

A Secret Passage: A conversational visit with Doña Gracia Mendes

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This paper is part of my research relating to an extraordinary Sephardi woman from the Sixteenth Century known as Doña Gracia Mendes. Rather than merely presenting her biography, I intend to speak, in particular, about her remarkable courage and the values we have received from her legacy. There are two parts to my Presentation. First, I will offer a brief description of the political and historical moment in which Doña Gracia first appeared. I will also describe in detail this intriguing female personage, including the various names by which she is known, as well as her journey from Portugal, the country of her birth, to Turkey, her last port-of-call. Secondly, I will present the one of the **responsa** which reveals somehow her life and some linguistics aspects of the Spanish which the Jews of that period used as their spoken and written language in their everyday life. It is my desire, at the conclusion of this lecture, to leave the door open, as it were, to continue research on this topic. With this structural outline in mind, let's embark together on this fascinating and provocative journey into a human life and heart.

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