Rabbi Isaac Cardoso (1608-1687)

Rabbi Isaac Cardoso was a Jewish physician, philosopher and polemic writer. He was born as Fernando Cardoso into a marrano family in Beira, Portugal in 1604. His family, as many other Jewish families in Portugal, kept Jewish observance secretly for many generations.

Fernando studied medicine, philosophy, and natural sciences at the prestigious university of Salamanca, Spain. He excelled in his medical practice and in 1632 he became the chief physician of Madrid. In Madrid he published an article on Mt. Vesuvius, analyzing the causes of earthquakes. He also composed a funeral poem (elegy) for the famous Spanish poet Lope de Vega and a treatise on the uses of cold water, dedicated to King Philip IV of Spain. Fernando Cardoso left Spain and settled in Venice where he embraced publicly Judaism. In Venice he changed his name to "Isaac." After a short stay in Venice he settled in Verona, where he remained until his death, highly honored by Jews and Christians.

Aside from the works already mentioned, Cardoso published a comprehensive treatise on cosmogony, physics, medicine, philosophy, theology, and natural sciences, printed at Venice in 1673 under the title *Philosophia Libera in Septem Libros Distributa*.

He wrote his most famous Jewish book in Spanish, "Las Excelencias y Calumnias de los Hebreos", printed in 1679 at Amsterdam. In the first ten chapters of this long book he describes the "excelencias" (distinguishing features) of the Jews, their selection by God, their separation from all other peoples by special laws, their compassion for the sufferings of others, their philanthropy, chastity, faith, etc.; and in next ten chapters he refutes the "calumnias" (calumnies) brought against them; that they worship false gods, they have a tail, smell badly, are hard and unfeeling toward other peoples, have corrupted Scripture, blaspheme holy images and

the host, kill Christian children to use the blood for ritual purposes, etc.

This book was submitted in 1679 to Rabbi Shemuel Abohab in Venice. Rabbi Abohab praised the book and thanked rabbi Cardoso for his splendid work.

Those who can understand classic Spanish can read now "Las Excelencias y Calumnias de los Hebreos", directly from the original source, thanks to Hebrewbooks. See **THIS.**

A brief text from the introduction

"El pueblo de Ysrael, al mismo passo amado de Dios que perseguido de los hombres, ha dos mil anios desde el tiempo de Nebuhadnezar que anda esparzido en las naciones….de unas maltratado, de otras herido, y de todas desespreciado, sin que haya monarquia o reyno que no haya desembainado contra el la espada…"

My translation (Y.B.):
The people of Israel, at the same time loved by God and persecuted by men, has been two thousand years, from the times of Nebuhadnezzar, scattered among the nations…. abused by some, wounded by other, and despised by all, there is no monarchy or kingdom that has not drawn its sword against him