

The historical biography of a true Jewish heroine in her day, Gracia Mendes. Born in 1510 in Portugal, the book details this woman's extraordinary personality until her death in 1569 in Constantinople (today's Istanbul). Her life exemplified a perseverance by the Jewish culture to survive and triumph even in the worst of conditions. As a young girl, Gracia secretly married successful Jewish spice trader, Francisco Mendes. But at age 27 she became a widow, yet she went on to raise her children and run the family business all on her own. Her travels led her through Antwerp, Venice, Ferrara, Ragusa, and finally to Constantinople, from where the Ottoman Empire dominated former Byzantium territories and offered shelter for battered Conversos (converted Jews). The text recounting the last fifteen years of Gracia's life at the center of the Empire is particularly revealing. Birnbaum's biography has the unique distinction of being the first among many studies to pay tribute to a woman during this period. It is also one of the first titles to pay equal attention to the lives of the Conversos in Christian West Europe and in the Muslim East.

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