

A JEWISH GLASS-BLOWER FROM SPAIN

A series of documents have been published recently which merit closer consideration, not only for the information they provide about a little-known field of Jewish activity, but because they throw new light on the glass industry in Spain in general. In spite of the vigour and originality which characterises the early glass industry of Spain (of which the Mexican is an off-shoot), its origins and development have always been something of a mystery.

The above-mentioned documents contain the story of Juan Robles, a 16th-century glass-blower of Cadalso de los Vidrios in Spain. They include an eye-witness description of the young man, and a number of his letters, which have been preserved through the circumstance that he — Juan Robles — fell under the displeasure of the Spanish Inquisition, and was tried in absentia in Toledo in a process which extended from 1532-35¹.

Cadalso de los Vidrios, in the Province of Toledo, at this period was an important center of the glass industry, providing high quality domestic glass for the whole kingdom of Castile. Although

¹ The documents were the subject of a paper published by Dr. Haim Beinart of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, in the *Isaac Ben Zvi Memorial Volume* (Hebrew) 1964, under the title «Fez, Centre of Proselytization and Settlement of Conversos to Judaism in the 16th Century». I take this opportunity of thanking him again for permission to use the material and for giving so generously of his time in discussing it.

it is believed that many glass furnaces must have been in operation there, to judge from the quantities of Cadalso glass which appear on the inventories of the great houses of the period (including that of Philip II), there are few details about the glass-making community itself.

Juan Robles was the son of a glass-blower of Cadalso, Hernando de Robles, a convert to Christianity. His mother, a Christian of 'old' Christian descent, who was about 60 years old when she was called upon to give evidence before the Inquisition Court at Toledo, declared that she had never had the slightest suspicion that her husband was not of pure Spanish decent, and there is no reason to doubt her evidence. It appears that she married him a few years before the expulsion of Jews from Spain 1492, so Hernando de Robles must have come from a family which had been nominally Christian for some generations. (It will be remembered that the first large-scale conversions took place in 1391, and after 1412 there were centres throughout Spain where practically the entire Jewish community adopted Christianity.)

As closely as de Robles guarded the family secret, there must have been some point at which he felt obliged to pass on to his son Juan the truth about his origin. This may have been on Juan's 13th birthday (when, according to Jewish law, a boy reaches the age of religious responsibility); or, more likely, it was just before Hernando's death, for the glass-blower died, leaving Juan at an early age, the head of a family which consisted of the mother, Maria Alonso, and several children.

It was as apprentice to a master glass-blower, one Francisco Ydobro or Ydrobo, that Juan left the place of his birth and set out for the independent Sultanate of Fez in Morocco.

Before following Juan on his journey to Fez, it may be of interest to stop here and consider how much of his background we can glean from the clues provided in his letters to his mother, and the information given about his father, Hernando de Robles. Slight as these details are, they gain body when fitted into the context of what is known about guilds and glass-making communities in Spain and elsewhere.

That Jews formed a large proportion of the glass-makers of the

ancient and medieval world is attested by references in the Mishnah and the Talmud (e.g., from about the 1st to the 6th cent. A.D.)². These are elaborated by contracts and references found among the Cairo Geniza documents (11th-12th centuries)³, which provide a vivid commentary to Benjamin of Tudela's famous statement about the Jewish glass-makers of Tyre and Antioch (late 12th century)⁴.

It is all the more remarkable, therefore, that there seems to be no direct references in Jewish writings to glassmakers' guilds as such. This may be due to the fact that glass-makers were included in other guilds, according to the branch of the industry to which they belonged. For example, makers of artificial gems and those who worked glass in lapidary fashion could be included with bankers, goldsmiths and/or beadmakers. Other likely guilds would be lanterners; masons or some other division of the building trade for those who provided the coloured glass slabs for mosaics, and the pot metal for windows; dyers (which would explain the signature 'Hyacinthus' found on an early specimen of blown glass); and potters' guilds, as suggested by another early vessel signed 'Bounneri the potter'; and perhaps glass-makers would even be included within the framework of shippers, as in Benjamin's reference to the community of Tyre. «The Jews own sea-going vessels, and there are glass-makers amongst them who make that fine Tyrian glass-ware which is prized in all countries.»

Benjamin, who himself came from Navarre, mentions among the three leading men of Tyre one Rabbi Meir from Carcassonne in far-away Provence, a fact which is of some significance. The Jewish community of the Mediterranean basin formed a closely-knit unit^{4a}. This is true for the whole of Spain, but particularly

² ANITA ENGLE, «Does Western Galilee Contain the Secrets of Glass-Blowing?», *Janus* (Brill/Leiden), LI, 2, 1964, pp. 125-35.

³ Prof. S. D. GOITEIN, «The Main Industries of the Mediterranean Area as reflected in the Records of the Geniza», *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, IV, 1961.

⁴ *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, ed. Adler, p. 18.

^{4a} Prof. GOITEIN, *Jews and Arabs* (U.S.A.), pp. 109-112.

^{4b} S. KATZ, *The Jews in the Visigothic and Frankish Kingdoms of Spain and Gaul* (U.S.A.), 1937.

so for Andalusia. Here Jewish settlement is attested without a break from Roman and Visigothic times, reaching its peak during the Moslem period.

The Cairo Geniza documents reveal that Spain was the leading country for silk production, and it is thought that this may have been due to the fact that in early Islamic times Spain was chiefly colonized by people coming from Syria and Lebanon, countries with an ancient sericulture⁵. There is no reason to doubt that members of the even more ancient glass-making industry of these areas were transferred at the same time, and were constantly reinforced and revitalised by the steady movement between the Jewish communities of the East and those of North Africa and Spain up to the 15th century. And indeed, students of Spanish glass have found that as late as the 18th century glass vessels from Andalusia (show the influence of early Islamic forms and of the blowing technique and plastic ornamentation used in Roman glass centres of Syria and Palestine.)⁶

That there were Jewish glass-makers in Spain is attested by the case of Hernando de Robles and his son Juan Robles, the subject of this paper. Several others will be dealt with in some detail in future publications. Bearing in mind the tight, self-contained craft traditions and conditions of the pre-machine age, one must conclude that these are not isolated instances, but rather the tips of a submerged iceberg whose true dimensions can, as yet, only be guessed at.

Although, as stated earlier, glass-making is not specifically mentioned, the guilds to which the glass-makers belonged would have been subject to the same laws as the other guilds created by Spanish Jews for the protection and perpetuation of their craft, and of these we have record in the *Responsa* literature (i.e. replies to questions sent to famous Rabbis)^{6a}.

⁵ Prof. S. D. GOITEIN, *Jews and Arabs*, 1964, pp. 172-3.

⁶ A. W. FROTHINGHAM, *Spanish Glass* (London), 1963, p. 14. ALSO R. RACKHAM, *Burlington Magazine on Spanish Art*, 1927, p. 85.

^{6a} For further information on Spanish guilds, see M. Wischnitzer, *A History of Jewish Crafts and Guilds* (U.S.A.), 1965, chaps. 10, 11 and 12, and Appendices I and II.

The following information about guild practices is derived from the Responsas of Rabbi Solomon Ben Abraham Adret who was born in Barcelona in 1235 and died there in 1310. Also known as Ibn Adret, or more commonly as Rashba, from the initials of his name in Hebrew, his fame was such that questions on the most varied topics were addressed to him from Spain, Portugal, Italy, France, Germany, and even from Asia Minor.

The guilds were called in Hebrew *haburot*, a word which was in use for trading organisations along the Phoenician coast as far back as the 2nd millenium B.C.

From Adret, IV, 185 we learn that a member of a guild was succeeded after his death by his son who had to be above 13 years of age. In default of succession, the place was to be voted by the members of the guild to the relative best qualified for admission into the organisation.

«Furthermore, if all the artisans of the city in any one craft, such as butchers, dyers, or sailors, pass an ordinance regarding their trade, this is as binding as the laws of the Torah upon the individuals of the trade ; and every trade organisations is a city unto itself, and does not require the consent of the outer community for its enactments... In conclusion, the members of an association are as autonomous in their own affairs as are the citizens of the city, and so each group or community is permitted to regulate its affairs and to prescribe fines and punishments which are not in the laws of the Torah... This is the practice of all the holy (i.e. Jewish) congregations and no one has ever questioned its legality.»⁷

There is no doubt that from earliest times there were conversions to Christianity on the part of individual glassmakers or whole families, either because of economic or political pressure, or simply through the process of assimilation. Any or all of these conditions would have been particularly active during medieval times when the monastries were the centers of arts and crafts, and only within their precincts could be found a livelihood and some measure of

⁷ As quoted by A. A. NEUMAN, *The Jews of Spain*, Vol. I (U.S.A.), 1942, p. 183.

security⁸. The Christian glass-making communities in Spain would have been augmented by the large-scale conversions which took place between 1391 and 1412, and certainly well before the expulsion in 1492 there would not have been any nominally Jewish glass-making guilds left.

The likelihood is that they followed the common practice of converting in a body, and putting their guilds under the protection of some Christian saint⁹. Perhaps we have an echo of this in the information that in 1455 the glassmakers of Barcelona united with the weavers of esparto grass to form a new guild and brotherhood under the protection of Saint Bernardino. In the same year one of their members was elected to sit on the municipal council, the first time the glassmakers were accorded such a privilege, although documentary evidence indicates that there was an active industry in Barcelona well before the 14th century¹⁰.

As we already know, the Jewish glassmakers did not forget their origin even though they married Christian wives who, in all likelihood, would have come from glass-making families themselves. Glassmakers have always formed a tightly-knit community, bound by ties of marriage even more than by their guild. From Juan's letters to his mother, one gains the impression that Maria Alonso's family were also glassmakers.

To explain the reasons for thinking so, one must go back a little. Although it is evident from the letters that Maria Alonso was in straightened circumstances, there is nothing to indicate that the de Robles family was poor while the father was alive. Juan could read and write. His letters are written in rather a crude hand, but they are fluent and legible¹¹. He writes to his mother as a proud person. He sends her two leather bags from Fez, and

⁸ FROTHINGHAM, *Ibid*, p. 20; W. A. THORPE, «The Present State of Glass Studies», Part I, *The Antique Collector* (London), Vol. 33, No. 2, April 1962, p. 70.

⁹ Prof. CECIL ROTH, *A History of the Marranos* (U.S.A.), 1960, p. 19 and note 2, p. 380.

¹⁰ FROTHINGHAM, *Ibid*, pp. 19-20, 23.

¹¹ Information communicated by Dr. Beinart, and based on his study of the four letters, which are now in the Archivo Histórico Nacional, Inquisición de Toledo, Legajo 176. No. 11, fols.22r, 22r-22v, 29v-30v, 38r-38v.

apologizes because «they are not sufficiently valuable for your honour.» Juan works out his way of life with independence and self-respect, and sets the highest professional goal for himself, not like someone who is accustomed to being underprivileged and of low social status. As we shall shortly see, this is in striking contrast to the behaviour of Ydobro, who was already a mature and independent artisan.

The impression is that the straightened circumstances indicated by the letters, and Juan's dependence on help from his mother's family, came about as the result of his father's death before he had had time to establish Juan in his profession.

An interview which appeared in the Israeli newspaper *Maariv* not long ago gives some idea of the sudden change which such a catastrophe could bring about in the life of a family. The subject of the interview was Rav-Seren (Major) Menachem Amosi who was born in Yemen where, until the mass exodus to Israel after the creation of the State, the social structure of the Jewish community had remained unchanged since medieval times. Rav-Seren Amosi's father had been a master silversmith earning a good living and highly respected in the community for the excellence of his work, and for the generosity of his hospitality and his almsgiving. The little boy was very happy in his early years. He learned to read the Torah, and was the pet of the village. Then, when he was eight years old, the oldest of the family, his father became ill and died.

«The burden fell on my mother, who had been a pampered woman, and she was shattered. For three years after my father died we lived off his possessions, which we sold. Eventually my mother had to go to work, and she wandered among distant Arab villages, selling perfumes and spices. My father's death not only brought a sudden change in my way of life, but there was also a complete change in the attitude of the people of the town towards me. I felt ashamed and disgraced by the sudden lack of interest on the part of all those who had formerly honoured me by calling me to the Torah, by giving me sweets or patting me on the head».

«Why this sudden change?» Rav-Seren Amosi was asked.

«Quite simple», he replied. «My father had died, and now

I was an orphan. I was an unfortunate, and everyone treated me as such.»

Juan's situation would have been worse, because of the complex hierarchy of the glass-makers' organization.

Glass-makers, like other guilds, were divided into categories subordinated to one another: masters, apprentices and journeymen. The masters were the dominant class, upon whom the other two depended. They were the proprietors of small workshops, owning their raw materials and tools. Thus the manufactured article belonged to them, together with the profits from its sale. The apprentices were initiated into the trade under their direction, and no one was admitted to the craft unless passed by an authorizing committee. Finally, the journeymen were paid workmen who had completed their apprenticeship, but had not yet risen to the rank of master, and, in fact, sometimes never did, for opportunities outside the circle of the big glass-making families were rare.

To become an apprentice, a youth needed guarantors, and some one to provide the lump sum which had to be payed to the master in advance for his training. He also required a measure of goodwill on the part of a glass-house master, for only one or at most two apprentices were permitted to each. Promotion would depend on the boy's ability to secure a work place near the fire (the furnace), where the actual manipulation of the molten glass took place. But it was just this sort of work which was hardest to achieve, since the glass-house masters invariably gave preference to their own children, or the children of their nearest relatives.

Without the help of his father, Juan's formal apprenticeship and eventual rise in status could only come through his next of kin in the trade. In Juan's case it appears that only members of the mother's family (notably her brother, who seems to have been the head of the family), were in a position of any authority in Cadalso at that time¹². And they, apparently, were not prepared to

¹² *The Journal of the American Jewish Historical Society*, No. 18, p. 18 ff, contains a list of marriages solemnised by the Dutch Portugal Jewish Congregation at Surinam from 1642-1750. Among them appear the names of Rachel Robles de Medina, David de Robles, Abigail Robles de Medina, Ester Robles de Medina, Rosa Robles de Medina, Rahel de Robles. If these names have any bearing on the case, the possibility arises that Her-

help him get the necessary qualifications without which he could never hope to gain advancement and financial independence.

It must have been at some point of frustration and anger brought about by the behaviour of his mothers's family that the young man decided to turn his back on the harsh Christian world and return to his father's people.

This seems to be the only explanation for the warmth and devotion which Juan showed towards his sisters and brothers and other relations in his letters, in contrast to the bitterness of his references to his mother's family.

The situation is clearly expressed in Juan's first letter to his mother. This was written in reply to a communication from her, the first he had received in the two years that he had been in Fez. His mother's position had deteriorated after Juan left Cadalso. Perhaps too proud to seek manual work in her own town, Maria Alonso moved to Toledo where she did housework by the day. It would seem that people, or more possibly her family, were taunting the mother with the fact that her son had gone off to work for Ydrobo, someone not of their own family, and had left her alone in her old age. There is also the suggestion that he was under some obligation to them. Juan wrote in reply:

«You send to tell me that I have denied you and yours, and I assure you that no such thing could happen, as you should know. It is because I could not find any good among your people that I left you. Then I met Ydrobo, and he showed me a goodness such as I never met from a single one of my relations. They never did anything for me except to use me without pay. There was not even one who was prepared to do the smallest thing that was necessary. I don't owe anything to anyone but to Ydrobo, who came here for my sake. And if I live, I will repay him for the losses which he suffered because of me.»

It is not clear whether Ydrobo was from Cadalso or the neigh-

nando de Robles was not a Cadalso man, but belonged to a family centered on Medina del Campo. Famous for its fairs, this town is almost equidistant from Toledo and Burgos, where another converso Jewish glassmaker, Pedro de Medina is referred to in a document mentioned by FROTHINGHAM, *Ibid*, p. 26.

bouring glass-making center of San Martin de Valdeiglesias. He is merely reported as being brother-in-law to the Arcipreste of Escalona, who was from San Martin. The Inquisition was only interested in tracking down 'new' Christians (conversos) who were attempting to return to Judaism, and there was never any suggestion on the part of the witnesses who later gave evidence before the Inquisition that he was anything but an 'old' Christian.

Spanish family names are frequently place names. If the name Ydobro can be equated with Egabro —later Cabra— in Andalusia in the southern tip of the province of Cordoba, this would bring him into the full stream of glass history in Spain from at least Roman times. The southern part of the Iberian Peninsula was under Roman domination from the beginning of the Christian Era until well into the period of the Visigothic invasions, and was thus subject to the influence of wandering glassmakers from the Orient who were centered on Gaul to the north and Carthage to the south. A vigorous glass industry grew up in that area, given diversity by the varying demands of its succeeding rulers, from the Romans, Byzantines and Visigoths, to the Moslems and Spaniards. The industry still exists.

What could have been the losses that Ydobro sustained because of Juan? Two types of losses could be involved. One would be the money for Juan's food, clothing and other expenditures, for which a master would normally expect to reimburse himself from the apprenticeship money received in advance. This was probably the great goodness which Juan writes about to his mother: Ydobro undertook responsibility for him as his trainee without payment of money or formal guarantees. Secondly, when Juan took up with him, Ydobro was probably setting off with a donkey laden with glass vessels, packed in straw panniers to be sold at one of the regional fairs. After selling his stock, he could return at his leisure, earning his way by working at one glass center after another en route. Frequently a journeyman received part of his wages in glass vessels, and so Ydobro would have been able to build up a new stock for the next market town on his route. This was the way of journeymen glass-makers the world over.

At some point Ydobro and Juan may have fallen in with other

artisans who were heading for Fez. As indicated in Juan's letters to his mother, there were many of their countrymen—and even some from Cadalso—coming and going the whole time. Fired by the stories of this great commercial center where East met west, Ydobro evidently let Juan persuade him to leave the beaten track and go to Fez, in spite of the increased hazards and expenses of such a journey.

Ydobro seems to have had no motive in going to Fez except to pick up some business. Juan, however, had other intentions. In the history of the conversos of Spain and Portugal, Fez was known as a place of refuge where Jews could return openly to their people and their religion. It was a point of departure as well, from which the conversos could escape the net of the Inquisition by disappearing into a Jewish community in some corner of the Eastern world. This was the plan of procedure which Juan Robles had worked out for himself.

They reached Fez sometime around 1524. Eye-witnesses describe Juan as slight, dark-skinned young man just beginning to grow a beard. In their opinion he was around 16 years of age, which seems in keeping with his state of dependence at the time. But according to his mother's evidence, which gave him as 30 years old in 1533, Juan would have been around 21 when he came to Fez. Although it would be logical to accept the age which his mother gave, it is just possible that she may have become confused when giving evidence.

Juan went to live in the Jewish quarter of Fez, was circumcised, given the name of Abraham, the usual name for male proselytes, and became an open member of the Jewish community there. He wore the Jewish symbol on his hat, attended synagogue, began to grow a beard (this would have been the time when the witnesses first met him), and in due course took a Jewish wife.

Ydobro also went to live in the Jewish quarter. He seems to have become completely bemused by the strange new way of life in the great city of Fez, and it was Juan who attempted to take command of the situation. In his second letter to his mother, Juan describes what happened.

«When we came here I said to him, 'Senor, we have no

money, but I will borrow 50 ducados and remain here as security. You go to Castilla and get barilla and tools (herramientas), and then we can earn.»

Barilla is a form of soda extracted from the ashes of certain plants—notably the *Slasola*—which grows in salt marshes near the sea. The quality of the glass depended in great measure on the quality of this soda, and the barilla of Murcia was famous not only in Spain but among the glass-makers in the whole of Europe. The tools which Juan referred to would have included iron pontils, blow pipes, tongs, pincers, shovels and probably a slide hammer to break up the barilla, which was sold in lumps of rock-like consistency¹³.

Juan intended, evidently, that they should set up as glassmakers on their own, and by hard work earn enough money to be independent. But Ydobro seems to have been a simple fellow, without ambition.

«What did he do, this Ydobro? He fell in love with a Jewess who lived in the house where he was staying, and he put off his going. Then he came an agreement with a Moor to work for him just for pay.»

The contract must have stipulated the number of pieces which Ydobro had to produce for his employer during a given period, together with the help of Juan, for Juan went with him as an indispensable part of the glass-blowing team. And it was here that Ydobro turned out to be a wolf in sheep's clothing. To quote Juan again:

«Because he was chasing after this Jewess he did not work, and let me pay for his losses out of my own money. Not only that. He used to treat me as if I was a Moor (probably synonymous with a menial in Spain). All the Christians here have testified to this.» When they tried to intervene, Ydobro said to them: «How do you know that his mather was not my mistress?»

«At the end of it all, by the time I parted with him, I had lost a year and a half of work, and he left me with debts amounting

¹³ FROTHINGHAM, *Ibid.*, p. 16. quoting Gudiol Riart: *Els vidres catalans* (Barcelona), 1936, pp. 160-1.

to 22 ducadoes which I had to pay to the Moors and the Jews for him, because he did not produce anything. He did not even give me money for shoes. He used to tell me that the Moor would give me money. Afterwards we became friends, the Moor and I, and he told me that whenever they payed money to Ydobro, he used to say that I was his servant.»

«There is no end to with I could tell you about the things he has done to me in this country», Juan wrote to his mother. «He spent more than 300 ducados on Moorish, Jewish and Christian women. And most of this money was earned by my work, very little by his.»

An interesting sidelight is the manner in which news and gossip was carried between Fez and Toledo. Ydobro must have gone around besmirking Juan's name among their countrymen. They evidently passed the gossip on to his family in Spain, and Maria Alonso wrote to her son to ask if it was true that he owed Ydobro money. In indignation Juan revealed the story to her as related above.

When Juan broke off from Ydobro he set up as an independent glass-maker, presumably in the Jewish quarter, for the Jewish community continued to show an interest in the young proselyte and helped him to get established. One of his witnesses before the Inquisition tribunal in Toledo¹⁴ reported that when he asked where he could buy a glass in Fez, they took him to Juan Robles.

But the troubles of Abraham the convert were by no means over. In fact, they had only just begun. Perhaps he was operating in an area where it was forbidden, or perhaps there was some restriction or tax which he was evading. He hints at some obstacle of this nature in the letter to his mother in which he complains about Ydobro: «I will not be able to acquire very much as long as I am here. He (Ydobro) prevented me from doing what I wanted to do in secret, although nobody here would have informed about what I was doing.» Whatever the cause, a servant who was learning to make glass with Juan warned him that the Sultan had an eye on him.

¹⁴ BEINART, *Ibid* (Note 33, 36r-36v).

Since coming to Fez he had already narrowly escaped death at the hands of Moors, who tried to cut his throat «for no reason, just because they were bad people, against God and man.» To have fallen under official displeasure was even worse.

«I feel that I am not going to leave this world without a terrible death», he wrote to his mother. «This is a country without justice, and without logic, and anyone can come and tell king any lie at all, and the king believes it.»

It was now too dangerous for Juan to remain on in Fez, and he had to find some way of getting away without attracting attention. His intention from the first was to go on somewhere else from Fez as soon as he had earned enough money to pay off his debts —first of all, on a pilgrimage, via Tunis, to the Holy Land, to Jerusalem. He wrote to his mother that from Jerusalem he would go to Rome, and then to Valencia in Aragon. Once in Spain, he assured her, he would find some way for them to be together again.

It is doubtful whether Juan (now Abraham the convert) really meant to return to Spain again, for not long after his conversion he had become aware that the Inquisition was on his tracks.

Fez, as previously mentioned, was a busy commercial center frequented by merchants who came from Spain to sell their wares. There was a special compound where the Christian merchants lived and conducted their business while they were in Fez, and the Jewish and Moslem merchants came to this compound once a week to trade with them.

The Christian who had been taken prisoner from merchant vessels and were being held for ransom were kept in the same compound. Monks of the Trinity used to come to Fez to ransom them. The Inquisition helped them with money gained from fines imposed on conversos for forgiveness from their sins. These monks served the Inquisition as a source of information about the conversos who had returned to Judaism. The Inquisition then did everything it could to get hold of the Judaizers and bring them to judgement.

The Christians who informed the Inquisition court in Toledo about Juan Robles tried to persuade him to retract and return to Spain and put himself at the mercy of the Inquisition. One of the

monks who came to redeem prisoners in the Sultanate of Fez promised Juan that he would speak for him before the Fathers of the Inquisition.

Juan did not seem to be impressed with the value of these promises, for he wrote to his mother: «they keep telling me that I must return to Christianity. If I don't manage this matter carefully, I am going to have a bad end.»

There were other, less open sources of information. Several of the witnesses who gave evidence against Juan Robles, and told about his Jewish way of life Fez, were hatters who came regularly from Spain to sell their wares there. These hatters posed as friends. They were the ones who acted as Juan's postmen, taking the letters and money which he sent to his mother in Toledo, and at the same time supplying information to the Inquisition.

The Inquisition brought pressure on Juan's mother to induce her son to return and stand trial, and she did her best to persuade him. She was a devout Catholic in the spirit of the time, and believed that this was the only means of saving his soul from eternal damnation.

Juan begged her again and again not to try and hurry his return. «You say that I must return and defend my honour, even to the death. But I don't want to face death little by little... I want to die only once, not many deaths.»

When she used the argument of her old age and sad state, he promised her that she would see him again before she died. The young man's letters reveal a remarkable attachment to his mother and to his immediate family. It is all the more astonishing that he had the strength of will to stick to the dangerous course which he had chosen quite voluntarily, and which cut him off from his country, his mother, and her religion forever.

The attitude of the Inquisition court to Juan Robles was also unusual¹⁵. The many adjournments of the case, the many extensions which the court—contrary to its usual practice—gave to the accused to allow him time to return, showed how important it was

¹⁵ According to Dr. Beinart who spent several years investigating Inquisitions files. See his book *Anussim B' din ha-Inquisition* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1964.

considered by the Inquisition to bring this young man to judgement. Perhaps the church authorities were also anxious to stop the break-up of the glass-making community in Cadalso de los Vidrios. Juan's was the eight and last file from Cadalso. (However, it is not known to the writer of this paper whether the other files dealt with members of the glass-making or allied crafts.)

The first information about Abraham the convert was brought by a monk who came back and reported to the Inquisition in Toledo in 1530. This was recorded in the book of evidence. Three-quarters of a year later, more information was recorded by a monk named Pedro de Mata, who gave his evidence in San Martin de Valdeigleisas when he returned from Fez.

Pedro de Mata's evidence was passed to the Inquisition Head Quarters in Toledo, and another year and a half elapsed until the court decided to take legal action against Juan's conversion was presented by 9 witnesses, the court postponed the case several times by giving orders that public proclamation demanding his return should be made in Cadalso, and extending the time limit within which he could appear.

When the mother, Maria Alonso, appeared before the Inquisition in January 1535, she begged that the case of her son should be delayed again to give him a chance to return, and once again an extension of some months was granted. After that Maria Alonso wrote to her son in another attempt to persuade him to return, but on April 24th the prosecutor presented to the judges a letter from Fez in which Juan stated quite clearly that he had no intention of returning, and the judges were asked to consider this as sufficient evidence.

From then on the case proceeded quickly, and Juan Robles (Abraham the proselyte) was convicted on Dec. 21, 1535, and sentenced to be burnt in effigy. More than 5 years had elapsed from the time that the Inquisition received their first information about the convert.

We have no further information about Juan Robles of Fez, as he signed himself in one of his letters. And even if he did chance to turn up in some later document, we would not recognise him, for his identity would be masked, perhaps deliberately, under one

of the many complicated names adopted by the Jews of the Moslem world. There may, however, be some traces of family connections to be found in the western World, and it is worth considering some of these possibilities here.

The name of another glass-maker who was working at Cadalso around the same period, that of Juan Rodríguez, has come down to us¹⁶. It is not clear when he left Cadalso de los Vidrios, but after working for some years in Venice and Barcelona, he is recorded as being a Seville in 1557, when he applied for permission to set up a furnace there. Seville was one of the centres from which the conversos of Spain and Portugal left for the Netherlands and/or England, or the New World. Several people by the name of Rodrigues or Rodriguez appear in Inquisition documents as Portuguese, where thousands of the Spanish conversos fled for refuge.

In a list of the Jews of the Spanish and Portuguese community in England who were made citizens in the time of Charles II (1661-1687), we find the following names: *Abraham* Rodrigues, *Alphonso* Rodrigues, and *Antonio* Rodrigues *Robles*¹⁷.

The name of Robles appears once again, this time in an unmistakably glass context. Among the names of Spanish glassmakers is that of the Sala family of which members are recorded in the Barcelona area from 1417 to 1489, one of them, Francisco Sala appearing in Barcelona records of 1485¹⁸. This name, in the form of de Sala, Salas or de Salas is one which is known among Jews of that area from the 13th century onwards¹⁹. At a later period we find the name of Francisco de Salhas (the Portuguese spelling) appearing again, this time among records of the Inquisition. He was a glass merchant of Alhos Vedros, and later of Lisbon, whose daughter Ursula Maria Salas was banished to Brazil in 1682 for

¹⁶ FROTHINGHAM, *Ibid*, pp. 57-8, 61, quoting GESTOSO y PÉREZ, *Ensayo de un diccionario de los artífices que florecieron en Sevilla* (Sevilla), 1909. Vol. 2, p. 401.

¹⁷ *The American Jewish Historical Society*, No. 20, p. 110.

¹⁸ FROTHINGHAM, *Ibid*, p. 24.

¹⁹ JACOB JACOBS, *Mss. Sources for Spanish Jewish History* (London), 1894; Prof. FRITZ BAER, *Die Juden im christlichen Spanien*, Vol. 1, part 1, 1929, part 2, 1936.

judaizing²⁰. One of the family married a *Sarah Robles* of Seville in Amsterdam early in the 18th century²¹. The Salas family apparently fled from Lisbon to Leghorn from where they later migrated to Amsterdam, Curaçao and Surinam²².

Surinam, it will be recalled, was also the destination of a large contingent of the Robles de Medina family, as referred to in Note 12.

Taking these facts into consideration, it would seem more than a coincidence that Sarah Robles, who married a Salas, bears a name given to female converts to Judaism, just as Abraham is the name taken by male converts; and that Francisco de Salhas, the Portuguese converso, has the same name as the member of the glass-making Sala family mentioned in the Barcelona records of 1485.

From the point of view of the 20th century, private, and even family names may seem flimsy evidence on which to base a relationship extending over 200 years. But it should be taken into account that it was a custom among the Jews of the Spanish and Portuguese communities to name a grandchild after his paternal or maternal grandparents. Those who have made a study of such communities have found that very often grandparents and childless relatives left large legacies to their namesakes, born or unborn, as indications of their appreciation²³.

Furthermore, glass-makers have always had a tradition of marrying within their own circle, presumably to perpetuate the secrets of their craft. This gives a continuity to glass-making families which may not exist in other fields, and we have examples of even longer duration than that indicated above. In present-day Italy there are glass-making communities whose families have been outstanding in glass history from the 15th century, with the same

²⁰ *Publication of the American Jewish Historical Society* (U.S.A.), Vol. IV, p. 173.

²¹ Portuguese Jewish Community Archive of Amsterdam, *Ket. vol. 9*, no. 234; Doop, Trou and Begraafregisters, Records of the City of Amsterdam, 714, f. 117v. (Quoting from Rev. ISAAC S. EMMANUEL, *Precious Stones of The Jews of Curaçao* (New York), 1957, p. 400.

²² EMMANUEL, *Ibid.*, p. 400.

²³ EMMANUEL, *Ibid.*, p. 98.

private names appearing over and over again during the period of more than 500 years.

There is every likelihood, therefore, that investigation into the files of Spanish and Portuguese Jews in Amsterdam and elsewhere would reveal further ramifications of the family of Juan Robles, glassmaker of Cadalso de los Vidrios.

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