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Hidden vs. Overt Protestant Propaganda in an Educational Book in Judeo- Spanish: Alexander Thomson's *Sila bario* (Constantinople, 1855)

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ABSTRACT

This study sheds light on the analysis of a work written in Judeo-Spanish in Hebrew letters by the Scottish Protestant missionary Alexander Thomson (1820-1899), namely, the *Sila bario o Ayuda para Amvežar a Meldar para el Uso de las Escuelas de los judiós Sefaradim* (1855). This reverend belonged to the Free Church of Scotland, an Evangelical schism from the Church of Scotland born in 1843 which pursued evangelist attempts to a great extent. Thomson, sent as a missionary to Istanbul in 1847, wrote this booklet for allegedly didactic reasons, namely, to teach Sephardic children to read their own language in the school established by this missionary and where he was the teacher himself. The main aim sought after by this research is to show how religious proselytism worked, which we hypothesize to be mainly disguised, with no reference to reference such as the Messiah.

KEYWORDS: Ideology; proselytism; Sephardic Aljamiado texts; Istanbul; 19th century

RESUMO

O presente trabalho centra-se na análise de uma obra escrita em judeo-espanhol aljamiado pelo missionário protestante escocês Alexander Thomson (1820-1899), *Sila bario o Ayuda para Amvežar a Meldar para el Uso de las Escuelas de los judiós Sefaradim* (1855). Este ministro integrava a Igreja Livre da Escócia, uma cisão evangélica da Igreja nacional da Escócia, surgida em 1843, com um forte enfoque prosélito. Thomson, enviado como missionário a Istambul em 1847, escreveu este livro com fins supostamente didáticos, nomeadamente, o de ensinar a ler em judeo-espanhol aljamiado a crianças sefarditas do colégio que ele mesmo fundara e onde era professor. O objectivo fundamental deste estudo é demonstrar como funcionava o proselitismo religioso, apresentando a hipótese de que este era essencialmente dissimulado, sem referências a figuras como o Messias.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Ideologia; proselitismo; textos sefarditas aljamiados; Istambul; século XIX.

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Protestant movements in the Ottoman Empire were actively engaged in the publication of different materials written in Judeo-Spanish in the second half of the 19th century. Although some of these works had been previously noted by scholars like Romero Castelló,¹ specialists in Sephardic culture and Ladino studies have been paying more and more attention to these works in the last decade. The first of these researchers was Wolfe, who precisely focused on the booklet at hand for this study.² Then, García Moreno³ shed light on the first short detailed analysis of one of Alexander Thomson (1820-1899)'s works, namely, the translation from English into Judeo-Spanish of the Westminster catechism, *El Catecismo Menor*.⁴ His article focuses on the mini-dictionaries appearing after every answer replying to theological questions in the same manner than the source text does. One year later, Pueyo Mena hints some of the Bible translations carried out by missionaries in Judeo-Spanish in the 19th century.⁵ David Bunis⁶ contends that most missionary books' language contributed to a transition from vernacular Judeo-Spanish to modern Spanish, thus aligning with previous studies (Lazar;⁷ Quintana Rodríguez;⁸ Sephiha;⁹ Bunis, Chetrit, and Sahim;¹⁰ García Moreno¹¹) claiming that the language of these authors was never Ladino but a pseudo-

¹ Elena Romero Castelló, *La Creación Literaria en Lengua Sefardí* (Madrid: Mapfre, 1992), 59-60, 134.

² Rachel Sabe Wolfe, "From Protestant missionaries to Jewish educators: Children's textbooks in Judeo-Spanish", *Neue Romania* 40 (2011): 135-151.

³ Aitor García Moreno, "¿Ante el primer diccionario monolingüe judeoespañol?", *Sefarad* 73 (2013): 371-408.

⁴ Alexander Thomson, *El Catecismo Menor, o una Corta Declaración de lo que Creen los Protestantes Cristianos* (Constantinople: A. B. Churchill Printing Press, 1854), 1-84.

⁵ Javier Pueyo Mena, "El corpus bíblico del español sefardí: De la planificación a la edición crítica", *eHumanista* 28 (2014): 177.

⁶ David Bunis, "The lexicography of Sephardic Judaism", in *International Handbook of Modern Lexis Lexicography*, eds. Patrick Hanks, Gilles-Maurice Schryver (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer, 2016), 5.

⁷ Moshe Lazar, "Apéndice: Ladinamientos aljamiados de la Biblia", in *Actas del Simposio Internacional sobre la Biblia de Ferrara*, eds. Iacob Hassán, Ángel Berenguer (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1994), 407-408.

⁸ Aldina Quintana Rodríguez, "Proceso de recastellanización del judesmo", in *Jewish Studies at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*, eds. Judit Tarragona Borrás, Ángel Sáenz Badillos (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 596.

⁹ Haim Vidal Sephiha, "The instruction of Judeo-Spanish in Europe", *Sophar* 19 (2001): 64.

¹⁰ David Bunis, Joseph Chetrit, and Haiden Sahim, "Jewish languages enter the Modern era", in *The Jews of the Middle East and North Africa in Modern Times*, eds. Reeva Spector Simon, Michael Menachem Laskier, and Sara Reguer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 121.

¹¹ García Moreno, "Primer diccionario monolingüe", 398.

variant of this language. Finally, García Moreno¹² recently published a second article addressing the translation of English and Spanish poems into Judeo-Spanish in another of Thomson's first and last edition of the book *La escalera* (1853¹³ and 1888¹⁴).

Our research places emphasis on the *Silabario* (Constantinople, 1855), written by the Scottish Protestant reverend Alexander Thomson (1820-1899) to be used at the missionary *escuelas*.¹⁵ As it was previously mentioned, this booklet was already addressed by Wolfe to determine that missionaries were unable to succeed converting Sephardic Jews but they were successful at introducing modern European education in the Jewish community in Constantinople.¹⁶ However, although Wolfe's idea attempted to confirm Bornstein-Makovetsky's¹⁷ claim about the conversionist incompetence of Protestant missionaries, which was again later reaffirmed by Şişman,¹⁸ none of these works properly address which specific ideas were being conveyed by these Christian missionaries. Thus, our interest lies within ascertaining to what extent this book can be claimed to be proselytizing, that is, in what manner Protestant ideas were vividly expressed in an educational book or whether the author rather heavily relied on more indirect techniques to refer to Christian tenets while allegedly simply teaching Sephardic children how to read in Judeo-Spanish. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, we have divided this study into several parts. First of all, we deemed necessary to summarize who Alexander Thomson was. Second of all, we will proceed by analyzing the *Silabario*, hence describing its main features and the religious propaganda spread all over the booklet. Thirdly, the results obtained will be graphically illustrated in our analysis, which will be followed by our concluding remarks regarding Thomson's proselytizing techniques and contents

¹² Aitor García Moreno, "Poemas castellanos en textos sefardíes: ejemplos en *La escalera a la anvežadura* (Constantinopla 1853 y 1888)", *Sefarad* 78 (2018): 149-200.

¹³ Alexander Thomson, *La Escalera a la Anvežadura (para los Niños y las Niñas)* (Constantinople: A. B. Churchill Printing Press, 1853), 1-228.

¹⁴ Alexander Thomson, *La Escalera o Lecciones Progresivas en la Ciencia y Literatura* (Constantinople: A. H. Boyacian, 1888), 1-420.

¹⁵ As opposed to a yeshiva (Heb. ישיבה), or Jewish schools where children attend in order to learn more about the Torah and other sacred texts in Judaism, *escuela* has a rather secular connotation here, automatically indicating a missionary school as opposed to the former.

¹⁶ Wolfe, "From Protestant missionaries", 137.

¹⁷ Leah Bornstein-Makovetsky "Jewish Converts to Islam and Christianity in the Ottoman Empire in the Nineteenth Century", in *The Last Ottoman Century and Beyond: The Jews in Turkey and the Balkans 1808-1945*, ed. Minna Rozen (Tel Aviv: The Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center, 1996), 306.

¹⁸ Cengiz Şişman, "Failed proselytizers or modernizers? Protestant missionaries among the Jews and Sabbateans/Dönmes in the Nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire", *Middle Eastern Studies* 51 (2015): 933.

in the *Silabario*. Our main hypothesis is that the Protestant author will not entreat mentions to Jesus Christ as the Messiah, attempting to address religious propaganda in the least overt possible manner.

1. Alexander Thomson's Life and his Production in Judeo-Spanish

Born in Arbroath (Scotland) on December 2nd 1820, Alexander Thomson became associated with an Evangelical Scottish movement (the Free Church of Scotland)¹⁹ at a young age, when he was ordained as minister in Edinburgh in October 1845.²⁰ Learned in both Classics and Hebrew, Thomson was sent first as a missionary to Pest in 1846²¹ to be later sent to Galata after eight month's work.²² However, this Scottish reverend was better known by his labor among both Ashkenazim and Sephardim Jews in the Hasköy quarter (Istanbul)²³ since June 1847, when he became the main religious leader and teacher of the missionary school and Protestant organization set up at this place. The origin of the Hasköy station can be traced back to 1844, when Dr. Leitner²⁴ started visiting this location as a physician and became an inquirer for the future mission. This work followed the efforts of the also Evangelical American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions,²⁵ mainly led by Wilhelm Gottlieb Schauffler (1798-1883)²⁶

¹⁹ The Free Church of Scotland was a religious schism from the Protestant established Church of Scotland which occurred in 1843 due to the influence of Evangelical ministers which was growing more and more since the 1740s to fight against Scottish Enlightenment.

²⁰ *New York Evangelist* 70 (1899), 21.

²¹ John Lillie, *The Jewish Chronicle, Published under the Direction of the American Society, for Meliorating the Condition of the Jews; and Edited by John Lillie* (New York: Society's Office, 1846), 254.

²² American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, *Thirty-Seventh Annual Report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1846* (Boston: T. R. Marvin, 1846), 52.

²³ Scottish missionaries mainly established their stations in two quarters in Constantinople, Galata and Hasköy.

²⁴ Baptized in October 20th, 1844 by Schauffler, Dr. Leitner was one of the first Protestant Jewish converts sent to work as a missionary. He started collaborating at the medical dispensary established in 1843 in Hasköy until it was discontinued because of the lack of funds in 1848 and moved to Brussa. He came back to Constantinople in 1853 as a medical missionary for the London Jewish Mission. He died on April 6th 1861, age 61.

²⁵ As a result of Christian revivals that occurred throughout the 18th century, several Protestant movements like the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions spread all over the US. This comission was born in 1810 out of the Protestant zeal of students attending the Andover Theological Seminary in Boston.

²⁶ Schauffler was considered the father to the Jewish Mission in the Constantinople. After five years of

in the previous years. However, this latter missionary decided to leave the religious enterprise to the Scottish Evangelical branch as soon as Thomson arrived to Constantinople. In the words of the former preacher, “when Mr. (now Dr.) A. Thomson came, and there was no more doubt of the readiness and intention of our Scotch brethren to occupy the Sefardee field, I saw that Constantinople was lost to us.”²⁷ Thus, these two missions must be regarded as one in the early beginning (from 1843 to 1846) until Thomson’s arrival. In any case, this Scottish missionary’s work for the Free Church of Scotland was put to an end in 1859 due to different reasons. First of all, the reverend’s house was set on fire. Secondly, Thomson’s wife required to be sent to Scotland to recover from her bad health condition. Thirdly, the missionary was also offered a position as the agent of the British and Foreign Bible Society,²⁸ which he adopted in 1860. Thus, the minister started working in the translation and printing of the New Testament and Psalms into other languages than Judeo-Spanish, like Gheg (a northern dialect of Albanian), in 1866²⁹ in collaboration with Kostandin Kristoforidhi (1827-1895), Gjerasim Qiriazhi (1858-1894), and Thanasi Sina (?-?).³⁰ Nevertheless, Thomson was still linked to the Free Church Mission by assisting his former colleagues in certain school duties or even republishing some works in Ladino.

Thomson’s production in Judeo-Spanish has been already described in great detail by García Moreno.³¹ For this reason, we deem unnecessary to shed more

training at the Andover Theological Seminary in the US, induced by the missionary of the American Board, Jonas King. He arrived in Ottoman lands in 1832 appointed by the Female Society of Boston and Vicinity for Promoting Christianity among the Jews after the removal of Josiah Brewer in 1831. Schaffler is well-known by his translation of Psalms and the Old Testament to Judeo-Spanish (Smyrna, 1838), which was based on Abraham Asa’s translation published in Constantinople in 1739-1744 (Vienna, 1841), helped by a Jewish convert from Rodosto named Arekal, a Ladino Lexicon, and a translation of Oppenheim’s Hebrew grammar into this language. Since 1831, Schaffler also worked in tracts and Scriptures to be given out among the Jews of Russia, especially in Odessa.

²⁷ Edwards Amasa Park, *Autobiography of William. G. Schaffler, for Forty-Nine Years a Missionary in the Orient* (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph and Company), 197. This claim meant that the American Protestant mission would no longer actively worked for the conversion of Sephardic Jews in Constantinople.

²⁸ More than 50 societies were devoted to the evangelization of the Jews all over the world. Among them we can find the British and Foreign Bible Society, the American Tract Society, and other groups who helped incidentally to the Free Church of Scotland’s Mission to the Jews in Constantinople. James M. Sherwood and Arthur T. Pierson, *The Missionary Review of the World. January to December, 1888* (New York, London: Funk and Wagnalls, 1888), 853.

²⁹ James Dennis, *Centennial Survey of Foreign Missions. A Statistical Supplement to “Christian Missions and Social Progress”, Being a Conspectus of the Achievements and Results of Evangelical Missions in All Lands at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (New York, Chicago, Toronto: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1902), 152.

³⁰ Robert Elsie, *A Bibliographical Dictionary of Albanian history* (London: I. B. Tauris and Co. Ltd, 2012), 257, 377.

³¹ García Moreno, “Primer diccionario monolingüe”, 373-374; García Moreno, “Poemas castellanos”,

light on the nature of these works *per se*. However, these books have never been categorized in any manner so we will now present one key element which should be taken into account when studying this missionary's works in future studies, that is, time. This Protestant minister did not start writing and translating books into Judeo-Spanish right out as soon as he arrived to Constantinople but it took him a few years to learn the language.³² Thus, the author's first works in Judeo-Spanish will not appear until the beginning of the 1850s. In this line, as we were mentioning before, the language found in these texts evidence the Protestant missionaries' lack of mastery and competence in Judeo-Spanish due to the lack of prototypical Ladino lexis, grammar, and syntax. The other production stage is the decade of the 1880s, when the Scottish reverend publishes re-editions and retranslations of these texts in the 1880s. Although these works do show a process of Judeo-Spanish assimilation,³³ some scholars might still think these few changes are not enough to consider the language thereof found proper prototypical 19th-century Ladino, probably due to the learner's language fossilization when he left his active engagement with the missionary school.

2. *Silabario* (1855)

Silabario o Ayuda para Ampezar a Mendar para el Uso de las Escolas de los judiós Sefaradim (1855) is the last Ladino booklet written by Alexander Thomson that has been preserved from his first stage of production in this language in the 1850s. We will now approach the work at hand by summarizing its main features and then its ideological propaganda.

151-154. Most of these texts were pedagogical or instructional. In words of the missionary, his main aim when writing or translating these texts was "to prepare statements of the doctrines and evidences of the gospel, and along with these, books of useful knowledge suitable for general reading, but with a special view to be used in our school". The Free Church of Scotland, *The Home and Foreign Record of the Free Church of Scotland, August 1852-July 1853* (Edinburgh: James Nichol; London: James Nisbet, 1853), 204.

³² The Free Church of Scotland, *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, held at Edinburgh, May 1854* (Edinburgh: John Greig and Son; Glasgow: Glass and Duncan; London: James Nisbet and co, 1854), 116; Lillie, *The Jewish Chronicle*, 93.

³³ A process defined as *sefardización* in García Moreno, "Poemas castellanos", 165, 180, 200.

2.1. Main Features

Silabario is a short booklet which allegedly aims at simply explaining how to read in Judeo-Spanish written with Hebrew letters following a bottom-up approach (from letters to complex and larger readings). This 20-page booklet, published in Constantinople in 1855, is written in Judeo-Spanish with Hebrew *Rashi* (cursive font) letters, although section headings are normally written in *merubá'* (square font) bold script. Apart from the title page, presented in Figure 1, the book is subdivided into four parts, each one more complex in size and content than the former, namely, letters (ליטראס / *letras*), syllables (סילאב'אס / *silabas*), words (פאלאבר'אס / *palabras*), and readings (מילדאדור'אס / *meldaduras*).

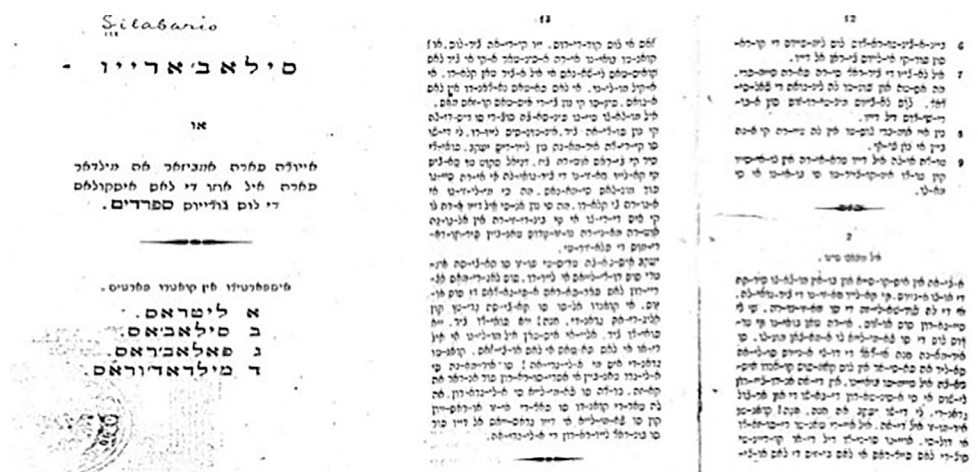


FIG. 1: Title page and extracts from *Silabario* (1855)'s part 3, first and second reading.

García Moreno (2018) claims that this text is the first edition of a series of books which were published by the Free Church of Scotland under the name of *Silabario español*,³⁴ which Wolfe (2011) also associated to this mission, “since some of its illustrations also appeared in *La Escalera*” (1853).³⁵

³⁴ García Moreno, “Poemas castellanos”, 153.

³⁵ Wolfe, “From Protestant missionaries”, 140.

2.2. Presentation of Ideological Components

This *Silabario o Ayuda para Amvežar a Meldar para el Uśo de las Escolas de los Ĵudiós Sefaradim* [henceforward *SIL1855*] is not a translation *per se*, as some of the aforementioned titles by the same author; although it contains the translation of several texts. In fact, this short booklet is purportedly a 20-page pedagogic manual to teach children how to read in Judeo-Spanish in Hebrew letters. In order to analyze the ideological component of this work, we will not resort to any known source text but we will emphasize Protestant messages found in the book. For the purpose of text presentation, we will not show the Hebrew script originally employed by Thomson in *SIL1855* but we have adopted the transcription system employed by Iacob M. Hassán in 1978³⁶ with some minor adaptations currently employed by certain scholars specialized in Sephardic linguistics from the Spanish school.³⁷

Now, turning to text analysis *per se*, the first section (letters) is purely linguistic, instructing the reader about the Hebrew alphabet, distinguishing consonants, vowels, and final-word letters. Now, the fact that the author already uses the second part of the book (syllables) to already introduce Protestant messages deems necessary to highlight this book as very ideological. The following texts are the introductory samples to learn to read in Judeo-Spanish with Hebrew letters found in the second section of the book:

- (1) ¹La vi-đa de ca-đa chi-co va-le mu-cho (*SIL1855*: 5).
- (2) ²Mi que-ri-đo, to-ma la ma-no de tu a-mi-go (*SIL1855*: 5).
- (3) ³La al-ma es-pí-ri-tu es, no se ve (*SIL1855*: 5).
- (4) ⁴El mu-cha-cho am-ye-ža en la es-co-la (*SIL1855*: 5).
- (5) ⁵²⁰¿Ōn-de es el ar-bo-li-co de mi a-mi-go? (*SIL1855*: 5).
- (6) ⁶¹⁵El pas-tor que-re a-pa-cen-tar sus o-ve-jaś 'en las pas-to-re-as ver-des (*SIL1855*: 6).
- (7) Los chi-cos 'de-ben de a-bo-rre-cer men-ti-ras y a-mar 'la ver-dađ (*SIL1855*: 6).
- (8) ⁸El Cri-a-đor nos da el tri-go y 'fru-tas pa-ra co-mer. De-be-mos de ¹⁰a-gra-de-cer-lo por su bon-dađ (*SIL1855*: 7).
- (9) ⁹La vi-đa es pres-to por cum-plir. Los 'hom-bres que-ren en-gran-de-cer sus oĥ-ras (*SIL1855*: 7).

³⁶ Iacob M. Hassán, "Transcripción normalizada de textos judeoespañoles", *Estudios Sefardíes* 1 (1978): 147-150.

³⁷ Aitor García Moreno, *Relatos del Pueblo Ladinán: "Me'am Lo'ez" de Éxodo* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2004), 31.

- (10) 'En el pre-ci-pio cri-ó el Dio los cie-¹⁵los y la tie-rra³⁸ (*SIL1855*: 8).
 (11) 'Hon-ra a tu paḏ-re y a tu maḏ-re pa-ra que se a-lar-guen tus dí-as sob-re la tie-rra que H', tu Dio, te da-rá³⁹ (*SIL1855*: 8).
 (12) ¹⁰Guar-dad los man-da-mien-tos del Dio (*SIL1855*: 9).
 (13) 'Des-pués de la muer-te es u-na 'vi-ḏa de siem-pre (*SIL1855*: 9).
 (14) El buen ni-ño 'am-ye-za su li-ción cum-pli-ḏa-men-te (*SIL1855*: 9).
 (15) 'En el tiem-po de Da/id, el rei-no de los ¹⁵ju-diós fue mu-cho po-de-ro-śo (*SIL1855*: 9).

Out of the 15 aforementioned texts, only 3 extracts can be ascertained as neuter in terms of ideology (2, 5, and 6). Regarding the other 12 texts, 4 texts are related to the Bible, namely, texts 10 (Genesis 1:1), 11 (Deuteronomy 5:16), 12 (Gospel of John 14:15, 21), and 15 (referring to King David's powerful kingdom). Now, 3 texts (1, 7, and 8) show a Protestant emphasis which might not be very controversial for the targeted audience. In text 1 the author highlights the importance of life while it sums up the Protestant concern for Jewish children, main target of the Scottish missionaries' proselytism attempt. Text 7 makes reference to the ninth of the Ten Commandments, which entreates the believer not to lie (Exodus 20:16; Deuteronomy 5:20). Text 8 instructs the reader about God's mercy, shown by feeding His creatures (Gospel of Mathew 6:26-33); so in exchange, believers must always be grateful (Psalm 105:1; 106:1; 107:1; Ephesians 5:20; Philippians 4:6; Colossians 3:7,15; 1 Thessalonians 5:18). The remaining 5 texts (3, 4, 9, 13, and 14) have been interpreted as controversial for most Jewish believers because of different reasons. Text 3, 9 and 13 are the most conflictive ones as they portray Protestant doctrines. In the first case, Thomson introduces the reader to the basics of Cartesian philosophy, whereby the soul or spirit is different from the body and it is the target of the new life (Gospel of John 3:5-6) provided by Christ. Therefore, two kinds of lives are here laid out, the earthly one (which is short, as text 9 mentions, and a shadow or type of the following one) versus the celestial (the one that really matters, eternal, as text 13 introduces). Finally, texts 4 and 14 can be conceived as ideological because the author willingly makes reference to learning at school, versus at home or in the traditional Torah Jewish centers, which were a

³⁸ Genesis 1:1.

³⁹ Exodus 20:12.

constant problem for Christian educators during Thomson's time.⁴⁰ Missionaries thus emphasize that children must learn at the missionary's schools or *escolas*.

Now we move to the analysis of the last section of the book (readings), which revolves around 6 texts, namely, "Examples", "The Blind Boy", "The Colored Glass", "The Story of Two Altars" (1 Kings 18), "the Ten Commandments" (Exodus 20:3-17; Deuteronomy 5:6-21), and a poem (Psalm 1). Let us have a look at each of these readings. The first one (אֵינֶשׁ יִמְפְּלוֹס / "Enjemplos") contains 9 sentences (texts 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, and 24), which they all can be categorized as ideological as well. The first five sentences seem to be translated from a Spanish translation of an Arabic manuscript translating the famous Classic moral book entitled *Tablet of Cebes* (1st century AD),⁴¹ mistakenly attributed to the Greek philosopher by that name. Sentence 16⁴² shows the commonly known Protestant work ethics embraced by the Christians involved in this mission (Colossians 3:23), teaching children not to delay any work and do it as soon as possible. Text 17⁴³ refers once again to the principle mentioned in text 8, that is, believers must always be thankful to the Lord in all kind of situations. However, text 17 could also be interpreted as an attack to the Catholic system of salvation, not solely based on repentance of sins to achieve salvation, hence considering them ungrateful believers. Text 18⁴⁴ is a famous proverb that prioritizes always telling the truth at all costs, hence obeying to the ninth commandment. Text 19⁴⁵ is another proverb that reminds the reader of the Parable of the Bags of Gold (Gospel of Mathew 25:14-28) in which the master entrusts his wealth to his servants by lending them bags of gold to make profit while he is gone. As in text 19, the third servant hid it in the ground and did not obtain any benefit (Gospel of Matthew 25:18). This story alludes once more to the Protestant work ethics that missionaries aimed at teaching Jewish children. Text 20⁴⁶ is another proverb emphasizing both blessings (Leviticus 26:3-13; Deuteronomy 7:12-

⁴⁰ Attendance in the missionary schools was always irregular among Sephardic Jews, sometimes because of these *heremot* (Heb. sing. חֵרֶם, 'censure'), which threatened parents with excommunication if they insisted on taking their children to missionary schools, or sometimes because of Jewish feasts. Overall, the attendance was among 40-50 Jewish pupils: 54 Jewish children in 1850, 44 out of the 60 alumni enrolled in 1853, 40 in 1857 before one of the most important *heremot* in the history of the mission. (*The Home and Foreign Record of the Free Church of Scotland* (1858), 129).

⁴¹ Pablo Lozano y Casela (trans.), *Paráfrasis Árabe de la Tabla de Cebes* (Madrid: Imprenta Real, 1793).

⁴² Lozano y Casela, *Paráfrasis Árabe*, 180.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 182.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 178.

24) for obedience and curses (Leviticus 26:14-46) for disobedience as stated in Deuteronomy 28. Now, in the same line, the following extracts are verses cited from the New Testament. Sentence 21 is the translation of the Gospel of Mathew 5:8, where Jesus Christ delivered his famous sermon on the Mount of Beatitudes. Text 22 again picks up the topic of lying by citing Proverbs 12:19, 22. Text 23 is the translation of Ecclesiastes 7:20, interpreted by Protestants as a proof of the *sola fide* and *sola gratia* principles.⁴⁷ Finally, Ecclesiastes 12:14 is translated in text 24, which Christian theology is prone to associating with God's Judgment Day (Gospel of Mathew 25:31-46).

(16) ¹1. Lo que has de ha-cér hoy no lo de-jes pa-ra ma-ña-na (SIL1855: 11).

(17) ²2. No to-dos que re-ci-ben bon-da-des son a-gra-de-ci-dos (SIL1855: 11).

(18) ¹⁵3. La ver-dað que da-ña es me-jor de la men-ti-ra que a-le-gra (SIL1855: 11).

(19) ⁴4. El te-so-ro de que no se gas-ta a-pro-ve-cha 'po-co (SIL1855: 11).

(20) ⁵5. ¿Jun-tó el Dio sus pro-me-tas con sus a-me-na-za-mien-tos (SIL1855: 11).

(21) ¹²6. Bien-a-ven-tu-ra-dos los lim-pios de co-ra-¿zon por-que e-llos verán al Dio⁴⁸ (SIL1855: 12).

(22) ⁷7. El la-bio de ver-dað se-rá para siem-pre, 'ma has-ta un pun-to la lengua de fal-se-¿dað. Los la-bios men-ti-ro-sos son a-bo-rre-ci-dos del Dio⁴⁹ (SIL1855: 12).

(23) ⁸8. Non hay hom-bre ¿jus-to en la tie-rra que ha-ga 'bien y non pe-que⁵⁰ (SIL1855: 12).

(24) ⁹9. To-ða he-cha el Dio tra-e-rá en ¿ju-i-cio ¹⁰con to-do en-cu-bier-to, si bue-no y si 'ma-lo⁵¹ (SIL1855: 12).

The second reading (איל מוג'אגו סיגו / "El Muchacho Ciego") is the story of a sick eight-year kid suffering from smallpox that has made him blind. One day he goes out for a walk with his sister Hannah and they sit under a tree, where he laments he will never see nature's beauty again. He starts crying and his own tears seem to cure him, becoming happy again. When he gets home, their entire family cries out of joy and gives thanks to God when praying.

The definition of a main character revolving around a physical problem was common in short stories in the 19th century.

⁴⁷ *Sola fide* and *sola gratia* are core principles normally attributed to Martin Luther's most basic theology, making Protestant be distinguishable from Catholic and Orthodox theologies. While the former means justification by only faith, the second one alludes to salvation to be attainable by God's grace only.

⁴⁸ Mathew 5:8.

⁴⁹ Proverbs 12:19:22.

⁵⁰ Ecclesiastes 7:20.

⁵¹ Ecclesiastes 12:14.

children often described as ‘cripples’ [...] were often constructed as objects of pity [...]. The child character in the literature and the child reader of that literature are often therefore highly politicised, being constructed as emblems of the future: their role is to act as both inheritors and saviours of the world.⁵²

As Little puts it, “they are central characters because their handicap is necessary to the storyline”,⁵³ “but their handicaps made them closer to God”⁵⁴. In this manner, we perceive the author’s ideological intentions not only by naming all characters with Hebrew names (the blind boy Yah‘acob, יעקב, his sister Ḥana, חנה, and the other boy who also cured from smallpox, Daniel, דניאל), but also by featuring the main character’s sickness from the very first sentence:

(25) ‘Ha-bí-a en Es-co-cia un bu-en mu-cha-cho cer-ca ¹⁵de o-cho a-ños que ca-yó ḥa-čí-no de vir-güe-la. ‘Y de la for-ta-le-za de su ḥa-čí-nu-ra se le ‘cie-ga-ron sus o-jos (*SIL1855*: 12).

In this line, Thomson makes the blind boy the target of pity by the narrator (text 26), other characters (text 27a), and God Himself (text 27b):

(26) E-ra tan bue-no que to-ḏos los de su fa-mi-lia lo a-ma-ban mun-cho (*SIL1855*: 12).

(27a) Non llo-res Ya‘acob, pue-ḏe /ser que ve-rás ot-ra vez. Dani‘el Scot, tú sa-bes ¹⁰que ca-yó ḥa-čí-no de vir-güe-la y e-ra cie-go /por mun-chas se-ma-nas, ma se me-le-čí-nó y ‘a-go-ra ve cla-ro [...] (*SIL1855*: 13).

(27b) [...] ma si non así, el Dio ha-rá lo ‘que es de-re-cho y te ben-de-čí-rá en al-gu-na ‘ot-ra ma-ne-ra, no-só-tros tan-bién per-cu-ra-¹⁵re-mos de pla-čer-te (*SIL1855*: 13).

Thus, Thomson does not place him under the scope of damnation, a sick boy because of his or his parents’ sin, but he becomes the focus of God’s saving grace. For this reason, the story has a happy ending in which the blind boy can cure from his illness (text 28).

(28) «Ḥana, ya pue-ḏo ver! ¡Ya ‘pue-ḏo ver! All-í es-tán el mo-li-no, y el ‘rí-o, y las pa-tas y las o-ve-jas ¡Cuán-to ‘gran-de es mi a-le-grí-a!» (*SIL1855*: 13).

⁵² Margot Hillel, “‘Helpless and a Cripple’: The Disabled Child in Children’s Literature and Child Rescue Discourses”, in *Stories for Children, Histories for Childhood*, ed. Rosie Findlay, Sébastien Salbayre (Tours: Presses universitaires François-Rabelais, 2007), 127.

⁵³ Greta D. Little, “Handicapped Characters in Children’s Literature: Yesterday and Today”, *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly* 10 (1986): 182.

⁵⁴ Little, “Handicapped Characters”, 181.

However, this is not exactly the end, as a Protestant coda had to be inserted (text 29):

(29) A 'la tar-de, cuan-do su paḏ-re hi-žo o-rac-ión 'con su fa-mi-lia y dio grac-ias al Dio por 'su bon-daḏ, llo-ra-ron de a-le-grí-a (*SIL1855*: 13).

To sum up, Thomson has been able to use a simple children story to convey one key Protestant message, namely, children must solely rely on God's grace to reach a solution for their problems (*sola gratia*) and they must just have faith this will be so (*sola fide*), as it happened with the story of Ya'acob.

The third reading (איל ב'ידירו קולוראדו / "El Vidro Colorado") revolves around another kid, Yoḥanán, who happily announces his sister Miryam that he has found a colored glass through which he can see the world in different colors. His sister takes this chance to teach her brother a lesson, namely, that the manner one perceives the world does not entirely rely on one's own senses (an outer feature) but on one's inner self. That is, if Yoḥanán was a good person, everyone else would be so in his eyes. For this reason he must always behave in the same way he wants the other to act with him. Such lesson is expected to be a translation of another short story told at the time that we have been unable to trace either. As it happened with the story of the blind kid, this text seems to exhibit a moral ending, in this case, the Golden Rule, or the Biblical rule of "do as you would be done by" (Gospel of Mathew 7:12), cited in text 30.

(30) A-go-ra, a-cór-da-te, mi 'her-ma-no, y se-as siem-pre lo que que-res que e-/llos se-an con ti (*SIL1855*: 14).

On a related note, Thomson might be using this story to foster a Christian religious concern about sin, as in text 31.

(31) Sí, Yoḥanán, mun-cho her-mo-śa co-śa; yo te mos-tra-ré 'có-mo pue-des am-ye-zar al-gún cas-ti-go de 'es-ta co-śa (*SIL1855*: 14).

The fourth reading (איסטוריא די לאס דוס אראס / "Historia de las Dos Aras") is a translation of the Biblical passage 1 Kings 18, which deals with the story of the prophet Elijah and his defiance to King Ahab. After causing a three-year drought to the land produced by God because of His people's idolatry, this prophet aims at proving that the Jewish God, versus the other gods worshipped by the idolaters

in the kingdom, is the only true one. When he does so, the people gathered there at the mount realize they were being idolaters and they kill the 450 false prophets; immediately putting an end to the drought. This specific story had already been translated in one of Thomson's famous translations from English into Judeo-Spanish, namely, *Ele Toledot Bené Yisrael* (1854) [henceforward *ET1854*].⁵⁵ However, when we compare both, it is easily concluded that the source text must necessarily be different, as the *Sila bario*'s version does not feature the same information than the same story translated in *ET1854* a year before. As an example, let us show how different the beginning of both stories is:

(32a) ¹²⁵Aḥab, el rey de Yisrael, se ca-šo con u-na mu-jeṛ ^{11p-15}ma-la, hi-ja de un ot-ro rey. E-lla som-bayó 'a su ma-ri-ḏo pa-ra en-cor-var-se a los 'i-ḏo-los, y ma-tó a los pro-fe-tas del Dio; 'Eliyaḥu ro-ma-ne-ció so-lo (*SILI855*: 14-15).

(32b) ¹⁵El rey Aḥab sobrepujó en idolatría a to'dos los que eran antes de él, y su mujer Izebel, 'una princesa šidonia, fraguó en Šomrón esplén'didos templos para los ídolos de Šidón, y mantení'a cuatrocientos y cincuenta sacerdotes de Bá'al [...], 'el ídolo del sol, y cuatrocientos sacerdotes 'de Aštarot, la diosa de la luna, a la cual el 'pueblo adoraba en solombrosas arboledas con 'enconado apetito y de una manera desvergonzada. ¹⁵Todos los siervos del Dio de Yisrael fueron perse'guidos, y los profetas de Dio matados, aunque 'en la misma corte de Aḥab había daínda un va'rón llamado 'Obadiá, que en lo encubierto servía 'a H', y escapó cien profetas⁵⁶ del Señor, es¹⁰condiéndolos en cuevas de las montañas, y go'bernándolos en las escondidas con pan y agua (*ET1854*: 130-131).

Whereas Thomson highlights that the prophet Elijah was the only prophet of God alive, in *ET1854* we read about another person who helped 100 servants of the Lord to escape from the wrath of the King's wife. In the same line, many more details are omitted in the reading in *SILI855*, which only focuses on the story of the altar offered to God by Elijah to prove which God was truly the one. Thus, we can claim that the fourth reading is a more canonical text which omits any comment or additional information found in *ET1854*. Therefore, we understand that Thomson is only interested in introducing the story to kids, focusing on fighting idolatry and highlighting the Jewish God as the true one.

As aforementioned, the fifth reading (לאס דיִיס אינקומנדאנסאס דיל דיין) / “Las Diez Encomendanzas del Dio”) is another Bible translation which corresponds to the

⁵⁵ Alexander Thomson, *Ele Toledot Bené Yisrael* [...] (Constantinople: A. B. Churchill, 1854), 1-174.

⁵⁶ I correct the original סס״פורפ / *profetss*.

Ten Commandments. This is a very ideological choice for a text to teach children how to read, informing them about what God demands from them. The selection of this text cannot be taken for granted. Thomson wants to use a text from the Torah that converges his reading manual to Judaism and he chooses this book because it is one of the only traditions followed by Jews which are honored by Protestants, as nothing can be added or deleted from the Ten Commandments. In the words of Thomson, regarding these ten precepts, “no se puede añadir nada y nada se puede quitar”.⁵⁷

Finally, the last reading appears in the form of a poem (קאנטאר / “Cantar”), corresponding to a translation of Psalm 1, which is particularly praised among Christians because it posits a dichotomy between two kinds of people, the rightful ones (text 34) and sinners (text 35).

- (33) '1 Cuánto bendicho es el varón
 /con pecadores non andán.
 '15 Non dándoles su corazón
 'ni con burlantes se asentán;
 '2 Las Escrituras Santas son
 'su gozo: en ellas meldará;
 'de día y noche él estudián
 '101 hombre entendido se hará.
 '3 Aseme]ante al árbol es
 'que sobre un río es su lugar;
 'su fruta da según su vez,
 'el Dio lo haçe prosperar (*SIL1855*: 20).
- (34) '154 Non es así el pecador;
 'ma es como paja la ayolán;
 'de la fortuna el ju]zga]dor
 'lo empu]jará, de él lo ju]zgan (*SIL1855*: 20).

On the one hand, the main trait of the rightful person is that he does not spend time with evil men. Rather, he reads the Holy Scriptures with joy day and night, hence being prospered by God. On the other hand, the sinner lives purposeless. The last verse (text 36) introduces the reader into a behavioral system which teaches believers to always do their best because God, unlike other men, is always looking at what humans do – which is one of the main concerns of Christians.

⁵⁷ Alexander Thomson, *Ele Toledot Bené Yisrael [...]* (Constantinople: A. H. Boyaciyan, 1886), 114.

- (35) ^{/5} Conoce a todos Adonay:
^{/20} justos y malos claros son.
[/] Coñas escritas a Él no hay;
[/] Él sabe todo corazón (*SILI855*: 20).

3. Analysis of Results

Our former analysis of texts revealed how ideological this apparently neuter pedagogical work turned out to be. Figure 2 summarizes the results of our interpretative study of the first 15 sentences written in the second section of the book, that is, the one teaching about syllables. In this line, only 3 texts (2, 5, and 6) have been interpreted as neuter and lacking ideological traces, representing 20% of the total amount of texts found in this section of the book, versus 80% samples of ideological propaganda. Out of this last category, whereas 7 texts are non-conflictive (representing 46,67% of the 15 texts), 4 being Biblical texts (10, 11, 12, and 15) and 3 presenting other religious values (1, 7, and 8), 5 are very contentious (3, 4, 9, 13, and 14, representing 1/3 of the 15 texts).

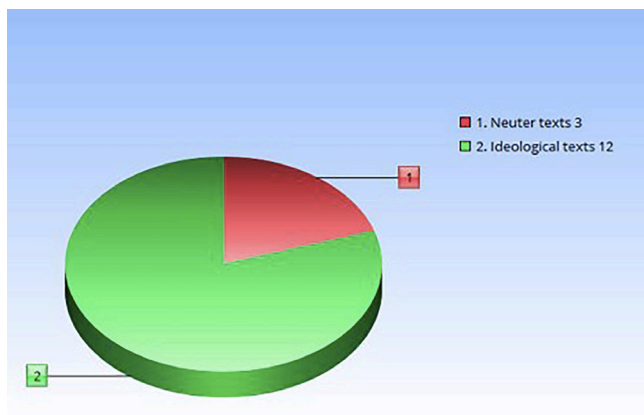


FIG. 2: Distribution of texts within the section of “Syllables” in *SILI855*.

Now, figure 3 thus summarizes the categorization of the 12 ideological texts, namely, 4 Biblical (10, 11, 12, and 15, representing 33,33% of the 12 texts),

3 non-conflictive (1, 7, and 8, or 25%), and 5 conflictive (3, 4, 9, 13, and 14, representing 41,67%), of which 2 pursue a clear proselytizing attempt regarding *escolas* (M4 and 14, 16,67%) and indoctrination texts (3, 9, and 13, representing the remaining 25%).

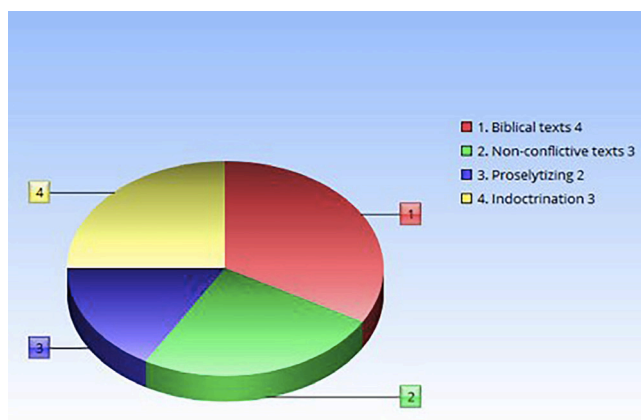


FIG. 3: Distribution of ideological texts in *SIL1855*.

Now, shedding light on the remaining texts, that is, the 6 readings, we have seen that half of them are taken from the Bible, plus almost half of the sentences in the first reading follow the same pattern. If we already considered that 80% of the first 15 sentences were ideological, the first reading contains 100% of ideological statements that aim at teaching Protestant ethics to children. Overall, it seems that the best strategy to convey ideological messages is the inclusion of Biblical texts, as it happens with 8 sentences out of the 24 combined between the syllables section and the first reading, representing 33,33% of these short texts. Similarly, if we just took into account the bigger readings, 57,4% of the texts contain Bible extracts (3 reading out of 6 plus 4 sentences out of 9 within the first reading). Thus, the final distribution of the strategies used in this book's texts is graphically represented in Figure 4 in rounded percentages. If we consider the first 15 sentences as the seventh reading, the most well-used sort of text is Tanakh stories (3 entire readings, or 42,85% of the total amount of texts, and 6 sentences, or texts 10, 11, 15, representing 2,85% of the total amount of texts, and sentences 22, 23, and 24, representing 4,77% of the total amount of texts),

used half of the times of texts to learn to read, then 2 moral stories (28,57%), 5 proverbs (7,93%), 3 neuter texts (2,85%), 3 ideological but non-controversial but ideological sentences (2,85%), 3 indoctrination sentences (2,85%), New Testament sentences (2,53%), 1 from the syllables section (0,95%) and 1 from the first reading (1,58%), and finally, 2 proselytizing sentences from the syllables section (1,95%).

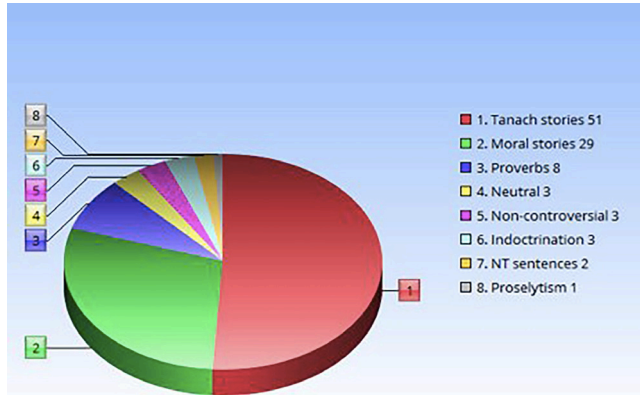


FIG. 4: Rounded percentage of the distribution of texts in *SIL1855*.

4. Conclusion

Thomson does not resort to references to the Messiah within this book, agreeing with our hypothesis of attempting to exclude references to the figure of Christ in the first production in Judeo-Spanish the 1850s to proselytize Sephardic children. As a pedagogical, more than theological, work, this book serves its purpose to attempt to culturally converge into the targeted audience by providing the Ottoman Jewish children attending missionary schools with resources to learn to read their own language. Notwithstanding some ideological statements that can posit some problems for the targeted audience (i.e. texts with Protestant indoctrination), these ideological references are subtle and need further explanation to be fully understood in Protestant theological terms. It is true that the author has decided to cite some New Testament verses like in texts 8,

9, 12, 19, and 21, of which only the last one is a full translated text from the Bible. Nevertheless, for the reasons and results here presented, we highlight *SIL1855* as an attempt⁵⁸ to introduce Protestant values to children of the Sephardic Jewry in Constantinople in the 19th century. We have found the very title (*Silabario or Ayuda para Amęezar a Meldar para el Uőo de las Escolas de Ĵudiós Sefaradim*) as enlightening about the goal of the book, aimed at Sephardic Jews learning at the missionaries' *escolas*. Thus, it perfectly summarizes what this manual does. On the one hand, it presumably leans on merely teaching how to read, when only 2,85% of the total amount of texts in the entire book can be considered neutral in terms of ideology. On the other hand, the book misses any warning to the reader about the hidden Protestant message inside, which can only be revealed through a content analysis as the one carried out in this study.

⁵⁸ Wolfe, "From Protestant missionaries", 137.