AMSTERDAM AS “LOCUS” OF IBERIAN PRINTING IN THE
SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

Harm den Boer

Introduction

The Netherlands, and particularly Amsterdam, was rightly reputed as the center of Jewish book printing almost from the moment Menasseh ben Israel started his press in 1627. In the seventeenth century, the Dutch Republic had developed a flourishing printing industry with a vast international reach. The Sephardi Jews who settled in Amsterdam at the beginning of the century found there the opportunity to have their prayer books and other works printed without major obstacles. They quickly established their own presses, which enabled them, and later also their Ashkenazi brethren, to obtain a dominant position in the Hebrew printing and book trade all over Europe.

The Sephardim who, as former New Christians, or *conversos*, had started printing in Spanish and Portuguese to overcome their lack of knowledge of Hebrew and Jewish tradition, continued to publish in their native languages throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The publication of Meyer Kayserling’s *Biblioteca española-portuguesa-judaica*\(^1\) revealed the wealth of Jewish learning available in vernacular language among the Western Sephardim, and established the reputation of Amsterdam as a New Jerusalem, where a cultural and literary brilliance unparalleled in the Jewish world existed.

In this article I will discuss the results of my recently published bibliography of Spanish and Portuguese editions printed in the Northern Netherlands from 1584–1825.\(^2\) Rather than comment on the details of the particular editions listed, the long sought after copies finally traced, or the new findings, I wish to elaborate on the overall relevance of

\(^*\) See illustrations on pp. 453–460.

\(^1\) M. Kayserling, *Biblioteca española-portuguesa-judaica* (Strasbourg 1890).

Iberian printing in the Netherlands, more specifically, on the relation between “Jewish” and “non-Jewish” editions.

My reflections on the Netherlands as “locus” of Iberian printing will, I hope, also provide the reasons for the chronological, geographical, and linguistic criteria that have been followed in the present bibliography. Notwithstanding the heterogeneity of the works comprised in Spanish and Portuguese Printing, I argue that these reflect a meaningful cultural reality, and not merely an arbitrarily or positivistically gathered set of titles. This reality has made itself evident during the course of the project, the history of which I would briefly like to comment upon.

In 1981, the eminent bibliographer José Simón Díaz encouraged me, the Dutch student in his course on bibliografía española, to look for the Spanish editions printed in the Netherlands that were extant at the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid. This exercise could be a starting point for a bibliographical research project that would complete the work undertaken by Jean Peeters Fontainas. The latter’s Bibliographie des impressions espagnoles des Pays Bas (1933) represented a first census of Spanish editions printed in both the “Southern” and “Northern” Netherlands—roughly corresponding to contemporary Belgium and The Netherlands—with a total of 1,484 entries. Peeters-Fontainas afterwards published a more complete and descriptive bibliography, which dealt exclusively with the works printed in the Southern Netherlands. The 1,413 works brought together by the great bibliophile in this second volume had a huge impact in the Hispanic world; now it was possible to see how much Spain’s Golden Age was indebted to the printing houses of the Southern Netherlands, where many of the classics of Spanish literature were produced in splendid editions, among them Lazarillo de Tormes, the works of Jorge Montemayor, Miguel de Cervantes, Baltasar Gracián, Francisco de Quevedo, and Santa Teresa de Jesús.

Peeters-Fontainas did not continue his bibliographical enterprise with a volume dedicated to the Spanish works printed in the Northern

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3 José Simón Díaz is the author of Bibliografía de la literatura hispánica, 15 vols. (Madrid 1950–1992) and the still very useful Manual de bibliografía española (Madrid 1980).
4 J. Peeters-Fontainas, Bibliographie des impressions espagnoles des Pays Bas (Leuven 1933).
5 Idem, Bibliographie des impressions espagnoles des Pays Bas Meridiaux (Nieuwkoop 1965).
6 Plus a few addenda; a supplement was printed, with the collaboration of A.-M. Frédéric, Supplement a la Bibliographie des impressions des Pays Bas Meridiaux (Antwerp 1977).