

2017

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#### Recommended Citation

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## THE JEWS OF ITALY (1650–1815)

FRANCESCA BREGOLI

## INTRODUCTION

Although the history of Italian Jews from the fifteenth to the early seventeenth centuries has long fascinated scholars, the approximately two centuries under consideration in this essay (1650–1815) have not fared as well in the annals of Jewish historiography. Attilio Milano went so far as to dub the experience of Italian Jews from 1600 to 1789 as “the age of oppression” in his classic *Storia degli ebrei in Italia* (1963).<sup>1</sup> The eighteenth century received especially pessimistic appraisals. The protracted process of ghettoization, widespread demographic decline, economic stagnation, and increasing pauperization, together with an uninterrupted flow of polemical publications against Judaism, were all taken as signs of the progressive deterioration of Italian Jewry throughout the century. For Milano, the “prostration” of the oldest Italian Jewish community, in Rome, summed up the abject conditions of Italian Jewish life, which only the so-called first emancipation upon the arrival of the Jacobin troops in 1796–9 would interrupt. In more recent years, Jonathan Israel has reiterated Milano’s view, based on the allegedly dwindling economic prowess of eighteenth-century Italian Jews.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, a revision of the old-fashioned, “lachrymose” interpretation of Italian Jewish history between 1650 and 1815 is long overdue. It is neither feasible nor wise to reduce 200 years of Italian Jewish history to a static past solely marked by stagnation and segregation, relieved only by the momentous arrival of the French “liberators” in 1796. Thanks to a wealth of recent research, it is now possible to offer a more balanced interpretation and show that the period under scrutiny was not an unmitigated low point in the history of Italian Jews.

The author would like to thank Omri Elisha, Federica Francesconi, David Ruderman, Elli Stern, and Kenneth Stow for their helpful observations on earlier versions of this chapter.

<sup>1</sup> Attilio Milano, *Storia degli ebrei in Italia* (Turin, 1963), 286–337.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan I. Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism, 1550–1750* (London, 1997), 205.

Providing a comprehensive formulation of the experience of those Jews living in Italy in the decades under consideration is complicated, considering that, until its final unification in 1870, Italy was divided into separate states and the history of its Jews is therefore varied. Although it would be an oversimplification to consider Italy as a mere geographical entity, with no real social or ethnic cohesion before its unification, the country's political fragmentation had obvious repercussions on Jewish life.<sup>3</sup> Between 1650 and 1815, Jews were allowed to settle in the Kingdom of Savoy (except for Sardinia), the Republic of Venice, the Duchy of Mantua, the Duchy of Parma (outside the capital), the Duchy of Modena, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, and in some areas of the Papal States. There were no Jewish settlements in the Kingdom of Naples, apart from an unsuccessful experiment between 1740 and 1747, and only a few well-off Jewish merchants were tolerated in Genoa. Each state applied different policies to local Jewish communities. The living conditions, legal status, and opportunities of Jews living in Tuscany, thus, proved very different from those of Jews living in Piedmont or Rome during the same period. (See figure 32.1).

Similarly, the Jews of Italy never shared a single, monolithic culture in the early modern period. Because of a long history of migrations facilitated by the country's strategic position in the Mediterranean Sea, Italy's Jews maintained close ties with a much wider Jewish world than the relatively small Italian context might lead one to think. During the sixteenth century, Jews from the Ottoman Empire and eastern Europe, as well as *conversos* from the Iberian Peninsula, started to settle in Italy alongside local communities dating back to the early medieval period. By 1650, Italy hosted a number of Jewish traditions, including (but not limited to) Italian, Ashkenazic, and Sephardic rites. Jews who spoke, read, and wrote a variety of languages, such as Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, German, French, Yiddish, and Hebrew, lived in close proximity to one another, practicing different customs and rituals, and pursuing different educational systems and social aspirations.

In addition, significant transformations took place in the broader Italian sphere from 1650 on. The seventeenth century is usually seen as a period of deep economic decline for Italy. However, the severe slump in trade and manufacture caused by the 1630 plague abated gradually after the end of the Thirty Years' War. The conclusion of the War of the Spanish Succession (1713) brought about an unprecedented period of stability, which allowed several princes to attempt administrative and economic reforms to

<sup>3</sup> Sergio Della Pergola, "La popolazione ebraica in Italia nel contesto ebraico globale," in Corrado Vivanti, ed., *Storia d'Italia. Annali XI: Gli ebrei in Italia*, II (Turin, 1997), 896–936.



Figure 32.1 The Italian states in 1750.

modernize their states. Spanish influence over Italian politics and culture declined, while Habsburg political authority and French intellectual influence intensified: this too affected local Jewish communities in different ways.

Overall, the period from 1650 up to approximately 1770 marked considerable social and political continuities in Italian Jewish history, whereas

significant intellectual and economic transformations took place throughout the eighteenth century. In many respects, the Napoleonic era constituted a meaningful break with the past, with far-reaching consequences. From 1796 to 1815 (though with some exceptions and an interruption in 1799–1800), legal equality introduced by French rule over most of Italy altered an established status quo and resulted in new political and economic opportunities and challenges for the Jews of Italy. However, the eagerness with which many Jews engaged the new situation shows that this “first emancipation” did not catch them unprepared and that the eighteenth century had provided them with a fruitful laboratory of practices of integration.

### JEWS IN THE ITALIAN ECONOMY

With the exception of the Roman community, economic usefulness provided ample justification for the development and growth of Jewish centers in early modern Italy. From 1550 on, Italian rulers sensitive to mercantilist ideas attempted to attract Jewish immigrants from abroad, in the hope that their wide economic networks and their ability to command large capital would boost the state’s economy.<sup>4</sup> The most notable achievement of such mercantilist policies was the 1591 establishment of a new Sephardic center in the Medicean port of Livorno (Tuscany), which grew to become the largest Italian Jewish community by 1750.<sup>5</sup> The 1650s brought important changes. From 1645 until the 1660s, several Italian princes issued new favorable edicts addressed to *conversos* and Sephardic Jews, whose arrival was expected to counter the economic stagnation that had followed the 1630 plague and the military despoliation of northern Italy during the Thirty Years’ War. The flourishing Livornese community welcomed most of the newcomers, although the Republic of Venice and the Duchy of Modena vied with Tuscany to draw Sephardic traders.<sup>6</sup>

The economic importance of Italian Jews expanded between 1650 and 1710. Sizable Jewish presence in flourishing urban centers reflects this fact. Around the second half of the eighteenth century, the Jewish communities of Livorno (*c.* 4,000), Ancona (*c.* 1,300), and Mantua (*c.* 2,000) amounted to 8–10 percent of the general population; in Ferrara (*c.* 1,800) and Modena

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin Ravid, “A Tale of Three Cities and their “Raison d’État”: Ancona, Venice, Livorno, and the Competition for Jewish Merchants in the Sixteenth Century,” *Mediterranean Historical Review* 6 (1991), 138–62.

<sup>5</sup> Renzo Toaff, *La nazione ebrea a Livorno e a Pisa (1591–1700)* (Florence, 1990); Jean Pierre Filippini, *Il porto di Livorno e la Toscana (1676–1814)*, 3 vols. (Naples, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> Israel, *European Jewry*, 129; Della Pergola, “Popolazione ebraica,” 916–17.

(c. 1,260), local Jews were 5–6 percent of the general population.<sup>7</sup> The Jews' fields of activity also changed considerably. An increased number of Jews entered commerce and industry in the Republic of Venice, the Duchies of Modena and Mantua, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, and in certain areas of the Papal States, such as Ferrara. The second half of the seventeenth century saw growing Jewish participation in the distribution of basic foodstuffs in northern Italy, while new Jewish manufactures gained momentum. Petty commerce was widespread in the entire Italian peninsula among poorer Jews, who mostly lived by selling second-hand goods and rags. Women actively contributed to the Jewish economy at all levels, particularly in the textile and second-hand clothing industry (as embroiderers, button makers, and milliners). There is also considerable evidence of Jewish women working as elementary school teachers, ritual bath and innkeepers, cooks, domestic servants, and shopkeepers.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the worsening decline of the Venetian economy, the Republic's Jews handled a great part of the city's imports of grain, salt, and olive oil from the southern Adriatic Sea, maintaining their economic prominence in the trans-Balkan trade, as well as control over the sale of tobacco and old clothes in Venice itself. Mantuan Jews were equally involved in the sale of grain. In the Papal States, Jews broadened their role in the trade of basic foodstuffs at Ferrara, while Ancona's Jewry increasingly handled the traffic between the Balkans and Italy. The Tyrrhenian port city of Livorno served as the main Mediterranean hub for Dutch and English ships. Livornese Jewish firms with contacts in North Africa and the Ottoman Empire handled the resale of the goods stored in the port's warehouses, which included grains, cloth, spices, and luxury items.

The role of Italian Jews in the fields of crafts and manufactures expanded as well after 1650. On the one hand, the traditional Jewish craft of silk weaving and cloth-production remained the main Jewish industry in Mantua, Padua, Verona, and Turin. On the other hand, Jews introduced new crafts. In the Kingdom of Savoy, they set up new sugar, soap, and tobacco manufactures. Piedmontese Jews were also known as fine silversmiths, while the production of coral, much sought after in India, became one of the principal activities of Livornese Jews. In Venice, where guild restrictions were tighter than in other regions, Jews were involved in a more

<sup>7</sup> Alan Charles Harris, "La demografia del ghetto in Italia (1516–1797 circa)," *La Rassegna mensile di Israel* 23 (1967), 1–61.

<sup>8</sup> Luciano Allegra, "Il lavoro delle donne nel ghetto," in Michele Luzzati and Cristina Galasso, eds., *Donne nella storia degli ebrei d'Italia* (Florence, 2007), 313–27.

<sup>9</sup> Israel, *European Jewry*, 129; Shlomo Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua* (Jerusalem, 1977), 295–6, 306–12.

limited number of manufacturing activities, such as tobacco processing. Farming of taxes and duties was also a common Jewish occupation, for instance in Mantua and Verona. So was the supply of military equipment, such as beds and barracks, in cities such as Rome and Verona.<sup>10</sup> In contrast with other cities, the Roman Jewish community was largely impoverished and burdened with debt. It eked out a living from tailoring, button making, and mending old clothes, though there were also silk and leather workshops in the ghetto.

The second half of the seventeenth century brought about enduring transformations in the field of moneylending and pawn-broking, a staple of medieval Jewish life in Italy. Though not stopping completely, this traditional activity no longer formed the bulk of Jewish economy in the late seventeenth century. Jewish banking activities survived in Piedmont, Mantua, and Modena into the early eighteenth century, and in Venice until the beginning of the nineteenth.<sup>11</sup> However, Pope Innocent XI's decision to suppress Roman Jewish loan-banks in 1682, to the advantage of the Christian *Monti di Pietà* (Church-approved low-interest loan-banks), aimed at breaking the Jewish economy and fostering conversion, had far-reaching repercussions well beyond the Roman ghetto. In Rome, the policy gravely affected the weak finances of the Jewish community, already suffering from severe communal debt, and led entire families to convert to Christianity.<sup>12</sup> From 1683 on, Jewish banks also closed down in all the ghettos of the Papal States, in the Duchy of Parma and Piacenza, in areas of the Mantovano, and in many parts of the Venetian Republic.<sup>13</sup> Although banking occasionally continued clandestinely, the official suppression of loan-banks transformed not only the Italian and Jewish economy, but also the social and political contours and aspirations of Italian Jewry.

The widespread move of Italian Jewish entrepreneurs from banking into commerce and industry continued in the course of the eighteenth century. Except for the Roman community, which lacked a truly wealthy elite, this period marked the consolidation of large patrimonies in fewer hands than in the past, and the growth of a widening gap between rich and poor in Jewish society. A number of Jewish trading families rose to economic and political prominence within their communities. Between the end of the seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries, families such as the Coen of

<sup>10</sup> Israel, *European Jewry*, 147–9; Renata Segre, “Gli ebrei piemontesi nell’età dell’assolutismo,” in *Italia Judaica. Gli ebrei in Italia dalla segregazione alla prima emancipazione: Atti del III Convegno internazionale, Tel Aviv 15–20 giugno 1986* (Rome, 1989), 67–80.

<sup>11</sup> Marino Berengo, “Gli ebrei veneziani alla fine del ’700,” in *Italia Judaica* III, 9–30.

<sup>12</sup> Mario Rosa, “Tra tolleranza e repressione: Roma e gli ebrei nel ’700,” in *Italia Judaica* III, 81–98.

<sup>13</sup> Israel, *European Jewry*, 143–5.

Ferrara, the Formiggini of Modena, the Grego of Verona, the Vivante and Treves of Venice, the Finzi of Mantua, the Morpurgo and Costantini of Ancona, and the Franco and Recanati of Livorno solidified large fortunes and emerged as entrepreneurs at the center of successful local, national, and in several cases international commercial networks.<sup>14</sup> Combining financial skills with careful matrimonial strategies in order to consolidate their economic influence and relations, these powerful merchants were able to position themselves as leaders in their communities, while supplying considerable economic services to local rulers. Still, although individual wealth greatly increased during the eighteenth century, the fiscal state of the Jewish community as an institution was on the decline in many Italian regions: the communities of Venice and Padua declared bankruptcy in 1737 and 1761, while in 1755 the Roman authorities registered the local Jewish community among debtors “of little hope.”<sup>15</sup>

The addition of a wealthy inland merchant class in northern Italy to the established Sephardic traders already active since the sixteenth century in the Italian port cities of Venice, Ancona, and Livorno was accompanied by a political transformation. In the eighteenth century, Jewish merchants of substantial means established themselves as leaders within the ghetto and as negotiators with the state authorities on behalf of their communities, largely replacing the role that bankers had traditionally played. This trend continued into the Napoleonic period, as the Jewish commercial elite capitalized on the opportunities brought by the changed political scenario, investing in army supplying and the trade of foodstuffs in a war economy.

These data correct the negative historiographical judgment on the inability of Italian Jews to contribute to economic growth after 1710. It would be misleading to compare eighteenth-century Italian Jewish entrepreneurship to contemporaneous industrial developments in England or Germany. In fact, the slow pace of Jewish inland commerce was heavily influenced by the largely rural surrounding society.<sup>16</sup> Even noted

<sup>14</sup> Werther Angelini, *Gli ebrei di Ferrara nel Settecento. I Coen e altri mercanti nel rapporto con le pubbliche autorità* (Urbino, 1973); Viviana Bonazzoli, *Adriatico e Mediterraneo orientale. Una dinastia mercantile ebraica del secondo ‘600: i Costantini* (Trieste, 1998); Alberto Castaldini, *La segregazione apparente. Gli ebrei a Verona nell’età del ghetto (secoli XVI–XVIII)* (Florence, 2008); Federica Francesconi, “Jewish Families in Modena from the Renaissance to the Napoleonic Emancipation (1600–1810)” (Ph.D. diss., University of Haifa, 2007); Simonsohn, *Duchy of Mantua*, 309.

<sup>15</sup> Pier Cesare Ioly Zorattini, “Gli ebrei nel Veneto durante il Settecento,” in Girolamo Arnaldi and Manlio Pastore Stocchi, eds., *Storia della cultura veneta. Il Settecento*, vol. 5/II (Vicenza, 1986), 459–86, esp. 461–3; Milano, *Storia degli ebrei*, 295.

<sup>16</sup> Angelini, *Ebrei di Ferrara*, 199.

Sephardic trading firms remained small, mostly individual businesses, unable to develop into larger productive enterprises.<sup>17</sup> However, by the end of the eighteenth century, 80–85 percent of the Italian population was still composed of peasants, who frequently did not own their land and lived in near-indigence. Petty and high aristocrats, lower and higher clergy, and a small, heterogeneous “bourgeoisie” (which included artisans, petty traders, doctors, lawyers, and civil servants) made up the rest of the Christian population. Considering this context, it becomes evident that the economic specialization of most Italian Jews in trade and manufacture allowed them to play the role of an otherwise largely absent “urban middle class.”<sup>18</sup>

Finally, the second half of the eighteenth century saw an increasing Jewish involvement in agriculture. Whereas Jews in the German lands and eastern Europe were prevented from owning land, in several Italian regions – in the countryside around Mantua, Modena, Reggio, Parma, and Livorno – Jews had found ways to enter the sphere of agriculture, often paying to receive special licenses and dispensations.<sup>19</sup> This trend accelerated during the Napoleonic period, in the wake of the nationalization and requisition of ecclesiastical goods. After 1800, Italian Jews found themselves free to invest the profits of their trading and manufacturing businesses in agrarian property. The Italian Jewish elite accumulated large territories in the Po valley.<sup>20</sup> Although contemporary critics associated the ownership of landed estates with lack of productivity and often contrasted it with “modern” industrial manufacture, access to land is yet another reflection of the Jewish elite’s efforts at economic normalization and equality with their non-Jewish peers.<sup>21</sup>

Alongside the small Jewish mercantile class, and the large number of Jews who earned their living as petty merchants and craftsmen, poverty increased considerably in all Jewish centers in the course of the eighteenth century. This phenomenon was particularly evident in the two largest Italian communities, in Livorno and Rome, consisting of approximately 4,500 and 3,000 souls, respectively, by 1800. Yet no center was immune from the presence of mendicants, vagrants, poor widows, orphans, and single mothers – social emergencies that the Jewish community leaders

<sup>17</sup> Bonazzoli, *Adriatico e Mediterraneo orientale*, 191–5.

<sup>18</sup> Roberto G. Salvadori, 1799. *Gli ebrei italiani nella bufera antigiacobina* (Florence, 1999), 18–37.

<sup>19</sup> Simona Mori, “Lo Stato e gli ebrei mantovani nell’età delle riforme,” in Paolo Alatri and Silvia Grassi, eds., *La questione ebraica dall’Illuminismo all’Impero (1700–1815)* (Naples, 1994), 209–34, esp. 211.

<sup>20</sup> Angelini, *Ebrei di Ferrara*, 312; Francesconi, *Jewish Families in Modena*, 246–7, 258.

<sup>21</sup> Angelini, *Ebrei di Ferrara*, 302–3.

faced with measures ranging from harsh policing to financial assistance. Growing destitution was not limited to Italian Jews, but was a burning social issue all over western and central Europe. Still, the process of pauperization that affected Italian Jewish communities during the eighteenth century needs to be examined in the specific context that characterized Jewish life in Italy from the mid sixteenth century: the ghetto.

### JEWISH SOCIETY IN THE GHETTOS

By the mid seventeenth century, the ghetto system was firmly in place in several Italian states, although, remarkably, a number of small urban centers in Piedmont and the Po valley did not establish ghettos until well into the eighteenth century, at the same time as reformist administrations were increasingly questioning legal restrictions over Jewish residence and economic opportunities. Regardless of the intentions lying behind the creation of segregated Jewish enclosures, Jews and Christians continued to interact socially and intellectually, and their economic exchanges did not cease. The ghettos did not lead to mass conversions either, as originally hoped for by those Catholic reformers who envisioned them as urban barriers to strengthen Christian unity by segregating unbelievers.<sup>22</sup> This notwithstanding, ghettoization profoundly shaped early modern Jewish life in Italy, not only because of the serious limitations it imposed, but also because of the specific survival strategies developed by Italian Jews to cope and, at least in certain instances, thrive in the ghettos.

Despite initial legislation to the contrary, Jewish community leaders frequently succeeded in negotiating central and commercially viable locations for the Italian ghettos, which provided a greater number of “public services” than any other urban area of the time, catering to the cultural and ritual needs of the community, as well as its welfare. This concentration required increasingly elaborate infrastructures for services, such as drinking water, garbage disposal, and the creation of ritual baths.<sup>23</sup> No two ghettos were alike, but most of them were unable to meet the augmented infrastructural burden and became plagued with scarce hygiene and overcrowding. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century descriptions of the Roman ghetto dwell on its filth, stagnant air, and above all on the miserable living conditions of Roman Jews. An average family of three to six people survived in a single room, men and women forced into uncomfortable proximity. A common architectural solution to the problem of overcrowding was the

<sup>22</sup> Kenneth Stow, *Catholic Thought and Papal Jewry Policy, 1555–1593* (New York, 1977).

<sup>23</sup> Donatella Calabi, “The Jews and the City in the Mediterranean Area,” in Alexander Cowan, ed., *Mediterranean Urban Culture, 1400–1700* (Exeter, 2000), 56–68, esp. 68.

construction of additional floors built over formerly one- or two-storey houses, a phenomenon evident in what remains of Mantua's and Venice's ghettos. Sanitary conditions were problematic in larger ghettos. Hygiene and living conditions were more acceptable in smaller, less cramped ghettos, such as in Modena, Reggio, Verona, Florence, or Padua.<sup>24</sup>

Early Jewish adoption of forms of “demographic rationalization” may be viewed as a reaction to overcrowding in the Italian ghettos and increasing pauperization from 1650 on. The Jews in Italy were about 20,700 at the beginning of the seventeenth century, in a global Italian population of 13,500,000. By 1700, their number had grown to 0.2 percent of the entire population (26,800 out of 13,600,000). The eighteenth century, conversely, marked a demographic decline in most Jewish communities, with the important exception of Livorno, while the general Italian population grew steadily. By 1800, Jews accounted for 0.19 percent of the total population on the peninsula (34,300 out of 18,300,000).<sup>25</sup>

Various factors explain the reduced birth rate among ghettoized Italian Jews. Nuptial frequency decreased, while the average age at marriage increased among poorer men and women, who were unable to secure proper dowries until well into their twenties. Above all, Italian Jews were early adopters of forms of contraception to control family growth. Because of the decline in births and the ensuing diminution of young people, Italian Jewish society started growing older – and stayed so for longer. Despite their often-dejected living conditions, heightened attention to food cleanliness, networks of Jewish benevolent societies in charge of the sick and the poor, and the presence of highly trained physicians in the ghettos account for a reduction of mortality rates among Italian Jews.<sup>26</sup> Jews can thus be compared to other small layers of the Italian population, such as urban aristocracy, who took up similar behaviors resulting in reduced birth and mortality rates, anticipating demographic trends that became common among the general Italian population only at the end of the nineteenth century.

The enforcement of ghettos in Italian cities also enhanced systems of self-government. Jewish communal institutions in Italy had long preceded the establishment of the ghetto and should not be seen as a direct result of forced enclosure.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, a highly structured community such as that in Livorno was never officially segregated. Yet frequent urban reorganizations planned by the city authorities, accompanying the establishment of the

<sup>24</sup> Milano, *Storia degli ebrei*, 532–4; Simonsohn, *Duchy of Mantua*, 527–8.

<sup>25</sup> Della Pergola, “Popolazione ebraica,” 903–5. <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 918–20.

<sup>27</sup> For a different interpretation, see Stefanie Siegmund, *The Medici State and the Ghetto of Florence: The Construction of an Early Modern Jewish Community* (Stanford, 2005).

ghettos; the concentration of high numbers of Jews coming from smaller rural centers into a single urban enclosure; and the official sanction paradoxically offered by the ghetto to permanent Jewish presence in Italy – all encouraged Jewish institution building.<sup>28</sup>

By 1650, all Italian Jewish communities had developed oligarchic systems of self-administration, firmly in the hands of families of merchants and bankers. Despite the widening gap between rich and poor within the ghetto, there seems to have been no overt opposition to the authority of these Jewish “aristocrats” or clear instances of class friction until the late eighteenth century.<sup>29</sup> Administration consisted of a variety of arrangements. The system normally included two boards: the larger one might comprise 60 members, as in Rome (and in the ghetto-free port of Livorno), 23 as in Padua, or up to 100, as in Mantua. From among their numbers, the “governors” appointed a smaller board, which elected three to five *parnasim* (“lay leaders”) and other communal officials. Ancient power struggles between the various ethnic components of a community were reflected in communal arrangements that allocated a fixed number of seats to Jews of Italian, Ashkenazic, or Sephardic origin, in cities such as Rome, Mantua, and Venice.<sup>30</sup>

Most communities, with the exceptions of Rome, Ancona, and Venice, also maintained autonomous jurisdiction over Jewish civil cases, which required the use of Halakhah, and over commercial cases between Jews, usually adjudicated by lay arbiters according to local laws and *ius commune*. In the case of criminal offenses and of cases between Jews and Christians, other tribunals – either civil or ecclesiastical – were responsible.<sup>31</sup> Increasingly in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, though, Italian Jewish men and women brought their civil grievances in front of state tribunals, to the chagrin of communal leaders. It should be noted that, at least in theory, Jews were only subject to the jurisdiction of lay civil courts, since they did not belong to the “body of the Church” and did not fall under the authority of canon law. However, whenever a Jew was accused of committing blasphemy or a crime “against the [Catholic] faith,” ecclesiastical judges could claim competence over the case. Conflicts of interest regarding jurisdictional authority over the Jews were common between lay and ecclesiastical tribunals, as well as within diverse ecclesiastical institutions (i.e., the Papal Inquisition as opposed to local bishops).<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Israel, *European Jewry*, 160. <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 165. <sup>30</sup> Milano, *Storia degli ebrei*, 465–6.

<sup>31</sup> In Livorno, minor criminal offenses involving Jewish parties might be adjudicated by the *parnasim*.

<sup>32</sup> Luciano Allegra, *Identità in bilico. Il ghetto ebraico di Torino nel Settecento* (Turin, 1996); Marina Caffiero, *Battesimi forzati. Storie di ebrei, cristiani e convertiti nella Roma dei Papi* (Rome, 2004), 14–19.

Conflicting claims regarding jurisdictional authority over Jewish subjects often permitted spaces of action and negotiation to the Italian Jewish communities.

Contrary to those who argue that the highly organized Jewish communities of Italy were “extra-territorial institutions,”<sup>33</sup> they should be regarded as well-integrated organs within the state machinery. Although corporate existence was legally forbidden to Jews, *de facto* Jewish communities still functioned like recognized corporate bodies with special privileges and distinctive restrictions. Such a model formed an integral part of the state articulation during the early modern period and was not limited to Jewish communities. In the juridically unequal society of the Old Regime, this included any organized collectivity, such as professional associations. State officials relied on the Jewish leaders primarily for tax purposes; with little exception, all Italian Jewish communities had to pay heavy taxes to their prince’s treasury, and occasional, equally hefty, “voluntary donations.” Moreover, Jewish supervision over the smooth running of the ghetto lightened the burden already weighing on state administrators. For similar reasons, the community’s judicial responsibility over its members also met with widespread state approval until the late eighteenth century, when some jurists and civil servants began to demand that the Jews abide by the same laws as any other inhabitant of the state.

*Parnasim* have been traditionally portrayed as cautious vis-à-vis contacts with non-Jewish authorities, out of preoccupation with internal autonomy and in fear of capricious reactions from the state. In reality, Italian Jewish leaders engaged in a dynamic relationship with local and central authorities, both lay and ecclesiastical. Throughout the early modern period, Italian *parnasim* maintained an excellent grasp of policies, norms, and juridical precedents relevant to the Jewish status, and relied on Christian lawyers and notaries to pursue their goals. The Jewish elite’s tendency to regard themselves as active interlocutors of the state only intensified in the course of the eighteenth century.

Jewish and lay or ecclesiastical authorities, including the Holy Office, could also collaborate to maintain order and stability, both within Jewish society and in regard to Jewish–Christian relations. Furthermore, individual members of Jewish communities did not hesitate to involve state or ecclesiastical authorities for personal reasons, in order to settle quarrels, submit pleas, obtain economic privileges, or (not infrequently) complain against decisions taken by the Jewish leaders themselves. The extent and intensity of Jewish negotiating activities should be emphasized. The bargaining power of each community often relied on its relative economic

<sup>33</sup> Milano, *Storia degli ebrei*, 460.

strength. Yet even in the impoverished ghetto of Rome, the community leaders were able to negotiate with the state, making use of a wide range of political and legal tools available to them.<sup>34</sup>

Relief for the poor was another of the pre-eminent concerns of Jewish governing boards, which devoted a large part of the funds raised through internal taxation to this effort. The practical and financial help of charitable societies considerably aided them in this task. The number of benevolent societies catering to the needs of the Jewish poor and the sick increased in relation to growing pauperization within the ghettos after 1650. Large communities had dozens of them. Burial and dowry societies were among the most ancient confraternities, together with the *bikkur ḥolim* societies, whose members visited and comforted the sick and the dying.<sup>35</sup>

Besides their social role, Jewish confraternities provided a unique outlet for religious devotion within the ghettos. From the second half of the seventeenth century, devotional practices connected to the activities of charitable associations reflected profound transformations within Italian Jewish society. For one thing, Jewish religious sensibilities became gradually more austere. Clearer borders were drawn between the realms of the sacred and the profane, similarly to contemporary trends in Baroque Catholic religiosity. Rabbis increasingly attempted to root out ancient popular, profane rituals, such as drunken revelries or dances on the eve of a child's circumcision, by "sacralizing" them. Though these efforts were only partially successful, rabbinic attempts at repressing Jewish popular customs affected female devotion, circumscribing female religiosity to prescribed activities, at the same time as new, entirely male devotional rituals were devised.<sup>36</sup> Late seventeenth-century ghettos witnessed an explosion of congregations established by lay educated men, which added a further layer of devotional requirements to what had been already established by local rabbis. The heightened sense of devotion promoted by pious congregations was often rooted in kabbalistic practices, such as the

<sup>34</sup> Silvia Grassi, "Gli ebrei a Roma nei primi decenni del Settecento," in Alatri and Grassi, eds., *Questione ebraica*, 161–81, esp. 179–80.

<sup>35</sup> Bracha Rivlin, *Mutual Responsibility in the Italian Ghetto: Benevolent Confraternities, 1516–1789* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1991); Israel, *European Jewry*, 166–7.

<sup>36</sup> Elliott Horowitz, "The Eve of the Circumcision: A Chapter in the History of Jewish Nightlife," in David Ruderman, ed., *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy* (New York, 1992), 554–88. On a female confraternity, see, however, Federica Francesconi, "Confraternal Community as a Vehicle for Jewish Female Agency in Eighteenth-Century Italy," in Nicholas Terpstra, Adriano Prosperi, and Stefania Pastore, eds., *Faith's Boundaries: Laity and Clergy in Early Modern Confraternities* (Turnhout, 2012), 251–76.

widespread *tikkun ḥatzot*, a nocturnal vigil devoted to mourning the destruction of the Temple, which took place before Jewish holidays.<sup>37</sup>

Life in the ghettos had notable repercussions also on laws and customs that developed as a result of forced enclosure. The so-called *gius gazagà* (or *ius cazagà*, from the talmudic Hebrew *ḥazakah*, meaning juridical possession) was a legal institution derived from the early papal decision to block rent prices *ad perpetuum* in the Roman ghetto and to forbid Christian landlords from evicting their Jewish tenants. Because of the *gazagà*, which rapidly spread throughout Italy, Jews started treating tenancies as if they had property rights over them – selling, donating, giving up, and inheriting them.<sup>38</sup> Yet another transformation in certain centers, such as Turin, was the development of a specifically Jewish system of devolution based on the dowry, favoring female heirs to the detriment of male relatives. Since dowry money by its nature was legally unavailable to creditors, by the eighteenth century dowries had turned into a financial instrument that helped safeguard capital from debt, creditors, or a relative's conversion to Christianity, while adding to a family's contractual power. This system enabled lasting wealth protection and prevented financial traumas in the highly uncertain conditions of the ghetto.<sup>39</sup> In Turin, as well as in the ghetto-free port of Livorno, moreover, the dowry's importance enhanced Jewish female authority, strengthening women's ability to determine their own economic conditions as well as that of their families.<sup>40</sup>

#### INTELLECTUAL AND SPIRITUAL LIFE

Despite their small number, the Jews of Italy participated fully in the intellectual and spiritual upheavals experienced by European Jewish society in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, contributing to the cultural developments of the time in crucial respects. During this period, technological innovations ranging from cheaper means of communication

<sup>37</sup> Robert Bonfil, "Change in the Cultural Patterns of a Jewish Society in Crisis: Italian Jewry at the Close of the Sixteenth Century," in Ruderman, ed., *Essential Papers*, 401–25, esp. 419.

<sup>38</sup> Vittore Colorni, *Gli ebrei nel sistema del diritto comune fino alla prima emancipazione* (Milan, 1956), 60–5.

<sup>39</sup> Luciano Allegra, "A Model of Jewish Devolution: Turin in the Eighteenth Century," *Jewish History* 7 (1993), 29–58.

<sup>40</sup> Allegra, "Jewish Devolution"; Cristina Galasso, *Alle origini di una comunità. Ebrei ed ebrei a Livorno nel Seicento* (Florence, 2002). For contrasting evidence from Modena, see Federica Francesconi, "Jewish Women in Eighteenth-Century Modena: Individual, Household, and Collective Properties," in Jutta Gisela Sperling and Shona Kelly Wray, eds., *Across the Religious Divide: Women, Property and Law in the Wider Mediterranean (ca. 1300–1800)* (New York, 2010), 191–207.

to better roads, which eased access to information, facilitated greater intellectual exchanges both between Italian Jews and non-Jews and among distant Jewish communities. Thus, from the second half of the seventeenth century on, Italian rabbis intensified their dialog with Jewish authorities throughout Europe, North Africa, and the Levant. Similarly, intellectual exchanges between Jews and non-Jews increased, though the dialog was often far from balanced or equal.

In the second half of the seventeenth century, the Sabbatean movement profoundly affected the Jews of Italy, and it continued to do so well after the failed messiah's conversion in September 1666, provoking deep fractures within the Jewish scholarly and kabbalistic world up to the 1730s. The diffusion of Kabbalah among Italian Jewish scholars surely prepared the ground for both the spread of Sabbateanism and its later clandestine survival in the Italian peninsula. Kabbalistic circles strengthened particularly in the area of Mantua, where Rabbi Moses Zacuto (1625–97) had established a flourishing school: among his pupils were scholars who distinguished themselves both as crypto- and as anti-Sabbateans in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century.

In 1666, in the aftermath of Nathan of Gaza's revelation of Sabbatai's messiahship, Mantua, Venice, and Livorno, another hub of kabbalistic studies, became centers for the dissemination of Sabbatean information. Thanks to its geographical location, Italy served as a crucial center of diffusion of Nathan's thought even after the initial messianic fervor subsided in the wake of Sabbatai's apostasy, as the movement transformed into an underground heresy. Those Sabbateans who did not apostatize to Islam in Salonika and instead fled from the Balkans transmitted Nathan's legacy to Italy. From Italy, these concepts spread to Poland–Lithuania, Smyrna, and the Holy Land.<sup>41</sup>

The Jewish establishment reasserted its authority relatively quickly after news of the messiah's conversion to Islam reached Italy. Unity and calm were restored – at least on the surface. Still, it appears that faith in Sabbatean beliefs survived clandestinely among Italian Jews for decades. Influential crypto-Sabbatean kabbalists such as the Livornese Moses Pinheiro and two of Moses Zacuto's pupils – Abraham Rovigo (c. 1650–1713), respected head of a *yeshiva* in Modena, and Benjamin Cohen Vitale, rabbi of Reggio (1651–1730) – never embraced the heretical antinomian streak that characterized the teachings of Abraham Cardoso. Rather, Italian crypto-Sabbateanism was characterized by extreme, ascetic pietistic

<sup>41</sup> Simonsohn, *Duchy of Mantua*, 562–4; Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah* (Princeton, 1976), 469; Meir Benayahu, *The Shabbatean Movement in Greece* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1971–7).

practices, pursued in the hope of achieving divine illuminations and prophetic visions.<sup>42</sup>

The Italian rabbinate suffered a loss of prestige in the wake of the Sabbatean fiasco and was largely on the defensive against threats to its safety and authority, coming from both inside and outside the Jewish fold. Against the resurgence of crypto-Sabbatean belief spread by the controversial Neḥemiah Ḥayon (1713–14), kabbalists such as Joseph Ergas (1685–1730) of Livorno embarked on a mission to popularize anti-Sabbatean kabbalistic thought. The international polemic orchestrated by the anti-Sabbatean zealot, Moses Ḥagiz, which erupted in 1729 and 1735 around the Paduan scholar Moses Ḥayim Luzzatto (1707–46), highlight the suspicion of most Italian rabbis vis-à-vis any alleged kabbalistic deviance. The talented and highly educated Luzzatto claimed to be visited by a divine messenger (*magid*) and believed himself to be his generation's Moses. Whereas Luzzatto never actually entertained Sabbatean beliefs, the young man's claims to divine illumination and his beliefs in Jewish spiritual renewal were largely perceived as a threat by the rabbinic establishment.<sup>43</sup> Despite the support of respected Jewish authorities, Luzzatto was forced to stop publicizing his views in 1730 and eventually left for Amsterdam in 1735.

At the same time as the Italian rabbinate found itself caught up in the Luzzatto affair, new currents of rationalism entered both Jewish rabbinic and lay culture. Customarily, Torah studies informed organically the pursuit of general culture among Italian Jews, while familiarity with non-Jewish culture was considered not only normal but something required of the intellectual elite.<sup>44</sup> Some eighteenth-century Italian Jews were therefore not oblivious to Enlightenment thought, from which they appropriated elements, including encyclopaedism, an appreciation for moral and civic education, an opening to scholarly and philological criticism, and faith in human progress. Jewish scholars were cognizant of contemporaneous philosophical, scientific, and literary tendencies flourishing not only in Italy, but also in France, Holland, and England. The Jewish intellectual elite in Italy responded creatively to such novel cultural challenges,

<sup>42</sup> Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 890–2; Isaiah Tishby, “R. Meir Rofe’s Letters of 1675–80 to R. Abraham Rovigo” [Hebrew], *Sefunot* 3–4 (1960), 71–130; Isaiah Sonne, “Visitors at the House of R. Abraham Rovigo” [Hebrew], *Sefunot* 5 (1961), 275–96.

<sup>43</sup> Elisheva Carlebach, *The Pursuit of Heresy: Rabbi Moses Hagiz and the Sabbatean Controversies* (New York, 1990), 195–230.

<sup>44</sup> Lois C. Dubin, “Trieste and Berlin: The Italian Role in the Cultural Politics of the Haskalah,” in Jacob Katz, ed., *Toward Modernity: The European Jewish Model* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1987), 189–224, esp. 197–9, 211.

embracing current scholarly vocabularies yet keeping an unflinching commitment to Jewish traditions.<sup>45</sup>

The highest example of Jewish encyclopaedism in Italy was the *Pahad Yitzhak* by rabbi and physician Isaac Lampronti (1679–1756) of Ferrara, a “ritual dictionary in the Hebrew language” arranged alphabetically in 120 volumes. Only 2 volumes were printed during the author’s lifetime (1750 and 1753, Venice). Yet Lampronti’s contemporaries appreciated the novelty of the genre and its filiation from the sort of eighteenth-century encyclopaedism made famous by Diderot and d’Alembert.<sup>46</sup> Lampronti’s reorganization of halakhic knowledge has been compared to the products of contemporary scientific academies. His *yeshiva* adhered to scholarly methods common in existing institutions of higher secular learning, and Lampronti himself operated at the center of a vast network of collaborators and correspondents.<sup>47</sup> The *Pahad Yitzhak* not only testifies to the creativity of Italian eighteenth-century rabbinic tradition, it also points to the role of intellectuals educated in both rabbinics and medicine in shaping Italian Jewish culture.

From the fifteenth century, Jews had been allowed to enroll at selected Italian universities in order to study medicine (law and theology were forbidden to Jewish students until emancipation). Between 1617 and 1816, approximately 320 Jewish students graduated from the University of Padua, where they had been exposed to study of the liberal arts, Latin, and classical medical texts, alongside more current developments in the natural sciences, anatomy, chemistry, and applied medicine. University training provided an institutional vehicle for the diffusion of lay and scientific culture among Jews before emancipation. Because of concerns regarding the opportunities for interethnic and inter-religious exchange that university life afforded, Jewish preparatory schools emerged where pupils supplemented pre-medical studies with a healthy dose of Jewish learning. Indeed, rabbinic ordination was often combined with university medical studies.<sup>48</sup>

The role of university-trained Jewish physicians in Italy was not limited to the practice of medicine within their own communities and at times among Christians, such as in the Venetian Republic or Tuscany. Perhaps

<sup>45</sup> Lois C. Dubin, *The Port Jews of Habsburg Trieste: Absolutist Politics and Enlightenment Culture* (Stanford, 1999); Francesca Bregoli, *Mediterranean Enlightenment: Livornese Jews, Tuscan Culture, and Eighteenth-Century Reform* (Stanford, 2014).

<sup>46</sup> David J. Malkiel, “The Burden of the Past in the Eighteenth Century: Authority, Custom and Innovation in the ‘Pahad Yitzhak,’” *Jewish Law Annual* 16 (2006), 93–132.

<sup>47</sup> David B. Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* (New Haven, 1995), 256–9; David Malkiel, “Law and Architecture: The Pollution Crisis in the Italian Ghetto,” *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 4 (2011), 255–84.

<sup>48</sup> Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery*, 100–17.

more importantly, university-trained physicians perceived themselves as the true intellectual elite of Italian Jewry. Italian Jewish culture was permeated by an ideal personified by the “rabbi-poet-doctor,” in Meir Benayahu’s definition: scholars such as Lampronti, Samson Morpurgo, or Shabbetai Marini were praised for their halakhic expertise, their skills in modern science and medicine, and their ease with both Hebrew and Italian literature.<sup>49</sup> In the second half of the eighteenth century, physicians – proud of the medical achievements of the “Jewish nation” and ideally equipped to bridge Jewish with Italian and European culture – also stood at the forefront of movements toward Jewish integration and equality.<sup>50</sup>

In the 1760s and 1770s, furthermore, scholars concentrated their attention on reforms to Jewish education. Evidence from the middle of the eighteenth century shows that in northern and central Italian communities, such as Verona, Mantua, and Livorno, the curricula differed only in a few details from those customary outside Italy.<sup>51</sup> Although the Church repeatedly banned the Talmud, Italian Jews were able to access its legal materials with the help of permitted codes such as Isaac Alfasi’s *Sefer Halakhah*, and halakhic study and practical expertise did not decline. In fact, in keeping with broader European trends, the study of legal commentaries and talmudic codes had gained terrain by 1750, although general studies, such as Italian and arithmetic, as well as the Hebrew Bible, were also taught in the Italian Talmud Torah (the Jewish public school). The Venetian rabbis Jacob Saraval (1708–82) and Simone Calimani (1699–1784) attempted to change this trend by focusing on ethics and education in the Italian language.

Both Saraval and Calimani pursued a kind of Jewish education more open to the requirements of the changing times. Saraval, spiritual leader of the Mantuan community from 1752, established a new *yeshiva* around 1769. In his emphasis on the necessity to teach the fundamentals of Judaism in Italian and his stress on moral and civic issues alongside traditional Jewish studies, Saraval appears to have anticipated the pedagogical reforms introduced by Joseph II in 1782.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, aware of French Enlightenment thought, Saraval defended Italian Jewish customs

<sup>49</sup> Meir Benayahu, “Rabbi Abraham Cohen of Zante and the Padua Group of Doctors-Poets” [Hebrew], *Hasifrut* 7 (1978), 108–40.

<sup>50</sup> Lois Dubin, “Medicine as Enlightenment Cure: Benedetto Frizzi, Physician to Eighteenth-century Italian Jewish Society,” *Jewish History* 26 (2012), 201–21; Bregoli, *Mediterranean Enlightenment*, 96–126.

<sup>51</sup> Simonsohn, *Duchy of Mantua*, 598; Pier Cesare Ioly Zorattini, “Fervore di educazione ebraica nelle Comunità venete del ’700,” *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 34 (1968), 582–91; Bregoli, *Mediterranean Enlightenment*, 103–5.

<sup>52</sup> Asher Salah, *Samuele Romanelli, Visioni d’Oriente. Itinerari di un ebreo italiano nel Marocco del Settecento* (Florence, 2007), 12–13.

against the attacks on the Jewish oath by the lawyer Giovanni Battista Benedetti of Ferrara, an admirer of Voltaire.<sup>53</sup> Saraval is also known for translating the libretto of Handel's oratorio *Esther* from English into Hebrew. Although his free verse translation was pioneering at the time, he shared a love for Hebrew verse, opera, and theatre with contemporary educated Jews: musical and literary academies provided common forms of entertainment and edification in the Italian ghettos.

Calimani's pedagogical leanings were similar to those of Saraval, with whom he had published an Italian version of *Pirke 'Avot* in 1729. In 1751, he translated into Italian a Hebrew grammar that he had composed twelve years earlier. Calimani's *Esame o sia catechismo ad un giovane israelita istruito nella sua religione* (Gorizia, 1783), inspired by the same opening to Italian culture as his earlier works, soon became the most widespread textbook in late eighteenth-century Italian Jewish schools. In the same spirit, Calimani supported the maskil Naphtali Herz Wessely's efforts to promote educational reforms among Ashkenazic Jews.<sup>54</sup>

By the second half of the eighteenth century, Italian Jews did not simply absorb or appropriate Enlightenment culture: they actively promoted its diffusion. The Jewish merchant Mosè Beniamino Foa from Reggio Emilia, who catered to a public of aristocratic and highly educated buyers, started importing key Enlightenment works in 1761 and was instrumental in diffusing them to urban centers in northern Italy. By 1788, Foa's catalogue offered a list of 5,500 titles selected from France, Holland, England, and the Flanders, including classic seventeenth-century philosophical and scientific texts, examples of French Enlightenment thought, and authors prohibited elsewhere in Italy, such as Rousseau.<sup>55</sup>

In sum, by the 1780s, Jews stemming from as widely different realities as Prussia and the Ottoman Empire saw Italian Jewry as particularly integrated within its surrounding society, while being able to maintain a strong attachment to Jewish traditions and learning. A similar perception was shared by many privileged Italian Jews, who looked at their less fortunate foreign brethren with a mix of benevolence and patronizing superiority.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Paolo Bernardini, *La sfida dell'uguaglianza. Gli ebrei a Mantova nell'età della rivoluzione francese* (Rome, 1996), 90–5.

<sup>54</sup> Dubin, *Port Jews of Habsburg Trieste*, 124–33; Ioly Zorattini, "Ebrei nel Veneto," 483–4.

<sup>55</sup> Luigi Balsamo, "Gli ebrei nell'editoria in Italia nel '600 e '700," in *Italia Judaica* III, 49–65, esp. 60–3.

<sup>56</sup> Matthias B. Lehmann, "A Livornese 'Port Jew' and the Sephardim of the Ottoman Empire," *Jewish Social Studies* 11 (2005): 51–76; Dubin, "Trieste and Berlin," 203–4; Salah, *Samuele Romanelli*.

## THE CHURCH AND THE JEWS IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

An overview of Jewish life in Italy would not be complete without considering the attitude of the Church toward the Jews, particularly those of Rome. The capital of Catholic Christianity hosted the oldest uninterrupted Jewish settlement in the peninsula, dating back to ancient Roman times. The symbolic presence of a large Jewish community within the very heart of Christianity (in the period under consideration, Roman Jewry fluctuated from 4,000 down to 3,000 souls) was accompanied by a harsh regimen of restrictions. It was in Rome that specific legislation pertaining to the Jewish condition, as well as concrete policies targeting the Jews, were first developed and applied.

Scholars disagree about the significance of the eighteenth century in the history of papal Jewry policy.<sup>57</sup> It seems safe to say, following Kenneth Stow, that the period did not constitute a radical turning point. Repressive eighteenth-century papal policies toward the Jews were rooted in centuries of canon law discussions and precedents. The periodic reformulation of Church regulations concerning the Jews depended also on wider political and religious concerns relative both to internal developments – such as the pressure of reformist groups within the Church – and to external demands – such as individual Italian states’ policies. Aggressive policies and authoritarian reactions from the Church characterized moments of perceived menace to its ministry and power. A comparison can be drawn between the restrictive anti-Jewish measures that characterized the Church’s reaction to the Protestant Reformation and those that characterized the late eighteenth century. Concomitant with the increased independence from the Church of a growing number of Italian rulers, the circulation of Jansenistic ideas, and the diffusion of secularism and Enlightenment culture, the papacy embraced measures leading to stronger conversionary efforts. At the same time, the blood libel was newly diffused through the propaganda of the rector of the Roman Casa dei Catecumeni (“House of Neophytes”), Francisco Rovira Bonet.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Caffiero, *Battesimi forzati*; Kenneth Stow, “*Favor et Odium Fidei: Conversion Invitis Parentibus in Historical Perspective*,” *Archivio Italiano per la Storia della Pietà* 25 (2012), 55–86.

<sup>58</sup> The Casa dei Catecumeni in Rome was probably the most influential House of Neophytes, a Counter-Reformation institution established to facilitate Jewish conversion to Christianity. Mario Rosa, “La Santa Sede e gli ebrei nel Settecento,” in Vivanti, ed., *Ebrei in Italia*, 1069–87; Marina Caffiero, “Le insidie de’ perfidi giudei. Antiebraismo e riconquista cattolica alla fine del Settecento,” in Alatri and Grassi, eds., *Questione ebraica*, 183–207, esp. 187–95; Stow, “*Favor et Odium Fidei*,” 67.

Italian Jewry reacted at several levels against these threats. Mantuan scholars Judah Briel and Solomon Aviad Sar-Shalom Basilea were well known for their literary endeavors against Christian critics.<sup>59</sup> From the 1690s, the Roman Rabbi Tranquillo Vita Corcos (1660–1730) emerged as a vocal apologist for Italian Jewry, whose centers he defended with the help of erudite discussions of Jewish law, customs, and legal rights. Jewish communities in northern and central Italy, moreover, customarily appealed to the state authorities to block the publication of polemical texts attacking Judaism or to prohibit preachers from haranguing their followers with Judeophobic sermons. Still, the space to maneuver around restricting policies or fight against libels, and the rate of success of these endeavors, varied significantly depending on specific political contexts.

Despite ecclesiastic pressures, everyday relationships between Jews and Christians were not necessarily tense or polarized, but often amicable, at least on the surface.<sup>60</sup> Physical proximity between Jews and Christians seemed unavoidable in the early modern Italian town, in spite of ghettoization. Jewish and Christian men socialized in public urban spaces such as taverns and coffee houses, while women may have encountered each other within shared domestic spaces, like a building's courtyard. Degrees of intimacy, including sexual relations, were not unheard of among the lower classes, regardless of the vocal opposition of both Jewish and Christian authorities.<sup>61</sup> Nonetheless, it should be emphasized that for most Jews life expectations and activities were entirely defined by belonging to their community. Still, Jewish leaders viewed conversion to Christianity as a constant and serious threat to the fabric of Jewish society and actively fostered the careful preservation of clear lines of demarcation between communities.<sup>62</sup> It was precisely on conversionary efforts that Popes Benedict XIV (1740–58) and Pius VI (1775–99) concentrated.

Benedict XIV's legal innovations were aimed primarily at converting Jewish children and women – vital links in the transmission of Judaism. Based on a trove of earlier argumentations by canon jurists, he considered binding not only the conversions of minors who had been secretly baptized by devout neighbors or wet nurses, and kidnapped from their parents, but also the numerous cases of “oblations” of children and adults, “offered” to the Catholic faith against their will by relatives who had converted from

<sup>59</sup> Simonsohn, *Duchy of Mantua*, 639–40.

<sup>60</sup> David Malkiel, “The Jewish Christian Debate on the Eve of Modernity: Joshua Segre of Scandiano and his *Asham Talui*,” *Revue des Études Juives* 164 (2005), 157–86.

<sup>61</sup> Marina Caffiero, *Legami pericolosi. Ebrei e cristiani tra eresia, libri proibiti e stregoneria* (Turin, 2012).

<sup>62</sup> David Malkiel, “Ebraismo, tradizione e società: Isacco Lampronti e l'identità ebraica nella Ferrara del XVIII secolo,” *Zakhor* 8 (2005), 9–42, esp. 39–42.

Judaism. A similar validity was granted to Christian “denunciations” against Jewish men and women who were said to have privately manifested their will to convert. Such legal decisions curtailed the Jewish father’s – or, in his absence, mother’s – rights over their born or unborn children, affecting inheritance and marriage rights.<sup>63</sup>

“Houses” or “hospices” for the education of neophytes were present in all Italian states. In Rome itself, the center of Catholic proselytism, almost 2,000 Jewish men and women converted to Christianity between 1619 and 1797. Former Jews, particularly if they had high education or were of rabbinic extraction, might work as censors of Hebrew books, preach the mandatory Christian sermons that Jews were subjected to in most of early modern Italy, or become teachers of Hebrew and Jewish texts. In the few generations that divided Giulio Bartolucci (1613–87), author of the *Bibliotheca magna rabbinica* (Rome, 1675) from Giovanni Bernardo De Rossi (1742–1831), author of the *Dizionario storico degli autori ebrei e delle loro opere* (Parma, 1802), the study of Hebrew and other “Oriental languages” became more widely available as a university subject. Though Christian Hebraists were now able to rely solely on instruction by non-Jewish scholars, converts could still rise to academic prominence, as was the case of Paolo Sebastiano Medici, professor of Hebrew at the University of Florence. Not unlike many educated converts, Medici also emerged as a vociferous proponent of polemical arguments against Jews and Judaism. His *Riti e costumi degli ebrei confutati* (Florence, 1736), a belated reply to Leone Modena’s *Historia dei riti ebraici*, quickly became one of the most quoted sources in later anti-Jewish propaganda. The role of converts, however, was not confined to the oppression of their former brethren. Converts acted as mediators in instances of both conflict and collaboration between the Jewish and the Christian communities, as exemplified by the powerful Ferrarese neophyte Fortunato Cervelli, supporter and promoter of Jewish business. Thus, although the overall number of conversions dropped in the course of the eighteenth century, the importance of both male and female neophytes as liminal figures, and their essential role as a link between Jewish and Christian societies, did not diminish.

While continuing on the conversionary path established by his predecessors, Pius VI also engaged in a direct confrontation with the perceived threat represented by the mounting forces of secularism and Enlightenment culture. In 1775, a jubilee year, he issued two separate yet related documents: first, an “Edict on the Jews” which once again prohibited the study of the Talmud, introduced a mandatory badge for Jews even within the ghetto precincts, and forbade any social contact between Jews and Christians, while

<sup>63</sup> Caffiero, *Battesimi forzati*, 112, 206; Stow, “*Favor et Odium Fidei*.”

severely curtailing the already limited Jewish economic opportunities; and second, his well-known condemnation of all Enlightenment culture, the bull *Inscrutabile divinae sapientiae*. It was under Pius VI's pontificate that Jews came to be associated for the first time with Jacobins and Freemasons. This conceptual move led to the deterioration of Jewish conditions during the Restoration and to the development of nineteenth-century reactionary Catholicism.<sup>64</sup>

THE JEWISH QUESTION IN ITALY (1781–1791)  
AND THE LIMITS OF THE “FIRST EMANCIPATION”  
(1796–1799/1800–1814)

As Marina Caffiero has remarked, the historiographical polarity between ‘old’ and ‘new’ Italian states, devised by students of eighteenth-century Italian history, applies not only to their relative opening to reforms and state modernization in the Age of the Enlightenment, but also to their attitudes on “the Jewish question,” particularly after 1770. ‘Old’ states such as the Kingdom of Savoy, the Republic of Venice, and the Papal States all increased restrictive legislation for their Jewish subjects, whereas limitations were gradually eased for Jews living in Tuscany, Modena, Parma and Piacenza, Mantua, and other Habsburg territories such as Trieste.<sup>65</sup>

In the Kingdom of Savoy, the *Costituzioni regie* (“Royal Decrees”), which had enforced the ghetto system throughout the state in 1723, were reiterated in 1770. In Venice, the harsh *Ricondotta* of 1777, inspired by the strict principles promoted by Pope Pius VI in 1775, forbade Jewish participation in any manufacturing activity. During the same years, reforms to Jewry policy, inspired by enlightened absolutist ideas and by the economic doctrines propounded by the science of administration known as cameralism, were introduced in Habsburg-ruled Italian regions, such as the Duchy of Mantua, Trieste, Gorizia and Gradisca, and the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. In 1778, Grand Duke Peter Leopold allowed Jewish property-owners in Florence and Pisa to be elected to municipal councils. In 1779, Joseph II permitted Mantuan Jews to acquire real estate, eliminated the Inquisition, and included Jewish pupils in public schools. In Trieste, the ghetto was abolished in 1785, as an outcome of the Josephinian *Toleranzpatent* of 1782.

Still, the first years of administrative experimentation in the direction of Jewish civic integration and equality were defined by deep ambivalences on the part of Habsburg administrators and Jewish communal leaders alike.

<sup>64</sup> Caffiero, “Insidie,” 194–207.

<sup>65</sup> Marina Caffiero, “Gli ebrei italiani dall’età dei Lumi agli anni della Rivoluzione,” in Vivanti, ed., *Ebrei in Italia*, 1091–132, esp. 1091–2.

The civil servants attempted to rationalize the relationship between state and Jewish subjects by introducing legal and behavioral uniformity, in the attempt to curb the privileges of separate civic bodies. Nevertheless, they were willing to preserve elements of autonomous Jewish administration whenever they could ease the burden of state organization. For their part, the Jewish leaders welcomed new elements of economic, political, and social integration between Jews and non-Jews; yet they tended to resist the growing rate of state intervention curtailing their traditional authority over the community and Jewish privileges of autonomous jurisdiction. Undeniably, both the state functionaries and the representatives of the Jewish communities often proved unable to move beyond deeply ingrained Old Regime categories, behaviors, and privileges that stemmed from an understanding of the Jews as a “corporate nation” within the body of the state, rather than as individuals.<sup>66</sup> This notion, undermined during the French Revolution, endured in Italy well beyond 1789.

Contemporaneously to policy reorganization, works promoting an improvement of the Jewish condition, best contextualized within the wider European debate concerning Jewish “regeneration” in the 1780s, circulated in the burgeoning Italian public sphere. According to this line of reasoning, Jews were considered unready for full civic inclusion because of their long residence in the ghetto, their professional specialization, and their supposed particularism. Hence, they needed to transform their social, economic, and political behaviors to become individually worthy of productive participation in modern society. The only divergence among contemporary critics was over whether traditional restrictions and limitations should be lifted before or after Jewish regeneration.

A sizable public discussion concerning Jewish emancipation in Italy did not develop until the Risorgimento. However, some Italian civil servants, such as the Mantuan nobleman Giovan Battista Gherardo D’Arco, embraced reformist ideas concerning the improvement of the Jewish situation, aimed at enhancing their economic usefulness within the state. In his *Della influenza del ghetto nello stato* (Venice, 1782), a work that contains innovative and liberal concepts alongside elements of trite anti-Jewish propaganda, D’Arco claimed that the ghetto had prevented Jews from developing into a useful part of society, and hence it should be abolished. The journalist Giuseppe Compagnoni (1754–1833) composed a passionate attack on all restrictions imposed on the Jews and advocated their right to full emancipation, in his *Saggio sugli Ebrei e sui Greci* (Venice,

<sup>66</sup> Mori, “Stato e gli ebrei,” 224–7, 233; Lois C. Dubin, “Subjects into Citizens: Jewish Autonomy and Inclusion in Early Modern Livorno and Trieste,” *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts* 5 (2006), 51–81; Bregoli, *Mediterranean Enlightenment*, 218–38.

1792). Yet another line of argumentation concerning the granting of equal rights to Jews was pursued in Italy by some authors of Jansenistic tendencies, such as the Hebraist G. B. De Rossi or Giovanni Maria Pujati, who in his numerous writings published between 1778 and 1814 maintained that the Jews deserved love and respect, being a people blessed by God. Though their ultimate goal was clearly conversionary, these Catholic authors moved toward a more tolerant vision of Jewish–Christian relations.<sup>67</sup>

The Jewish enlightened avant-garde in Habsburg Italy, for its part, saluted the goal of Jewish civic and educational integration promoted by Joseph II's tolerance legislation. The leader of Gradisca Jewry, Elia Morpurgo, and the Mantuan physician Benedetto Frizzi (1756–1844) – one of the most vocal protagonists of the Italian Jewish Enlightenment – actively promoted Haskalah-inspired educational reforms. Morpurgo favored the establishment of normal schools for Jewish students and encouraged the prompt translation of Wessely's *Divre shalom ve-emet* [Words of Peace and Truth] into Italian (Gorizia, 1783). In his apologetic *Difesa contro gli attacchi fatti alla nazione ebrea* (Pavia, 1784), Frizzi extolled Jewish economic contributions against D'Arco's critiques. Frizzi's later Hebrew work *Petaḥ 'Enayim* (Livorno, 1815–25) promoted the application of modern philosophical and scientific methods to traditional scholarship, discouraging the practice of casuistry for its own sake.<sup>68</sup>

If, in the Habsburg areas, the progress toward Jewish civic integration began in the 1780s, Jews in the rest of Italy experienced their first instance of political participation only with the arrival of the French revolutionary troops in 1796–9. As the French army marched down the Italian peninsula, ghettos and old restrictive legislations were abolished; however, full equal rights as citizens were extended only gradually to the Jews. Almost everywhere, individual Jews entered into municipal councils. The most famous appointees were Moisè Formiggini of Modena, perhaps the first Jew in Europe to participate in a legislative assembly in 1797, as a deputy in the newly formed Cispadana Republic; and Ezechia Morpurgo of Ancona, elected tribune in the Roman Republic in 1798.<sup>69</sup> Many others enrolled in the civic guard, pursuing a military experience from which they had been barred until that moment.

A certain historiographical tradition has depicted Italian Jews as enthusiastic Jacobins during the three years of French revolutionary rule. Indeed,

<sup>67</sup> Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, *Il prezzo dell'uguaglianza. Il dibattito sull'emancipazione degli ebrei in Italia (1781–1848)* (Milan, 1998), 40–52.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 134–8.

<sup>69</sup> Federica Francesconi, "From Ghetto to Emancipation: The Role of Moisè Formiggini," *Jewish History* 24 (2010), 331–54.

sectors of Italian Jewry not represented by the oligarchic establishment – above all the young and the poor – quickly appropriated a political vocabulary influenced by democratic ideas, with episodes of internal disturbance against the “despotic” Jewish leaders, such as the demonstrations against the *parnasim* in Ancona in 1785, in Livorno and Rome in 1796, in Modena, Ferrara, Mantua, and Venice in 1797.<sup>70</sup> The perceived Jewish sympathy for French rule and allegations of Jacobinism led to instances of severe anti-Jewish violence perpetrated by clergy-led peasant mobs during a series of religiously motivated anti-revolutionary episodes, the so-called Viva Maria riots that erupted in 1799. Jewish communities in central Italy were harshly hit: twenty-six Jews were burned alive in Senigallia and Siena; others were injured during the looting of the ghettos in Urbino, Pesaro, Lugo, Arezzo, Monte San Savino, and Pitigliano.<sup>71</sup>

Still, evidence of cautious and moderate attitudes can be found throughout the Italian communities. The established Jewish elite in Trieste, where Jews already enjoyed considerable privileges, maintained a marked pro-Habsburg attitude. Members of the Piedmontese communities showed only moderate appreciation for French innovations, reiterating their loyalty to the Kingdom of Savoy despite its conservatism in matters of Jewry policy. Although many communities celebrated the arrival of the French with ceremonies that included axing down and burning the gates of the ghetto and proclamations commemorating the enlightened French spirit, in a few centers, such as Reggio and Florence, Jews preferred to maintain the ghetto locks intact, fearing for their safety. The most outstanding instance of Jewish conservatism took place in Livorno, where the ruling oligarchy not only maintained a cautious approach toward the French occupiers, but remained highly skeptical of egalitarian and democratic ideas.

Overall, however, Italian Jews greeted favorably the new political, economic, and social prospects that French emancipation brought. The Jewish mercantile elite reaped the greatest benefits from the new situation, eagerly participating in political and economic experimentation during the fifteen years of Napoleonic rule. Jewish merchants in areas such as the Duchy of Modena and the Papal States were well equipped for such new opportunities, despite their long segregation in the ghettos. The merchants’ experiences as negotiators and mediators on behalf of their communities, as well as their economic and social networks, which reached well beyond the ghettos, paved the way for their entry into the political sphere not only at the local, but also at the national,

<sup>70</sup> Caffiero, “Ebrei italiani,” 1122–4.

<sup>71</sup> Salvadori, *Gli ebrei italiani nella bufera*, 71–110.

level.<sup>72</sup> A comparison with the pre-revolutionary period shows that, for the most part, Jewish political involvement was not a direct outcome of emancipation, but rather a development, in “democratic” garb, of older traditions of community leadership and negotiation matured within the ghetto system. Under French rule, moreover, relative newcomers who were able to emerge in the worlds of business and politics joined exponents of well-established mercantile families.

This process intensified after 1800, with the return of the Napoleonic army to Italy, the stabilization of democratic governments, and the creation of the Kingdom of Italy (1805), which unified Lombardy, the Venetian territories (under Habsburg rule between 1797 and 1805), the area of Trent, the Duchy of Modena, and part of the Papal States (Piedmont, Genoa, Parma, Tuscany, and Rome, conversely, became departments of the French Empire). The presence of Jewish notables in administrative bodies demonstrates the eagerness with which the elites, whose political energies had long been compressed by the ghetto system, were ready to engage in the government of the *res publica*. Such political fervor is also reflected in the common ambition to receive tokens of public recognition, such as prizes and decorations, a growing trend among Italian Jews in the nineteenth century.<sup>73</sup>

For the first time, the project of equality and codification pursued by the Napoleonic governments also demanded a public confrontation with the questions surrounding the polarized conception of the Jewish nation and individual, which was at the root of the “regeneration” discourse. In 1806, Napoleon summoned to Paris an assembly of 111 Jewish notables (of whom 28 were Italian), representing the approximately 90,000 Jews living in the French Empire and the Kingdom of Italy. The following year, the Emperor convened a revived “Grand Sanhedrin” (a rabbinic high court) composed of 71 representatives, to ratify the Assembly’s decisions from a theological perspective. At both assemblies, Italian representatives mediated between radicals and traditionalists; their reputation as progressive leaders solidified among non-Italian Ashkenazic Jews.<sup>74</sup> The actual significance of Italian involvement emerged fully only in the aftermath of 1807, as some of the delegates, such as Moisè Formiggini, adapted the message of the Parisian Sanhedrin to specific Italian situations, guiding their constituencies in the transition to civic equality. The impact of the Napoleonic era on the

<sup>72</sup> Caffiero, “Ebrei italiani,” 1120–1.

<sup>73</sup> Renzo de Felice, “Per una storia del problema ebraico in Italia alla fine del XVIII secolo e all’inizio del XIX. La prima emancipazione (1792–1814),” *Movimento operaio* 7 (1955), 681–727, esp. 718.

<sup>74</sup> Dubin, “Trieste and Berlin,” 210.

religious sphere cannot be ignored either. Some of the leading rabbis who had taken part in the assemblies, such as the Mantuan Abraham Cologna (1755–1832), Elijah Aaron Lattes (d. 1839) from Turin, and the Venetian Jacob Emanuel Cracovia (1746–1820), successfully initiated a process of intellectual elaboration that would transform Italian Judaism in the course of the nineteenth century, touching primarily on the fields of Jewish education and liturgy.<sup>75</sup>

With the fall of Napoleon and the restoration of the old political order in 1815, Italian Jewry was forced back to the juridical conditions that had preceded French-imposed emancipation. After the brief season of partial unification under the two political entities of the French Empire and the Kingdom of Italy, and the shared experience of emancipation, each Jewish community reverted to particular conditions that depended on each state's legislation. The old political, economic, and social restrictions were once again reinstated. The energizing experiences of the Jacobin triennium and the fifteen years of Napoleonic freedom, however, altered the Jewish condition in Italy irreversibly and were not to be easily forgotten. The processes begun during the revolutionary and Napoleonic period – economic expansion and diversification, brought about by the entry of Jews into agriculture, the liberal professions, and vocational careers; the first exhilarating experiences of political participation that had seen many Jews at the forefront of civic and national administration; the intellectual and religious re-elaboration that emancipation required of Italian Judaism, alongside the permanent undermining of Jewish autonomy and rabbinic authority – all of these trends germinated during the first half of the nineteenth century, creating the foundations for the entry of the Jews into Italian society that would be accomplished with the second emancipation of 1848–61.

While being mindful of the specific conditions experienced by Jews in different Italian states from 1650 to 1815, it is possible to offer a few general concluding observations. In the course of this period, the Jews of Italy solidified their ties to the states where they resided, at the same time as an increased political awareness and confidence developed within the precincts of the ghettos. Jews were able to take advantage of the interstices of competing political jurisdictions for utilitarian aims, both at the individual and at the communal levels. Such efforts were not always successful, but they demonstrated active engagement with the surrounding society, beyond widespread daily interactions with non-Jews. Economically, in the course of the eighteenth century large sectors of Italian Jewry grew into a sort of commercial and manufacturing “middle class” that stood out

<sup>75</sup> Luzzatto Voghera, *Il prezzo dell'uguaglianza*, 118–22.

in an otherwise agricultural context, contributing productively to the commercial and industrial development of northern and central Italy. On the other hand, increased pauperization radicalized the differences between the Jewish elite and the impoverished masses, particularly in the largest centers such as Livorno, Rome, and Mantua. The great presence of urban Jewish poor, often anchored to old superstitions and habits stigmatized by the Jewish elite itself, emerged as one of the fundamental issues that nineteenth-century Italian Jewry had to confront during its process of modernization.<sup>76</sup> Finally, Italian Jews were not oblivious to the broader intellectual discourse regarding progress and societal improvement that crystallized in the course of the eighteenth century. For many educated Jews, widespread aspirations to contribute to the common good of the larger society coexisted with untainted pride in and attachment to Jewish traditions. Only by paying attention to such formative political, socio-economic, and intellectual experiences, matured within the ghettos from the late seventeenth century on, is it possible to fully appreciate the readiness of the Jews of Italy to confront the challenges of the first emancipation, and their eagerness to engage with modernizing Italian society in the nineteenth century.

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

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