DOÑA GRACIA (Part 4) and the Jewish Boycott against Ancona, Italy

GOOD RELATIONS

Something exceptional and unprecedented, which included the intervention of Doña Gracia Mendes-Nasí, occurred in the city of Ancona, an important commercial port on the east coast of Italy. This city was established as a "papal state" in 1429. The Popes Clement III and Paul III tried to develop Ancona as a center of international trade. And to achieve this goal, they granted the city's Jews permission to open banks and offer credit. On February 21, 1547, the pope invited "any person… from the kingdoms of Portugal… including New Christians [=anusim] to settle in Ancona." Due to this pro-Jewish attitude, many *anusim* Jews (forcibly converted to Christianity) from Portugal and Spain began to settle in Ancona, which thanks to its privileged geographical location became an ideal base for maritime trade with the Ottoman Empire. In 1550, the Jewish population of Ancona numbered about 2,700 people. In that year one of the largest Synagogues in Italy was built there.

THE POPE VS THE JEWS

But everything changed in 1555 when a new Pope, Gian Pietro Carafa (Paul IV), took office in the Vatican. This Pope, known for his undisguised anti-Semitic feelings, turned against the Jewish population of Ancona and ignored all the rights granted to Jews by the popes that preceded him. The Jews were humiliated, deprived of their commercial privileges, and locked up in a ghetto. The new pope also reinstated the inquisition in Ancona, confiscated the property of the Jews, and began to persecute and condemn the *anusim*. Nearly 100

anusim were imprisoned by the Inquisition and threatened with being burned or sold into slavery if they did not renounce their Jewish faith. Some chose a forced conversion to save their lives and the lives of their children. Others were deprived of their liberty to be sold on the Maltese slave market. 24 *anusim*, who openly lived as Jews, adamantly refused conversion (even a fictitious one) and were burned at stake in an auto de fe of the Inquisition.

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HISTORY

The news of the execution of these *anusim* reached the ears of Doña Gracia Mendes in Constantinople. On March 9, 1556, at the behest of Doña Gracia, Sultan Suleiman wrote to the pope demanding the release of the imprisoned men, whom he called his subjects since he granted them Ottoman citizenship from afar. The Sultan also requested the release of the confiscated property. But despite all diplomatic efforts, this did not work, and Doña Gracia then planned a "Jewish" response that until then had been unprecedented in the history of the Jewish people: an economic boycott. In this case, against the city of Ancona. Very respectful of the rabbinical authorities, Doña Gracia sought Halachic support for her plan and instructed Rabbi Yehuda Faraj to explain the situation to the chief rabbis of Constantinople and Italy and enlist their support in establishing the boycott and persuade with their co-religionists to support her.

THE END OF ANCONA'S GLORY

Doña Gracia managed to declare a boycott of the port of Ancona. No ship of her company or of companies that had relations with her company could embark or disembark in Ancona. The port to use would be from now on Pesaro, or the already famous port of Venice. It must be remembered that Doña Gracia was the head of the wealthiest family in the Ottoman Empire and one of the most influential families in Europe. With her boycott, Doña Gracia managed to paralyze the port of Ancona, which remained closed and abandoned for a considerable

time, and had a devastating effect on the city's commerce. There is a document from the Ancona City Council addressed to the pope in which they beg him to stop the inquisitorial proceedings against the *anusim* because they were antagonizing Ottoman merchants and affecting the city's trade. According to the historian Bernard Dov Cooperman, after this embargo, Ancona never recovered from this boycott and lost its importance as a commercial port for good. Although this was not the first economic boycott in the renaissance, it was the first organized by the Jews. Never before, until the days of Doña Gracia Mendes, Jews had the power to defend themselves, react and punish the abuses of the church and the inquisition. Doña Gracia Mendes, once again, demonstrated her courage, her leadership, and her passion for defending her Jewish brothers.

The book "Shalshelet HaQabalá" (p. 276-278) written by Rabbenu Gedalia Ibn Yajia (1526-1588) tells the story and mentions the names of the 24 Jewish martyrs who were executed in Piazza della Mostra AL QUIDDUSH HASHEM, that is, by maintaining their Jewish faith and refusing to convert to Christianity, knowing that they would pay their refusal with their lives.

These are their names

Simeon Ben Menachem

Yoseph Guascon

Samuel Guascon.

Abraham Falcon

Isac Nahmias

Salomon Alguadish

Moses Paggi

Salomon Pinto

Yoseph Moljo

Abraham Cerilia

David Nahas

Abraham di Spagna

Moses Barzilon

David Reubén

Salomon Iahia

David Sadicairo

Yoseph Verdai

Yoseph Pappo

Yacob Cohen

Yacob Montalban

Abraham Lobo

Yacob Mozzo

Abraham Cohen

And a woman, whose name is unknown.

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The execution of these Yehudim in 1555 shook the Jewish communities of Europe and inspired elegies (qinot) that to this day are recited in some communities of Italy during Tish’a beA