

## The Trial of Pablo Montañés, a Canariote Augustinian Friar

Among the few remaining *processos* of the Court of the Inquisition in the Canary Islands stands as a singular case the trial of the Augustinian friar Pablo Montañés<sup>1</sup>. Pablo Montañés, a native of Los Silos in Tenerife, was the son of Capitán Sebastián Pérez Montañés<sup>2</sup>. We lack information on his past in the Island until his becoming an Augustinian friar. He may be considered a devoted member to his order and loyal to his vows, since he was accepted as a priest in the *tercia* of Don Fernando del Castillo, and recruited in the Island for the war in Flandres<sup>3</sup>.

He served in Flandres as a priest and held Mass, heard soldiers' confessions and gave the Sacraments and final Unctions. In this capacity he served in Brussels and Amsterdam as well, as we can learn from the testimony of Juan Antonio Moermans, a young Flemish merchant settled in San Cristóbal in Tenerife<sup>4</sup>. Already in Brussels

1 The file's number is Archivo Histórico Nacional, Inq. Canarias, leg. 1825 n. 23. It holds 15v folios. The file (see Appendix 2) ends with the summons to return to Tenerife within a year and stand trial. On another group of Canariote Conversos see: H. Beinart, 'The Jews in the Canary Islands: a Re-evaluation', *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England XXV* (1977) 48-86. See also: L. Wolf, *The Jews in the Canary Islands* (London 1927).

2 He had another brother who joined the army in Seville for Ceuta. There was probably another brother named Nicolás. See Pablo's letter sent to his father from Amsterdam (fol. 11v). He promised his father to search for his brother who joined the army on returning to Spain. For the letter see below, Appendix n. 1.

3 After the *tercia* disbanded in Flandres Don Pedro Benítez de Lugo, the Sergeant-Major, became its head. See Francisco Coronado's testimony, fol. 4r.

4 Moermans was 22 years old when he testified on 11 February, 1697. Moermans engaged him to say Mass in Amsterdam. After the Mass held in the Franciscan Church there, Moermans learned that Pablo became a proselyte to Judaism. Moermans suspected that the Mass was held by

Pablo Montañés expressed his wish to return home and permission was granted to him. He was even given a grant in aid from the Military authorities of 400 *Reales de Ocho* to cover his expenses<sup>5</sup>. But instead of going home he went to Amsterdam, where we learn about his Judaizing practices. Although we may presume that already in Brussels he made up his mind to become a Jew he did still act in Amsterdam as a priest, as we can learn from his letter to his father, sent on October the 10th, 1696<sup>6</sup>.

He joined the Jewish Community in Amsterdam. Nevertheless, we cannot say if he was a proselyte or a converso, returning to the fold of his ancestral faith<sup>7</sup>. His appeal to the community elders was first rejected, according to the rules of proselytization. Later, some Jews having intervened on his behalf, the Community Council consented and gave its permission for his circumcision<sup>8</sup>. He claimed that he was of Jewish descent, thus trying to facilitate his acceptance in the fold<sup>9</sup>. Bartolomé de Castro, the witness who testified on that in Garachico (in Tenerife) told the Inquisitor that some Jews went to verify this with Juan Antonio Moermans, the Flemish merchant of Tenerife, who was then in Amsterdam<sup>10</sup>. This was perhaps the system by which the community elders examined those who wanted to become Jews and join the Amsterdam community. We cannot say when this became a rule with the Community<sup>11</sup>. Bartolomé de Castro told

Pablo Montañés already after his becoming a Jew and he intended to «break his head». When they met and exchanged words Pablo Montañés started shouting for help and thus escaped Moermans' wrath. This was most probably during the months of October-November, 1696, before Montañés' circumcision.

5 On the sums value see J. Lynch, *Spain under the Habsburgs*, 2 (Oxford 1969) p. 281. One «Real de Ocho» was 272 maravedí.

6 See his letter fol. 11r.

7 See further below.

8 «...que antes auiendo dado petiçion en el conçilio judaico no le auian querido dar permission para çircumçidarse y que despues, a ruego y persuaziões de otros judios, se la auian concedido». See Moerman's testimony, fol. 5v.

9 Testimony of Bartolomé de Castro, fol. 7v-8r «...que el dicho religioso dio petiçion a la sinagoga en dicha çiudad de Amsterdam para que le recibiesen por judio y que falicitar (sic) la entrada dixo dicho religioso que en esta Isla todos sus parientes eran judios».

10 See above and especially note 4.

11 Mr. Yoseph Kaplan informs me that this was the way the community acted when Lorenzo Escudero wanted to become a Jew around 1658. My

his examiner that Pablo Montañés' family name was Henríquez. Perhaps he took this name after having joined the fold; or was it the tradition of the family's name in the past? <sup>12</sup>. Juan Antonio Moermans denied the converso past of the family and in his words the Pérez Montañés were *buena gente*. No doubt he had in mind the good Christian stock of the family <sup>13</sup>. Support for this may perhaps be found in the testimony of Pablo Montañés' father, Capitán Sebastián Pérez Montañés <sup>14</sup>.

True, many conversos were ship-captains in the Canary Islands as in other parts of Spain and Portugal in the 17th Century <sup>15</sup>. No doubt the Court would have questioned Sebastián Pérez Montañés if it had any suspicions about this. As a rule it was customary to reconstruct the genealogy of the tried by the Inquisition. It was Sebastián Pérez Montañés duty to inform on this to the Court. We would not think this an omission of the Court of the Canary Islands. More so, since the file was sent to the Suprema in Madrid and its instructions were sent back to the Canariote Court, it would have remarked on this as an omission.

It is clear therefore that Sebastián Pérez Montañés was considered in the Canary Islands as a good Christian and the Court had no doubts as to his past. He told in his testimony how he went from Silos to San Cristóbal in order to meet and question Francisco Coronado if the rumors about Pablo Montañés proselytization were true. He stop-

thanks are due to him for this information. See his work on Isaac Orobio de Castro (in preparation).

<sup>12</sup> See fol. 8r.

<sup>13</sup> We may presume that conversos were considered «*mala gente*».

<sup>14</sup> He was 53 years old when he testified. We presume that Pablo Montañés was in his thirties when he became a Jew. Sebastián Pérez Montañés testified on 28 March, 1697. See fol. 9v.

<sup>15</sup> See for instance Sebastián de Ares de Fonseca, who became a Jew in Amsterdam. He later returned to Spain, confessed before the Inquisition and informed on many conversos who became Jews in Amsterdam and took part in the Dutch 1624 war expedition to conquer Brazil. See H. Beinart, 'The Spanish Inquisition outside Spain' (in Hebrew), *Proceedings of the 5th World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Vol. II, p. 63, n. 45. Cf. as well Idem, 'The Jews in the Canary Islands: a Re-evaluation', See above note 1. See also AHN, Inq. Toledo, leg. 142, n. 6, fol. 39r-42v. We would point out here to these new kind of witnesses, who while abroad had connections with former conversos and later informed on them and their Judaizing practices before the Inquisition.

ped in Realejo where he met a relative, Gonzalo Machado, who confirmed the news. There was no reason to continue to San Cristóbal and he returned home. He was not reprimanded by the Court for not presenting himself before the Court in order to testify on his son. The Court only ordered that the letter which his son sent him should be added to the file<sup>16</sup>; a confirmed copy of it by the Court's notary should be left with the father<sup>17</sup>. It should be said that the father had no idea at all of his son's intentions.

Little is known on Pablo Montañés' ways as a Jew. Some Jews saw him fasting on Yom Kippur in the synagogue and they told the witness about it<sup>18</sup>. But there were also some Jews who said that Pablo Montañés was neither a Jew nor a Christian, because he lacks any knowledge on Judaism<sup>19</sup>. He was circumcised, most probably, in November or December, 1696, since on the 4th or 5th of January 1697, Francisco Coronado visited him while he was convalescing<sup>20</sup>. While visiting him Coronado tried to argue with him about his circumcision. It seems doubtful whether this was possible while he was still in pain. Francisco Coronado most probably heard about this before going to Amsterdam, since he asked for Pablo's whereabouts in the Amsterdam synagogue.

From there he was sent to the house, or hostel, where Pablo's lodgings were. His circumcision was public knowledge. In this place Francisco Coronado met two other Jews, who were also convalescing. Perhaps this was a convalescing home or hospital for proselytes. There, Francisco Coronado saw the Ten Commandments in Hebrew in Pablo Montañés possession. Maybe he tried to learn Hebrew in this way; no doubt Pablo Montañés knew their contents in Latin and Spanish. Bartolomé de Castro, who also visited him in those circumstances and testified before the Court in the Canary Islands, told the Inquisitors that Pablo

16 For the letter see Appendix 1.

17 The Court's order is of 11 March, 1697. See fol. 9v-10r.

18 Testimony of Juan Antonio Moermans, fol. 5v.

19 Testimony of Moermans, fol. 6r. See further below.

20 See testimony, fol. 4r-4v.

Montañés asked him to pass the word in the Island about his circumcision<sup>21</sup>.

To the above told we would like to add more information found in Pablo Montañés letter to his father. Francisco Kaiçer (*sic!*) from Tenerife was the messenger who brought this letter from Amsterdam. As already pointed out, it was written before he became a Jew; since he informs his father about Mass he was holding in the Franciscan Church of Amsterdam and of those he held for the soldiers while in Flandres and France, as well as his staying with a Catholic family and holding Mass for them. He speaks very highly of the town. He was an eyewitness to the decline of Spain at the end of the 17th century, in the last days of Charles II and the end of the Habsburg dynasty there. Personal matters and his own destiny are intermingled in his story. His military unit suffered heavily; many of the youth which were recruited with him died on the way<sup>23</sup>. The unit reached Ostende by sea and continued to Antwerp. From there the unit went to Brussels, where it was disbanded, as already told<sup>24</sup>. There he made up his mind to go to the Spanish Main and on way he arrived in Amsterdam, most probably after the hostilities ceased. He wrote to his father on the 10th of October, 1696 (as already mentioned), informing him of his intentions: to go to Cádiz by sea; from there to Madrid, to act as a reformed priest; and then to Rome<sup>25</sup>.

He postponed his going and decided to pass the winter in Amsterdam. He had his reasons: He wanted to see how the peace agreement was kept<sup>26</sup>; he wanted to travel safely by sea, and in winter it is dangerous; he feared to cross France; there he will go only if there will be peace. His

21 «...que estava enfermo por la çircunçision hecha y que asi la dixese en esta Isla», fol. 8r.

22 He mentions in his letter more than 50 churches in Amsterdam.

23 He gives the name of Andrés Pérez, who was most probably known to his parents. He died on way from Ostende to Antwerp. Others died in England. See fol. 10r-11r, and Appendix 1.

24 See above note 3.

25 On conversos visiting Rome see H. Beinart, 'Fez, a proselyting centre during the 16th century' (Hebrew), I. Ben-Zvi Memorial volume, *Sefunoth* 8 (1964) 330.

26 «...guardo como se zelebren la paz» (fol. 11r).

attitude (and perhaps of many) towards France is clearly seen. But in the meantime he did what he did and became a Jew. Perhaps already then he made up his mind to make this important step in his life, but concealed this from his father and covered his real intentions and reason for his continued stay in Amsterdam.

Pablo Montañés does not spare harsh words on Spain. «The Spanish army was sitting with folded arms<sup>27</sup>. A peace agreement is about to be signed in the Hague, in which England will be a partner. The Duke of Savoy went over to the French»<sup>28</sup>. It seems that this former friar foresaw the Ryswyck agreement, which was signed in September, 1697; the agreement that forced France to return to Spain the conquered territories it had taken from her. This was the outcome of the Dutch and English intervention against France. But Louis XIV had other long range plans: his eyes were on the Spanish Succession and the of the Habsburg Dynasty<sup>29</sup>.

HAIM BEINART

#### APPENDIX N.º 1

##### THE LETTER OF PABLO MONTAÑÉS TO HIS PARENTS

[10r] Quiera Nuestro Señor esta halle a mis padres con la salud que les desea su hijo de Vuestras Merçedes. Tengo escriptas muchas cartas, y por dos que solo he reçiuido de mi padre, por mano de Martin, el que estaba con Daniel<sup>30</sup>. Veo mias no las ha visto mi Padre, la mas fresca fue su fecha a catorze de junio y la otra a quince de febrero. Las reciui en esta ciudad de Amsterdam, donde quedo con salud, para pasar a Cadiz quando tengo la mejor ocasion de siguranza, para de alli ir a Madrid y pasaré a Roma; a Madrid

27 «...solo se estan mirando unos a otros» (fol. 11r).

28 See Appendix 1.

29 See J. Lynch, *Ibidem*, pp. 252, 280.

30 Daniel Kaiçera merchant living in Garachico. See testimony of Luis Fernández de Silva. Pablo Montañés conversion to Judaism discussed there. Leg. 1825 No. 23 fol. 7r.

por pretensión como capellan reformado; a Roma, a lo que Dios dictare; a esto no faltare vn punto dandome Dios salud.

Mi Padre me escriba a Cadiz a manos del Governador o de el Prior, que fuere de San Agustin, mi Padre, dandose a conoçer con los tales, diçiendo guarden las cartas a su hijo que llegara alli, y lo mas seguro sera a vn gran amigo que yo tube en Flandes, y vine con el hasta esta ciudad, el que por pasaporte se ha ido por Françia, Italia y Roma, que es de Cadiz, llamado Don Alberto Perez de Agito. Adbierto esto porque si a Vuestra Merçed se le ofreçe algo que adbertirme que haga de pretension en su gusto, si la fortuna ayuda lo hare en vna y otra parte. En quanto al caxonçillo, por çierto que quedo por cerrarse las aguas de nieve oy me le leuare conmigo a Cadiz, y es cierto siendo cosa tan corta aun no lo arriesgo por ver no escapa llavio <sic> que el frances no toma. Ya Vuestra Merçed sabra, por cartas mias, o por otras vias, que el terçio se reformo. Don Bernardo queda en Ilamur de guarniçion, a la retirada de campaña espero en Dios se ira por alla queda alentado. A quien le hago por alli quien dara notiçias de los muertos. En otras les di, como de Andres Perez que murio en las barcas que benimos de Ostende para Amberes, no hablando de los que murieron en Inglaterra y en el mar, ni Ostende, sino de los que en el Hospital de Malinas, remito la memoria que mande / [110v] sacar para saber destos tales, para hacerles bien por el alma y como morian me traian villetes. Dios tenga en Su Gloria tanto pobre que muera a la clemençia por el poco gouierno de España. Hasta la fecha deste no se ha hecho nada en los exercitos, solo se estan mirando vnos a otros, sin mas cosa alguna. Se diçe se hara una junta dentro de quinçe dias por los aliados de todas dos partes, España y Françia, para señalar puesto donde se ha de ir a proponer la paz, y su firmeza, que esperamos se hara sin duda. Esta junta se haze ante el Rey de Inglaterra en esta su Corte de Aya, que es de Olanda. Esta es la çierta nueba y sin aver cosa de nobedad. El duque de Saboya salio de nuestra liga y hizo pares con Françia. Todavia este ynbierno sere aqui en Amsterdam por dos cosas, la primera porque aguardo a que se zelebre la paz, y tener siguro para pasar, porque no sera gustoso ir a Françia y tambien que pasado el ynbierno ai y con boçes que ira vn hombre siguro, y aora ya estamos en el y no ay siguras embarcaçiones. Yo temo mucho del mar y si puedo auiendo paz me determinare pasar por la Françia, que aunque es verdad es mucho corto, Dios ayudara como hasta aqui no me ha olvidado, ni recelo ir por todo el mundo, si posible fuera, por lo experimentado. Aqui ay muchas Iglesias. Digo Misa. Ay frayles de mi Orden. Ay en esta villa o ciudad de Amsterdam mas de cinquenta Iglesias; todo se zelebra, si quieren, cantado, pero no del todo publico, pero todo el Pueblo y Justiçia lo saben. Pagase de las Iglesias vn tanto, como otra cosa particular a los Estados lo que les señalan y como pais libre y interesado permiten dichas Iglesias. De mi hermano largamente auia escrito las notiçias que tube. Aora al presente no se del, pero despues de auer salido destos Estados de

Flandes, y Olanda, ya saue Vuestra Merçed como estubo en Cadiz, fue a Sevilla, se recluto para Ceuta, y sento plaza donde fue de soldado. Esto sucedio asi; no he savido mas, procurare saber pasando a España del, donde para, vivo o muerto. Yo escuso descriuir mas largo porque no ay nobedad vara.

A mis tias y señoras mis besamanos. A / [111r] don Vicente que espere a Bernardo, y que en el interin le remita algo aqui a Olanda, por letra, que vien lo ha menester. Ya dira mi Padre que si con el capitán que vino este año Don Gonzalo le embio algo, no le dio nada, ni aun carta, pues dixo no vio a nadie de nuestra casa, pues todos esperamos cartas. Y si le imbio algo, imbie carta aqui, que se cobrara bien Vuestra Merçed me le deje ver este capitulo, porque sepa me acuerdo del, y si me quiere escribir yo agradezia mucho ver aqui letras. Auiendo benido aqui para luego embarcarme, como tube mi ropa a bordo de un nauio que iba para Malaga y Liorna, la volbi a tierra, por auerme vna señora catholica dado la mesa y cama y lo necesario por que le diga Misa. Y como lleuo arriba dicho aguardo pase este inbierno y en este tiempo lo paso bien; porque de no ser asi ay mucho gusto en esta ciudad y no lo pudiera yo sustener, y asi digo con Caiçer<sup>31</sup> o por su mano de Daniel me pueden inbiar cartas en casa de la posada de donde asiste o vive Françisco de Caiçer en esta çiudad, donde está vn sobrinito de los dichos, el que queda bueno. Y si me imbian vna frasquera que dar a esta señora la agradezca, y la azemos a conoçer para que inbie en flota algunos efectos, y no este mal para el que quisiere comunicarse, pues es Mercadela, es viuda, tiene un hixo solo, tambien catholico. Y con esto a Dios que me guarde a Vuestra Merçed muchos años. A mi Madre mis memorias, Nicolas y demas de casa.

Amsterdam, y octubre dies de noventa y seis años. El hijo que sus manos besa. Fray Pablo.

## APPENDIX N.º 2

### COMPOSITION OF THE COURT

#### *Judges:*

Francisco Alvarez de Lugo  
Andrés Romero Suárez de Calderón.

#### *Prosecutor:*

Licenciado Pedro de Soto.

<sup>31</sup> See above note 1. They were two more brothers: Francisco and Pedro. See testimony of Luis Fernández de Silva, fol. 6v-7r.



*Examiners of witnesses:*

- in La Laguna:  
Diego Ilarena y Cabrera
- in Garachico:  
Gaspar de Montesdoca.

*Notaries:*

- in La Laguna:  
Marcos Antonio de Lariz y Munabe  
Mathías Oramas Villarreal<sup>32</sup>
- in Garachico:  
Pedro de Mora.

*Confirmation of witnesses testimonies:*

- in Garachico:  
Don Juan del Saz, emisary from La Laguna.

*Witnesses for Prosecution:*

- in La Laguna:  
Capitán Francisco de Coronado  
Juan Antonio Moermans.
- in Garachico:  
Luis Fernández de Silva  
Bartolomé de Castro.
- in Silos:  
Sebastián Pérez Montañés.

*Members of the Suprema connected with the trial:*

- Lorenzo Folch de Cardona
- Dr. Juan Bautista de Arzamendi
- fray Pedro de Matilla
- Pedro Miqueléz de Mendaña Osorio, notary.

## SYNOPSIS OF DATES

1696 11 Oct. Pablo Montañés writes from the Low Countries to his parentes in Silos.

<sup>32</sup> He was already active in 1656 as notary of the Court. See trial of Francisca López, wife of Diego Rodríguez Arias, AHN, Inq. Canarias, Leg. 1824 No. 7 fol. 7v.

- 1697 11 Febr. Captain Francisco Coronado testifies in San Cristóbal de La Laguna (Tenerife) before Diego de Ilarena y Cabrera.
- » » Juan Antonio Moermans in examined in La Laguna.
- » » Luis Fernández de Silva testifies in Garachico.
- » » Bartolomé de Castro testifies in Garachico.
- 11 March The Court orders the confiscation of the letter which Pablo Montañés sent to his father. In his possession will remain an authorized copy.
- 13 March The Prosecutor asks for a continuation of the trial.
- 18 March The judges concede the Prosecutor's request.
- » » Juan de Saz sends a confirmation of Coronado's and Moermans testimonies.
- 28 March Captain Sebastián Pérez Montañés, father of Pablo Montañés, testifies in Silos.
- » » Gaspar de Montedoca writes to the Court in La Laguna and sends the Court Pablo Montañés letter.
- 15 April Answer of Court to continue trial is given to the prosecutor at the Audiencia.
- 28 April Testimonies confirmed in San Cristóbal.
- » » More testimonies confirmed in San Cristóbal.
- » » Diego de Ilarena informs the Court that he is sending the confirmation of Coronado's and Moermans' testimonies.
- 14 May The letter of Pablo Montañés reaches his father.
- 17 June The Prosecutor asks for order of arrest and confiscation of the accused's property.
- » » Coronado is examined for a description of the accused.
- 20 June Orders the arrest and confiscation of property is given. A Consulta confirms the order.
- 21 June The Court informs the Suprema about Pablo Montañés judaizing in Amsterdam.
- 25 Sept. The Suprema sends an order to hold trial against Pablo Montañés in the Canaries.
- 1698 14 Jan. The order of the Suprema reaches the Court in the Canaries.
- 18 Jan. The Prosecutor asks the Court to expell Pablo Montañés from the Church.
- 21 Jan. Request granted at a Consulta held in the Court. A year is given the accused to return to the Canaries and stand trial. He is to be summoned every three months. The fourth summons will be considered the last summons.
- 22 Jan. The Court informs the Suprema that Pablo Montañés cannot be arrested, being absent.