DOÑA GRACIA MENDES (Part 6) and a Jewish State in 1564

THE JEWISH STATE OF TIBERIAS

Earlier, we saw that in 1558 Doña Gracia Mendes agreed with Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent to rebuild the city of Tiberias, which was practically in ruins. The Christians did not live there, nor did they claim it. And the Muslims had no interest on it. Tiberias was a no man's land: a ghost town. Doña Gracia, her nephew Yosef Nasí and Rabbi Yosef ben Aderet began to revitalize the city, beautify it, develop industries and bring in investors, thinking of Tiberias as a future "Jewish city". However, in 1564, when the construction of the city's security wall was finally completed and the Jews began their return to Israel, suddenly the city of Tiberias triggered the interest of Christians and Muslims.

HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

As André Aelion Brooks explains in his book on Doña Gracia Mendes ("The Woman who defied Kings") the problem was not that the gentiles suddenly fell in love with Tiberias. The problem was that it was "the Jews" who were rebuilding it, and planned to make Tiberias a Jewish city, where eventually all the Jews of the world could have their own place, settle down and live in their ancient land in peace. Christians and Muslims were not willing to accept this. And they were willing to do whatever it took to prevent it. But why not let the Jews have their own independent place to live? In fact, a "Jewish State" should be the simplest solution to the "Jewish problem": our enemies do not want us in their lands, they demonized us and expelled us from all their countries… Why then the illogical opposition that we Jews would have their own place?… Doesn't make sense…

In those times – as it happens today with the State of Israel – the problem of Israel's enemies is not political but religious. The opposition to Israel disguises itself as politics but hides a religious root. The presence of the Jewish people in Israel is a very serious theological conundrum for Islam and especially for Christianity.

THE GAME OF RELIGIOUS SUPERIORITY

For centuries, Muslims tolerated Jews living on their land as long as they submitted to the "political" authority of Islam, paid an extra tax, the jizya, and behave as second-class citizens or dhimmis. But in no way would Muslims conceive that Jews would have an independent state, much less in the Middle East, in the lands that they consider holy for Islam (these points are very clearly stated, for example, in the Founding Charter of Hamas, articles 6: "under the wing of Islam followers of all religions can coexist in security and safety where their lives, possessions, and rights are concerned for". And 12: "Nationalism, from the point of view of the Islamic Resistance Movement, it is part of our religious creed» see more here). Whoever ignores this point will never fully understand the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Going back to the times of Doña Gracia, a Muslim Sheikh began to spread the word that an ancient prophecy had been found where it was stated that if the Jews rebuilt and returned to Tiberias "the Muslim faith would disappear and the Muslims would become a nomadic people ». And despite the absurdity of this statement, Sultan Suleiman began to feel the pressure from extremists who accused him of betraying Islam. And so things began to get more difficult for the settlement of the Jews in Tiberias.

THE WANDERING JEW

But that was not all. Christianity considers itself as the religion that inherited and replaced the Jewish people and their Tora with a New Covenant or Testament. The only small problem with this theory is that the original Jews, us, should have already converted collectively to Christianity, or disappeared by the sword, something the Church tried to achieve by every possible means. But despite all their efforts, the stubborn Jewish people did not disappear or converted massively! Church leaders then held to what is known as the "wandering Jew" idea. That is to say: the reason why the Jewish people continue to exist and does not disappear is becuase Jews are paying for the sin of "deicide" (killing a god: Yeshu). And the collective suffering that the Jews should suffer for the sin of deicide is: to be "wandering from place to place for eternity", that is: they will never have a land of their own. And obviously, they will never return to the land of Israel. Having this in mind, what was about to happen in Tiberias in 1564 represented a theological nightmare for the Christian world (similar to the existence of the State of Israel today for the Vatican, although, conveniently, this is no longer talked about…) that would shake the founding dogma of Christianity: the Replacement Theology (see here)

EUROPEAN PRESSURE

At the time of Doña Gracia, the Christian world viewed with great concern that the Jews planned to settle in an independent city, much less in the "Holy Land". The French consul in Constantinople and other European ambassadors also pressured the Sultan demanding he stops settling the Jews in Tiberias. According to Aelion: "The idea that the Jews could regroup as an independent nation, even in an embryonic form, was horrible for the Christian world." The pressure became very heavy for the Sultan, who was facing serious conflicts between his future successors, and constant wars against his enemies. In 1566 Sultan Suleiman died on a military expedition to Hungary and the plan to make Tiberias a Jewish city vanished.

A DREAM THAT HAD TO WAIT

The project of a Jewish colony in Tiberias did not prosper and we had to wait until 1948 for our dream – actually: a much bigger dream – to miraculously come true. Doña Gracia never made it to the land of Israel. In 1569 she left this world. Until the last day of her life, she continued to help and save her Jewish brothers and sisters, maintaining Jewish institutions of learning and strengthening the Jewish settlements in the diaspora and in Erets Israel.

I feel it is a great injustice that the name, life, and work of this incredible ESHET CHAIL is so little known. Knowing her story, in my opinion, is not only important in order to honor her memory but mainly to learn from this virtuous woman how to use all our means and resources to help our Jewish brothers and sisters in every way we can.

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May her example be an inspiration for all of us.

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