Alexandre Benghiat’s *Hasan-pasha the Terrible* is undoubtedly an adaptation of an anonymous French source.¹ It is the story of a real figure, Cezayirli Gazi Hasan Pasha (1713-1790). The readers learn how Hasan, a former slave of Persian origin, started his free life as a pirate, became a navy hero, and died as Grand Vizier. This text contains elements of various genres, such as the fairy tale, adventure story, and history textbook. Overall, however, it has a hagiographic character which accounts for the blatant distortion of the events of the 1768-1774 Russo-Turkish war.

The novel’s vocabulary is quite rich compared to that of most other Ladino novels and contains a significant number of bookish words without glosses, as well as numerous lexical and syntactic gallicisms. Aside from the linguistic evidence suggesting that Benghiat’s source was created by a Francophone writer, there are other indications confirming that it targeted a French audience. It could have been produced by a Turkish émigré fluent in French to appear in serialized form in one of the Young Turks’ periodicals, which came out in Ottoman or Arabic but had French versions, and regularly published similar stories. Benghiat’s choice of text for rewriting not only fits the general assimilationist project embraced by many Sephardi westernizers, but also reflects the new Ottomanist agenda that emerged in the period immediately following the Young Turk revolution of 1908. Hasan-pasha’s story demonstrated that one did not have to be Turkish in order to make an extraordinary career and be appreciated in the Ottoman Empire.
This novel presents an example of how Ladino fiction, while providing entertainment, could serve the purposes of instruction and indoctrination.

Olga Borovaya

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1 The present translation and phonetic transcription are made from the only extant edition: *Hasan-pasha el terivle: romanso istoriko por Aleksander Ben Ghia*. Jerusalem: estamparia de Shelomo Yisrael Sherezli, 5671 [1910 or 1911] 20 p.