In his *Cinco leyendas y otros relatos moriscos* (*Five Legends and other Moorish Narratives*), Professor Ottmar Hegyi both edits and studies a surprising collection of Spanish Renaissance texts. I say "surprising" because, given Spain's special situation in the context of European history — the country was under Arab rule for eight centuries — we are still able to find undeniable proof that the Islamic culture was somehow alive as late as the sixteenth century. It survived side by side with traditional Spanish classics like Garcilaso de la Vega and Cervantes, who were deeply established in the mainstream of European Renaissance culture.

But the clandestine literature that Hegyi explores in his book (and in many other previous articles) gives us the other side of the "official" Spanish literature of the Golden Age. This mostly anonymous and mostly unpublished literary corpus, which has begun to be studied in earnest only recently, is also clearly hybrid: the underground authors wrote in Spanish but used the Arabic script in a linguistic system that has come to be known as *aljamiado* or *ājamiyya*, originally meaning a foreign, non-Arabic tongue. Hegyi thoroughly studies the origin of the term in his Foreword, and correctly proposes (with P. Dressendorfer) that the use of the Arabic alphabet should be explained not in terms of the secretivity the *moriscos* or Moors wanted to maintain for their writings (in any case the Inquisition had experts in the Arabic language and the texts could be easily deciphered) but rather in terms of the prestige that the characters of the sacred Arabic language carried for those who belonged to the umma or Islamic community. The *moriscos* were losing precisely their Islamic identity and the *aljamiado* texts betray a desperate effort to preserve the remnants of their prestigious cultural past.

The *aljamiado* literature covers a vast range of subjects: legends, magical and medical treatises, Islamic proselytic texts, personal testimonies of the collective tragedy of some cryptomuslims like the Mancebo de Arévalo, among other subjects. Hegyi gives an important contribution to our present published *aljamiado* corpus by editing ms. 4953 of the Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid, which consists of five legends and other assorted narratives. These include mostly some ritual prayers, fasts and ablutions; the five precepts of Islam; a description of the Arabs' principal tribes and an *anušra* or magical potion. The miscellaneous contents of Hegyi's manuscript are typical of the *aljamiado* manuscripts in general, and the author suspects that the situation is representative of the texts that a private Moorish library would contain.

The main thrust of Hegyi's approach in his study of the manuscript he edits is linguistic: the author has distinguished himself in his previous works as one of the foremost experts in the study of *aljamiado* from a linguistic point of view, much as his colleagues Alvaro Galmés de Fuentes, Reinhold Kontzi and Consuelo López Morillas have done. His study of Arabisms and especially of the sintactic calques from the Arabic in the *morisco's* *aljamiado* Spanish should be specially commended: Prof. Hegyi shows a profound command of Arabic and of Aragonese Spanish (in which the texts are written) and his clarifications are often of the essence for the proper understanding of the hybrid manuscript he is working with. (The text presents unusual problems because the Arabic words that the *moriscos* intermingle with their Spanish are very often incorrectly written: they were indeed forgetting the Classical tongue of
their more fortunate ancestors.) I would also like to point out Hegyi’s brilliant defense of the system of transcription for the *aljamiado* that he is employing throughout his work: it is the system officially used by CLEAM (*Colección de Literatura Aljamiada y Morisca*, the special collection created by Galmés de Fuentes in the publishing house of Gredos in Madrid for the publishing of *aljamiado* manuscripts). Hegyi himself contributed many years ago to the establishment of this CLEAM system, which is quite scientific and yet accessible to the reader. It is also the system most widely used by the experts in the field. As was to be expected, some dissension exists among scholars in relation to the different systems of transcription currently used (witness López Morillas’ objections to CLEAM’s system) and the situation is far from being solved. In forthcoming articles in the *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica* of México, both Professor Kontzi (Tübingen) and Professor L.P. Harvey (London) revise their own systems of transcription and we *aljamiadistas* eagerly await the exchange of views that is sure to ensue.

Prof. Hegyi’s glossary of *aljamiado* terms at the end of the book is of particular importance not only for the correct interpretation of his manuscript but for the field of *aljamiado* in general: each new “dictionary” adds to our knowledge of this particularly difficult field and is specially welcome for the edition of new texts. It should be remembered that, as of now, many *aljamiado* words, no longer employed in modern Spanish, are still completely obscure to experts: *alayda*, *subelar* and *edianza* are but a few examples.

For all its contributions to the field, we miss in Prof. Hegyi’s book a study — or at least some kind of evaluation — of the literary and historical importance of the texts he is editing. Due precisely to the hybrid quality of this *aljamiado* literature, which is Romanic in language but Arabic in script and content, many questions arise, whether the reader be an expert or not. How do these legends, which are rather rudimentary and naïve from the literary point of view, compare with the flourishing prose of Spain’s Renaissance writers? How do they compare, on the other hand, with the Arabic originals they seem to stem from? How many Arabic originals can be found for these legends? (The all-important *miˇrā misogyn legend of Muhammed’s ascent into Heaven comes to mind here; many of Hegyi’s legends seem to be quite related to it, and it must be remembered that tales such as the *miˇrā misogyn seemed to have influenced Dante’s eschatology in the *Divine Comedy*, as both Arabists Miguel Asín Palacios and Enrico Cerulli propose.) It would also have been of interest to study the legends within the context of the genre in *aljamiado* itself, given the fact that F. Guillén de Robles had edited so many of these imaginative folk tales in the nineteenth century.

On the other hand, some words on the *annušara* or magical potion would have been useful to the reader, for the practice of magic was extraordinarily common among the *moriscos*, and it seemed to have been a *panacea* for the embattled cryptoislamic community. Prof. R. Kontzi published in 1974 an extensive study (*Aljamiado Texte. Steiner/Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GmbH*) in which he published quite a few magical texts, and I think Professor Hegyi’s transcriptions and commentaries would have benefited from having taken Kontzi’s work into account here. In general, it would have been helpful if the author would have quoted more amply from the works of the experts on the field who have published studies of manuscripts similar to his, although it must be pointed out, in all justice, that even though the *Cinco leyendas y otros relatos moriscos* was published in 1981, it has been under publication for quite a few years.
Finally, we would like to add that Hegyi’s transcription of the legends and narrative texts renders them quite understandable to a non-Arabic reading public. The author usually gives the translation of the Arabic words—which often obscure the text—in parenthesis, thus saving the reader the nuisance of constantly consulting the glossary. (He is not completely consistent here, though, for the word aljārī’ata [young girl] appears on p. 193 and is only explained on p. 194). Also, we feel that Professor Hegyi should have given the non-Arabic reader the translation of the long Arabic prayer in p. 200. I have found quite useful, on the other hand, Hegyi’s clarification of the authors so often quoted in the legends (Ka’bu al-Alibār, Abī Hurayrat, etc.), even though some extra information on their specific relevance for the morisco’s secret literature would have been welcome.

All in all, Professor Hegyi’s Cinco leyendas y otros relatos moriscos is a true scholarly achievement that will be of the essence for the proper understanding of aljamiado literature and, thus, of Spain’s profoundly original Renaissance, which we are barely beginning to understand in all its linguistic, literary and historical complexity.

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Notes

1 Thanks mostly to the efforts of Prof. Álvaro Galmés de Fuentes from the Universidad de Oviedo, who sponsored the first international symposium on aljamiado studies some years ago and who has established a special collection for the publication of aljamiado manuscripts in the publishing house of Gredos in Madrid.

2 Prof. Hegyi had explored this subject brilliantly in his article “El uso del alfabeto árabe por minorías musulmanas y otros aspectos de la literatura aljamiada, resultantes de circunstancias históricas y sociales análogas” (Oviedo: Actas del Coloquio sobre Literatura Aljamiado-morisa, CLEAM, Gredos, 1978).

3 See also his “Arabīya y ‘ażamīya: hacia una interpretación de la literatura aljamiada” (Under publication in the Actas del 30 Congreso Internacional de Ciencias Humanas en Asia y Africa del Norte, México, 1976); “Reflejos del multiculturalismo medieval: los tres alfabetos para la notación del íbero-romance” (under publication in the Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica of México); “Algunos aspectos del sistema de escritura aljamiado-español” (Iberoromania, Nummer 8, Neue Folge, 1978, págs. 30–41).

4 See his Leyendas moriscas sacadas de varios manuscritos existentes en las Bibliotecas Nacional, Real y de P. de Gayangos. Madrid; Imprenta y Fundición M. Tello, 1886. (3 vols.) and his Leyendas de José, hijo de Jacob y de Alejandro Magno. Zaragoza: Imprenta del Hospicio Provincial, 1888. Prof. Hegyi carefully edits again some of the legends that Guillén de Robles, without any scientific pretensions, had already published.


The need to study the Jews in Renaissance Italy with binocular vision has long been recognized, but until now has not been accomplished. The subject needs to be considered against an ample background that must be reconstructed from both Jewish and Italian sources. Substantial studies of this sort have been long in coming, not