taking control over the family business since 1526, apparently followed his father's footsteps regarding the risks of publishing entertainment literature in Hebrew: some time between 1534 and 1540 he published the first book of the Hebrew *Amadís de Gaula*.^[17]

Unfortunately, and unlike other European initiatives to publish the whole sequence of *Amadís* books, the parallel Hebrew enterprise seems to have stopped abruptly after the publication of the first book for reasons that are not entirely clear today.^[18] The importance of this Hebrew translation is twofold. On the one hand, it testifies to the fact that Jews were indeed consumers of European entertainment literature, even years after the 1492 expulsion. On the other hand, it also shows that the Hebrew language was not merely employed for religious purposes, but also frequently used by Jews in their daily activities. Based on substantial evidence, today we know that chivalry books, abundant with bloodshed battles and implicit and explicit sexual allusions, interested Jews in Europe ever since the Middle Ages and throughout the Early Modern Era.^[19]

Translating a Spanish Book of Chivalry into Hebrew

Most of the Hebrew translations of *belle-lettres* from the Middle Ages were produced by anonymous writers who usually kept their activities as inconspicuous as possible in order not to irritate the religious authorities who could condemn their work as immoral and decadent. In the Early Modern Era, owing to the popularization of the printing machine, translators had no choice but to expose their identity and faced severe criticism. In this respect, the Hebrew *Amadís* was no exception.^[20] Regardless, the Hebrew *Amadís* was not only approved by the "sages" (*hahamim*, i.e., an unidentified rabbinical authority), but also granted the sole privilege to be printed and sold for 25 years – an indication of the commercial potentiality of the book among the dispersed Jewish communities (Ashkenazi, *Un Nuevo aporte* 393-4).^[21]

The main obstacle in translating *Amadís* was not the Jewish authorities, but rather the total linguistic imbalance between the source language (Spanish) and the target language (Hebrew). In the course of the 16th century accelerated emancipation of many vernacular languages took place in Europe. Spanish, French, and German, among other languages, gradually freed themselves from the monopoly of Latin as the dominant written language for literary and scientific texts, and so a rapid process of neologization began. In fact, other European (French, Italian, and German) translators of *Amadís* from the same

period (circa 1540) used their translations to manifestly express the richness of their own national languages and thus helped light the spirit of nationalism in their respective countries.[22]

Meanwhile, the stagnated Hebrew language showed no signs of a meaningful transformation towards revival. In fact, substantial changes in the Hebrew language occur only from the 19 th century onward, a period commonly known today as the “Jewish Enlightenment”. Up until then Hebrew was roughly trapped in the same archaic linguistic patterns which governed the books of the Bible. The vocabulary, for most part, was limited and out of date, the expressions were worn out and overused, and, most importantly, every word, idiom or expression was bound to trigger among the recipients the inevitable, although in most cases unintentional, associations with the stories of the Bible, specific verses in the Bible, prayer books or exegetical literature.

In other words, any Jewish author or translator in the 16 th century, was compelled to use these archaic linguistic patterns no matter what he was writing, be it a letter to a friend or a family member, an original literary work or simply a translation from a foreign language, which the Jews considered the least admired form of expression in Hebrew. Thus, the linguistic patterns in use could not serve the translator of a literary work in his purpose to bring about a foreign text to his readers. He never simply transmitted a foreign story: in most cases, he gave his readers two stories, the foreign one and the biblical one. His vocabulary barely signified new meanings of the 16 th century reality such as reflected in the reworked text of the Spanish *Amadís*, no matter where Jews lived.

How could a Hebrew translator living in the 16 th century, equipped with this archaic linguistic tool box, deal with the rich expressions and concepts of the Spanish chivalry literature, with the Spanish regal ideology (which, as we know today, is implied in the text), with its disguised and explicit humor, and with other subtle nuances? Could the translator, Rabbi Yaacov ben Moshe de Algaba actually understand the textual intention he was trans-converting? A 16 th century Jewish translator was compelled to cope with three different linguistic levels: the language of the source text (Spanish, French, etc.), the language of the target text (i.e., the Hebrew language influenced by the geographical space where the translator resided, and therefore *different* from the Hebrew employed by Jews in other geographic locations), and a supra-language (i.e., the language of the sacred books, which was always there, looking from above as a severe linguistic vigilance, silently hardening and censoring the work of the Jewish translator).

Strategic Use of Transliteration

One of the effective ways to successfully overcome the enormous gaps between a relatively well developed European vernacular, such as the medieval and early modern era Spanish, and a stagnated Hebrew—which was mostly and naturally used for liturgical purposes – was to employ transliteration whenever it was necessary, namely whenever no Hebrew parallel was familiar to the translator. In several Hebrew translations of that time we find terms or expressions from different languages, such as Spanish, French, German, Arabic, and even indigenous languages from the New World, for instance Nahautl and Quechua.

All these borrowings were kept in the texts intact, transcribed with Hebrew alphabet.[23] Although in the 16 th century Hebrew was not considered a minor language, mainly because of its reputation as sacred, its archaic and limited vocabulary was certainly characterizing it as minor.

Contrary to the 16 th century, transliteration today in any language is a deliberate act taken by the translator in order to add a desired and intentional *strangeness* to the text, and in so doing to offer to its recipients the “closest” sensation of its original character. Many translators today tend to “spice” their text with foreign words, and editors approve it, as long as the target culture is self-confident in its linguistic strength and accustomed to this type of foreign “infiltration”. [24] A considerable amount of transliteration in a text may not only show the translator’s inclination toward the original language of the text, but also suggest that the translator deliberately transmits his translation toward an imagined group of recipients who could easily understand the meaning of the transliterated words. This group, in the case of the Hebrew *Amadís* , consisted of former Spanish Jews.

The fact that the Jewish translator worked with a copy of a Spanish edition of *Amadís* is clear from his constant use of Spanish toponyms and anthroponyms. Another example of the translator’s inclination towards the Spanish is his recurring use of the expression “horse’s chair” (כסא של הסוס). Algaba quite surprisingly chose to translate it according to the Spanish expression “silla del caballo” כסא של הסוס (horse’s chair), despite the fact that a much more adequate Hebrew term אוקף (ukaf) was already well known in the 13 th century. It is in this light that we should examine the Hebrew *Amadís*, since its translator barely used transliteration in his text, and only in one case was compelled to transliterate in Hebrew the Spanish word *espuela* (spur), to which he could find no Hebrew equivalent. On other occasions, whenever this word appears in the text, he translates it as “the iron of the horse” or “the iron”, as if he were saying to his imaginary recipients: “You already know what I mean.”

How to explain the reluctance of the Jewish translator – and most likely also his editor – to preserve as much as he could the limited Hebrew vocabulary in the process of translation? The answer may be found in the translation of another chivalric text, though not into Hebrew, but into another Jewish diasporic language, Yiddish. In 1507 Eliyahu ben Asher ha-Levi Ashkenazi published his translation of the famous Italian chivalric poem *Buovo d’Antona* in a manuscript form. Thirty-four years later the same Jewish translator decided it was time to publish his translation in a printed edition (Isny 1541). While the manuscript version was characterized by many Italianisms and intended for Ashkenazi Jews in Italy, the printed version deliberately omitted many of them and those that were kept were translated into Yiddish in a special glossary. According to Rosenzweig:

The translator must have thought that, once printed, his book would have a broader audience; not only in Italy, but also north of the Alps, and that he should therefore *revise the language to make it intelligible outside Italy as well*. In making this decision he

anticipated what would become the rule, before the 19th century, for printed Yiddish books: the use of Western Yiddish, a standard written language that was understood throughout the Ashkenazi world. (64; emphasis mine)

Algaba's refraining from using transliteration in his translation and yet his clear affiliation to the Spanish language are, in my view, an indication of his intention to actually restrain himself from his inclination toward the Spanish, not so much because he was afraid of any censoring measures that could be taken against him by the rabbinical authority, but because he was thinking about his potential diasporic audience. He was aiming at standardizing his text into a common denominator for all Jewish people. The recurrent use of transliteration, which represented localism and always left marks in the translated text, was in this case unnecessary and even undesirable, and was therefore limited to the required minimum.

Conclusion

In his article "The position of Translated Literature Within the Literary Polysystem" (1990), Itamar Even Zohar refers to the changing role of translation from a marginal position within the literary system to a primary one:

In any case, as translational activity participates, when it assumes a primary position, in the process of creating new models, the translator's main concern is not to like for ready-made models in his home stock, into which the original texts could be transferable; instead he is prepared *to violate* the home conventions. Under such conditions the chances that a translation will be close to the original in terms of adequacy (in other words a reproduction of the dominant textual relations of the original) are greater than otherwise. (25; emphasis mine)

In this respect, the Hebrew *Amadís* was still located in the marginal sphere. It was most likely produced for commercial reasons, but when examining it in a broader social perspective, it serves as an example of a dual intrinsic force that operated in the post-expulsion Jewish society. That subversive force strove, on the one hand, to open up Hebrew literature to new literary genres, contemporary writing styles, filling the artistic void of the secular literature in Hebrew, and identifying with the daily concerns of a former homeland (Spain) and, on the other hand, was compelled to preserve the ethnic heritage and both its literary and linguistic norms. The Hebrew *Amadís* reflects a translational tension to standardize the Hebrew language on the practical level as a first step towards its nationalization. In other words, the Hebrew *Amadís* was an experiment not only regarding the readiness of Hebrew book consumers to accept a European bestseller, but also regarding their willingness to gradually abandon their linguistic restraints in Hebrew. Despite the constant use of archaic biblical patterns in the Hebrew *Amadís*, it can be seen as an innovative venture. It is the notion of transliteration employed in *Amadís* or, to be exact, the surprising lack of it, that indicates its binary nature. The standardized Hebrew in the translated text almost entirely silenced the foreign voice of the source version and, at the same time, opened the sacred tongue to foreign literature.

If transliteration during the Middle Ages and throughout the Early Modern era was not only a translator's tool, but also an implicit stance of the receiving culture regarding its diasporic situation, by the end of the 19th century, and especially in the first three decades of the 20th century, the same tool changed its role and position. Transliteration in Hebrew translations was used more frequently and deliberately to openly enrich the mostly tabooed Hebrew language. Moreover, translation endeavors of *belle-lettres*, both in Europe and Palestine (before the establishment of the state of Israel), flooded the Hebrew book market.[25] It was a clear indication of the strength of a language that had successfully transformed from a mainly anachronistic written medium to a modern one.

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1. See, e.g., Wasserstein 1996; Aviv and Shneer 2005.

2. For data on immigration to Israel from European countries after WWII by period and country of birth see Wasserstein 92.

3. Shavit completely negates the claim that the Holocaust was the main reason for the fall of Hebrew literary centers in Europe. She claims that in the late 1930s the dominant center of the Hebrew culture was in Palestine and not in Europe, as was commonly thought, and that its hegemony was already then unshakeable (Shavit, “ On the fall ” 46; see also Shavit and Shavit 1977). The National Library of Israel has recently uploaded on its website (web.nli.il) an updated database of all publishing houses of books , newspapers, periodicals, etc., starting from the initial days of publishing activity in the land of Israel (in the years prior to the establishment of the state of Israel and afterwards). The database contains information about more than 1500 publishing houses, some of them still functioning today. This figure outnumbers the total sum of Hebrew publishing houses in the entire Jewish history.

4. According to Wasserstein: “Displaced persons’ were formally defined by the International Refugee Organization (IRO), formed in 1947, as ‘victims...of the Nazi or fascist...or...quisling regimes...[or] persons who were considered refugees before the outbreak of the second world war, for reasons of race, religion, nationality, or political opinion...who [have] been deported from, or obliged to leave [their] country of nationality or of former habitual residence” (8).

5. According to Sheffi: “[...] the number of Jews actually expelled is uncertain. Some claim that only a few tens of thousands were forced to leave, whereas the more extravagant estimates put the number at some 130,000 households, or about 800,000 people. Modern researchers, however, have settled on 70,000-200,000 as a more likely range, and one that indicates the limited extent of the operation.” (82)

6. For more information on the Spanish literary works that were read by Sephardic Jews outside Spain see Yahalom 1986.

7. The following is a brief sketch of the plot taken from Thomas (1969): “Amadís is born of the secret union of Perion, King of Gaul, and the Princess, Elisena. With the help of her confidante Darioleta, the Princess conceals the birth of her child, and to avoid the censure of the world places him in an ark which is launched on a stream and carried out to sea. A Scottish knight who is crossing from ‘Little Britain’ rescues the infant, takes him to Scotland, and rears him under the name ‘Child of the Sea.’ Transferred while still a boy to the court of the King of Scotland, the foundling there meets Oriana, the young daughter of Lisuarte, King of Great Britain.” (Thomas 44-45) . Amadís then falls in love with Oriana. Thomas continues: “This provides the motive for the rest of the story. The obscure Child of the Sea, to win his mistress’s esteem, and to justify himself for placing his heart on one who ‘excelled all others in goodness, and beauty and parentage’ gets himself knighted by unknowing and unknown his own father, Perion, who had meantime married Amadís’s mother Elisena and had another son Galaor, now grown up. The remainder of the book centres round the achievements of these brother-knights Amadís and Galaor, who typify respectively the constant and the fickle lover. Amadís in various encounters proves himself the best knight in the world, and fighting for King Perion slays the giant King Abies of Ireland. After the battle, by means of a ring, Amadís is recognised by King Perion as his son, and now seems in a position to claim his mistress and close the book with an appropriate ceremony. But that would entail a sacrifice of nine-tenths of the story. After a series of adventures by different knights, King Lisuarte is deprived of his kingdom through the machinations of Arcalaus the wicked enchanter, and both he and his daughter are taken prisoners. Lisuarte is restored by Galaor; Amadís rescues Oriana, and from this rescue springs a secret son Esplandian, the hero of a later story for it was essential that these heroes should be ignorant of their lofty parentage till they had proved their worth. Here again an opportunity of ending the story is avoided, and the first book closes with a few miscellaneous adventures, including the restoration of the Princess Briolanja to her dead father’s kingdom, and her passion for Amadís a minor incident which has been tampered with, and so has acquired importance for the history of the text. In the second book Amadís obtains possession of an enchanted island, called the ‘Firm Island’ having overcome its spells by virtue of being the most loyal lover in the world. As a set-off to this he temporarily loses Oriana, who dismisses him in a fit of jealousy whereupon he changes his name to Beltenebros and retires to a life of penance on the Pena Pobre a course which Don Quixote consciously imitated in the Sierra Morena. Soon Amadís is forgiven, and again all is well with the world. But not for long. Two wicked counsellors poison King Lisuarte’s mind against Amadís and his companions, who are driven from the court. The third book tells of discord in Lisuarte’s court, of the early years of Esplandian, and of the adventures of Amadís as the ‘Knight of the Green Sword,’ and afterwards the ‘Greek

Knight,' in Bohemia, Turkey, Greece, and the Devil's Island, where he slays a fiery monster. The main theme advances again towards the end of this book, when Lisuarte hands over Oriana, much against her will, to the ambassadors of the Emperor of Rome, whom she is to marry. While the ambassadors are conveying Oriana to Rome by sea, Amadís, back from his eastern travels, opportunely appears at the head of a powerful fleet and carries off his mistress to his stronghold in the 'Firm Island.' At the opening of the fourth book the breach between Lisuarte and Amadís is complete. Each of them summons his allies for the ensuing struggle, in which Lisuarte is worsted. The death of the Roman Emperor in battle removed the chief cause of the quarrel, so that when the already weakened Lisuarte is unexpectedly attacked by forces stirred up against him by the wicked enchanter Arcalaus, Amadís turns his army against his former opponent's new enemy, whom he completely overthrows. Lisuarte, moved by this generosity and the newly acquired knowledge that Amadís and Oriana are already the parents of a very promising son, consents to the young couple being publicly united. All the interested parties repair to the 'Firm Island,' and there Oriana, having successfully proved the enchanted 'Arch of True Lovers' and the 'Forbidden Chamber' an adventure reserved for the fairest and most faithful woman in the world is married to Amadís amidst general rejoicing. After an anti-climax of several chapters, the story ends with the enchantment and imprisonment of King Lisuarte, which provides an excuse for a sequel." (Thomas 45-47)

8. In my dissertation (Ashkenazi, *Traslatio y/o transversus* 2013) I demonstrated that although the text was translated from Spanish, it was not produced from the 1508 Montalvo edition, but from a similar though not identical version that was probably well known in Italy in the third decade of the 16th century.

9. For details on the genre of the Spanish books of chivalry see, for instance, Eisenberg 1982.

10. An excerpt from Montalvo's preface: "I corrected it from the old originals, which were corrupt and badly composed in ancient fashion through the fault of different and bad writers, deleting many superfluous words, and adding others of a more polished and elegant style, relating to chivalry and the deeds thereof" (42).

11. For further information about this unique edition from 1508 and its preservation over time see West.

12. In spite several attempts by the Spanish royal authorities to ban the selling of *Amadís de Gaula* in the Americas they were all to no avail. Leonard referred in his book, *Books of the Brave* (1992), to the royal efforts to prevent the selling of these books: " The most famous of these royal decrees and the one so often quoted with damning effect by historians is the instruction of the Queen, acting as sovereign in the absence of her imperial lord, to the House of Trade at Seville, and dated April 4, 1531. It reads: ' I have been informed that many books of fiction in the vernacular which are unrelated to religion such as Amadís and others of this sort go to the Indies; since this is bad practice for the Indians and something with which it is not well for them to be concerned or read, I command you, therefore, from this time henceforth neither to permit nor allow any

person at all to take any books of fiction and of secular matters there, but only those relating to the Christian religion and morality upon which the above-mentioned Indians and other inhabitants of the Indies may practice the art of reading, and with which they may busy themselves; no other kind is to be allowed. Done at Ocaña, April 4, 1531. I, the Queen. ' [...] Yet in the instructions which the Queen issued to the first viceroy of Mexico, Antonio de Mendoza, under date of July 14, 1536, there is clear evidence that only five years later her earlier banning of ' Amadís and others of this sort ' was so ineffective as to require repetition. " (81)

13. The earliest translations of the Spanish text, apart from the Hebrew translation, are the following: the French translation by Herberay de Essarts (1540); the Italian version by Roseo da Fabriano (1546); and a much later German version published in 1569 by an anonymous translator.

14. The continuations of the *Amadís* series were written in various languages and by various authors. The Spanish series consist of eight books while the remaining parts (24 in total) were written in Italian, French and German.

15. Braga (1915), for instance, claimed that the Hebrew *Amadís* was an adaptation, while Piccus (1984) argued that it most likely followed a pre-Montalvo version of the text, and therefore preceded all other known versions of that book.

16. The data regarding Algaba appears on the title page of the translation. For more information about the etymology of his surname see Ashkenazi 2013.

17. For further reading on the Soncino's family, see Haberman 1933 and Marx 1969. Among the literary works published in Gershom Soncino's press were: *Mashal hakadmoni (The Fable of the Ancients)* by Isaac ben Solomon ibn Sahula, *Ma ḥ berot Immanuel Haromi (The Cantos of Immanuel of Rome)* by Immanuel ben Shmuel ben Yekutiel, who was influenced in his work by the great Florentine poet Dante Alighieri, and *Melitsat Efer ve-Dina (The tale of Efer and Dina)*, an allegory about pleasure by Don Vidal Benveniste.

18. One of the reasons may have been a total failure of that translation in the book market, although there is no evidence to assume it commercially failed.

19. For example the unfinished Hebrew translation, *Mort Artus*, from the 13th century, telling the story of King Arthur's death. For further information on that Hebrew translation see Leviant 1969. The name *Amadís* appears regularly in popular Ladino ballads. For further information see Armistead 2011.

20. See, for example, the explicit criticism that was raised against *Amadís* by Menachem di Lonzano: " Menachem di Lonzano criticises the spreading of the novel among the Jewish public in his poem *Tova Tochachat*, which describes social life in the Holy Land in the sixteenth century. He complains of the materialism of the Jews, who even on the Sabbath do not concern themselves with Jewish learning, and have no leader or spiritual guide to direct them along the true path:

And let them not pay heed to empty words and a tale
Like *Amadís and Palmerin*...
To accounts of wars of nations against nations,
And captains and knights and archery.” (Malachi, 92; my emphasis)

21. Nevertheless, it is unclear whether this Hebrew translation was in fact a bestseller on the Hebrew book markets.

22. See, for example, Rothstein 2006.

23. One Hebrew translation from the 16 th century that manifestly transliterated samples of indigenous languages of the New World was *Sepher ha-India ha-hadashave sepher Fernando Cortés* by Yosef Ha-Kohen. The text was translated to Hebrew between 1556 and 1557 in manuscript format.

24. “In source text to be translated translators are presented with aspects of the source culture that are unfamiliar to the receiving audience – elements of the material culture (such as foods, tools, garments), social structures (including customs and law), features of the natural world (weather conditions, plants, animals), and the like; such features of the source culture are often encoded in specific lexical items for which there are only extremely rare or technical words. In the face of such a crux, a translator has a variety of choices: to omit the reference or pick some ‘equivalent’ in the receptor culture on the one hand, and on the other to import the word untranslated (with an explanation in a footnote perhaps), add an explanatory classifier or an explicit explanation, use a rare or recondite word of the receiving language, extend the semantic field of a word in the receptor language and so on. The use of rare or untranslated words in translations and the inclusion of unfamiliar cultural material are not necessarily defects of translated texts: translation is one of the activities of a culture in which cultural expansion occurs and in which linguistic options are expanded through the importation of loan transfers, calques, and the like. The result is, however, that translations very often have a different lexical texture from unmarked prose in the receptor culture” (Tymoczko 24-25).

25. From the beginning of the third decade of the 20 th century the amount of literary Hebrew translations surpassed the number of published original literary works in Hebrew (Shavit, “Translated vs. Original Literature” 52).

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