

## A Note on Bernardim Ribeiro's *Menina e moça* and an Inquisitional Document

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“Me pigliorno da mia madre..”  
*Ebrei anonimi*, Venezia, Santo Uffizio, 1550

“Menina e moça me leuara decasa de minha may..”  
*Rebeiro, Menina e moça*, Ferrara, 1554

In the sixteenth century, Venice provided a haven for Peninsula refugees fleeing their own autonomous Inquisition. So numerous were these conversos and marranos, that Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, Spain's envoy to Venice and to the Council of Trent, remarked that he felt right at home; all he heard in the street was Spanish and Portuguese. Prominent among the new arrivals was Beatriz Mendes, née Luna –aka Gracia Nasi–,<sup>1</sup> who had escaped the clutches of the Inquisition in Antwerp, together with her sister Brianda, their daughters, Gracia and Reyna, their nephews, Juan and Bernado Micas, who would marry their cousins.<sup>2</sup> Her household also included a large number of servants and business agents.<sup>3</sup> Because of doña Gracia's wealth the family was permitted to reside in a spacious palace in one of the most opulent areas of the city, outside the ghetto. A frequent visitor was Juan Hurtado de Mendoza, the nephew of don Diego and his successor as ambassador to Venice. During his stay in Venice, Juan Micas supported local authors, such as Ortensio Lando<sup>4</sup> and Girolamo Ruscelli, as well as the Spaniard, Alonso Núñez de Reinoso.<sup>5</sup>

Doña Gracia, on the other hand, established the Jewish printing press of Abraham Usque – Duarte Pinel– and Yom Tob Athias –Jerónimo de Vargas– in Ferrara,<sup>6</sup> whose publications

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<sup>1</sup> Her later entrance in Constantinople is recorded in *Viaje de Turquía*: “Una señora portuguesa que se llamaba doña Beatriz Méndez, muy rica, entró en Constantinopla con quarenta caballos y quatro carros triumphales llenos de damas y criadas españolas [...] destaxó con el Gran Turco desde Veneçia, que no quería que le diese otra cosa en sus tierras sino que todos sus criados no traxesen tocados como los otros judíos, sino gorras y vestidos a la veneçiana. Quando menos me caté vieráis a la señora doña Beatriz mudar el nombre y llamarse doña Graçia de Luna et tota Hierosolima cum illa” (451). It was customary among Jewish families to have a Christian name for the outside world and a Jewish name that was used at home.

<sup>2</sup> Endogamy was a prevalent practice among wealthy Jewish families in order to safeguard their money and religion.

<sup>3</sup> Life was not always trouble free in Venice; several of doña Gracia's business agents would run into difficulties with the local Inquisition. See, for example, the case of Odoardo Gomez in Zorattini, 225-246.

<sup>4</sup> Lando, a friend of Aretino and Reinoso, obliquely acknowledges Juan Micas' financial support by mentioning in *Sette Libri* that the Mendes (“Mendesí”) family was one of the richest in the world. He also lists “Alphonso Numez de Reynoso” as one of the best poets of the era, calling him “poeta di giocondissimo stile” (476).

<sup>5</sup> Núñez de Reinoso dedicates his novel, *Clareo y Florisea* (1552), to Juan Micas and constantly praises doña Gracia in his *Algunas Rimas*, in which he also addressed a letter to Juan Hurtado de Mendoza, SeZor de Fresno de Torote, the ambassador. Ironically, Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo called Micas, in error, an Italian gentleman interested in Spanish literature.

<sup>6</sup> In his *Consolaçam*, the only Gentile whom Samuel Usque praises is Ercole II, d'Este, Duke of Ferrara, for the establishment of religious freedom and the sheltering of Jewish refugees in his ducal state. In times of difficulty in Venice, doña Gracia herself sought a safe-haven in Ferrara. With minor exceptions this liberal attitude continued down into the twentieth century until Hitler persuaded Mussolini to round up the Jews of Ferrara and deport them. See the novel *The Garden of the Finzi-Contini* by Giorgio Bassani and the film of the same name by Vittorio de Sica.

include the Ferrara Bible, that is, the Spanish Hebrew Bible (1553), and Bernardim Ribeiro's *Hystória de Menina e moça* (1554), the only non-Jewish secular work the press issued.

It is doubtful that doña Gracia knew anything about Ribeiro and undoubtedly she had never met him. Over the years there were fantastic tales which tie him to the forbidden love of a lady, of madness and an early death. Today we still know very little with any certainty about him. Truly we do not even know if Ribeiro was his name; perhaps it was only a poetic pseudonym or was adapted from the title of one of his poems.<sup>7</sup> There is the strong possibility that he was a New Christian, that is, a converso,<sup>8</sup> and the distinct probability that he was a member of a poetic academy which included Francisco Sâ de Miranda and Alonso Núñez de Reinoso and which took place at the Basto, the country estate of the Pereira brothers, known followers of Erasmus.<sup>9</sup> The only thing that is certain is that his novel and some pastoral eclogues were published by a Jewish press in Ferrara, Italy, in 1554. Even if his friend, Núñez de Reinoso, delivered the manuscript to the press, as Marcel Bataillon suggested, for what reason was doña Gracia interested in publishing a work of fiction? Perhaps an inquisitional document from Venice can shed new light on this matter.

Many years ago in Venice, while carrying out research for my doctoral thesis on Núñez de Reinoso, I decided to investigate two files that I had encountered in the Archivio di stato: "Ebrei anonimi" (1550) and "Secrete, Criminales" (1553). Later I wrote an article about the exciting kidnaping and trial in absentia of some members of the Mendes family as depicted in the "Secrete", during which I briefly alluded to "Ebrei anonimi". Both documents pertained to activities of Juan Micas. In the first, he and his brother kidnaped his cousin and future bride and escaped with her to Ravenna, papal territory, where they were free from the pursuit of Venetian authorities who were offering a substantial reward for Juan's capture and were planning to have him drawn and quartered and hung from the columns of San Marco, if captured.

For anyone familiar with the workings of the Holy Office, be it Spain, Portugal or Venice, "Ebrei anonimi" is an odd affair.<sup>10</sup> It is an inquisitorial interrogation of a twelve-year old boy,<sup>11</sup> temporarily residing in the palace of Juan Hurtado de Mendoza, doña Gracia's friend. The file consists of a small, single sheet of paper. On the front are facts dealing with the acusser's travails, and on the back his actual accusations against two men, which consist of the standard charges against forbidden Jewish practices including circumcision and the preparation of kosher food. Furthermore, the accused tried to force him to adopt Judaism, and in their anti-Christian zeal, abused a crucifix.

On Wednesday, June 11, 1550, the boy, "Ioannes [Iu]lius [A]longcig[ar]i[a] [de] [Casti]glia", (Juan de Castilla)<sup>12</sup> testifies against a Portuguese father and son,<sup>13</sup> Giovanni and

<sup>7</sup> "Ao longo de hua Ribeira" was published in Antwerp in 1545, the only other work by Ribeiro to be printed outside Portugal. At that time, the Mendes family was living in Antwerp where Núñez de Reinoso, who was perhaps tutor to the two girls, was responsible for the printing of his friend's poem. See Rose 1970.

<sup>8</sup> Eugenio Asensio 1957 and José Vitorino de Pina Martins, in his introduction to the facsimile of the *princeps* of *Menina e moça* both deny that Ribeiro was a converso. Although there is no external evidence either way, his works suggest that he was a New Christian.

<sup>9</sup> Bataillon, Michaëlis de Vasconcelos, and Rose 1971.

<sup>10</sup> Zoratini lists the case under the names of the accused, Giovanni and Alfonso Álvarez.

<sup>11</sup> A complete transcript of the "Ebrei anonimi" can now be found in Zoratini's book on the Venetian Inquisition, 93-94, and a photographic copy of the document can be seen in the Appendix to Rose's 1968, also reproduced in this article.

<sup>12</sup> The tattered and worn sheet of paper does not inspire confidence in the identification of the accuser; his name could just as easily be Ioannes Iulius Alfonso García de Castiglia, that is, Juan Julio Alonso Garcia de Castilla. Castiglia may be either a last name or place of origin; the fact that Ioannes was housed in the ambassador's

Alfonso Álvarez, whom he accuses of judaizing. Normally such a document would be accompanied by other papers concerning the individual testifying, the accused and the accusation, and there would be some sort of follow up, including an outcome to the proceedings. Yet, the only paper in the file is the interrogation itself. To the question of where he came from and how he reached Venice, the boy replies:

Me pigliorno da mia madre ch'io potevo haver da tre in quatro anni [et] me menorno in Fiandra [on]de steti con loro circa due anni, poi mi parti da loro et andai a Bruseles con meser Zuan Miches. Tre in quatro anni dopoi tornai in Fiandra in casa deli diti Portugalesi et poi con loro son venuto in questa terra... (Zorratini 93)

Two of Ioannes' initial remarks are of special interest to the present study: his first sentence is of literary interest and his reference to Juan Micas ("Zuan Miches")<sup>14</sup> is of factual or historical interest. There is no trial and no conclusion. Perhaps because there was no corroborating witness, the case was closed. Clearly somebody wanted this case to go away, to disappear, and it did. Even though three people are mentioned, "Ebrei anonimi" lay buried in the warehouse of the Santo Uffizio for centuries, gathering dust. Like the document itself, the Álvarez disappeared from the annals of sixteenth-century Venice and from Zorattini's recent listing of the Republic's inquisitional proceedings.

The one possible corroborating witness should have been Juan Micas, but he does not testify. The reference to him is brief and puzzling. Whether or not the boy mentions the gentleman's name in a helpful or accusatory way is unclear. Ioannes states that Zuan Miches took him to Brussels. Was he among those who mistreated the boy, or does his action constitute a reprieve from misery? Was the child taken away for his own good, to a place safe from inquisitional authorities? Is young Joannis di Castiglia implying that the time spent with Juan Micas were the good days? After all, he addresses him as "messer", a title of respect, but he also addresses the elder Álvarez in the same way even as he denounces him to the Inquisition for judaizing. Perhaps he is merely acknowledging a change of master and location, while implying that he is still in the hands of heretics.

Although Juan Micas was known, by some, to be a New Christian and although he acted as agent for his aunts, Beatriz (Gracia) and Brianda de Luna, who were often suspected of judaizing and indeed had to flee Antwerp for that reason, he seems to have escaped such suspicion because of his discretion. In Flanders, he graduated from the University of Louvain, consorted with eminent Christians, and even went horseback riding with the Emperor Charles V. Only after arriving in Constantinople would he assume his Jewish name, Joseph Nasi, and his Jewish identity.<sup>15</sup>

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residence implies that he was from Spain. Zorattini reveals that the surname "Aloncingaria" was written in at a later date.

<sup>13</sup> Possibly the two were not Portuguese but Spanish, as their last name indicates; Spainards often applied the designation of Portuguese to all conversos and marranos.

<sup>14</sup> Juan Micas was known as Zuan Miches, Giovanni Miquez, Johannes Miquez, Jehan Micques, etc., depending on the country in which he resided.

<sup>15</sup> Upon reaching Turkey, Juan Micas openly embraced Judaism. See *Viaje de Truquía* 452: "... vino un sobrino suyo en Constantinopla... y porque aquella seZora [doZa Gracia] no tenía más de una hija, a la cual daba trescientos mil ducados en dote, engañóle el diablo y circuncidóse y desposóse con ella; llamáse agora Iosef Nasi". Selim II, the son of Suleiman the Magnificent, later named him Duke of Naxos, and some scholars think that he was the prototype for Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*. For more information on Juan Micas/Joeseeph Nasi, see Grunebaum-Ballin.

Die mercurij - et vniuerso  
 anno naturalis in domo...  
 quod est...  
 am...  
 In p[ro]cedendo...  
 in qua...  
 quia...  
 madre...  
 de...  
 circa...  
 a...  
 cum...  
 per...  
 venne...  
 a...  
 da...  
 da...  
 da...  
 in...  
 circa...  
 no...  
 como...  
 no...  
 mangiano...  
 sopra...  
 expresso...  
 el...  
 d...  
 fugo...

Fig. 1 – Venetian Inquisition Document

Let us now return to the boy's initial statement in the document and examine its literary implications and its relevance. If these, "me pigliorno da mia madre.." the boy's first words, sound familiar to readers of sixteenth-century Peninsular literature, they should, for Ribeiro's *Menina e moça* begins in a similar fashion: "Menina e moça me llevaram de casa de minha mai para muito lonje". Both quotations are uttered by children who have been taken from their home and led away to a distant land. Each young person narrates the story of his or her miserable existence. The menina also supplies the reason for her removal: "Vivi alli tanto tempo quanto foi necesario para nam poder viver em outra part", a cryptic statement in itself, but one which suggests pursuit, perhaps by the Holy Office, as implied in Ioannis' declaration. Ribeiro elaborates three points which will reveal a subtle message dealing with gender and religion: he emphasizes that it is the mother's house that the child is taken from, he transforms the boy of the anti-Jewish document into a young girl, and he creates a second introductory passage.

The double prefatory and seemingly aborted narratives, make *Menina e moça* unusual; the central story is introduced twice. An unusual and inventive authorial choice. The first time the menina narrates her sad situation, then she encounters a woman who recounts, not her own story, but the lives of others, which will constitute the plot of the novel; at this point the first and second narrators drop out of the fictional events. Ribeiro has created two female narrators in succession, thus suggesting the fact that Judaism is transmitted through the female line, through mothers.<sup>16</sup>

What is striking is that in the original *Menina e moça* the parent that the girl is taken from is the mother. In all subsequent Portuguese printings of the work, beginning with the Evora edition of 1557,<sup>17</sup> the parent named is the father, which seems to be a deliberate reversal, from female to male, on the part of the Portuguese editor in order to erase Ribeiro's covert message.

Did Ribeiro learn about the inquisitional document and was he inspired to create a young female character who would echo the boy's grievances in her melancholy lament? I am not suggesting that he was living in Venice or Ferrara at the time of his book's publication, nor am I suggesting that the entire work was written in Italy.<sup>18</sup> Surely everyone in doña Gracia's circle of friends and relatives knew about "Ebrei anonimi", and its reference to Juan Micas; it is not beyond the realm of belief that in the four-year interval between the interrogation of the boy and the publication of *Menina e moça*, someone, probably Núñez de Reinoso, informed Ribeiro who carefully crafted the new opening of the novel. If, however, he did not respond, or more likely if he were dead,<sup>19</sup> the Venetian group included a number of excellent writers capable of approximating Ribeiro's style and fashioning a new fictional preface: Samuel Usque, author of

<sup>16</sup> See Rose 1998 for the suggestion that an archetype of the melancholic female narrator is the widow Jerusalem from "Lamentations".

<sup>17</sup> Two versions of the novel are based on the *princeps*: Colonia (1559) and the Madrid manuscript which, indeed, may be a copy of the Ferrara original. As the editor of the Evora edition notes, there were a number of versions in existence, each with numerous variants: "Foram tantos os tradutores deste livro, e os pareceres em elle tan diversos que nam he de maravilhar que na primeira impressam desta história se achassem tantas cousas en contrario de como foram pello auctor delle escriptas...parece que foi causa de andar este livro tam vicioso e com palavras tan diferentemente postas das que deviam ser. E porque a dor desta chaga se nam podia curar sem se buscar o madronho, conveo tirar-se a limpo do proprio original seu, esta primeira e segunda parte todas enteiras, pera que muy certo conheça quam ler h[á] e outra a differença dambas". In her 1947 edition, D. Grokenberger details the variants and remarks that there are serious cuts in some of the Portuguese editions, "para obter o imprimatur inquisitorial de 1645, a obra sofreu várias cortes".

<sup>18</sup> This is exactly what Núñez de Reinoso did; inspired by a fourth-century Byzantine novel, he wrote *Clareo e Florisea*, a roman B clef, in Italy, where he created fictional figures to represent Micas, Ribeiro, doña Gracia, and others.

<sup>19</sup> In Núñez de Reinoso's novel, the Ribeiro figure dies suddenly and the grief stricken heroine Isea (Núñez de Reinoso) abandons the idyllic pastoral setting where, as in the *Basto*, these friends composed poems and songs.

the *Consolaçam* and Salusque Lusitano, the translator of Petrarch's sonnets. And perhaps doña Gracia then authorized the printing of *Menina e moça* because she knew the story behind the story.

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