

On One Halakhic Issue in *Meza de el alma*

1 Introduction

The monumental halakhic book *Šulḥan ‘Aruk* by Rabbi Yosef Karo (1488–1575) was translated into Ladino and published circa 1568 in square vocalized Hebrew letters at Yosef Ben Yiṣḥaq Ya‘abeš’s printing house in Salonika. The translator, Rabbi Me‘ir Ben Šemu‘el Ben Ban Benist [Benveniste] (Cohen 2015), named his book by the following words: *Livro lyamado en lashon hakodesh Shulhan hapanim i en ladino Meza de el alma*¹ ‘A book named in the sacred language [Hebrew] *Shulḥan ha-panim* and in Ladino *Meza de el alma*’ (Benveniste 1568:1a).

The translated book contains two introductions, one in Hebrew which is printed in Rashi script (1b–2a), and the other in Ladino, printed in Hebrew square vocalized letters (2b–4a). In both introductions, Benveniste praises Rabbi Yosef Karo’s tremendous achievements and explains his reasons for translating the work in Ladino: it is written for men who need to study Jewish law but who do not know enough Hebrew to understand the original *Šulḥan ‘Aruk*. The book is printed in square vocalized letters so that anybody can read and understand it easily. In both introductions, Benveniste also stresses the prohibition against publishing the work in Italy, because the people or the authorities there might change the laws.²

A substantial part of the Hebrew introduction is apologetically devoted to the fact that the book has been published in Ladino. Benveniste gives references to previous Jewish Halakhic works written in languages other than Hebrew (such as Arabic and Aramaic), and claims that this practice does not prevent people from learning Hebrew; indeed the reader will actually benefit from being able to understand the material more easily.

The Ladino introduction stresses the importance of teaching Jewish laws to all family members, especially women. The author gives the names of the two books that he had previously written specifically for women. The first of these (which has been lost) is *Espejo de las muzyeres* [espejo de las mujeres] ‘Mirror of the women,’

1 Aki *Yerushalayim* conventions are used for the transcription of Ladino. However, I copy by as in the original text although it might have been pronounced as y. I use current pronunciation of Ladino in representing the letters *b* and *v*. Also, *h* represents Hebrew *He* (ה) and *H* represents Hebrew *Het* (ה) or *Kaf Rafa* (כּ) in the transliteration of Hebrew words in Ladino. I represent *Aleph* by ‘ and *Ayin* by ‘ in the Hebrew transliteration, *Het* by *h*, *Shin* by *š*, and *Kof* by *q*.

2 In spite of this prohibition, the book has been reprinted in Venice in 1602, 1608 and later in 1713 with some changes (Schwarzwald 2017; Cohen 2021:957–959).

in Hebrew *Mar'ot šovē'ot*, a book for the teachers of women, which describes all relevant laws except for those concerning menstruation (for reasons of modesty). The second book is *Seder našim*, a prayer book for women to be used throughout the entire year published in 1565 in Salonika (which features detailed instructions); the only copy of this work can be found in The National Library of Israel in Jerusalem (Schwarzwald 2012:3–4).

Regarding his translation and editing methods, Benveniste gives this very brief statement in the Ladino introduction:

Este livro es treslado de todos los dinim ke son menester para uzar el pueblo [. . .] palavra por palavra en breve i en ladino de letra entera kon puntos para ke todos se pueden aprovechar de el.

This book is a translation of all the laws that the public need [. . .] word for word briefly [in a brief manner] printed in Ladino using full letters [square letters rather than Rashi script or cursive *solitreo*] with dots [vocalization] so that everyone can benefit from it (Benveniste 1568:2b).

The expression *en breve* means concisely, hinting at the translator's tendency to shorten instructions in spite of his literal inclination expressed by *palavra por palavra* 'word for word.'

Benveniste's translation and editing approach are discussed in more detail in the Hebrew introduction. These are his principles: he includes laws that individuals need to know and laws that are customary in the community; he skips laws that are either already generally known or laws that need a rabbi's ruling decision; he also does not include laws which people can ascertain from the conduct of others (such as behavior in the synagogue); he does not include new laws that are unfamiliar to the community; he refrains from listing laws that he knows the public cannot observe or which might be ridiculed; he also avoids disputable laws; he is reluctant to list certain laws that the general public might perceive as encouraging bad behavior; he recommends consulting a rabbi in many cases of exact measures, and so on (Levy 1994).

In this paper I will examine one short chapter, *Dine Sefer Tora* 'the laws of the Torah' in *Yore De'a* (124a–124b), called *Hilkot Sefer Tora* in the *Šulḥan 'Aruḥ*. I want to explore the ways in which Benveniste translates and edits the source material and show the extent to which he follows the principles that he formulates in both introductions.

2 *Šulḥan 'Aruḥ* and *Meza de el alma* Compared

The following table depicts parallel laws in *Šulḥan 'Aruḥ* (SA) and *Meza de el alma* (MA) regarding the transcribing and handling of a Torah scroll (*Sefer Tora*). The left-hand column includes the section number (with the number of subsections in

it given in parentheses), the middle column describes subject matter, and the right-hand column shows the equivalent passages in *Meza de el alma*:

SA	Subject Matter	MA
270 (2)	The reward for transcribing a <i>Sefer Tora</i>	
271 (7)	The leather and ink to be used	
272 (4)	The width of the parchment	
273 (6)	The size of the parchment, the space between lines and sheets	
274 (7)	The scribe's intention and laws regarding corrections	
275 (6)	Formation of open and closed <i>parašot</i> and of poetry	
276 (13)	Correction of a forgotten word and writing God's name	276 (2)
277 (1)	The prohibition against turning the parchment upside down	
278 (4)	Sewing the parchment sheets together	
279 (5)	Proofreading	
280 (2)	Torn parchment after sewing	
281 (5)	Who may transcribe a <i>Sefer Tora</i> ?	
282 (19)	Respect for the book and its accessories, and the way to use it	282 (7)
283 (5)	The possibility of appending Pentateuch, Prophets, and Hagiography	283 (1)
284 (2)	The prohibition against writing down holy scriptures without having a pattern	

Whereas the *Šulḥan 'Aruk* contains 15 sections numbered 270–284, each of which contains subsections (a total of 88), *Meza de el alma* only features parts of three sections: 276, 282 and 283, and a total of 10 subsections.

At this point, four obvious questions arise:

1. Why does the translator skip so many laws?
2. Why does the translator include specific laws?
3. To what extent are the translations adequately equivalent?
4. Does the translator take liberty in translating the text?

Sections 270–275 and 277–281 consist of laws relating to *Sefer Tora* writing. Section 284 deals with the laws pertaining to writing biblical Hebrew verses on straight lines. These laws would not have been relevant to most Sephardic laymen as a Torah scroll would only be transcribed by someone who was very familiar with Hebrew. This is the reason that Benveniste does not translate these sections.

Most of the laws in 276 also deal with writing a Torah scroll; however, two of these (subsections 9 and 13) are general and relevant for every Jew. I am copying here the texts next to each other, Hebrew on the left-hand side and Ladino on the right-hand side. The section numbers are given according to the *Šulḥan 'Aruk*. Here is the first one:

(1) 276:9

'asur li-mḥoq 'afillu 'ot 'aḥat mi-šiv'a šemot
 še-'enam nimḥaqim, wē-lo me-'otiyyot
 ha-nitpalot me-'aḥarehem kēgon כ' (k) šel
 'eloheka wē-כ"ם (km) šel 'elohekem. Wē-'ellu
 ha-šiv'a šemot: šem ha-hawaya; wē-šem 'adnut;
 wē-'el, 'eloha, 'elohim; šadday; šēva'ot. Wē-yeš
 gorēsin gam ken 'ehye 'ašer 'ehye (Karo 1565 §
 276.9).

Es pekado rematar afilu una letra de los syete
 nombres ke no se pueden arrematar ke son
 YhWh Adonay El Eloha Elohim Shaday Ševaot
 i ay kyen dizyen tanbyen Ehye Asher Ehye ni
 pueden rematar las letras ke estan djuntas
 depues delyos kumo la ח (Ha) de EloheHa
 i el כ"ם (Hem) de EloheHem (Benveniste
 1568:124a).

Šulḥan 'Aruḵ claims: it is forbidden to erase even one letter of the seven names that should not be erased and also [it is forbidden to erase] from the letters that are attached after them like 'ך of אלהיך ('eloheka) and כ"ם of אלהיכם ('elohekem). And these are the seven names: שם, אלהים, ואל, אלוה, אלהים, שדי, צבאות. And some say that also [the expression] אהי"ה אשר אהי"ה ('ehye 'ašer 'ehye).

Meza de el alma translates: it is forbidden to erase even one letter of the seven names that should not be erased which are: יהוה אדני אל אלוה אלהים שדי צבאות (YhWh Adonay El Eloha Elohim Shadday Šēva'ot), and some say that also [the expression] אהי"ה אשר אהי"ה ('Ehye 'Ašer 'Ehye). Also it is forbidden to erase the letters that are attached after them like the ח of אלהיך (Eloheka) and the כ"ם of אלהיכם (Elohekem).

Although the subject matter is the same in both works, the order of the sentences is slightly different and, in my opinion, the order in the translation of *Meza de el alma* makes more sense. *Meza de el alma* lists the seven names of God immediately after stating that, and then adds the additional letters that should not be erased. *Šulḥan 'Aruḵ* gives a list of additional letters that cannot be erased before it provides the seven names.

Meza de el alma also specifies expressions which appear in *Šulḥan 'Aruḵ*: Benveniste used יהוה (YhWh) and אדני (Adonay) instead of שם ההויה (šem ha-hawaya) and אדנות (šem 'adnut) as written in *Šulḥan 'Aruḵ*.

The second law states:

(2) 276:13

Kēli še-haya katuv 'alaw šem, qošeš mēqom
 ha-šem, wē-gonzo (Karo 1565 § 276.13).

Un atuendo ke estava eskrito sovre el un
 Shem kortara el lugar del Shem y lo porna en
 Geniza (Benveniste 1568:124a).

The translation is equivalent to the original: in case of a tool that the Name [of God] is written on, one should cut out the place of the Name and put it in *Gēniza*.³ *Šulḥan ‘Aruḵ* uses the Hebrew verb *gonez* ‘hide, store,’ while *Meza de el alma* uses the periphrastic expression *lo porna en Geniza* ‘put it in Genizah.’

Although most of section 276 is comprised of instructions for the Torah scroll scribe, Benveniste is concerned here with the treatment of God’s written name as it appears in any context. As this commandment is practical it should be observed by every Jew (not only where God’s name appears in the Torah scroll, but also in other texts—for example the Passover Haggadah). Benveniste includes these relevant instructions in his translation but does not talk about the laws regarding the actual writing of the Name.

There are 19 subsections in section 282 of *Šulḥan ‘Aruḵ*, but Benveniste translates only seven of these. I will list them here one by one:⁴

(3) 282:1

Ḥayyav ‘adam li-nhog kavod gadol bē-Sefer Tora. U-mišwa lē-yaḥed lo maqom u-l-ḳabbed ha-maqom ha-hu u-l-haddēro bē-yoter. Wē-lo yiroq kēneged Sefer Tora. Wē-lo yēgalle ‘erwato kēnegdo. Wē-lo yifšot raglo negdo. Wē-lo yaniḥennu ‘al rošo kē-mašuy. Wē-lo yahazor ‘aḥoraw, ‘ella ‘im ken gavoah mi-mennu ‘ašara tēfahim, ‘ella yešev lēfanaw bē-ḳoved roš u-v-yir’a wa-faḥad, še-hu ha-‘ed ha-ne’eman ‘al kol ba’e ‘olam, še-ne’emar: wē-haya šam bē-ḳa lē-‘ed [Deut 31:26], wi-yḳabbēdennu kēfi koḥo (Karo 1568 § 282.1).

Es ovligado el ombre de uzar grande onra en el Sefer Tora i no eskupa ni espanda su pye enfrente del i no lo ponga sovre su kavesa kumo karga ni le buelte las espaldas salvo si esta mas alto ke el dyes punyos salvo este delante del kon temor i pavor i onrelo asegun su fuersa (Benveniste 1568:124a).

These are the parallel instructions in *Šulḥan ‘Aruḵ* and *Meza de el alma* regarding ways in which to honor the Torah scroll: A man must treat the *Sefer Tora* with great respect: he should not spit or spread his legs in front of it; he should not put it over his head as if carrying a burden; he should not turn his back to it unless the book is ten handbreadths higher than him; but he should sit in front of it with dread and fear, and honor it according to his strength.

3 A *Gēniza* (or *Genizah*) is a storage place, often found in a synagogue, for disused sacred books and ritual articles.

4 The italicized phrases in *Šulḥan ‘Aruḵ* indicate identical contents in *Meza de el alma*.

Šulhan 'Aruḵ adds the following instructions: it is a commandment to put the *Sefer Tora* in a special place, to clean the place and to exalt it; a man should not reveal his nudity in front of it; [he should] (sit) seriously (with dread and fear) because it is the true testimony of all people of the world, as the verse says: 'And it will be there a witness for you' (Deut 31:26).⁵ *Meza de el alma* ignores these additions. Placing the book in a special clean, respectable location and not standing naked in front of it seem obvious and redundant to Benveniste (but see no. 5 below). The editor had already given detailed instructions regarding praying in general, treating the prayer book with respect and behaving properly in the synagogue in previous chapters of *Meza de el alma*; therefore, he does not need to repeat himself here.

The final phrases of this *Šulhan 'Aruḵ* subsection include a biblical citation which serves as an explanation as to why one should sit respectfully and fearfully before the book.⁶ Benveniste does not include this explanation and citation here probably because it sounds vague in this context (he does however include original source material explanations in various other places throughout the book).

(4) 282:2

Ha-ro'e Sefer Tora kē-še-hu mēhalleḵ, ḥayyav la-'amod lēfanaw, wē-yihy ha-kol 'omēdim 'ad še-ya'amod ze še-moliḵo wē-yaggi'ennu li-mqomo, 'o 'ad še-yitkasse me-'enehem (Karo 1565 § 282.2).

El ke vee lyevar Sefer Tora es ovligado de alevantarse delante del i estaran todos en.pye hasta ke se pare el ke lo lyeva i lo alyege asu lugar o hasta ke se enkuvra de sus ojos (Benveniste 1568:124a).

When someone sees a *Sefer Tora* being carried, he must stand up, and everybody should remain standing until the one carrying the scroll puts it in its place or until it cannot be seen anymore.

The translation here is an exact copy of the original, unlike the next example.

⁵ An exact translation of the missing words in the Ladino translations appears in the footnotes in the Conclusion section.

⁶ The book was placed for testimony next to the Ark in the holy tent (Miškan) in the desert.

(5) 282:4

Lo ye-eḥoz 'adam Sefer Tora wē-yikkanes bo lē-vet ha-kisse 'o lē-vet ha-merḥaṣ 'o lē-vet ha-qēvarot, 'af 'al pi še-karuḳ bē-miṭpaḥat wē-natun ba-tiq šelo, wē-lo yiqra bo 'ad še-yarḥiq d' [d=4] 'amot me-hamet 'o mi-bet ha-qēvarot 'o mi-bet ha-kisse. Wē-lo ye-eḥoz Sefer Tora bē-lo miṭpaḥat (Karo 1565 § 282.4).	No trave el Sefer Tora desnudo (Benveniste 1568:124a).
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Meza de el alma simply states that one should not carry the *Sefer Tora* naked. *Šulḥan 'Aruḳ* gives more detailed instructions: a man should not hold a *Sefer Tora* and enter with it to the toilet, to a public bathing place or to the cemetery, even if it is covered with a mantel (scarf) and inserted in its box; and he should not read from it unless he is four cubits away from a dead person, from a cemetery or from the toilet. And he should not hold a *Sefer Tora* without a mantel.

This is important information about carrying a *Sefer Tora*, but Benveniste gives a short instruction which can be interpreted in two ways: either a naked man should not carry a *Sefer Tora* or a *Sefer Tora* must be carried only if covered. According to the first interpretation, as a person might not be wearing any clothes in the toilet or when taking a bath, he should not hold a *Sefer Tora* while naked. The second interpretation regarding the 'nudity' of the *Sefer Tora* refers only to the last sentence of *Šulḥan 'Aruḳ*: a man should not hold a *Sefer Tora* without a cover.⁷

Benveniste does not refer to a cemetery here, and ignores the instructions regarding how a *Sefer Tora* should be held. Apparently, because the act of reading the Torah is mentioned at this point, Benveniste did not include these instructions in his translation: a Jew who does not know Hebrew is incapable of reading from a Torah scroll, all the more so carrying it around. Perhaps he also thought that the laws referring to the proximity of a cemetery would not seem reasonable to a Sephardic layman.

The following laws are presented slightly differently in *Šulḥan 'Aruḳ* and *Meza de el alma*:

⁷ In fact, the mention of nudity of a man could have been better incorporated in (3) above rather than here, thus perhaps the second interpretation is more reasonable.

(6) 282:5

'En zorëqin kitve qodeš, wa-'afillu halakot	Es pekado de arrodjar livros de ley (Benveniste
wë-'aggadot (Karo 1565 § 282.5).	1568:124a).

Šulḥan 'Aruḳ states that it is forbidden to throw away any Holy Scriptures or even texts containing Jewish law (*halakot*) and legends (*'aggadot*), i.e., any Hebrew traditional texts. *Meza de el alma* gives a more generalized translation: it is a sin to throw away books of law. However, since the Ladino word *ley* implies the Bible as well as Jewish law, *halakā*, and any other scripture, Benveniste covers all the detailed phrases in *Šulḥan 'Aruḳ* by using the expression *livros de ley* 'books of law', as opposed to *el libro de la ley* which refers specifically to the Bible.

(7) 282:7

'asur le-šev 'al ha-miṭṭa še-Sefer Tora 'aleha (Karo	Es pekado de asentarse en un lugar ke ay
1565 § 282.7).	livro de ley en el (Benveniste 1568:124a).

Šulḥan 'Aruḳ states that it is forbidden to sit on a bed where a *Sefer Tora* is lying. *Meza de el alma* again uses the ambiguous word *ley*, rather than *Sefer Tora* and the translator generalizes about the Torah scroll's location: it is a sin to sit in a place (not necessarily a bed) in which there is a book of law (including the Torah scroll?).

(8) 282:8

Bayit še-yeš bo Sefer Tora lo yešammeš bo	En la kaza ke el ombre se adjunta kon su
miṭṭato 'ad še-yoš'ennu. Wë-'im 'en lo maqom	mujer no tenga tefilin ni livros ni Ĥumašim,
lë-hoši'o, ya'aše lëfanaw mëḥiṣa gavoah 'asara	sino en un atuendo dyentro de otro atuendo
ṭëfahim. 'Aval 'al yëde hanaḥat këli bë-toḳ këli	ke no es apropiado para elyos i si espande un
še-'eno mëyuhad 'eno muttar ella bi-tfillin u-š'ar	tapete sobre la kasha adonde están puestos
kitve ha-qodeš wë-ḥummašim, 'aval lo bë-Sefer	se kuantan kumo un atuendo dyentro de otro
Tora, wë-ha-Rambam mattir 'af bë-Sefer Tora.	(Benveniste 1568:124a).
Wë-'im paraš tallito 'al ha-'argaz še-munnaḥ bo,	
ḥašuv ki-ḳli bë-toḳ këli (Karo 1565 § 282.8).	

This law refers to a house where a man and a woman are having sexual intercourse. *Šulḥan 'Aruḳ* uses the euphemism: *yešammeš bo miṭṭato* 'will use his bed,' while *Meza de el alma* is more specific: *el ombre se adjunta kon su mujer* 'the man

unites with his wife.’ While *Šulḥan ‘Aruḳ* distinguishes between the *Sefer Tora* on the one hand, and *tēfillin* ‘phylacteries,’ Holy Scriptures and single books of the Pentateuch on the other, *Meza de el alma* only talks about the latter—*tēfillin*, books, and the Pentateuch. *Šulḥan ‘Aruḳ* specifies that under these conditions a *Sefer Tora* should be taken out of the house, whereas *Meza de el alma* states from the onset that neither *tefillin*, nor (law) books, or Pentateuch books should be in the house in the first place.

Šulḥan ‘Aruḳ adds a further condition: if there is nowhere to take a *Sefer Tora* out to, a man should make a partition ten handbreadths high. Both *Šulḥan ‘Aruḳ* and *Meza de el alma* claim that it is possible to place Jewish artifacts and texts (not a *Sefer Tora* according to *Šulḥan ‘Aruḳ*) in a container within the original container that covers them in order to isolate them; *Šulḥan ‘Aruḳ* also says that this can be accomplished by placing a *Ṭallit* over the box where the *Sefer Tora* or any other Jewish texts are located, because this can be considered a container within a container. *Meza de el alma* replaces the word *Ṭallit* with *tapete* a ‘cloth cover’ (carpet in Judeo-Spanish) and claims that covering the box with this cloth cover can also be considered as a container within another. *Šulḥan ‘Aruḳ* adds Maimonides’ opinion that a *Sefer Tora* can also be isolated by placing it in a container within another container.

Meza de el alma differs from *Šulḥan ‘Aruḳ* in that it makes no mention of a *Sefer Tora* (hence the separating partition and Maimonides’ opinion are not relevant and are not discussed). *Meza de el alma* also differs from *Šulḥan ‘Aruḳ* in that it claims that any cloth cover over a box (and not just a *Ṭallit*) is enough to isolate Jewish texts.

(9) 282:12

Tiq še-huḳan lē-Sefer Tora wē-hunnaḥ bo, wē-ken ha-mitpaḥot wē-ha-‘aron wē-ha-migdal še-meniḥim Sefer Tora bo, ‘af ‘al pi še-en meniḥim bo Sefer Tora kēše-hu lēvado ‘ella kēše-hu ba-tiq, wē-ken ha-kisse še-huḳan lē-hanniah Sefer Tora ‘alaw, wē-hunnaḥ, kullam tašmiše qēduša hem wa-‘asurim, u-l-‘aḥar še-yivlu ‘o yiššavēru, nignazim
(Karo 1565 § 282.12).

El tik ke fue aparejado para Sefer Tora y fue metido enel i ansi la tovaja i el heḳal i la teva adonde lo ponen todos son servicio de santidad i es pekado servirse delyos i depues ke.se envejesyeren o se kevraren los pornan en Geniza (Benveniste 1568:124a–b).

The final translated law in this section refers to *Sefer Tora* accessories—the case prepared for the *Sefer Tora*, the mantel, the Holy Ark, and the reader’s desk. *Šulḥan ‘Aruḳ* also adds the chair onto which a *Sefer Tora* is customarily placed.

All these accessories are to be considered sacred, therefore it is a sin to use them for any other purpose, and once they wear away or break, they should be put in Genizah.

In addition to the chair, *Šulḥan ‘Aruḳ* also stipulates that the Holy Ark is also held sacred even though the *Sefer Tora* is put in it with its case, namely in spite of this isolation, the Holy Ark is still sacred. This reservation is not mentioned in *Meza de el alma*.

The twelve subsections that were skipped are the following: 3: The way to hold a *Sefer Tora* while riding a donkey; 6: One can enter the toilet with a talisman (probably with God's name in it) covered by leather; 9: Impure men and menstruating women may hold a *Sefer Tora* and read it, but their hand must be clean; 10: A worn out or void *Sefer Tora* should be put in a clay vessel and buried next to a learned Jew (*talmid ḥakam*) as a Genizah; 11: A worn out mantel of a *Sefer Tora* may be used as shrouds of an anonymous corpse to be buried as Genizah; 13: A smaller reader's desk (and not a chair for a *Sefer Tora*) can be made from a broken reader's desk; a broken *Sefer Tora* chair can be changed into a smaller chair but not into a stool; 14: The pulpit does not acquire the sanctity of a *Sefer Tora* but rather the sanctity of the synagogue; 15: Worn out accessories for a *Sefer Tora* may be used only if an *a priori* condition has been made to use them for other purposes; 16: Gold and silver *Sefer Tora* ornaments are sacred and may only be used subsequently to buy another *Sefer Tora* or Pentateuch; 17: If it is agreed to exchange a religious object for something less sacred, it is possible to sell it publicly in the presence of seven community leaders and the community; 18: It is unclear whether it is permitted to use the money obtained from selling an individual's *Sefer Tora* and its accessories; 19: One can put a *Sefer Tora* on top of another *Sefer Tora* or the Pentateuch on top of the Prophets and the Hagiography but not vice versa. It is forbidden to put the Pentateuch on top of a *Sefer Tora*.

Some of these laws refer to the handling of a *Sefer Tora* and its accessories. Assuming that a Sephardic Jewish layman would not possess any of these items and would be unable to read Hebrew in any case, laws 3, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 17, 18 and 19 would have been completely irrelevant for him (and were therefore not included in *Meza de el alma*). Law 6 regarding entering the toilet with a talisman apparently did not seem important enough for Benveniste to translate in this context; therefore he ignores this commandment. Law 14 about the (non-)sanctity of the pulpit as compared to the sanctity of a *Sefer Tora* is also a matter that is not directly related to a *Sefer Tora* or to any individual in the community, and is thus overlooked in the translation.

The last law in this chapter is very short:

(10) 283:4

'asur li-rqom pësuqim bē-ṭallit (Karo 1565 § 283.4).	Es pekado de broslar pasukim en kual kyer vestido (Benveniste 1568:124b).
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Šulḥan 'Aruḳ specifically states that it is a sin to embroider biblical verses in a Ṭallit, whereas *Meza de el alma* forbids biblical verse embroidery in any kind of clothing. The purpose of this commandment is to avoid profaning any biblical text.

3 Conclusion

Although this paper has dealt with Benveniste's translation of just one chapter of Šulḥan 'Aruḳ, his translation and editorial techniques can be applied to any of the chapters in *Meza de el alma*. In the Ladino introduction the author declares that he has translated all the laws necessary for the use of the public *palavra por palavra en breve*, namely 'word for word briefly.' The laws regarding *Sefer Tora* in *Meza de el alma* demonstrates that the translated laws were certainly relevant for the Sephardic Jewish layman; however, the work is only an accurate translation in a limited number of instances as presented in (2) and (4). It is short not only because Benveniste skips many laws for the reasons stated above, but also because he does not always include all the details within the laws he translates, as in (3),⁸ in (6),⁹ in (8),¹⁰ and in (9).¹¹

In example (5) Benveniste abridges the laws and ignores the details brought in Šulḥan 'Aruḳ. The order of the sentences is changed in *Meza de el alma* in (1) (God's names are listed before the suffixes and not afterwards). In other cases, Benveniste

⁸ He does not translate: *U-mišwa lē-yaḥed lo maqom u-l-ḳabbed ha-maqom ha-hu u-l-haddēro bē-yoter; Wē-lo yēgalle 'erwato kēnegdo. bē-ḳoved roš; še-hu ha-'ed ha-ne'eman 'al kol ba'e 'olam, še-ne'emar: wē-haya šam bēḳa lē-'ed* (Deut 31:26) 'it is a commandment to put the *Sefer Tora* in a special place, to clean the place and to exalt it; a man should not reveal his nudity in front of it; [he should] (sit) seriously; because it is the true testimony of all people of the world, as the verse says: 'And it will be there a witness for you' (Deut 31:26).'

⁹ These words are missing in the translation: *wa-'afillu halakot wē-'aggadot* 'and even Jewish laws and legends.'

¹⁰ The missing translation is: '*aval lo bē-Sefer Tora, wē-ha-Rambam mattir 'af bē-Sefer Tora* 'but not in *Sefer Tora*, and Maimonides allows it even in *Sefer Tora*.'

¹¹ There is no translation of: '*af 'al pi še-'en meniḥim bo Sefer Tora kēše-hu lēvado 'ella kēše-hu batīq, wē-ken ha-kisse še-hukan lē-hanniah Sefer Tora 'alaw, wē-hunnaḥ* 'Although a *Sefer Tora* is not put [in the Holy Ark] by itself but rather in its case, as well as the chair which was prepared to put the *Sefer Tora* on and was put on [they are also held sacred].'

changes the meanings of instructions. In (7) he replaces *miṭṭa* ‘bed’ with any place a person intends to sit on. Instead of *Ṭallit* in (8) he uses *tapete* ‘table cover; rug.’ In (10) he generalizes about embroidery; thus, it is forbidden to embroider biblical verses on *kual kyer vestido* ‘any article of clothing’ and not just on a *Ṭallit*.

If we recall Benveniste’s translation principles in his Hebrew introduction, we can confirm the following; he discusses laws pertinent to the general public and laws that are customary in the community (thus he does not mention laws that were generally known, laws that would need a rabbi’s decision, or standard synagogue behavior). He does not mention laws that are irrelevant for the community layman, so most of the instructions relating to Torah writing are not included in his translation. He also avoids disputable laws, which is why he does not mention Maimonides’ opinions regarding *Sefer Tora* isolation in a place of sexual activity (8). In fact, he does not even mention Torah scrolls when discussing this issue (presumably assuming that a Ladino speaking layman would not own a *Sefer Tora*). Benveniste refrains from listing laws that he knows the general public could not observe or any laws which would be ridiculed. For this reason he sometimes changes the wording of Rabbi Yosef Karo, thus simplifying various laws. He is reluctant to list certain laws that the general public might perceive as encouraging bad behavior. In the examples cited he does not recommend consulting a rabbi in cases of exact measures, etc., because these are irrelevant. In many other cases he does recommend consulting rabbinical authorities (for example, regarding kosher food and drinks).

Benveniste does not mention in either of his introductions that sometimes he alters laws and simplifies them (although this can be inferred from his general discussion). For instance, he specifies God’s names which might be unclear to the layman in (1), and he explains what is *’asurim* ‘forbidden’ in (9) by *es pekado servirse delyos* ‘it is a sin to make use of them.’

Here are the answers to the four questions that I raised earlier in the introduction:

1. Why does the translator skip so many laws? He skips so many laws mostly because they are irrelevant to the layman who does not know Hebrew and would be unable to read or write a *Sefer Tora*; These laws would only have been relevant to rabbis and educated people who could have studied them anyway in the original *Šulḥan Aruk*.
2. Why does the translator include these specific laws? He includes specific laws because they would have taught a Jew with little religious education how to handle a *Sefer Tora* and to behave properly around one, and how to treat sanctified articles.
3. To what extent are the translations adequately equivalent? The translations are only partly equivalent, at least in the cases of some parallel laws.

4. Did the translator take liberty in translating the text? Yes, the translator certainly took some limited liberty in translating the text. He added explanations when needed in addition to simplifying and generalizing laws so that a layman in the community could easily understand them.

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