Amadores das Musas

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The Hebrew language enjoyed a remarkable revival among members of the Sephardic Jewish community in Amsterdam during the 17th century. As their new congregants returned openly to their ancient faith and embraced the Jewish way of life, the local rabbis and *parnassim*, or governors of the congregation, devoted particular attention to the teaching of the biblical language. The study of Hebrew became a permanent feature of the curriculum from the very start of the community's existence. Isaac Uziel, who arrived from Fez and served as the rabbi of the Neve Shalom congregation, composed Hebrew poems and authored a study of Hebrew meter as well.[1] Among his students were Rabbi Isaac Aboab da Fonseca (later the community's rabbi) and Menasseh Ben Israel, a renowned Hebraist in his own right. But since no existing traditions of language education were available, the local teachers had to improvise different methods of study. They developed a new approach: the grammar book and systematic analysis of non-Jewish schools assisted the teachers to construct a coherent program that could match the long-standing traditions of study of the Hebrew language among members of Jewish communities in Spain before the expulsion as well as in other communities of the Sephardic diaspora.[2]

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1 See manuscripts in Ets Haim Library: EH 47 E32 = L. Fuks and R.G. Fuks, *Hebrew and Judaic Manuscripts in Amsterdam Public Collections: I. Catalogue of Manuscripts in the Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana; II. Catalogue of Manuscripts of Ets Haim/Livraria Montesinos, Sephardic Community of Amsterdam* (Leiden, 1973-75) II. no. 252.

2 For the history of the Sephardi community in Amsterdam see H. Brugmans and A. Frank, *Geschiedenis der Joden in Nederland* (Amsterdam, 1940), Part Two, cc. 1-2; D. Swetschinski, *The Portuguese Jewish Merchants of the 17th century* (Ph.D. thesis: Brandeis University, 1980); J.I. Israel, "Spain and the Dutch Sephardim, 1609-1660", *Studia Rosenthaliana* 12 (1978), 1-61; R.G. Fuks-Mansfeld, *De Sephardim in Amsterdam tot 1795* (Hilversum, 1989). One of the most famous grammars of Hebrew is that of Rabbi Moshe Rephael d'Aguilar, *Epitome de grammatica hebrayca*, which

This development of a systematic approach towards language education had the additional effect of stimulating other uses of Hebrew. Teachers encouraged their pupils to write both prose and poetry in Hebrew. Literary associations were founded in which the Hebrew language was used in all kinds of forms. Poems were specially written for literary gatherings, speeches were delivered on all kinds of subjects, riddles were invented and Hebrew translations of foreign language literature were recited.[3]

Nevertheless, the Sephardi Jews of Amsterdam remained conscious of their roots in Spanish-Christian culture. Their feelings towards their Iberian motherland were two-edged. After all, the country they had fled was also the country that had nurtured them. The last thing they desired was to abandon the culture of their ancestors; on the contrary, their love for Hebrew was matched by their love for Spanish. Alongside the Hebrew literary associations, "academies" were organized focusing on Spanish and, through Spanish, on European literature at large.[4] Gatherings such as these were held frequently within the Jewish community throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. Nevertheless, in the 18th

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was published in Leiden in 1660, and of which a second edition appeared one year later, in 1661, in Amsterdam. This second edition dealt not only with pure grammatical questions but also with meter and rhyme of Hebrew poetry, thus following in the footsteps of Isaac Uziel. Another Hebrew grammar was composed by Baruch de Espinoza and published posthumously in 1677: see edition and translation of M.J. Bloom (New York, 1962). On activities related to Hebrew see Fuks-Mansfeld, *op.cit., passim*. For a description, and praise, of the curriculum of the local school, see the introduction of Shabtai Bass, *Siftei Yeshenim* (Amsterdam, 1680).

3 On literary associations, like the *Miqra Qodesh*, see J. Melkman, *David Franco Mendes* (Amsterdam, 1951), 43-48. Manuscripts by its members are assembled in Ets Haim Library: EH 47 A12 = Fuks and Fuks, *Manuscripts*, II. no. 257. On riddle literature see D. Pagis, *A Secret Sealed. Hebrew Baroque Emblem Riddles from Italy and Holland* (Jerusalem, 1986) [in Hebrew].

4 On the academies of the 17th century see D. Swetschinski, *op.cit.*, 536-541; Y. Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism. The Story of Isaac Orobio de Castro* (Oxford, 1989), 286-302; H. den Boer, *La literatura hispano-portuguesa de los sefardíes de Amsterdam en su contexto histórico-social (siglos XVII-XVIII)* (Ph.D. thesis: University of Amsterdam, 1992), 147-161.

century the Hebrew language tended to gain the upper hand.[5]

On 14 January 1767, four poets and scholars assembled at the house of the well-to-do Amsterdam Sephardi Yaacov Even-Yakar (Abeniacar). They decided to meet there every Saturday evening after the Sabbath, or "once a week during the long winter nights", as described in the title of the poem dedicated to the first festive meeting. At these meetings they enjoyed "God's words and His Torah". The poets gave themselves the Portuguese name "Amadores das Musas", or Lovers of the Muses, and from existing manuscripts by two of the members it is clear that the classics were certainly not *terra incognita*.[6] Yaacov Even-Yakar's four guests — David Franco Mendes, Yaacov Israel Hai (Vita), Samuel Baruch Benavente and David Jimenes Pereyra — were poets who worked together and whose writing career spanned a long period.[7] Their world was a Hebrew world: they wrote in Hebrew and translated into Hebrew from several European vernaculars (Spanish, Portuguese, French and Italian). In their search for suitable material they were willing to embrace classical literature, and although we possess only a few examples of such translations we may assume from the combined

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5 See den Boer, *op.cit.*, 161.

6 J. Melkman, *op.cit.*, 38ff., was the first scholar to identify the group and discuss its activity. The poem dedicated to the group is found in "A Few of the Notebooks of Yaacov Israel Hai (Vita)", EH 47 C8 = Fuks and Fuks, *Manuscripts*, II. no. 269, f.21r. The fact that they chose a Portuguese name rather than a Hebrew one, as was common with Hebrew literary associations, may suggest that they decided deliberately to deal with non-Jewish literature as well.

7 The collaboration among these four friends can be further appreciated from the poems and other compositions they wrote for each other. Franco Mendes dedicated a poem to S.B. Benavente when he became a physician and D.J. Pereyra translated the poem into Dutch (EH 47 B3 = Fuks and Fuks, *Manuscripts*, II. no. 255, f.105, 106); in the same manuscript there is a farewell poem which Franco Mendes wrote for Hai (Vita), when he traveled to Venice in 1767; Yaacov Israel Hai composed a poem celebrating S.B. Benavente's marriage in the same year (manuscript of the Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, ROS.PL. B-69 = Fuks and Fuks, *Manuscripts*, I. no. 315; another copy of the poem is found in EH 47 C8= Fuks and Fuks, *Manuscripts* II, 269, f.45); Franco Mendes wrote a short speech for the same occasion (EH 47 B3 = Fuks and Fuks, *Manuscripts*, II. no. 255, f.11 [the speech is not mentioned by Fuks and Fuks]); S.B. Benavente added a dedication poem to Franco Mendes' *Gemul Atalia* in 1770. The lives and works of Franco Mendes' friends have not been investigated.

evidence that the world of Japhet was far from being alien to these sons of Shem.

The five translations which are presented here belong to the manuscript collection of Franco Mendes, the central figure of the group and the most important Hebrew poet in 18th-century Amsterdam.[8] The manuscript, entitled "Sukkat David" (The Tabernacle of David), contains a copy of a satirical letter to a friend who forgot to return some borrowed books; the letter is based on a fable by Aesop. Another manuscript, entitled "Kinnor David" (David's Harp), contains Portuguese and Hebrew translations by Franco Mendes of a poem by Cicero. In 1774 Franco Mendes also copied compositions by his colleague and friend from the "Amadores", Yaacov Israel Hai (Vita), into a special notebook. This notebook, entitled "Ketzat Mahbaroth Y.I.H.", contains a second Hebrew translation of Cicero's poem as well as translations of Horace, *Odes* 1.11 and an unknown Latin epigram.[9]

Had these Lovers of the Muses learned Greek and Latin? If so, where? And how can we assess the extent of their knowledge? In "Kinnor David" we learn that Samuel Baruch Benavente translated Cicero's poem from Latin to Portuguese, and Franco Mendes prepared the Hebrew version on the basis of this text. Benavente must have had a fairly thorough knowledge of Latin since he studied medicine and graduated in 1770; he would have had to consult books and write his thesis in Latin.[10] Being an educated person with a taste for literature Benavente

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8 On Franco Mendes see Melkman, *op.cit.*; see also the Chronicles (*Memorias...*) of the Jewish community Franco Mendes had written, and which were published by L. Fuks and R.G. Fuks, *Studia Rosenthaliana* 9 (1975).

9 See EH 47 B3 = Fuks and Fuks, *Manuscripts*, II. no. 255, f.133 (see also below, note 21); EH 47 A26 = Fuks and Fuks, *Manuscripts*, no. 258, f.12r (one should add to the description of the MS. the fact that the letter is based on Aesop); EH 47 C8 = Fuks and Fuks, *Manuscripts*, no. 269, ff.42v, 58v (one should add to the description of the editors the fact that the Portuguese translation is accompanied by a Hebrew one as well), 59r (the editors do not mention the Latin verses alongside the French and Portuguese). For other compositions of the "Amadores" see Fuks and Fuks, *Manuscripts*, *passim*.

10 On Benavente's studies and graduation see *Archive of the Senate and Faculty, Rijksuniversiteit Leiden* = *ASF* 350, f.10r: "Feb. 14 [1770]: Samuel Benavente, Amstelodamo, Batavus, post defensam in Senatu dissertationem *De Rachitide*, Medicinae Doctor renunciatus est a Rectore Magnifico...". Brugmans and Frank,

might have been able to step with ease from the technical Latin required of a physician to the Classics. The fact that Hai (Vita) possessed a Latin transcript of Cicero's poem may suggest that he had a reasonable knowledge of Latin.[11] With their background in Romanic languages and their intellectual aspirations, the "Amadores" could have easily studied and eventually mastered Latin. All four, however, had to acquire their knowledge privately, since the Jewish school had no classes in Greek or Latin until the mid-19th century.[12] Moreover, Horace's ode was not translated from the original Latin but from a French version, and, as will be shown later, it was actually French literature which occupied a central place among members of these literary circles.[13] In all probability they generally relied on translations of the original Latin.

There is no real evidence of a knowledge of Greek. Franco Mendes probably read translations of Aesop's fable, which were to be found in many European languages; in fact, he spelled the author's name in Hebrew as *Aesopo*, reflecting the use of a Spanish-Portuguese suffix; he uses neither the Greek *-os* nor the

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op.cit., 674 write "Amstelodamo, Judaeus"; cf. with P.C. Molhuysen, *Bronnen tot de geschiedenis der Leidsche universiteit* (Den Haag 1918) vol. 6, 83*, who writes "Batavus" as well. To be referred to as "Batavus" is not unique; see Brugmans and Frank, *op.cit.*, 675: "Isaac Haim Abendana de Britto, Amstel.Bat.", who received his M.D. in 29 Oct. 1778; on efforts to acquire knowledge of the Latin language see also two manuscripts from the Ets Haim collection, which contain dialogues in Latin and Portuguese for the purpose of education: EH 48 E30, EH 48 E60 = Fuks and Fuks, *Manuscripts*, II. nos. 438, 444. Kaplan, *op.cit.*, 125, discussing the events concerning Juan Prado, relates an anecdote in which a boy tells Rabbi Morteira that Prado gave him private classes in Latin, since he wanted to study medicine later. See also another study by Y. Kaplan, "The Jewish Students in the University of Leiden in the 17th Century", *Studies on the History of Dutch Jewry* 2 (1979), 65-75.

11 See below.

12 J. Vaz Dias, "The Ez Hayyim Beit Midrash in Amsterdam", *Studies on the History of Dutch Jewry* 5 (1988), 297.

13 Swetschinski, *op.cit.*, 527 gives an inventory of a household library, which contained French translated editions of classical texts. On the growing influence of French culture on the Sephardic Jews from the end of the 17th century onwards see D. Swetschinski, "The Portuguese Jews of Seventeenth Century Amsterdam — Cultural Continuity and Adaptation" in F. Malino and P. Cohen Albert (eds.), *Essays in Modern Jewish History* (London, 1982), 56-79.

Latin *-us*. "Sukkat David" nevertheless does contain a reference to the Greek language.[14] Franco Mendes describes a "testimony" dealing with the use of the Hebrew vowels *kamatz gadol/kamatz katan*. In an attempt to prove that the pronunciation of the Sephardim is superior to that of the Ashkenazim, he claims that the spelling of names like Abraham, Sarah, Adam and Havah (Eve), as transliterated by Josephus in the *Antiquitates*, proves that "the exiles in Spain, France and Greece" use the correct vocalization of the ancient, original Hebrew.[15] Clearly, it is impossible to deduce from such evidence that Franco Mendes could read Aesop in Greek, or that he had learned Greek at all. What it does show, however, is the range of his intellectual curiosity, and that he must have known the Greek alphabet to be able to substantiate such a statement.

That these scholars were principally concerned with the Jewish faith is beyond dispute. This, in turn, influenced the way Franco Mendes and his friends translated. The very title of the poem dedicated to the "Amadores das Musas" states their intention as a society "to listen to God's words and His Torah". A poem by Cicero or Horace would surely seem out of place here, yet the group's name (Musas) is derived from Greek mythology, and the farewell poem Franco Mendes composed for Yaacov Israel Hai (Vita), who left to visit his mother in Venice in March 1767, opens with a verse mentioning another mythological character, Kalliope. Franco Mendes does, however, furnish a rather fanciful etymological gloss: the Greek name Kalliope, he claims, stems from the Hebrew and means *Kol-Yaphe*, or beautiful voice.[16]

This dualism — resorting to foreign literature while trying to remain loyal to Jewish custom — was already evident in the activities of the academies of the 17th century. It is a phenomenon of which modern scholars are fully aware and whose influence has become a subject of debate.[17] Among the following

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14 EH 47 A26 = Fuks and Fuks, *Manuscripts*, II. no. 258, f.14r.

15 Franco Mendes says: "Avraham and not Afroom [!], Adam and not Odam".

16 See Melkman, *op.cit.*, 46, 136 n. 22. This etymology is, however, not an invention of Franco Mendes; it is already found in David Provençal's book, *Dor ha-Pelaga*, and was copied by Azaria de Rossi and Moscato in the 15th century: see A. Altmann, "*Ars Rhetorica* as Reflected in Some Jewish Figures of the Italian Renaissance", in S.D. Cooperman (ed.), *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA, 1983), 20. The local Jewish literature of Amsterdam abounds in such examples.

17 See n. 4.

translations, Horace's ode is the most problematic with regard to ideas and content.[18] Originally a drinking song, the ode praises an Epicurean concept — *carpe diem* — which emphatically contradicts Jewish philosophy. The translator consequently twisted its meaning and provided the poem with a totally different interpretation. At best, the Hebrew version might be considered a free adaptation of the Latin, or, indeed, of the French which the translator Hai (Vita) used.

(Horace, *Odes* 1.11)
Pour prevoir l'avenir en vain se tourmente,
Croi moi Luconoë, des Chaldeens menteurs,
Cesse de consulter les calculs imposteurs.
Le mieux est de soufrir tout ce qui se presente,
Soit que le Dieu[19] qui veille au soins del' universe
Daigne te conserver pendant plusieurs hyvers
Ou qui borne au plus tôt la course peu durable,
Dans des termes etroit, sache tecontenir,
Nous perdons à parler un temps inreparable
Profitons du present, peu sur de l'avenir.

העתקה מל' צרפת: כאשר עיניך לנכח יביטו:

לדעת העתיד גר אל תחקור
אל חרטום אל תדרוש או אל כשדי
כי חשבונם לעד שקור ישקור
גם טוב גם רע קבל, הקשב עדי
כי אם יקצורו או ירבו ימיך
יקצורו או ירבו ברצון שדי
צלם תמיד יום יום מעגל רגליך
בקש את המועיל מן ההוה
וליום מחר אל יתהלל לכך
כי על מה שיהיה תמצא מסוה.

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[18] On the original Latin poem see R.G.M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace: Odes, Book 1* (Oxford, 1970), 135ff.

[19] In the original version the poet refers of course to Jupiter. This is the only meaningful difference between the French translation and the Latin.

The French translation, whose origin is unknown, is close to the Latin. It was copied into the manuscript with the Hebrew and it is clear that neither Hai (the translator) nor Franco Mendes (the copier) had consulted the Latin. The poet's name in the title is spelled according to the French and not the Latin usage: Horace rather than Horatius. And following the French translator, Hai (Vita) added a title that was rarely used in antiquity. But while the French title is simply: "à Luconoë" (the name of the woman mentioned in the second verse, to whom Horace dedicated the poem), the Hebrew version, reflecting the change in the interpretation of the poem, has another, more profound title: "When your eyes look forward ...". The Hebrew version also loyally follows the French in the number of verses (10, instead of the Latin eight) and ignores the Latin meter; the Hebrew translator tried to compose verses of 11 syllables (hendecasyllables), a traditional form of Hebrew poetry in Spain and Italy.

The Hebrew translator omits the name of Luconoë from the text; instead Hai addresses the *Ger*, or stranger — gentile. From the third verse, however, the deviation in the Hebrew text, from the original Latin as well as the French, is total. Horace speaks about the long winters and the stormy seas caused by Jupiter, which we have to endure patiently; Hai ignores the metaphor altogether and deals rather with God's place in human life. Horace thinks that it is futile to ask astrologers about the future, since there is no reason to believe that better days will come; on the other hand, Hai believes that tomorrow can be as good as today because God protects us. Thus, while Horace encourages Luconoë to enjoy today, for tomorrow may be worse than today or indeed there may never be another tomorrow, the Amsterdam Jewish poet advises us to enjoy today because there is a God who will take care of the days to come. Moreover, it is a grave sin to doubt the Creator's intentions, since it is He who determines how long we shall live. Thus the Epicurean idea was displaced by a Jewish one. Horace was judaized.

By contrast with Horace's ode, the subject matter of Cicero's poem does not pose such a problem. However, the fact that our manuscripts contain two translations of the same poem gives it added importance, since it enables us to examine the way in which the translators thought and the lines along which the "Amadores" operated. Again, it must be stressed that the translations are rather free, and the translators took considerable liberties in their efforts:

(תרגום יעקב ישראל חי)

כן העוף הנשא בעל הרעם
נשוך מן הנחש בכאב ובזעם
ירמום ידרוך עליו גם יכניעהו
ובפיו ובצפרניו הכה יכהו
אך זה עד שער המוות מגיע
ומבקש לְנצל ערפו יניע
וכנפו וזנבו קשר על קשר
יקשור, יסוב, יקיף גופת הנשר.
הנשר מלא אך עוד לא ירפנו
יוריד למו עד צאת נפשו ממנו
יבצע גוו, ישמח כי ידו רמה
עודנו חם ישליך אותו הימה.

(תרגום דוד פרנקו מנדס)
העתק שיר הח[כם] הרומי סִיסֵירו.

כמעופף[א] (הנושא על כנפי אברתו
את צדק המבריק ברק בגבורתו)
הנשוך מנחש יוצא מלב אלה
ילבש נקם, בלתי ישקוט עד אם כלה.
יאזור עוז, יתגבר, ילטוש לו את עיניו,
ירמום, ימחץ אותו בפתיחות צפרניו,
לא ירא לא יחת מרוש [כך] ולשון צפעון
מעברת עת מותו כי ירבה שגעון
אף כי יהפוך ערפו החובר בר אליו
גם יאבק עמו כרוך סביב עליו.
הנשר יתגונן, ישוב ישלח יד בו
ובחודת פיו ינקוב מעיו וסגור לבו
(לגמול רעת שומו את שיניו בבשרו)
ישפוך ארצה דמיו יאכך בדי עורו
ישליך את נבלתו מעליו לגזרים
כאבן במצולות תוך מים אדירים.

[א]המעופף הנשא כוכב הצדק על אברתו הוא הנשר והוא כוכב קטן ממנו הסובב אותו עם רעיו המשרתים אותו. בלעז סטיליט.

Franco Mendes was responsible for one translation, Hai for the other. As we have seen, this last version was copied by Mendes in 1774, but he does not mention the fact that he had translated the same poem himself before. Mendes' own (and Hai's?) translation would seem to be considerably earlier than Mendes' copy of Hai's piece. One is tempted to connect both translations to the meetings of the "Amadores" in 1767, although there is no evidence to support this.

In "Kinnor David", Franco Mendes copied the Portuguese version (entitled "Exacta traduçaô do D. Sam. Benavente do Latino") alongside his own Hebrew translation (entitled "copy of a poem by the Roman philosopher [in Hebrew *Haham*] Cicero"[20]). In "Ketzat Mahbaroth", he copied the same Portuguese text together with Hai's Hebrew translation. Here he also included a rather careless copy of the Latin text of the poem with, for example, the first half of the third

[20] Note that Franco Mendes spells his name with a *samech*, thus the Roman's name is pronounced "Sisero". The poet apparently follows the usual Spanish pronunciation.

verse combined with the second half of the fourth verse — which makes the poem very difficult to translate. Evidently Hai had a Latin copy of the poem to hand in addition to Benavente's Portuguese translation while struggling with his own Hebrew version. However, since Benavente's text is found in both translators' manuscripts, it seems likely that it was the young physician who had found Cicero's text, translated it into Portugese and later, distributing his version among the "Amadores", suggested the Hebrew translations.

The fact that Hai also used a Latin version may have been the reason why, probably with the aid of a Latin dictionary, he was able to avoid a mistake made by Franco Mendes when translating the first verse. Franco Mendes, using only Benavente's text, wrongly interpreted the first verse and, indeed, the general meaning of the poem: *Sic Jovis Altisoni subito pinnata satelles* (or rather, as in his Portuguese version: *Tal o plumado sattelite de Jupiter tonante*). According to the explanation Franco Mendes added to his own translation in "Kinnor David" at the bottom of the page, the poem describes the planet Jupiter and its suns. The poem that he produced deals with astronomy or astrology,[21] while Cicero was in fact using a common epithet referring to Jupiter.[22]

The title of Hai's translation states that Cicero's text was copied from "Vers qui nous sont restés de Ciceron: Voltaire, Pièces de theâtre, T. 5, pag. 5".[23] Evidently Benavente had not read the Roman orator; he preferred the French philosopher, a hero of the time. Benavente read the poem while reading Voltaire's play "Rome Sauvée" (published in 1752), which is about Cicero (Voltaire's own hero[24]) and Catiline's conspiracy of 63 BC. Voltaire copied these verses in an introduction to the play he wrote himself in which he tried to illustrate the

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21 Relying on Franco Mendes' explanation, Fuks and Fuks, *Manuscripts*, *ad loc.*, also mistakenly entitle this fragment an "abstract of a Port. astrological treatise with Hebr. trans."

22 Cf. Lewis and Short, *Latin Dictionary*, "Pinnatus" (1).

23 I could not identify the edition of Voltaire's work indicated in the title of the manuscript.

24 On Voltaire and Cicero see D.A. Day, "Voltaire and Cicero", *Revue de littérature comparée* 39 (1965), 31-43; R. Gartenschläger, *Voltaire's Cicero-Bild* (Diss. Marburg, 1968). The fact that there are other translations of his poetry in the manuscripts shows how popular Voltaire was in that period. See EH 47 B3, EH 47 A26 = Fuks and Fuks, *Manuscripts* II. no. 255, f.134; no. 258, f.11r. Moreover, in 1758 Binyamin Garcia translated Voltaire's *Brutus* into Spanish: den Boer, *op.cit.*, no. 343, p. 87.

Roman orator's mastery of the art of poetry.[25] He quoted eight of the 13 verses, as quoted in *de Divinatione* I, 106 and translated them into French.[26]

The poem was dedicated by Cicero to Caius Marius, who was born in Cicero's home town Arpinum. The metaphor in these verses describes a divine omen according to which the noble eagle will eventually crush the evil serpent. Cicero used this metaphor to express his sympathy for Marius' return from exile in 87 BC and his struggle against Sulla.[27] Voltaire does not mention, and the Amsterdam poets probably did not know, that the metaphor employed by Cicero was borrowed from Homer (*Iliad* XII, 200ff.), where this omen was given to the Trojans.

From these translations of both Horace and Cicero, it is clear that the "Amadores" were heavily indebted to French literature. The third example provides further evidence of this fact.

When they began, the "Amadores" probably searched for some particularly interesting literary gems to discuss at their first festive meeting. One of the treasures they found was a short, otherwise unknown Latin epigram, which is quoted alongside a Hebrew translation by Hai in "Ketzat Mahbaroth" and is dated 14.1.1767, the date of that first meeting.

Delphinum juvenem rapuit mors invida quare?
Virtutes numerans credidit esse senem.

דֶלפין באבו שׁב למקום צלמות
על מעשיו. כי שׁב נחשב ממות.

The epigram was composed in the pure elegiac *distichon* form of classical Latin poetry. My hypothesis is that Hai found this epigram in a French newspaper or journal during the previous year (1766). In October 1765, fifteen months

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25 Voltaire says: "Cicéron etait encore un des premiers poètes d'un siècle où la belle poésie commençait à naitre. Il balançait la réputation de Lucrèce. Y a-t-il rien de plus beau que ces *vers qui nous sont restés* [my italics: compare with the title in the manuscript] de son poëm sur Marius ...".

26 Benavente copied and translated the first seven verses while Franco Mendes, as a result of his own mistake in verses 3/4, has only six.

27 On Cicero's poetry and this poem in particular, see P.C. Brush, *Cicero's Poetry* (Ph.D. thesis: Yale University, 1971), 38-48.

before the first meeting of the "Amadores", the Dauphin Louis, son of Louis XV, died at the age of 36. Presumably, in the following year the French littérateurs published epitaphs and eulogies commemorating his death, one of which was this epigram, which deals with the death of a young dolphin, thus alluding to the Dauphin.[28] Hai translated the epigram and, as the date on the top of the page may suggest, it was presented during that memorable first meeting. Evidently, no attention was paid to the sad occasion for which the epigram had originally been written.[29]

The Hebrew translation (or rather adaptation) shows how much Hai toiled over the precise rhyme and meter: verses containing 11 syllables, the interplay of words in the sixth and the eleventh syllable of both verses, and the allusion to a biblical verse.[30]

The only translation from Greek rather than Latin literature is Franco Mendes' satirical letter based on a fable by Aesop. The letter dates from 1775. As might be expected, it is impossible to identify the person to whom the letter was addressed: no name is explicitly mentioned in the text, and it may be assumed that such a letter was never mailed. The letter-form is probably no more than a

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28 On the Dauphin Louis see P.G. Gooch, *Louis XV, The Monarchy in Decline* (Oxford, 1956), 119-131. On the term Dauphin (= Delphin/Delphinus), see *Grande Larousse de la langue française* II (Paris 1972), 1111, s.v. "Dauphin" (2), which also relates how Louis XIV commissioned the writing of a book for his son entitled "Ad usum Delphini", or "Edition du Dauphin", containing the selections from Latin literature of importance for a future king of France. Although I have been unable to identify an ancient author for the text, and while the hypothesis that the epigram is connected with the death of the Dauphin seems likely to be true, one cannot rule out the possibility that the epigram was composed in antiquity or the Middle Ages and simply borrowed for this occasion. What is relevant here, if my hypothesis is correct, is the degree to which these poets were indebted to French literature.

29 The page where the epigram is copied also contains another quatrain dealing with the subject of life and death; this quatrain is translated from Italian and is dated 28.1.1767, two weeks after the first meeting. Was "Life and Death" the general subject of discussion in the first weeks of the group's meetings?

30 Cf. Job 38:17. See also Franco Mendes' translation of Cicero, where in the last verse, for instance, he resorts to Ex. 15:10, or the satirical letter, where he resorts to Ps. 49:10.

literary convention, in which Franco Mendes toys with the fable genre, using Aesop as his model, to describe how he is confronted with the dilemma of lending yet another book to a forgetful friend.[31] The original Greek versions of the fable are much shorter and Franco Mendes' story deviates from Aesop's example in a few minor details.[32] Franco Mendes composed another longer and more elaborate version of the fable, which he concluded with clues as aids to understanding the parable.

This latter text provides us with a list of seven books: six his friend already had in his possession and the seventh he had asked for and Franco Mendes refused to lend. Six of the books mentioned are in Hebrew,[33] the seventh is by Penso de la Vega and was in Spanish.[34] All the books deal with Jewish subjects, indicating again how these people were immersed in Hebrew and Jewish topics.

A:5535

להחכם השואל ספרי בית לימודי, ואחרי שהפצרתי בו פעם אחר פעם / להשיבם לי ולא עלתה בידי.....כתבתי המשל הזה ביום / הוסיף לשלוח אלי שליח לדרוש שאשאיל אליו עוד ס׳ מחברות עמנואל:

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31 Aesop's fable relates the story of the fox who refused to visit the lion who was lying in his cave and pretending to be sick. When the lion wondered why the fox did not come, the fox replied that he had seen all the other animals going into the cave, but none coming out. Each of the entering animals represents a missing book, and the last book which was asked for by his friend is the fox. It should be noted in this connection that following the ancient Greek tradition, Hebrew literature developed its own genre of parables, the *Mishlei Shualim*, or fox fables, for which Aesop served as a model.

32 See the three Greek versions in A. Hausrath (ed.), *Corpus Fabularum Aesopicarum* (Stuttgart, 1962), no. 147 = E. Chambry, *Esope, Fables* (Paris, 1960), no. 196.

33 For the identification of the books see J. Fürst, *Bibliotheca Judaica* (Hildesheim [1849], 1960) I, 65, 392; II, 391. There are titles (like *Sha'arei Dim'ah*, see Index) which were given to several books and it is impossible to determine which ones Franco Mendes was referring to.

34 J. Penso de la Vega, *La Rosa. Panegirico Sacro en Encomio de la Divina Ley de Mosseh* (Amsterdam, 1683); see also M. Kayserling, *Biblioteca española-portugueza-judaica* (Strasbourg, 1890), 86.

אוהבי היקר חכם ומשכיל.....מן שמיא יקב יהבי ליה (משקל לא שקלי)/ חינא וחסדא ורחימי וחיי אריכי ומזונא רויחא: אוכי״ר:

איזופו הממליץ המפואר המשיח אלמים השם פה לדבר לחיה ולבהמה, רמש וצפור כנף, ספר לנו/ במשליו ושניניו שפעם אחד [כך] שכב האריה (מלך החיות) על משכבו והתחל. וילכו כל חיות/ השדה ובהמות היער אל המערה אשר שם רפד יצועו לבקרו ולברכו ברפואה שלימה, זולתי השועל./ והנה אחרי אשר רמס וטרף כל הקרב אליו ואין מציל, בהתאחר פעמי השועל לבא להלכד ברשתו/ אשר טמן בהוודעו לכל החיות שחולה הוא (והוא היה חזק ובריא), התנכל עליו להמיתו. שלח מלאכיו וקרא לו לאמר:/ מלכנו האריה האוהב את נפשך כנפשו התפלא עליך מדוע לא הלכת לראות פניו בחליו, ומה גם/ שדבר סתר לו אליך. המלך דבר רדה אליו: אל תעמוד, אל תירא לנפשך כי לא יאונה לך רעה./ ויען השועל[א]: הגידו למלך שעבדו נאמן אני, ושבחלותו לבושי שק ותפילתי זכה לא הסירה מאתי לרפא/ החולי[י]ם אשר בשמים נסאו [כך] בעדו ובעד ביתו שיחליתוהו ויסעדהו על ערש דוי. אמנם אנכי לא אקרב/ אל פתח ביתו ולא אבא בצל קורתו, כי כבר שמתי לדרך פעמי כפעם בפעם לילך אליו, ובהיותי/ הולך וקרב למערתו נכונותי בדפוסי פרסות הגמל[ב], השור[ג], החמור[ד], הצאן[ה]/ והשה[ו] ויתר החיות והבהמות, ורשומן ניכר באדמה ובחול. זה דרכם כסל למו/ כלם הולכים הלוך ליכנס [כך] לפנים לתוך המערה ולא ראיתי דפוסי הפרסות השבים ממנה,/ ורק חכמתי עמדה לי. וככלות אמריה אלה נסעה לדרכה לשלום.

וזה פירוש והתייחסות המשל הוא לדברים בגו ונכונים המה למבין:

א. השועל - הוא ס׳ מחברות עמנואל אשר חשבתי לשלחו אליו.
ב. הגמל - עץ הדעת וכו׳
ג. השור - הוד מלכות וכו׳
ד. החמור - אגרת פורים
ה. הצאן - שערי דמעה
ו. השה - קול מבשר אשת חיל
ויתר החיות Panegirico de Penço והנשכחים ממני.

מאוהבו הנאמן חפשי (=פרנקו מנדס)

The priorities are clear. Jewish subjects and books in Hebrew were first on the list for the "Amadores". Yet as we have seen, these poets were not living in an exclusively Jewish enclave. They cherished their Spanish and Portuguese past and, through French literature, Franco Mendes and his friends were influenced

by the European cultural heritage in general. Classical Greek and Roman culture was not their main subject of interest, but, being in contact with the general European culture, the "Amadores" were nevertheless acquainted with ancient literature. Hence they were able to choose whatever they found aesthetically beautiful for their own purposes. These classical gems enriched their own knowledge and gave them the opportunity to translate and to practise their skills in Hebrew composition.

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