PART FOUR

THE NOTION OF OTHERNESS AND THE QUESTION OF INTEGRATION
CHAPTER TEN

“THE BOOKS THAT SHOULD NOT BE MISSING IN ANY JEWISH HOME”:
TRANSLATION AS A CULTURAL POLICY IN ARGENTINA, 1919–1938

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For much of the twentieth century, the city of Buenos Aires was the main center of translation into Spanish of ‘works of Jewish interest’ written in different languages. As such, it emerged as the primary bridge of contact between the Jewish cultural world and Spanish-speaking readers in Latin America, Jews and non-Jews. This role was the result of the endeavors of intellectuals, cultural entrepreneurs, philanthropists, and institutions, as well as some commercial companies that invested time, energy, and money in publishing work. This article explores the initial stage of development of the translation and publishing of books ‘of Jewish interest,’ as defined by the actors involved in these tasks. It further identifies the people and institutions behind early publishing projects and explores their notions of ‘translation’ and ‘books’ in order to understand what led them to undertake their endeavors.

The period 1919–38 comprises the first attempts at publishing Jewish-themed books in the Spanish language. The beginning of this period is marked by the publication of the first translation of a Yiddish volume, Isaac Leib Peretz’s Los cabalistas, the end by the birth of the first modern publisher exclusively devoted to Jewish issues, Editorial Israel. In political and cultural terms, this stage of Jewish publishing history was characterized by the ideological predominance of a liberal or—in Ezra Mendelsohn’s words—integrationist position.¹ According to Mendelsohn, those in the Jewish integrationist camp were defined