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WAS URIEL DA COSTA'S *EXAMEN* SEIZED BY THE SPANISH INQUISITION?

The Spanish *Index librorum prohibitorum* as a bibliographical source

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Although the Spanish *Indices* contain no more than a few references to Jewish books in Spanish or Portuguese¹, they still include some very interesting descriptions of Spanish and Portuguese works printed by the Sephardi Jews in Amsterdam.

In the *Index* of 1640 the following title is mentioned:

Sendero de vidas, que contiene quatro tratados de las cosas que el hombre deve hazer para servir al Dio Benedito, por via de la contricion, y de los ayunos, y del temor, traducido, parte del, de un libro de Rabino Ioanna. – Memoria de justo por bēdicion, y mas abaxo dize: Compuesto por Ioseph Saloa Hacá del K.K. de Bet. Iacob da Absterdam a 15. de Flud. 5398 años, tiene 333. planas de a 16 y acaba con quatro sonetos Castellanos, en que los Iudios piden la venida del Messias, y el remedio de su dispersion.

From this work Kayserling and Peeters-Fontainas mentioned two editions: one printed in Amsterdam, by M. Benveniste, without date, in octavo; and a second edition supposedly printed in Amsterdam in 1640, in duodecimo². Most probably these two descriptions refer

¹ I have examined the *Indices librorum prohibitorum* published from 1632 until 1790, that is, when Spanish and Portuguese works were printed in the Northern Netherlands, and found the following descriptions:

– *Novus index librorum prohibitorum et expurgandorum* (Madrid: 1632): *Examen das Tradições Phariseas* (p. 354).

– *Novissimus librorum prohibitorum et expurgatorum index* (Madrid: 1640): *Orden de Oraciones del mes . . .* (Absterdam [sic]: Paulo Rabestem [sic], 1 Adar 1382) (p. 818); Samuel Usque: *Consolacion a las tribulaciones de Israel* (Ferrara: 5513) (p. 903); *Sendero de vidas . . .* ([Amsterdam]: 15 de Flud 5398) (p. 905).

– *Novissimus librorum prohibitorum et expurgandorum index* (Madrid: 1707), II vols.: *Biblia en lengua española* “que falsamente se dize ser vista, y examinada por el Officio de la Inquisicion, impressa en Amsterdam” (I, p. 152); *Elogios à la memoria de Abraham Nuñez Bernal* (I, p. 392); Francisco de Cazares: *Vnion deleitable, y sumario de todas las ciencias* (Francofurte: 1623) (I, p. 439); Menasseh Ben Israel Hebrews: *Spes Israel . . .* (Amstelodami, Samuel Ben Israel) – the only work of Menasseh ben Israel mentioned by the Spanish Inquisition! – (II, p. 58); *Orden de las oraciones del mes . . .* (Amsterdam: Juan de Bivam [sic], 14 de Yuart 5417) (II, p. 107).

– *Index librorum prohibitorum, a expurgandorum novissimus* (Madrid: 1747): no new entries.

– *Indice último de los libros prohibidos y mandados expurgar* (Madrid: 1790): no new entries.

² M. Kayserling: *Biblioteca española-portuguesa-judaica* [1890] (New York: Ktav, 1971), p. 49. Kayserling quotes from the *Cat. libr. hebr. in Bibl. Bodleiana* (Berlin: 1852-1860), by M. Steinschneider, in which only a reference to the author can be found, and the *Catalogue de la collection [. . .] de livres et manuscrits hébr., espagnols et portugais [. . .] de la bibliothèque de Mr. Isaac da Costa* (Amsterdam: 1861), in which two copies of the edition in 12 by Benveniste are described (n. 2294 and 2297). Peeters-Fontainas (*Bibliographie des impressions espagnoles des Pays-Bas*, Louvain, 1933), copied Kayserling's data.

to the same edition, of which copies are present in several libraries. This edition in duodecimo was printed in Amsterdam by Imanuel Benveniste; we do not know when it was printed. Some copies bear the word “Sendroe” (instead of “Sendero”) on the titlepage³.

When we compare the description appearing in the *Index* with the data from the edition by Benveniste, the following can be noted:

- a) the title is almost identical with that of the copies we know – the differences can be explained by an incorrect transcription of some words, unfamiliar to the censor: “Rabino” for “Rabenu” and “Ioanna” for “Jona” –;
- b) the description in the *Index* mentions that the work was composed (= selected and translated) by Ioseph Salom, Haham of Bet Jacob in Amsterdam on the 15th of Elul 5398, *i.e.*, the 25th of September 1638;
- c) no printer is mentioned in the description in the *Index*;
- d) the copy described in the *Index* is in 16° and has 333 pages (or leaves?), the edition by Benveniste is in 12° and has 252 pages;
- e) the book described in the *Index* ends with four sonnets in Spanish in which “the Jews ask for the arrival of the Messiah and the end of their dispersal”; in the edition by Benveniste these do not appear.

The description given in the *Index* of 1640 must refer to an earlier edition of *Sendero de vidas*, of which – nowadays – no copies are known⁴. It must have been printed by another printer than Benveniste, as the later was active only from 1640 onwards (his name does not appear in the list of members of the Amsterdam Sephardi community *Talmud Torah* drawn up in 1639)⁵. That the date of 5398 (1638) given in the *Index* is correct, can be inferred from the mention of Joseph Salom as Haham of *Bet Jacob*, that is, some months before this community, together with that of *Bet Israel* and *Neve Salom*, was united in *Talmud Torah*.

Of the numerous prayerbooks edited by the Sephardi Jews in Spanish during the 17th and 18th centuries, only two Amsterdam editions appear in the Spanish *Indices*. The *Index* of 1640 mentions:

Orden de oraciones del mes, con los ayunos del solo, y Congregacion y Pascuas, nuevamente emendado. Y por orla tiene, Encomendanças de A. derechas de grande coraçon. Mandamiento de A. claro alumbran ojos. Y abaxo, Absterdam, estampado en casa de Paulo Rabestem, por industria de Tehudab. Machabeu à primero de Adar 1382.

³ See my description on p. 76 of this volume.

⁴ The description by Antonio Palau y Dulcet (*Manual del librero hispano-americano* [1923, 7 vols.] (Barcelona: 1977² aum. 28 vols., n. 307522) is a bad copy of the entry in the *Index*, with numerous errors.

⁵ L. Fuks and R.G. Fuks-Mansfeld: *Hebrew Typography in the Northern Netherlands 1585/1815*, I (Leiden: Brill, 1984), p. 146.

This description must have been based upon direct examination, for it is the transcription of a titlepage (“y por orla tiene”, “Y abaxo”). It is not difficult to identify the printer with Paulus Aertsz van Ravesteyn, who was active in Amsterdam from 1611 until 1657⁶; and “Tehudab Machabeu” must refer to Jehudah Machabeu, known as a gifted calligrapher and editor of a prayerbook in 1656⁷. The date of the edition could be interpreted as the 1st of Adar 5382, which corresponds with the 11th of February 1622. No copies of this edition are known⁸.

The *Index* of 1707 reports another prayerbook, which I have not been able to locate, neither:

Vn libro cuyo titulo es: Orden de las Oraciones del mes con lo mas necessario, ù obligatorio de las tres Fiestas del año, como tambien lo que toca à los ayunos Hanucac, y Purim, con sus advertencias, y notas para mas facilidad, y clareza. Y aora de nuevo añadido con toda curiosidad por Daniel Vaez, y Joseph Athias. En Amsterdam en casa de Juan de Bivam, Impressor de libros à 14. de Yiart 5417.

This description was copied by Palau, but is further not recorded. Rodríguez de Castro had mentioned an “*Orden de oraciones para todo el año*. Amsterdam 417. de Cristo 1677 [*sic.* must be 1657] en 12. Por Dan. Vaez y Joseph Athias, en caracteres pequeños, en 583 hojas”. This was copied by Kayserling who took over the mistaken Christian date of 1677 and “adapted” the Jewish year: 5437(!). It could be possible that two prayerbooks were printed in 1657 for Daniel Vaez and Joseph Athias. As for “Juan de Bivam”, no Dutch or Sephardi printer by that name is known; could it be Joan Blaeu, who was active by then and who is known to have printed some Spanish and Portuguese books?

But the most intriguing and surprising information I found in the Spanish *Indices* is certainly the appearance of Uriel da Costa’s *Examen das tradições phariseas*.

The Portuguese bibliographer Inocêncio da Silva already mentioned a description of the *Examen* in the Spanish *Index* of 1790. This was remarked by Carolina Michaëlis de Vasconcelos who in a review on the history of the hitherto unfindable work – supposedly burnt – mentioned that only in the *Index* of 1790 there is an indication that the then General Inquisitor of Spain, Agustín Rubín de Cevallos, actually had a copy of it on the ‘censor’s desk’: the work ends with a sonnet, of which the first verse is quoted⁹.

⁶ J.A. Gruys and C. de Wolff: *Typographi & bibliopolae neerlandici usque ad annum MDCC Thesavrvs* (Nieuwkoop: B. de Graaf, 1980), p. 75.

⁷ His name appears in the list of members of *Talmud Torah* in 1639 (W.Chr. Pieterse: *Daniel levi de Barrios als geschiedschrijver van de Portugees-Israëlietische gemeente in Amsterdam in zijn ‘Triumpho del gobierno popular’* Amsterdam: Scheltema & Holkema, 1967, p. 165).

⁸ A. Palau (202347) used the description he found in the *Index* leaving out – and changing – some information; he also described a prayerbook printed by David de Castro Tartaz in 5422 (1662), giving the Christian year 1622 (n. 202332). This was copied by Peeters-Fontainas, n. 1016.

⁹ Carolina Michaelis de Vasconcellos: *Uriel da Costa. Notas relativas à sua vida e às suas obras* (Coimbra: Universidade, 1921), p. 92-93.

When I examined the Spanish *Indices* I was surprised to find Uriel da Costa's work already mentioned in the *Index* published in 1632! The first description of this work was, therefore, not made by Joannes Möller in 1644 but by a Spanish Inquisitor, in 1632. On p. 354, under anonymous works, we find:

En Portvgves.

Libro intitulado, *Examen das Tradiçoẽs Phariseas comferidas com a ley escrita*. Del todo se prohibe, y en qualquier lengua, cõ nombre de Auctor, o sin el, como Iudaico, y impio contra la immortalidad del alma, y contra el premio eterno de los buenos, pena y castigo de los malos. Tiene 214. paginas: acabase en un Soneto, *Em nome de alguns do povo quasi penitentes*. Y en estas palabras finales, *Paz à os verdadeiros*.

The most accurate description of the *Examen* can be found in the auction catalogue of David Nunes Torres, made in 1728 when, surprisingly, a copy was offered for sale. As it seems, this copy was bound with the work of da Costa's fiercest adversary:

76. Tratado da Imortalidade da Alma por Semuel da Silva Ibid 5383 Item Examen das tradicoems Phariseas Conferidas com a Ley Escrita por Uriel Jurista Hebrea com reposta a hum Semuel da Silva seu falso Calumniador, Ibid. 5384 rarissimo¹⁰

On the hand of this description, the following can be said about the *Examen* as it appears in the *Index*:

- a) the work is listed under anonymous works. Although it is mentioned as a Jewish work and as "impious against the immortality of the souls" the name of its author is nowhere mentioned;
- b) the title, however, closely resembles that of the description given in the *Cat. [. . .] Nunes Torres*;
- c) there is no reference to the place or year of edition, nor to the printer;
- d) the number of pages is revealed – for the first time! –¹¹;
- e) the work ends with a sonnet of which the first verse is given, and
- f) it ends with the words: *Paz a os verdadeiros*.

Upon the basis of this information, it seems improbable that the Spanish Inquisition possessed a copy of Uriel da Costa's *Examen das tradiçoẽs*. If it had, surely the name of the author would have been mentioned as well as everything that could lead to the further identification of the work (place, printer, year).

Then, I think, three possibilities exist. First, in the *Index* a copy without titlepage could have been described. In this case the title must have appeared in other parts of the book.

¹⁰ *Catalogus librorum, quibus (dum viveret) usus est Vir admodum reverendus David Nunes Torres* (The Hague: 1728), p. 33, n. 76. A copy of the *Catalogus* can be found in the British Library, London.

¹¹ The number of pages exceeds the proportions of a mere pamphlet.

The second possibility is that the Inquisition possessed a manuscript copy, in which the name of the author was left out. Finally, it is possible that the work was reported to the Inquisition by Spanish or Portuguese Christians present in the Low Countries at the time of the upheaval on Da Costa's book. In this case, it would be strange (but not impossible) that the number of pages and the first verse of a sonnet were reported – or recorded –, but *not* the name of the author, nor the place or year of edition.

Maybe that, combining all the data we have on the *Examen*, some day it can be found. As we have seen, in the *Cat. Nunes Torres* the *Examen* is bound with Samuel da Silva's *Tratado da immortalidade da alma* (Amsterdam: Paulus van Ravesteyn, 1623). It is possible that some copy of Da Silva's – very rare – work conceals the *Examen*. Inquisitorial documents of the period 1624-1632 should be examined in order to find a report on the *Examen*. If there exists an incomplete printed copy or a manuscript, it could be found under its title, not under the author's name. Finally, in catalogues or bibliographies we could try to find the sonnet of which the first verse seems to belong so unmistakably to the dramatic personality of its unfortunate author.