

AN ETHNOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF SEPHARDIC JEWS AND THEIR LANGUAGE
IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE IN THE 19TH CENTURY IN THE EYES OF SCOTTISH
PROTESTANT MISSIONARIES

Un estudio etnográfico de los judíos sefardíes y su lengua en el Imperio
Otomano del s. XIX desde la perspectiva de los misioneros protestantes
escoceses

DANIEL MARTÍN-GONZÁLEZ

Universidad Complutense de Madrid.

danielma@ucm.es

[ORCID ID: 0000-0002-7587-2108](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7587-2108)

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Resumen: Este artículo realiza una aproximación etnolingüística a la descripción de los judíos sefardíes y su lengua en el Imperio Otomano desde la perspectiva de los misioneros protestantes escoceses a través de cartas, actas e informes de la Iglesia Libre de Escocia, así como de los textos educativos publicados por el misionero escocés Alexander Thomson (1820-1899), quien lideró la Misión para los judíos de Constantinopla de dicha iglesia durante casi dos décadas. Nuestro estudio revela una actitud antirabínica encubierta en los escritos educativos pero reflejada en las cartas e informes que posteriormente sería revelada de manera más explícita en textos educativos posteriores.

Abstract: This ethnolinguistic study examines the description of Sephardic Jews and their language in the Ottoman Empire in the eyes of Scottish Protestant missionaries through the Free Church of Scotland's letters, minutes and reports as well as educational textbooks written by the Scottish rev. Alexander Thomson (1820-1899), who was the leader of the Mission to the Jews in Constantinople for two decades. This study reveals an antirabbinical attitude hidden in educational textbooks but openly manifested in the missionaries' letters and reports. This article also hints a more overt criticism to rabbis in later educational textbooks.

Palabras clave: Sefardíes, Iglesia Libre de Escocia, Constantinopla, Alexander Thomson, etnolingüística

Keywords: Sephardim, Free Church of Scotland, Constantinople, Alexander Thomson, ethnolinguistics.

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INTRODUCTION

Sephardic Jews established a thriving community in the Ottoman Empire that has long been studied. The loss of prestige of this Jewry in the 19th century¹ attracted Protestant missionaries² among other agents of social change during the Tanzimat period (1839-1876). Numerous volumes have been published to shed light on this period of Jewish history. However, an ethnographic study of this Sephardic Jewry in the eyes of missionaries have not yet been accomplished. This study aims at describing Sephardic Jews by using both primary sources, namely, missionary records and letters from Scottish Protestant missionaries and the Assembly at home, together with some book descriptions commonly read among missionaries at the time. As Sisman puts it, «[...]these records can be some of the most valuable resources for social, historical, religious, and ethnographic studies of the Ottoman Jews»³. In fact, missionaries «loved to describe their conversations with people from various religious and denominational backgrounds»⁴. Missionary letters sent to their headquarters also shaped the modern West and their ideas of the Middle East⁵. The following subsections thus shed light on social stereotypes, which can be defined as «a conventional (frequently malicious) idea (which may be widely inaccurate) of what X looks like or acts like»⁶. This image «is imposed upon all the members of a given social category»⁷. Therefore, we can understand this concept as related to the idea of prototypicality, but the latter «is basically a psychological notion, whereas stereotypicality is a sociolinguistic» one⁸. In the following sections, we will provide a brief account of the Scottish Mission to the Jews in the Constantinople, followed by a description of the corpus used to analyse these characterizations and the subsequent analysis of these stereotypes about

¹ For a detailed non-Protestant biased history of the Jewry of Turkey, please read Shaw, 1991, Rozen, 1996, and Benbassa - Rodrigue, 2000.

² For a Jewish perspective on the history and the evolution of Jews since their establishment in Istanbul in 1453, please see the first chapter of Rozen 2015.

³ Sisman, 2015: 933.

⁴ Van der Leest, 2008: 176.

⁵ Sisman, 2015: 945.

⁶ Putnam, 1975: 249.

⁷ Kristiansen, 2001: 141.

⁸ Geeraerts 2008: 24.

Jews formed long ago by Protestant communities in the Anglo-American context.

MISSIONS TO THE JEWS IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE IN THE 19TH CENTURY

Protestants believed they were meant to accelerate the dawning of the millennium. Both the conversion of Jews and defeating the anti-Christ⁹ were necessary to bring Jesus' Second Coming. All of these millennial ideas allowed Britain to regard itself as the New Jerusalem that was meant to re-Christianize the old Jerusalem and the Ottoman lands¹⁰. Reasons for this colonialist agenda were not merely religious but they rather include a political¹¹ or even an economic explanation¹².

America also shared a common view, as they were thought to be the city upon a hill. «The millennium became to be perceived as an actual phase in the history of America, to such an extent that every worldly development was interpreted in millennial terms»¹³. Thus, America was interpreted by itself as destined to redeem the world. Their work would turn out not to be easy, as to become the city upon a hill in the Ottoman Empire implied proselytism, and «the Ottoman law would not allow movement from religion to religion even by Christians from one Christian denomination to another»¹⁴. In this new but old allegory¹⁵, the Ottoman

⁹ According to Murre-van den Berg, 2006, the reason why the association of this demonic figure with the Pope in American and British minds might have been hardly encouraged in the letters because such link was already established in every reader of these letters (p. 71).

¹⁰ Tejirian - Simon, 2002: 81.

¹¹ «The evangelisation of Turkey is a political necessity... as regards Russia; for Turkey can never become a sufficiently strong barrier between us and northern despotism unless it be Christianized» (*THFRFCS*, 1857: 65).

¹² «The evangelisation of Turkey is a commercial necessity. English capital could be invested in the country: railroads, financial, and trading enterprises could not “flourish unless the country shall be evangelised, for without that we cannot expect the peace and order of the country to be permanent”». Missionaries claimed that «the pecuniary of our own country are so bound up with the political and social regeneration of the Turkish state» that Christianity was needed (*THFRFCS*, 1857: 65).

¹³ Başaran, 1997: 8.

¹⁴ Tejirian - Simon, 2002: 82.

Empire and its Sultan were considered as types of the ancient pharaohs. If Protestants were able to civilize these *pagans*, then a post-millennialism would follow¹⁶, a time in which «evil passions, licentiousness, injustice, strife and dissension would fade away», together with the disappearance of war, famine, oppression and slavery both at home and on the mission fields¹⁷.

Therefore, both British and American Evangelicals aligned to help each other convert Jews in the Ottoman Empire into Protestantism. One of the most prolific churches in the area was the Free Church of Scotland, which, led by the Scottish rev. Alexander Thomson (1820-1899)¹⁸, took over the Mission already established by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions when they decided to give up their mission to Sephardic Jews in Constantinople in the 1840s.

Alexander Thomson was thus commissioned by the Free Church of Scotland to take charge of the Mission to the Jews of Constantinople until 1859, when he quit to become the agent of the British and Foreign Bible Society of Constantinople, although he continued translating texts into Judeo-Spanish for the Scottish mission. During these two decades, Alexander Thomson was devoted to produce educational textbooks to be used in the missionary schools he managed, which had both Ashkenazim and Sephardim students, but which ultimately targeted mainly Sephardic Jews. Through his free schools, many Jewish children were granted a more modern and European education, although receiving some proselytizing information in exchange.

METHODOLOGY

The ethnolinguistic description we aim at producing here derives from the analysis of a corpus of texts written in English and Judeo-Spanish written

¹⁵ Puritans had already applied such kind of reasoning before when arriving to America from Europe. However, typological readings of both history and literature were common among Protestants, as they found them in the very Bible: i.e. 1 Corinthians 10,1-11, Romans 5,12-21, Gospel of Mathew 12,41-42, Gospel of John 3,14, and 19,36.

¹⁶ Puritans believed in post-millennialism, that is to say, the reign of the glorious church for a thousand years right after the conversion of Jews (Kovács, 2006: 38).

¹⁷ Pikkert, 2006: 48.

¹⁸ For more information on Alexander Thomson's life and production, please see (García Moreno 2013, 2018, 2019, and Martín-González 2019; 2020a; 2020b).

by Alexander Thomson and the clergymen of the Free Church of Scotland. On the one hand, we have analysed Alexander Thomson's letters written in English to the Free Church of Scotland and the minutes of the Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, which were published annually under different names, i.e. *The Home and Foreign Record of the Free Church of Scotland* or the *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland* since the 1840s. These historical documents report about the state of the different missions this church set up all over the world, but they also portray the vision of missionaries about the world they were committed to transform through their preaching. Moreover, these reports were published for all members of the church to read in order to raise awareness and get more funding for their work. Besides, we have also compiled numerous books which were commonly read among Protestant missionaries that help understand the stereotypes formed about Jews.

On the other hand, we have also examined Alexander Thomson's works written in Judeo-Spanish in Hebrew letters to be used in the missionary schools for children and teenagers. For this purpose, we have transcribed these texts into Judeo-Spanish written in Latin script following Jacob M. Hassán's method in 1978, revised in 2008, also used by Sephardic linguists from the Spanish school¹⁹. Out of these transcriptions, we have selected texts from the introductions found in these books which directly addressed the descriptions of Sephardic Jews, the Jewry and their language.

CONSTANTINOPLE JEWRY IN THE EYES OF SCOTTISH PROTESTANT MISSIONARIES

In the following section we will shed light on the description of Sephardic Jews and their language in the eyes of Protestant missionaries such as the Mission to the Jews of Constantinople led by Alexander Thomson.

DESCRIPTION OF SEPHARDIC JEWS

The definition of both Sephardic Jews and their language, notwithstanding «Sephardic Jews often saw themselves as people without

¹⁹ García Moreno, 2004: 31.

(a standardized) language»²⁰ by Protestants in the 19th century falls within the study of language ideologies, that is, «conceptualizations about languages, speakers, and discursive practices»²¹. Thus, Protestants understood «these images of language» as «common sense or as if they were the truth», providing them with a «naturalizing and normalizing power»²²⁻²³. First of all, missionaries on the 19th century distinguished four divisions of modern Judaism: Orthodox or Talmudic Jews («differing but little from the average Jew of the time of Christ»²⁴), Reform Judaism, rationalists from the 18th century («among them can be found a wide diversity of opinion, embracing all shades of belief or unbelief»²⁵), Chassidim («ascetics in practice and mystics in belief, they are deeply versed in Cabbalistic lore»²⁶), Karaites, «the truest type of the most ancient Judaism, holding to the Old Testament as the only rule of faith and practice and rejecting the Talmud and other excrescences which encumber other religious parties»²⁷. Their mission targeted any kind of Jew to be encountered.

The first missionary sent to the Jews in Istanbul, Josiah Brewer, just shows one of the archetypical anti-Semitic images of Jews, conceiving them as «very industrious, and like the rest of the Jews in the Turkish empire, their chief aim is to amass money»²⁸⁻²⁹⁻³⁰. The descriptions of the

²⁰ Bürki and Sánchez, 2016: 14.

²¹ Irvine, 2012; apud Bürki and Sánchez, 2016: 15.

²² Bürki and Sánchez, 2016: 16.

²³ Therefore, Protestants seem to apply a type of *cultural transference* in their description of the Jewish society. For a detailed analysis of this concept and its application to the case of European and Sephardic literature, please see Cimeli 2009.

²⁴ Thompson, 1902: 39.

²⁵ Thompson, 1902: 40.

²⁶ Thompson, 1902: 41.

²⁷ Thompson, 1902: 42.

²⁸ Sisman, 2015: 935.

²⁹ In the words of Protestant missionaries, «money is their god -they have scarcely a thought for anything else» (*PGAFCS*, 1856: 10-11).

³⁰ Anti-Semitism was also common among Protestants. However, not all descriptions were like this. Rev. W. Graham, in his *The Jordan and the Rhine* (1854) claims that «We are in the habit of contemplating the Jews mostly as the bankers, jewellers, and money-changers of the earth, who, like a ubiquitous swarm of leeches, such the life out of the nations, and to whom we are under no obligations, save those of mortgages and bills of exchange. This is an unjust estimation of their characters» (*THFRFCS*, 1855: 210-211).

Jewry of Turkey, estimated by Protestants in 80,000 out of 200,000 Jews in the world³¹⁻³², made by missionaries of the Free Church of Scotland did not differ much from what we can read on *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* (1840), a document written up by European Jews:

«The picture depicted was a sombre one. The Jews lived isolated from the rest of society in Turkey, attached to their rabbinical traditions, resigned to injury and outrage, consoling themselves with the hope of a glorious future. They were 'ignorant, superstitious, and intolerant'. They did not educate their children, did not know any European languages, and they spoke a corrupted Spanish. They thought of the Talmud as divinely inspired and believed in angels and demons. The rabbis exercised great influence and used excommunication frequently. From the point of view of morality, they seemed beyond reproach. But early marriages were the rule and, together with the lack of artisanal professions, were, for the reporter, the principal cause of the misery that reigned in the community»³³.

However, Protestants might have not heavily relied on descriptions made by Jews. The actual sources for their stereotypical descriptions can be found in Protestant books³⁴ written at the time, as well as commentaries made by the first inquirers sent by the Mission to the Jews, like Bonar - M'Cheyne's *Narrative of a mission of inquiry to the Jews from the Church of Scotland in 1839* (1845). As the latter would state:

«The Jews have many schools, but their system of teaching is more deplorable. No enlightened attempt has ever been made for the instruction of the Jewish children under

³¹ Lillie, 1846: 195.

³² A number so big Schauffler refers to as a «dead mass» (*TMH*, 1836: 134).

³³ Rodrigue, 1990: 10.

³⁴ Alexander McCaul's, *The old paths* (1838), translated to Judeo-Spanish as *Senderos antiguos*. Ridley H. Herschell's, *A brief of the present state and future expectations of the Jews* (1841), or *A course of lectures on the Jews: by ministers of the Established Church, in Glasgow* (1839), edited by Collins.

fourteen years of age [...]. These children are cruelly used, as well as ill instructed, under their present teachers; and the Old Testament being made their school-book, the teacher might explain it, and ground the whole truth thereon. The inducements of a solid education in Hebrew grammar, and perhaps in some of the modern languages, would lead them to come [...]. It would be important to instruct the Jews in the grammar of the Spanish»³⁵.

First inquirers, as the famous Prof. Robert Duncan, claimed that success of the mission depended on missionaries' knowledge of both the religion and language of Jews³⁶. It was not in fact an easy mission, so all tools available were needed against rabbis. Jewish authorities were the common target of all missionaries' attacks, and despite all this bad propaganda against them, they were still considered to have higher moral standards than other non-Protestant Christian denominations³⁷⁻³⁸. However, not just rabbis, but Jews overall were described as self-righteous³⁹, hypocritical⁴⁰, superstitious⁴¹, terrified by rabbis⁴², ignorant⁴³, «blinded by Talmudical

³⁵ Bonar - M'Cheyne, 1845: 332.

³⁶ «Ignorance of Jewish language has this bad effect -the Jews are apt to say to such a man, «If you knew anything of our country, you would not speak of our religion in the way you do»» (Lillie, 1846: 95).

³⁷ *TMH*, 1845: 5.

³⁸ However, they were the same, as «in the minds of missionaries, Judaism, Oriental Christianity, and Islam were all examples of spiritual corruption that had to be eliminated» (Sisman, 2015: 938).

³⁹ «Two thousand years of punishment have not sufficed to destroy the feeling that they are the beloved of heaven, God's peculiar treasure, and that their tithing of mint, anise and rue constitutes all the holiness there is in the world» (*TMH*, 1851: 111).

⁴⁰ «The words are empty of all meaning, and thus the missionary is baffled. Let him strive to convict them of sin, ransack his vocabulary, and search the word of God to find expressions that shall penetrate to their consciences; the Jew is familiar with them all, and repeats them every day in his prayers. They either mean nothing, or through a Talmudic gloss, aided by self-righteous blindness, they foster his confidence in the mercy of the God who is in his peculiar friend, and loves him more than the Gentile world, or even his own justice and truth» (*TMH*, 1851: 111).

⁴¹ Missionaries complained Sephardic Jews believed in magic and the Kabbalah, which Protestants saw as fables, i.e. the story of Joseph de la Reina which talked about Satan being married to Lillith and interfering in earthly matters: «to reason against it were

teaching»⁴⁴, restless⁴⁵, temperamental⁴⁶, fanatical⁴⁷, violent⁴⁸, blasphemous⁴⁹, and dirty⁵⁰.

absurd, just because it is founded, not on reason, but on blind submission to authority» (*THFRFCS*, 1853: 41). Connected to magic, Thomson is disturbed to note that Jewesses took their children to expensive exorcists to cure them from leprosy (*THFRFCS*, 1854: 151). For further reading on superstitions held by Jews according to Protestants, see Allen 1830.

⁴² The Rabbi is less influencing in the community «but superstitious fear still strongly binds the Spanish Jew, and the infliction of misfortune, sickness, or death, is still supposed to be within the limits of Rabbinical power». The consequence is the removal of children from schools or the loss of interest (*PGAFCS*, 1852: 15).

⁴³ «The population of 70,000 Spanish Jews is sunk in deep ignorance, and both ignorance and pauperism are represented as increasing» (*PGAFCS*, 1852: 14).

⁴⁴ «The veil of Moses has been lifted from their eyes simply by the reading of the New Testament in the school» (*THFRFCS*, 1853: 328).

⁴⁵ «The restless and migratory habits of the Jews who settle there are a source of difficulty, trial and depression to the missionaries. Many to whom they believe their labours have been blessed, and some whom they have baptized, leave the country and are from that time lost sight of» (*PGAFCS*, 1854: 117).

⁴⁶ The loose state of Jewish family life increases the number of orphans among them continually; husband and wife are divorced for the most trifling reasons, and a whole family is left suddenly unprovided for (*THFRFCS*, 1854: 263-364).

⁴⁷ *THFRFCS*, 1853: 204.

⁴⁸ Thomson describing a travel among Jews: «At Zeptsheh, I found a number of Spanish Jews, with whom I had a good deal of conversation, and whom I consider to be among the most deplorably ignorant and fanatically bigoted individuals I ever met. From my knowledge of Hebrew and Spanish they insisted for a time that I was Jew; but on my professing my faith in Jesus, as the promised Divine redeemer, they regarded me with something like horror [...] that such nonsense as I was uttering would not go down with the Bosniac Jews; and that If I ventured to talk in this way in Seraievo, the Jews there would kill me, as they nearly did a Jewish missionary (Mr. Palotta) some six years ago» (*THFRFCS*, 1872: 224).

⁴⁹ «During the short time in which he has enjoyed this means of meeting with the people, Mr. Thomson has come more in contact with the prejudices, misconceptions, ignorance, and blasphemous misrepresentations of the Jews than for a whole year before» (*PGAFCS*, 1852: 15).

⁵⁰ «Their schools [referring to rabbinical] are revoltingly dirty" (*PGAFCS*, 1852: 14), as opposed to Jewish girls attending missionary schools, «twenty clean, pretty, happy, diligent, and affectionate little daughters of Judah, I might almost say redeemed from the dirt, and far worse, the dogged depravity around us» (*THC*, 1846: 117). Missionaries also opposed their schools to Jewish houses: «Children are alive to the difference between cleanliness and filth [...]. We now and then hear even a lisping infant

Regarding their physical appearing, Sephardic Jews were thus described:

«They are a very handsome race, with black eyes and hair, and the young women are often of great beauty. Their dress is very much like that of the Moslems, though somewhat less gay: a turban, an under surtout or tunic with sleeves, bound round the waist with a silk or shawl girdle and extending nearly down to the feet, a loose over-coat, lined with silk or fur, with red or yellow sleeves. This is the everyday garb. The learned, the rabbis, and some of the students, wear a high, dark blue velvet cap, having a black and white scarf of turban wound round the lower part, a singular head-dress, peculiar to the Jewish people. They pretend that the whole of this dress is very ancient -upon what foundation, I know not; but it gave an interest to their costume to imagine that it might be nearly the same as that worn by our blessed Lord and his apostles»⁵¹.

Missionaries of the Free Church of Scotland in Constantinople targeted both Sephardic and Ashkenazim Jews, the former by the Hasköy station and the latter by the Galata station. However, not both groups are described equally in their narratives. If we are to compare both Sephardic and Ashkenazim⁵², it seems that missionaries understood the latter were easier to be converted, as the former were «proud of their origin [...], fanatical, almost unapproachable»^{53 - 54}. «The Talmudism of the

contrasting the peace and purity of the school with the jar and filth of the den of wretchedness it calls a home» (*THC*, 1846: 117).

⁵¹ Lillie, 1849: 165-166; taken from Woodcock, 1849: 307.

⁵² «On account of their poverty and their filthy habits they are looked down upon as plebeian by the Sephardim, who regard themselves as patricians» (Richter, 1910: 393).

⁵³ Gidney, 1909: 173.

⁵⁴ «The Sephardim have in most cases a separate synagogue from the Ashkenazim, but they have only one chief rabbi [...] The Ashkenazim, though poorer in general than the last-named class, are said to be more addicted to learning, and to be stricter in their ceremonial observances» (Lillie, 1849: 166, taken from Woodcok, 1849: 307).

Sephardim, resting longer, and darker, and deeper on them than on the German Jews, has been scarcely assailed»⁵⁵.

Descriptions of Jews by Alexander Thomson himself in 1888 did not differ much from previous Protestant propaganda:

«These Spanish refugees are the descendants of those who were expelled from Spain by Ferdinand and Isabella in the very year that America was discovered [...]. France refused to receive them, Italy would not have them, even the North Africa refused them, and in despair they went eastward, and the Sultan, who had some years before taken Constantinople, received them with open arms, and they are to this day spread through all the principal towns of Turkey. We have a difficulty in knowing how many there are in Constantinople, but their number is computed at above fifty thousand. Salonica is almost a Jewish town. In Smyrna there may be fifteen thousand Jews»⁵⁶.

Missionaries primarily targeted Jews by means of education, as Jews were described as follows,

«They are not destitute of the means of education, such as they are: but the instruction imparted in their schools has the least possible intellectual value. Except in a few wealthy families, female education is entirely unknown. It has thus become obvious that education will need to enter into the plan of a mission to the Jews»⁵⁷.

«The people love learning, but have no means of acquiring it; their schools are revoltingly dirty, and in them thousands of children are congregated from morning to evening, to be 'subjected to a cruel bondage which starves the mind, checks curiosity, perverts the judgment, and fills the whole character with idle superstition and the most rooted bigotry'. Not fifty

⁵⁵ Lillie, 1846: 94.

⁵⁶ Johnston, 1888: 318-319.

⁵⁷ *TMH*, 1851: 5.

women amongst the many thousands are supposed to be acquainted with reading, or writing, or the simplest elements of divine truth»⁵⁸.

Rabbis were described as «the enemies of knowledge and education»⁵⁹, always threatening parents with excommunication if they did not withdraw their children from the missionary schools. New schools were needed, since Jews

«were learned, but helplessly learned, in Hebrew, and Talmudic knowledge, and were totally ignorant of geography and all the ordinary branches of knowledge, believing in exorcism and magic, both of which were ordinary and reputable trades amongst them»⁶⁰.

This is why Schaffler recommends some preparatory work for the mission:

«For fifty generations the Jews have been fortifying themselves against the gospel, and their whole literature is anti-Christian. So also, is their education, as well as their internal religious police. The great effort of Jewish learning and ingenuity, ever since the destruction of the Old Testament, has been to prevent the reading of the Old Testament from being suggestive of Christian ideas to the Jewish mind. Hence a Jewish mission requires an extraordinary amount of preparatory work»⁶¹.

Finally, regarding religious beliefs, Alexander Thomson thought that they were ignorant of the true meaning of their own Scriptures⁶². The

⁵⁸ *PGAFC*, 1852: 14.

⁵⁹ *THRFCS*, 1853: 154.

⁶⁰ *THRFCS*, 1855: 292.

⁶¹ *ARABCFM*, 1846: 110.

⁶² *THRFCS*, 1853: 178-179.

American mission once summarized the general feeling about Jewish beliefs held in Turkey:

«Their religious notions (all rationalists and infidels excepted) are substantially the same. The Talmud is their ‘standard’, and they think at least as highly of it as the Catholic of his traditions. But their acquaintance with this book grows less and less, and hence the degrees of superstition are very different in different places, and their estimation of the Talmud is far from being the same in all cases. While (e.g. in Germany and Russia) few believe in Maimonides' story of the inspiration of the Oral Law or the Mishnah, the Spanish Jews believe it fully. Their hope of salvation is based upon their work or performances of the law, and their ceremonial rites, all ‘ex opere operato’, with circumcision at the bottom, a rite which will not leave any one in hell, even if his works and penances have been so imperfect as to leave him to go there [...]. Under the influence of such notions, whether baptized or circumcised, spiritual religion is out of the question, and justification by faith ‘an offence’ and a dangerous heresy»⁶³.

However, Protestant were specifically angry at the Jewish ideas on the Messiah.

«The rationalistic Jews boldly assert, that the idea of a Messiah does not properly belong to their religion; that it is a conception of oriental poetry, expressive merely of the hope of a golden age, which the prophets fondly expected. The orthodox are struck dumb. They confess they know not when the Messiah will come, and pretend that no man knows it. The Jews are forbidden by their Rabbis to think or talk about it. The man who inquiries into the meaning of the seventy weeks of Daniel is, *ipso facto*, cursed and anathematized»⁶⁴.

⁶³ *ARABCFM*, 1847: 105-106.

⁶⁴ *ARABCFM*, 1847: 106.

«The most astonishing ignorance prevails on this subject, even among many who have the New Testament in their hands. For instance, I was told by a Jew, about a fortnight ago, who understand English well, and has the Scriptures both in English and Italian, that the only evidence we have of that great event is that a number of women went to the sepulchre and could not find the body. I have met the same objection often»⁶⁵.

Thus, the Free Church of Scotland placed a lot of importance to the teaching of Jews in missionary schools. «This they cannot get supplied in their own Rabbinical books, for the teachers themselves are as ignorant of such matters as the common people [...]. Their only resource, therefore, is to avail themselves of our schools»⁶⁶. Therefore, for Thomson, the Hasköy school was the only solution:

«They are teaching them ‘to exercise their judgment in ascertaining its meaning’ and disregard Talmudic interpretations, to observe that from the first dawnings of revelation down to the time when vision and prophecy were scaled, there was announced substantially one only plan of hope and redemption for lost man- through the atoning sacrifice of the Messiah, God manifest in the flesh [...]. Such training is the Scripture antidote to Jewish unbelief»⁶⁷.

DESCRIPTION OF JUDEO-SPANISH⁶⁸

Protestant missionaries employed numerous ideogemes⁶⁹ or «recurrent ideas about language that materialize or crystalize in certain discourses of certain institutions during certain periods»⁷⁰ to refer to Judeo-Spanish, as «the tendency of valuing languages was common at that time»⁷¹.

⁶⁵ *THFRFCS*, 1853: 180.

⁶⁶ *THFRFCS*, 1854: 14.

⁶⁷ *THFRFCS*, 1854: 14.

⁶⁸ For a description of the history of the language and current sociolinguistic studies of Judeo-Spanish, please see Kirschen 2018.

⁶⁹ Angenot, 1982; Narvaja de Arnoux - Del Valle, 2010: 13.

⁷⁰ Bürki and Sánchez, 2016: 16.

⁷¹ Berk Albachten, 1999: 25.

«Linguistically, the Jews of the [Ottoman] Empire could be divided into four major groups: Romiotes [descendants of Greek speakers], Sephardim [Spanish-speaking Jews], Ashkenazim [German-speaking Jews], and Arabic-speaking Jews»⁷². Judeo-Spanish, also known as Sephardic language, Judezmo, or Ladino, is the language spoken by Sephardic Jews. From what we can read in Bürki, this language has always been accustomed to be approached from very different ideological lenses⁷³. Missionaries provided Judeo-Spanish with numerous linguistics descriptions, sometimes very negative as the following ones.

a. *A jargon*

According to the London Jews Society, Judeo-Spanish was «a jargon composed of Spanish and Hebrew»⁷⁴. Some Protestants thought that it was a jargon «similar to Yiddish in its development, but with a basis of Spanish instead of German. It is spoken by about a million Jews, scattered over Holland, Turkey, Palestine and North Africa»⁷⁵.

b. *A dialect*

«The dialect is the Spanish of the fifteenth century adjusted to Hebrew idioms»⁷⁶.

c. *A language*

«The Spanish language, instead of being viewed as a mere stepping-stone to the Hebrew, has been made of late the vehicle for diffusing useful Christian information»⁷⁷.

d. *A mixture of Spanish and Hebrew*

«Judaeo-Spanish (a mixture of Hebrew and Spanish), Spanish, and Hebrew, are the languages chiefly spoken among the Sephardim»⁷⁸.

e. *A corruption*

Schauffler already thought this idea: «hence they speak the Spanish language, but somewhat corrupted, and written with Hebrew letter»⁷⁹. Such description was held by many other Protestants: «They still retain, in

⁷² Masters, 2009: 300.

⁷³ Bürki, 2016: 150.

⁷⁴ Gidney, 1909: 173.

⁷⁵ Thompson, 1902: 38.

⁷⁶ Dennis, 1902: 153.

⁷⁷ Johnston, 1888: 319.

⁷⁸ Lillie, 1849: 166; taken from Woodcock, 1849: 307.

⁷⁹ *TMH*, 1836: 6.

common use, the Spanish language of the fifteenth century, strongly intermixed with Hebrew idioms [...] their language being a corruption of Hebrew-Spanish»⁸⁰. Western schools in Constantinople taught their students that «traditional vernaculars were not ‘Jewish languages’ at all but corrupt jargons»⁸¹.

«The Jews in Turkey are of Spanish and Portuguese origin, and their language is a corrupt Spanish, although it is not nearly as corrupt as the German⁸² of the Jews in Russia and Poland, and the parts of Austria and Prussia bordering thereupon. The males all or nearly all read the Hebrew, but understand little of it; their Spanish dialect in Rabbinic character they read and understand»⁸³.

But, what about the language missionaries used in their texts? Could it be linked to any of the four previous definitions of Judeo-Spanish? Thomson's usage of Judeo-Spanish, and missionaries' language overall, has been associated to a vernacular variety of Judeo-Spanish, what Sephiha calls Judezmo, or oral language⁸⁴. Bunis contends that the Protestant texts are written with «a novel synthesis of traditional Judezmo and Modern Castilian» in Rashi letters⁸⁵. He defined their language as a «pseudo-Sephardi vernacular (essentially a blend of Old and Modern Spanish transcribed in the Hebrew alphabet)»⁸⁶, invaded by modern Spanish lexis⁸⁷, which introduced the «first state of Modern Spanish» to the Sephardim of the Ottoman Empire⁸⁸. Lazar had already associated the

⁸⁰ Richter, 1910: 392.

⁸¹ Bunis, Chetrit - Sahim, 2003: 116.

⁸² Schaffler also applied such definition to Yiddish: «In Russia, they dress differently and speak another language, their vernacular language being a very corrupt German [...]. Every male knows how to read Hebrew, they all read and understand their German dialect in Rabbinic character; few only read the German character» (*ARABCFM*, 1847: 105-106).

⁸³ *PGAFC*, 1856: 10-11.

⁸⁴ Sephiha, 2001: 64.

⁸⁵ Bunis, Chetrit - Sahim, 2003: 121.

⁸⁶ Bunis, 1992: 411.

⁸⁷ Quintana Rodríguez, 1999: 596.

⁸⁸ Bunis, Chetrit - Sahim, 2003: 121.

missionaries' language with a Sephardization attempt⁸⁹. Finally, García Moreno provides these texts with a similar definition to Bunis', namely, a «Sephardized Spanish»; that is to say, a hybrid that balances an unknown weight of 19th century Spanish and a Judeo-Spanish adaptation attempt⁹⁰.

What can be indeed easily held is that Alexander Thomson intended to «help effect a linguistic transition among the Sephardim of the Ottoman regions from Judezmo to Spanish»⁹¹, as Western-style schools fostered the idea that «the languages and cultures developed over the centuries by Jews under Islam were 'inferior' to those of the West»⁹². However, Thomson saw «the difficulties arising from the diversities of language prevailing among the various nationalities in Asia Minor. He urged the vast importance of circulating the Scriptures in the languages which the people understand»⁹³; a need also which Schaffler had already felt some years ago: «The experience of years taught the American missionaries the necessity of printing a large edition of the Old Testament, both in Hebrew, and in Jewish-Spanish, the language which they speak and universally understand»⁹⁴.

If Thomson wanted to foster Iberian Spanish in detriment to Judeo-Spanish, then we can just but expect his description of the latter language to be very negative. It is in his last known literary work written in Judeo-Spanish in Hebrew letters where he expands the most on metalinguistic knowledge. As a classical Evangelical, Thomson contends all languages come from a common language as Genesis 11 tells, «que los hombres salieron todos en el principio de una sola familia, ma que su lenguaje fue espartido por alguna tal manera como está contada en Bere. (Génesis) cap. 11»⁹⁵. For him, Judeo-Spanish is a Romance language⁹⁶, which has lost many important words⁹⁷⁻⁹⁸. Thomson, although writing in Hebrew letters,

⁸⁹ Lazar, 1994: 407-408.

⁹⁰ García Moreno, 2013: 398.

⁹¹ Bunis, 2017: 5.

⁹² Bunis, Chetrit - Sahim, 2003: 116.

⁹³ *THFRFCS*, 1855: 292.

⁹⁴ Baillie, 1843: 85.

⁹⁵ Thomson, 1888: 1.

⁹⁶ Thomson, 1888: 1.

⁹⁷ Thomson, 1888: 8.

⁹⁸ «Se han perdido agora muchas palabras importantes» (Thomson, 1888: 8).

wants the children to learn the Latin script to be able to read the important books published in Iberian Spanish since 1868⁹⁹⁻¹⁰⁰. The missionary believes it is easy to learn the Latin letters, which will also help them to learn the other Romance languages¹⁰¹⁻¹⁰², as opposed to learning Judeo-Spanish with Hebrew letters, which resembles the Turkish language written with Greek or Armenian characters¹⁰³, and which is not a good language for writing science¹⁰⁴⁻¹⁰⁵. In fact, this manner of thinking was not solely ascribed to this missionary, as even certain Jews who had studied in modern French schools established in Constantinople also contended that Judeo-Spanish lacked core vocabulary to fully work in a modern society¹⁰⁶. Moreover, the comparison with Yiddish written with Hebrew letters is unavoidable now, which Thomson understands as a mistake, and therefore only one language or alphabet was preferable, which he will attempt to achieve in *La escalera*¹⁰⁷⁻¹⁰⁸.

CONCLUSION

The second half of the 19th century meant huge changes for the political, social and spiritual atmosphere of the Constantinople Jewry. Protestant missionaries were attracted to preach the gospel among Jews in foreign lands like never before, thus attempting to bring forth the millennium and Christ's Second Coming. According to Sisman, 400 schools were

⁹⁹ Thomson, 1888: 8.

¹⁰⁰ «Deśde la proclamaci3n de libertađ de conciencia en 1868» (Thomson, 1888: 8).

¹⁰¹ Thomson, 1888: 9.

¹⁰² «No es perfecto, pero muy bueno y f3cil a entender y escribir [...], abrir3 la puerta para estas otras lenguas (las romances) tambi3n» (Thomson, 1888: 10).

¹⁰³ Thomson, 1888: 9.

¹⁰⁴ Thomson, 1888: 9.

¹⁰⁵ «Ma para libros cient3ficos es grande dificultad que las letras <> y <> tienen cada una dos sonidos diferentes, y la manera de escribir es larga» (Thomson, 1888: 10).

¹⁰⁶ B3rki, 2015: 398.

¹⁰⁷ Thomson, 1888: 9.

¹⁰⁸ «La misma cosa hicieron los aśkenazitas, y por muchos siglos iban escribiendo la lengua ġermana con letras ʼebraicas hasta que el grande M3ndelson les mostr3 c3mo grande yerro fuera este, y agora no lo hacen. Ans3 como una sola lengua ser3 grande conveniencia para todo el mundo, lo mismo ser3 tambi3n un solo alfabeto; y en este librico buśquimos de abrirle la puerta» (Thomson, 1888: 9).

managed by missionaries in the 1880s in the Ottoman Empire¹⁰⁹. Numerous studies have been published on the description of historical facts from this period, but we seem to lack ethnographic studies that examine the language and speakers' perceptions from this time. This study has explored numerous primary historical sources from the 19th century such as church minutes and report and Protestant missionaries' educational textbooks describing Jews and their language. These works received much attention from the rabbis in the area, mainly to reject and to condemn them for their proselyting hidden message. Throughout the years, missionaries were able to spread their message despite rabbinical opposition, probably due to the publication of essential books like the Bible at a low (or even free) cost.

The missionaries' texts shown describe Jews and their language through numerous stereotypical ideogemes developed throughout Christian history and emphasized by adventurous Protestant journey accounts which show little interest in acknowledging Sephardic Jews for who they were but for who missionaries wanted them to become. Even for Ladino, rev. Thomson aimed at teaching them a more modern Peninsular Spanish dialect rather than their own vernacular language. Throughout time, missionaries became more explicit in their proselytizing work, showing a more anti-rabbinical and anti-Jewish attitude in later works, as it was already shown in the minutes and church reports.

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¹⁰⁹ Sisman, 2015: 932.

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