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Zamir Chorale of Boston
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MUSICA EBRAICA



In 1622 the Venetian rabbi Leon Modena wrote, "No longer will arrogant opponents heap scorn on the Hebrew folk. They will see that it too possesses talent, the equal of the best endowed."

What kind of scorn had Modena experienced? In 1611 Thomas Coryat published a book about his impressions of Venice. He referred to the singing in the synagogue as "exceeding loud yelling, indecent roaring, and as it were a beastly bellowing."

What was the basis for Modena's optimism? "There has arisen in Israel, thank God, a very talented man, versed in the singer's skill, who has performed music before princes, yea, dukes and nobles. He set the words of the psalms to music organized in harmony, designating them for joyous song before the Ark."

That man was the Jewish composer Salamone Rossi, who, in 1622, produced the first book of its kind: a stunning setting of the synagogue service. "He is more talented than any other man, not only those of our own people, for he has been compared with, and considered the equal of, many of the famous men of yesterday among the families of the earth."

As we listen to Rossi's music we become aware of the extraordinary accomplishments of the Jews in Renaissance Italy. Perhaps their lives were not so different from our own. These men and women were enthusiasts of and participants in the rich culture of the secular world, while remaining loyal to the traditions of their religion.

This spring we are spotlighting Jewish cultural achievements in Italy. For this issue of *Notes from Zamir* I have solicited articles from the leading scholars of Jewish life in Renaissance Italy. In May and June, Hebrew College and Zamir will be presenting a series of illustrated lectures on the cultural dialogue between Italian Jews and Christians. In June we will present a gala concert at Regis College's Casey Theater featuring four centuries of glorious Jewish Italian music. Then in July we will bring Jewish art music back to its birthplace. We have received invitations from both Jewish and Christian communities to revive this repertoire, much of which has been long forgotten. We will perform in synagogues, churches and concert halls in Milan, Mantua, Venice, Florence, Siena, Rome, and the Vatican. These historic concerts will be professionally recorded and photographed, enabling us to share the message with an international audience.

Come along! Enjoy the articles in this issue. Visit our website (www.zamir.org) for more in-depth follow-up. Come and learn at Hebrew College. Come and hear this gorgeous music at our concert. *Andiamo!*

—Joshua R. Jacobson
Artistic Director

NOTES FROM ZAMIR

published semi-annually by

THE ZAMIR CHORALE OF BOSTON



Joshua R. Jacobson, Artistic Director
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The Zamir Chorale of Boston is a non-profit mixed chorus whose mission is to be the premier performer of Jewish choral music. The Zamir Chorale of Boston:

- Enhances appreciation of Jewish culture and strengthens Jewish identity by heightening awareness of the variety and quality of Jewish music.
- Serves as a world-wide resource for the dissemination of Jewish choral music through concerts, recordings and publications, and by commissioning and premiering new works.
- Provides an opportunity for singers to share their passion for Jewish choral music in an environment that respects traditional Jewish observance.

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The Zamir Chorale of Boston

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A Message from the Zamir Chair

Supporting the Zamir Chorale is deeply gratifying—not only am I supporting an outstanding choral ensemble, but I'm contributing to the rich cultural environment of Boston's Jewish community.

This year Zamir is focusing on the Jews of 16th-century Italy. What a unique community! It seems incredible that a pre-modern Jewish society could produce a culture as rich as they did. We are determined to preserve and promulgate this precious legacy. We are also committed to presenting a positive image of Jewry. Using music, Zamir has created bridges of healing between Christians and Jews. Today it is important to keep open and widen whatever doors of goodwill may exist.

Listen to the words of Philip A. Cunningham, Executive Director of the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College,

I am delighted to offer praise for the Zamir Chorale of Boston. As director of an academic center devoted to promoting mutual understanding between Jews and Christians, I have personally experienced the unique and irreplaceable contribution that the Zamir Chorale makes to such efforts. By presenting the musical roots and inter-connections between the two religious traditions, Zamir opens doors of shared recognition and interreligious solidarity that for some individuals might not be opened in any other way. The Chorale's inspiring *Sacred Bridges* performances have produced much good will between Christians and Jews on the local level. I look forward to more and more such occasions.

We are living in a complex and challenging world. But at times of difficulty do we abandon our museums, our symphonies, our schools? In the 16th century, when the Jews of Italy were confined to ghettos, they created an efflorescence of Jewish music, theatre, dancing, and literature. In the Lodz ghetto the Zamir Chorale continued performing through 1941. In the Terezin concentration camp, Jews maintained their humanity by singing in choirs and playing in orchestras. *Davka!* It is in times of discord that we need music the most. Not merely for distraction, but to remind us of the harmonious potential of the world that God created.

Sincerely,


Joyce Bohnen
Board Chair

An order form for tickets
and for making donations
is on page 13.

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SACRED BRIDGES

Two years ago the Zamir Chorale of Boston announced a new program of workshops and concerts, *Sacred Bridges: A Musical Encounter*, designed to explore the musical connections between synagogue and church over the past two millennia. Our partners in this endeavor included the Archdiocese of Boston, the Anti-Defamation League, the Theology and Arts Program of Andover Newton Theological School, the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College, the Interreligious Center on Public Life at Hebrew College, the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston, and the Synagogue Council of Massachusetts. Our first event, a free concert on Nov. 17, 2001 at Our Lady Help of Christians Church in Newton, was a tremendous success.

This season our efforts have continued apace with several exciting programs. In November, Zamir was honored to perform at Boston College for Walter Cardinal Kasper, President of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. We have enjoyed a close and meaningful relationship with the Boston College Center for Christian-Jewish learning, and its Executive Director, Dr. Philip Cunningham, and much appreciated the invitation to share our music following Cardinal Kasper's moving presentation, "The Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews: A Crucial Endeavor of the Catholic Church."

In January, Joshua Jacobson presented a *Sacred Bridges* lecture co-sponsored by Temple Israel and St. Basil Parish in Ottawa, Canada. In February, Prof. Jacobson, together with long-time colleague and friend Maestro Matthew Lazar of New York's Zamir Choral Foundation, presented workshops on *Sacred Bridges* repertoire at the national convention of the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) in New York City. One enthusiastic participant wrote, "I write to tell you how thoroughly I enjoyed your session at ACDA this past week. In my ten years with this organization I cannot recall a more informative, scholarly, musical, witty, timely, and useful session.... I look forward to programming some of the music you presented to us, and to the exciting challenge of

seeking out some of my own musical bridges. Bravo."

On April 3, Zamir presented an inspirational *Sacred Bridges* concert at Merrimack College in North Andover. Prof. Padraic O'Hare, Director of the Center for the Study of Jewish-Christian Relations at Merrimack College, wrote, "Words can hardly express how moved we all were by the beauty of the music made by Zamir."

This spring Hebrew College's Center for Adult Jewish Learning is co-sponsoring a five-session series, developed with Prof. Jacobson, titled "Venetian Glass: The Fragile World of Italian Renaissance Jewry." The second session, on May 8, is a *Sacred Bridges* lecture-concert with Prof. Jacobson and the Zamir Chorale of Boston.

Then, in July, Zamir's mission to Italy will bring Jewish music to new audiences, both Jewish and Christian, in the very locations where this music began some 400 years ago. Our concerts in synagogues and churches throughout Italy will give an international scope to the *Sacred Bridges* project. The recording of these concerts with accompanying book will allow thousands of others to share this remarkable experience.

A number of individuals have made major gifts to support this mission. We thank Jayne and Harvey Beker, the Beker Foundation; Joyce and Michael Bohnen; Mickey Cail; Janice and Gregory Del Sesto; Sean McLaughlin, EZE Castle Software, Inc.; Sheri and Eli Gurock; Phyllis and Michael Hammer; Susie and Fred Jacobs; Jake and Linda Kriger; Jay and Robin Kroopnick; Cara and Nelson Shaller; David Weinstein; and Susan Whitehead for their generous and early commitments.

Your participation, your support, your ideas and your generosity are always welcome. Please contact me at RMJacobson@attbi.com anytime. We look forward to seeing you at any and all our upcoming *Sacred Bridges* events. So, let's go! *Andiamo!*

—Ronda Garber Jacobson
Chair, *Sacred Bridges*



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Zamir's annual children's concert was held on Feb. 2 at the Solomon Schechter Day School in Newton. Several of the school's choirs joined Zamir onstage.



At the reception following the Zimriyah 50th anniversary concert Prof. Joshua Jacobson was joined by Esther Herlitz, Mati Lazar, and Stanley Sperber. (See p. 31)



The Zamir Chorale of Boston onstage in Haifa.

ZAMIR'S UPCOMING SCHEDULE

- May 8, 7:30pm, **Hebrew College**, Newton MA
 Jun 8, 7:30pm, **Casey Theatre, Regis College**, Weston MA
- ITALIA!**
- Jul 1, **Milan** Casale Monferrato synagogue
 - Jul 2, **Sabionetta**, Teatro Antico
 - Jul 6, 7:30pm, **Venice**, Chiesa Santa Maria dei Miracoli
 - Jul 8, 9:00pm, **Florence**, Synagogue forecourt
 - Jul 9, 9:30pm, **Siena/Cortona**, Teatro Signorelli
 - Jul 10, 9:00pm, **Rome**, The Jewish Cultural Centre
 - Jul 11, Special afternoon concert in the **Vatican**
- Nov 16, 7:00 pm, **Temple Emunah**, Lexington, MA
 Nov 23, 4:00 pm, **Temple Shalom**, Newton, MA
 Dec 7, 4:00 pm, **Temple Tefereth Israel**, Malden, MA
 Dec 14, 3:00 pm, **Morristown Jewish Center Beit Yisrael**, NJ
 Dec 24, 7:30 pm, **Temple Emanuel**, Newton, MA

Alumni news

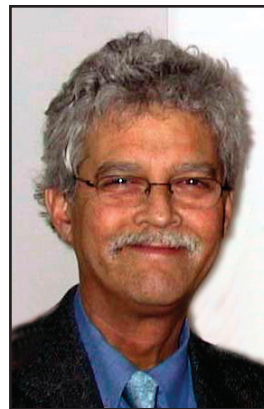
Mazal tov to...

- Cantor Erica Lippitz and Rabbi John Schechter on the bar mitzvah of their son, Gabriel.
 Steve and Jill Ebstein on the bat mitzvah of their daughter, Sarah.
 Alan Teperow and Suzanne Hanser on the bat mitzvah of their children, Tova Teperow and Raviva Hanser.
 Scott Tepper and Melinda Gordon on the bat mitzvah of their daughter, Cayla.
 Sarah (Kashin) and Robert Klein on the birth of their daughter, Shifrah Chaya.
 Dan Rostan and Florette Kupfer on the birth of their children, Isaac Wallace and Eliana Lynn.
 Jeanne Segal on being honored with the Cleveland Institute of Music's "Alumni Outstanding Music Achievement Award."

Condolences to...

- Herbert Birnbaum and his children, Benjamin, Ilanna, and Arielle, on the death of their beloved wife and mother, Connie.

Louis Naphtali Garber (1948-2002)



A few months ago the ranks of Zamir were again diminished by a tragic loss. Lou Garber was my good friend ever since our youthful summers together at Camp Yavneh. In 1969, when our music counselor suggested that we start a Zamir Chorale in Boston, Lou was right there at my side. Lou not only sang bass, he served as manager and treasurer during those early years. Lou was also a visionary; he loved to dream up wonderful and ambitious projects for the Chorale. In more recent years, Lou served as a dedicated and generous member of our board of directors. He leaves behind his wife, Roz, and their children Ilana, Shira, and Yafa. Lou will be remembered by many for his extraordinary commitment to the cultural well-being of the Jewish community and by those who knew him well for his sense of humor, spirituality, and devotion to those he loved. *Shalom, khaver!*

—Joshua Jacobson

Salamone Rossi, the Mystery Man of Jewish Art Music Composers

Prof. Don Harrán



Salamone Rossi needs no introduction. He occupies a special place in Western and, more particularly, Jewish music history as the earliest outstanding Jewish composer to work in the European art music tradition. Active at the court of Mantua in the later 16th and early 17th centuries, Rossi had no predecessors of comparable celebrity among Jewish musicians in the 1,500 or more years that separate him from the legendary “sweet psalmist of Israel,” King David; and, as a Jewish composer of art music for multiple voices and instruments, including a premier collection of Hebrew “songs,” he remains unchallenged by other Jews, in both the quantity and the quality of his works, until the 19th and 20th centuries.

Yet why the “mystery man”? Because Rossi’s life and works read as a halting account of certainties and obscurities. Large gray areas of the unknown surround and shadow the fragmentary information on Rossi contained in court records and the archives of the Mantuan Jewish community or conjectured from collateral evidence. I’ll review the information as a series of conclusive and inconclusive propositions. The conclusive ones are easily recognized from their declarative formulation while the inconclusive ones have their own telltale signs, among them verbs in the subjunctive (*may, might*) or the conditional (*would, could*), or qualifying adjectives or adverbs (*presumable, presumably*), or sentences beginning with a restrictive conjunction (*but, yet*) or ending with an interrogation point.

Rossi *may* have been born around 1570, *probably* in Mantua; he is *assumed* to have died around 1628, in Mantua or *possibly* in Venice. Why 1570? Because the composer *may* have alluded to his date of birth in certain numerical references in his first publication. Why Mantua? Because, *as far as known*, there is no evidence to the contrary. Why Venice? *Perhaps* because Rossi signed his last collection with the inscription “From Venice, 3 January 1628,” after which date he disappears from the literature. In short, the years and places at the extremities of his biography are indeterminate. Except for the name of his father (Bonaiuto, or in Hebrew Azariah, not to be confused, by the way, with the eminent 16th-century historian Azariah de’ Rossi) and piecemeal information on a sister (Europa) and brother (Emanuele, or in Hebrew Menahem), we know nothing about his family and relations. *One wonders*: was he married? did he have children? Who are the heirs to whom he refers in the copyright notice appended to his Hebrew collection?

Rossi served the Mantuan court from *at least* 1589 until 1622, *if not* 1628, to judge from his appearance on three records of court payments to musicians over the period 1589–1622. But why the upward extension to 1628? Because it is *likely* that Rossi continued serving the reigning dukes until the *presumed* time of his death. *Yet* the salary listings for musicians at the court are few and far apart, indeed between those for 1592 and 1622 no others have been preserved; so

who knows whether the service was consecutive or interrupted? He *seems* to have been active at the court as a violinist, a conductor of one or more instrumental ensembles, and a composer; or so one *might infer* from the kinds of works he wrote and various references to him, in the archives, in one or another of these capacities.

Rossi *appears* to have been active in the Mantuan Jewish theater, for the productions of which he *probably* supervised the musical portions variously presented at beginnings and ends of comedies or between their acts. *But* all one has to go on for his affiliation with the Jewish theatrical troupe are the lists of participants, with his name inscribed on them, for a few productions. Since the Jews were expected to act, sing, and play instruments in these comedies, it *may be assumed* that their leading musician, Salamone Rossi, contributed his share by writing vocal and instrumental works, rehearsing them, and, together with others, playing or *perhaps* even singing them. *Yet* nothing remains of his compositions for the Jewish productions. Are they hidden away in his published collections? Were they prepared as manuscript copies that since have perished?

Rossi provided music for productions of the non-Jewish theater, for instance, a vocal-instrumental *balletto* for the sacred play *La Maddalena*, staged in 1617 as part of the celebrations for Duke Ferdinando’s marriage to Caterina de’ Medici. It *may be assumed* that his contribution to these productions was more extensive than is known. *Why?* Because the court sponsored a sizeable number of theatrical entertainments for which Rossi’s and his fellow musicians’ services *would* have been needed to meet the heavy demand for vocal or instrumental music and its performance.

Rossi *seems*, or so one *might presume* from certain remarks in the archives, to have directed one or *possibly* two instrumental ensembles at the Mantuan court. At some stage, he even formed his own ensemble, or *concerto*, thus designated, of two or more instruments and *perhaps* voices, with which he appeared at the Mantuan and occasionally other courts and in private houses of the nobility. The dedications to his instrumental collections as well as their contents lead one to various *suppositions* about this activity, the details of which are still to be corroborated by written evidence.

Rossi *may be assumed* to have actively participated in the life of the Mantuan Jewish community, preparing music for use in the synagogue and for private celebrations. *Yet* all we have to go on for this postulation is the presence of his Hebrew music collection and the references, in its elaborate prefatory material, to music making among the Jews. His sponsor in the Jewish community, and the one who *may* to a certain degree have defrayed the expenses of this and his other publications, was the loan banker Moses Sullam. *But* the nature of his relations with his benefactor and the extent to which he received his financial, if not moral, support remain to be explained.

Rossi, continued from previous page

Rossi composed 313 or more works, of which 307 are preserved in thirteen collections printed between 1589 and 1628. Some of the collections were issued in reprints or later editions, making a total of twenty-five (!) publications. *Whether* there were more works than those printed cannot be determined: Rossi does, for example, refer, rather enticingly, to having prepared a considerable number of Hebrew songs, from which he selected the ones to be published. *But* where are the ones he omitted?

In his thirteen collections Rossi assembled three kinds of compositions:

(1) Italian vocal works, mainly madrigals for five or, in one collection, four voices, yet sometimes lighter types (*madrigaletti, canzonette*) for two or three. Many of them were composed to verses by leading contemporary poets (Battista Guarini, Gabriello Chiabrera, Ottavio Rinuccini, Giovan Battista Marino). They form eight collections, with, all together, 150 items. *But* what was the order of their composition (as distinct from their publication)? On musical grounds *it seems*, for example, that he wrote his four-voice madrigals published in 1614 as early as 1601–3, *yet* the assumption remains to be demonstrated. *Why* did Rossi choose the poems he did? *How* does one explain the anomaly of his predilection for the manneristic verses of Marino and their classicistic musical elaboration at his hands?

(2) Instrumental works, largely in three parts (two violins and a *chitarrone*, or bass lute), yet sometimes in four or five; in all, 130 items published in four collections. They comprise dances (*gagliarde, correnti, brandi*), executed alone or *possibly* in pairs or larger groupings; relatively short *sinfonie* that *may* have introduced vocal or other instrumental compositions; and lengthy, autonomous *sonate*. It is still *unclear*, though, how the dances were assembled into aggregate forms or when and why the short *sinfonie* were joined to other pieces. *One wonders* how much of the writing in the often technically demanding sonatas reflects Salamone Rossi's own abilities and practices as a virtuoso string player and whether, in performance, he or his partners abided by what he notated or varied it by luxuriant ornamentation.

(3) Hebrew works, thirty-three in all, for three to eight voices, in a single collection, titled the "Songs of Solomon" (1623). To judge from the ample introductory comments of the composer and others to the collection, they were meant to be performed in the synagogue on festivals and special Sabbaths and, where suitable, in confraternities or for private and communal events. *Yet* when did the idea for the collection originate? Who initiated it, the composer, the sponsor, his rabbi friend Leon Modena? *How* did the congregation react to these new pieces of art music, so different from the traditional chants of the prayer services: with reticence? indifference? enthusiasm? hostility? What kind of discussions or arguments or altercations were there, if at

all, for or against the "Songs"? How were the reactionaries placated? Why did the composer choose the prayers and *piyyutim* he did? On what level do the "Songs of Solomon" connect with the "Song of Songs," to which the composer facetiously refers as a paradigm: metaphorically, metaphysically? Could there be hidden prayer melodies lurking behind the counterpoint of his polyphonic works? *One wonders* how the composer related to the fabled music in the Ancient Temple: did he conceive himself as a new David or Solomon, renewing its practice, as he was described in his collection ("he restored the crown [of song] to its original state in the days of the Levites")?

Rossi collaborated, in his Hebrew works, with the renowned Venetian rabbi and cantor Leon Modena: it was Modena who, on his own testimony, strengthened and supported the composer in their preparation and who oversaw their printing and undertook their proofreading. *Yet* what were the realities of this collaboration: when did the two first meet and discuss ideas and procedures for the pioneering collection? How did Modena shape Rossi's textual and musical conceptions? What were the different stages in the elaboration of the plan, from inception to realization?

Rossi dedicated his collections to various "patrons" in Mantua (Duke Vincenzo I Gonzaga; his son Prince Vincenzo, later to become Duke Vincenzo II; and other members of the Gonzaga family) and its Jewish community (Moses Sullam), Mirandola (Prince Alessandro Pico), and Modena (Duke Cesare d'Este and his son Prince Alfonso). *Yet* we know almost nothing about the composer's relations with these notables. As patrons, what in fact did they do? Commission the collections or, if

not commission them, then at least reward the composer for his efforts? Why is it that Rossi dedicated no works to Duke Francesco or Duke Ferdinando? Was it because unlike the earlier Duke Vincenzo, who *appears* to have appreciated and encouraged his Jewish musician, or so Rossi leads us to believe from his flattering words of dedication to him, they, on the other hand, remained distant? or evinced hostility? Francesco, for example, was known as a Jew-hater; even the pope said so.

Rossi traveled to the court of Mirandola at least once. Visits to other courts, including Modena and *possibly* Vienna, may be *conjectured*: Modena, on the basis of Rossi's collections dedicated to its rulers; Vienna, on the basis of his "Sonata detta la Viena" (was Rossi at the Hapsburg court to participate in the festivities for the marriage, in 1622, of Eleonora Gonzaga, daughter of Duke Vincenzo I, and Emperor Ferdinand II?). The composer was in Venice on three different occasions, *if not* others, to supervise the printing of his collections and *possibly* to try out his Hebrew works, in various synagogues, before and after their publication. There he *would* have met with Leon Modena and members of the Venetian Jewish community, including the poet and

Rossi's madrigal *Dir mi che più non ardo*

Rossi, continued from previous page

literary patroness Sara Copio Sullam, whose husband Jacob was, moreover, the son of Rossi's protector Moses Sullam. But did he?

Rossi's life and works are riddled with uncertainties. They raise more questions than one could possibly answer by reference to the existing documentation. But the biggest question to challenge the imagination and beg an explanation is: how did it happen that, almost "out of the blue," there appeared a fully-formed Jewish musician who won the favor of the court rulers as both an instrumentalist and a composer and who, building on this favor, produced an incredibly large repertory of over 300 compositions printed in a total of thirteen collections? True, there were various attempts, from the early 17th century on, to introduce art music into the synagogue. But no remnants of these earlier works have survived nor do we know their composers' names. True, again, there were a few other Jewish composers at the time (David Sacerdote, David Civita, Allegro Porto). But their works—all in Italian and secular in character—are sparse and fragmentary. Rossi burst onto the scene as if a comet in the heavens, leaving a long and luminous trail of compositions that, all at once, renewed art music of Jewish authorship after centuries of its neglect: with the destruction of the Second Temple and the Exile and Dispersion, the Jews forgot their musical heritage, or so Leon Modena argued. Yet no sooner did the "renaissance" of Jewish art music composition begin than it abruptly ended. There were some occasional works to He-

brew texts from the later 17th and 18th centuries, but their composers were usually Christians under commission to prepare them for special occasions in the community. Where are the Jewish composers, though? How is it that none of any stature emerged until the Emancipation? Jacques Halévy, Giacomo Meyerbeer, Jacques Offenbach, Salomon Sulzer, the Jewish-born Mendelssohn and Mahler who eventually converted to Christianity, or the Jewish-born Arnold Schönberg who converted and then returned to Judaism, Ernest Bloch, Leonard Bernstein, Darius Milhaud: these and others are Rossi's real, lawful successors. But, apart from Sulzer, not one of them produced a repertory of Hebrew works as extensive and musically exceptional as Rossi's "Songs of Solomon." In his person and music Rossi is shrouded in as much mystery today as in his own time. Maybe we will have to wait, for its elucidation, "until the Rock," no less mysteriously, "renews His Temple by restoring speech in song [*shir*] to the faithful" (from a dedicatory poem in the "Songs of Solomon").

B

Don Harrán is Artur Rubinstein Professor of Musicology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He has published widely in professional journals and is the author and editor of numerous volumes, including a monograph on Salamone Rossi, Jewish Musician in Late Renaissance Mantua (Oxford University Press, 1999) and an edition of Rossi's complete works (American Institute of Musicology, volumes 1–12, with his instrumental and Italian vocal compositions, 1995, and, recently published, volumes 13a–b, with his Hebrew "Songs of Solomon," 2003).



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Rabbis, Politics, and Music: Leon Modena and Salamone Rossi

Prof. Howard Tzvi Adelman

Leon Modena was born in Venice in 1571, about the same time that Salamone Rossi was born in Mantua. An examination of their lives reveals a few instances of demonstrable creative interaction between them, leaves open the possibility of many other undocumented occasions, and shows the vitality of Jewish music in early-modern Italy.

The Ghetto was a setting for economic and cultural growth and the establishment of one correlated with the development of Jewish art music in the various cities of northern Italy. Indeed, contemporaries considered a ghetto to be an ideal place to live. In 1573 the Turks also asked for a place of their own, “as the Jews have their ghetto,” and in Padua the Jews celebrated each year the day on which the ghetto was established.

Along with the traditional Jewish subjects, Hebrew and Latin writing, and preaching, Modena’s studies included how to play music, to sing, and to dance, an education that was not at all unique for Jews in early-modern Italy at this time.

After the wealthy members of the Venetian Jewish community raised the age of ordination, which reduced Modena’s chances to serve as a rabbi in Venice, he taught children, adults, and Christians, composed letters for others including the rabbis, wrote poetry for books and for gravestone inscriptions, published popular books, preached, edited and expedited the publishing of Hebrew books, was involved in alchemy, and gambled.

At this time Rossi began to publish his collections of music, usually in Venice, which involved his presence there to supervise the publishing. In Venice, on Sept. 16, 1600, which happened to fall on Shabbat Shuvah, he dedicated his first book of madrigals to Vincenzo Gonzaga I, Duke of Mantua (1587–1612).

Tensions between Venetian rabbis and local rabbis in northern Italy peaked in a dispute over a ritual bath, a *mikveh*, in Rovigo, a small town between Padua and Ferrara, which ultimately divided much of Italian Jewry and which is relevant for subsequent musical developments.

In 1594, Rabbi Avtalion Consiglio questioned the fitness of his brother’s mikveh, built his own, and forbade others from using his brother’s. His brother, Yekutiel, instigated a massive outpouring of opinions, basically divided between those who supported the authority of the Venetian rabbinate (and Yekutiel) and those who supported the local rabbis (and Avtalion). Many members of Modena’s family joined those who supported the local rabbis, which drew Leon Modena away from the Venetian rabbinate.

Meanwhile, in 1603, Modena left Venice to live in Ferrara. There he worked for a wealthy family, teaching, arranging matches, and supervising a vineyard as well as preaching, writing, and functioning as a rabbi. Soon after his arrival, the musical activities of the Jews of Ferrara were renewed by the creation of a musical organization and the hiring of a

music teacher who may even have been Modena.

Now that he was functioning as a rabbi, Modena’s decision to support one or the other faction in the mikveh dispute was expected. Private correspondence indicates that Modena drew close to those who opposed the leading Venetian rabbis, but he decided not to issue any public pronouncements.

Modena’s caution soon paid off. In the Great Synagogue of Ferrara, on holidays, festivals, and Sabbaths, six to eight, maybe ten, members of the community would sing artistic renditions of songs and prayers such as *Yigdal*, *Eyn Keloheynu*, *Alenu*, and *Adon Olam* before a large and enthusiastic audience. On Friday evening, July 30, 1605, a choral musical presentation took place in honor of Shabbat Nahamu, the Sabbath of consolation after the mourning for the destruction of the Temple on the Ninth of Av. The performance, therefore, fell around the time of Tu be-Av, the Fifteenth of Av, an ancient Jewish holiday of joy. In modern Hebrew literature, in the Zionist movement, in the State of Israel, and at Jewish summer camps, Tu be-Av became known as Yom ha-Ahavah, associated with musical and dance festivals. This performance in Ferrara may have been one of the first ever.

Despite the success of this musical presentation, and the involvement of most of the rabbinic scholars in the city, one rabbi, because he believed that after exile and the destruction of the Temple it was forbidden for the Jews to rejoice with any art music at all, opposed it, ridiculed it, even tried to expel the performers.

To defend the musical performance, Modena wrote a rabbinic responsum. He presented and refuted all possible arguments against Jewish music. He also included examples of contemporary practices: on Simchat Torah there are cantors who dance in the synagogue with the Torah in their arms and assistant cantors who sing in harmony (what he calls an aria) along with some Ashkenazic cantors in need of help when their voices can not carry. Modena asserts that if Jews discontinued musical training they would become an object of mockery among the other nations who would say that the Jews scream like dogs and ravens at God.

Warily, Modena turned to Venice for an endorsement, afraid that he had alienated the rabbis there because of his relationship with their opponents in the battle over the mikveh at Rovigo. Accordingly, when Modena wrote to them about the matter of music he felt the need to review the events of the mikveh controversy and to assure them of his present lack of involvement in it.

To Modena’s surprise and delight, they quickly agreed to approve his responsum five days after the music was presented in the synagogue. When Modena wrote to thank them for their generous endorsement of his responsum on music, he felt it necessary to allay their fears that although



The Sephardic synagogue in Venice

Leon Modena and Salamone Rossi, continued from previous page

he had received their support, he would still maintain his discretion concerning the matter of the mikveh.

In 1610, as he approached forty, Modena received his ordination from the Venetian rabbis. He returned again to Venice—this time from Florence—to serve not only as a rabbi but as a cantor, with his pleasant tenor voice. It must have been an exciting time to serve as a cantor in Venice, where Claudio Monteverdi, fired in Mantua, became the choir leader at St. Mark's Cathedral in Venice in 1612, marking a major event for art and music in the city.

In Venice, Modena also served as an expert in Hebrew publishing. In 1622, he was in charge of editing, arranging, and proofreading the first book of Hebrew music ever published, *Hashirim Asher Lishlomo* by Salamone Rossi. In 1622, Rossi was in Venice, where at that time he had two other books of music in press. While in Venice he and Modena met and became friends. Modena claims that he pleaded with Rossi to publish his choral music for the synagogue, written for religious festivals, special Sabbaths, and weddings. Modena notes that he had no model for a Hebrew music book and had to solve the problem of how to print Hebrew and music, which are read in opposite directions. He decided to print both from left to right because he felt that most singers knew the Psalms and liturgical pieces by heart and did not read the words carefully when they sang.

While Modena was working on this music book, the night before the first Passover seder in 1622, eight young Jewish men murdered his son Zevulun in an ambush, apparently in a rivalry over a woman. The murder interrupted Modena's work on the publication. Since his son's death he had personally eschewed music, but he felt that delaying the publication of Rossi's book too long would deprive the Jewish community of an important work and the opportunity for a large number of children to be inspired to learn music. He was also concerned over the prospects of opposition to the music by those whom he called "self-proclaimed pious ones," or "pseudo-pious ones," *mithasdim*, and whom he chided for drawing away from all that is new and all wisdom that they could not understand. The published edition of Rossi's Hebrew music book included a preface by Modena, a dedication to Moses Sullam, and a copyright. Modena included the responsum he wrote in 1605 in Ferrara in support of music.

During the summer of 1628 hostilities broke out in Mantua in the struggle for succession after the death of the last Gonzaga duke, Vincenzo II, in 1627. Many fled from Mantua to Venice, among them a large number of musicians, some of whom were Jewish. In around 1628 in the Venetian ghetto, an academy of music was organized with Modena serving as the Maestro di Caepella. It was called the *Accademia degli Impediti*, the Academy of the Hampered, named in derision of the traditional Jewish reluctance to perform music because of "the unhappy state of captivity which hampers every act of competence." In this spirit, especially in light of Modena's

responsum on music in 1605, the Accademia took the Latin motto *Cum Recordaremur Sion*, and in Hebrew, *Bezokhrenu et Tzion*, when we remembered Zion, based paradoxically on Psalm 137, one of the texts invoked against Jewish music: "We hung up our harps.... How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" The Accademia met twice a week in the evenings under the sponsorship of the communal leaders and the wealthy Jews.

According to Giulio Morosini (who, as Samuel Nachmias, had studied with Modena and who later converted to Christianity, changed his name, and wrote a massive tome, *Via della Fede*, to vindicate his decision) for Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah in October 1628, a spectacular musical performance was held in the Spanish synagogue, which had been decorated with silver and jewels. Two choirs sang artistic Hebrew renderings of the afternoon service, the evening service, and some psalms. Their extensive repertoire lasted a few hours. A throng of Christian noblemen and ladies attended the Simchat Torah service. The applause was great and police had to guard the gates to ensure order. Among the instruments brought into the synagogue was also an organ, which Morosini notes was not permitted by the rabbis because it was played in churches. In a similar vein, at about the same time, Rabbi Abraham



The Italian synagogue in Venice

Joseph Solomon Graziano of Modena (d. 1683) wrote, "Jewish musicians should not be prevented from playing on the organ [to accompany] songs and praises performed [in honor of] God...." Echoing the concerns heard in Morosini, Graziano dismissed the idea that Jews playing the organ constituted an imitation of non-Jewish practices and that only ignoramuses would oppose it.

It seems that Salamone Rossi was also in Venice at around this time based on his dedicatory letter at the beginning of his collection of "Madrigaletti for Two Voices, Opus XIII," which bears the date January 3, 1628. This date, if written in Venice, however, may be according to the Venetian style of dating which observed the New Year on March 1 rather than January 1. If this were the case, the letter was actually written in January 1629, possibly extending what is known about Rossi's life an additional year. Despite much speculation, there is no evidence of Rossi's involvement in musical activities at this time in Venice, but the arrival of musicians from Mantua and the sudden increase in musical activities indicate the possibilities that either the two had again collaborated or at least that there was a large number of Jewish musicians at this time.

The date of Rossi's death may be learned from the fact that during the Plague, on August 15, 1630, when Modena prepared the manuscript edition of his responsa collection, *Ziknei Yehudah*, above the text of his responsum on music from 1605, Modena indicated that this one was also published in the book of music by the late Mr. Salamone Rossi. If this epithet was written by Modena at the time of editing and not by a later copyist, it is evidence that by 1630 Rossi

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Lord & Tailor: Fashioning Images of Jews in Renaissance Italy

Prof. Barbara Wisch

Among the splendid testimonies of Jewish life and culture in Renaissance Italy are elaborately decorated manuscripts. Lavish Hebrew *mahzorim* (prayerbooks) and *Haggadot* (books for celebrating the Seder), illuminated with expensive gold and silver leaf, were commissioned by the wealthiest Jews. The *Sefer Minhagim* (book of religious customs), written in Yiddish and directed toward a more modest audience, was also profusely decorated. Such diversity of illustrated books affords fascinating insight into Jewish customs and costumes. The books also reveal how Italian Jewish communities chose to represent themselves, for their own images often differed dramatically from the way Christians chose to portray them—both in art and in life.

The saying “clothes make the man” was as true then as now. However, fashion “statements” in late medieval and Renaissance Italy were also legal mandates—official dress codes (known as “sumptuary laws”), carefully inscribed in city statutes. Cities saw fit to legislate how much jewelry might be worn and which fabrics were appropriate to each social class, even the cut of a dress or a sleeve or a shoe. Clothing was an extremely expensive commodity, and extravagant apparel, it was believed, not only drained the economy but bred the worst excesses. Therefore, it was imperative, according to Christian theology and societal conventions, to fashion a visual order patterned on the divinely ordained design of heaven and earth. Of crucial importance was the issue of Christian-Jewish relations: the unquestioned belief in Christian legal and social superiority over Jews needed to be given material form.

Rules regarding dress had been long established in Jewish law and tradition. For example, Jewish males were commanded to wear *tzitzit* (tasseled fringes affixed to the four corners of one’s garment) and *tefillin* (small leather boxes strapped to the head and arm containing several excerpts from the Torah), although by the Renaissance these were probably not displayed in public. With the abandonment of the “four-cornered” toga-like garment of the classical world, Jews had adopted the practice of attaching the *tzitzit* to a piece of white woolen fabric that covered the head and the body—the *tallit*. However, this was no longer an item of everyday costume but a male garment of prayer. Jewish communities also imposed self-restrictions in times of trouble at least back to Roman times, mostly, it seems, to avoid creating envy by extravagance and ostentation. Most Jewish sumptuary laws were aimed at women, as were their Christian counterparts.

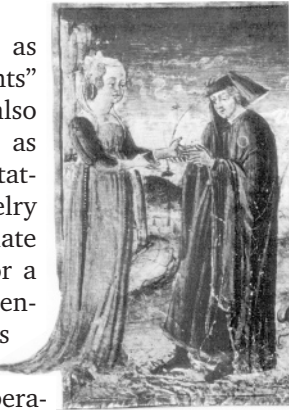
Although Lev. 18:3 proscribes imitating non-Jewish customs, when it came to daily dress, Italian Jews chose to clothe themselves indistinguishably from their Christian neighbors. Wealthy men and women alike aspired to dress in the high fashion of the upper classes—rich, fur-lined brocades, well-tailored jackets, tight-fitting bodices, sleeves

slashed to reveal silken tunics and laced with velvet ribbons. Illustrations from Hebrew manuscripts, mostly Northern Italian from the second half of the 15th century, portray Jewish men, women, and children of all ages splendidly arrayed in imported styles *alla fiamminga* (in the Flemish manner) or *alla francese* (in the French style) as they celebrate joyous festivities such as weddings, Sukkot, and Purim.

The normalcy of Jewish dress and diversity of Jewish occupations in Italian cities had made daily interaction between Christians and Jews unexceptional. Nevertheless, the Church frowned on such relationships and had sought to limit Jewish-Christian social interaction through a variety of measures. One significant stipulation, decreed by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, initiated official church policy on distinctive dress for Jews, although the wording did not specify what that should be. Over the course of the following centuries, secular and local ecclesiastical authorities enacted a wide range of provisions, for the most part adopting the color yellow for Jews and heretics. In 1218, England seems to have been the first kingdom to comply with the decree by adopting a badge, a depiction of the two tablets of the Law. Although diverse shapes for the badge were legislated throughout Christendom, the most common was a yellow circle or ring. It could be made of parchment, felt, or linen, with some localities legislating specific measurements.

Badges were not unique in medieval life: various professions and confraternities wore them, as did pilgrims. However, the Jews’ badge was understood by Jews and Christians alike as a special mark of ignominy—redressing the individual with all the negative stereotypes of “Jewishness” culled as much from elevated theologians as from superstitious conventional wisdom. If a Jew found favor in the service of a ruler or civic government, the first thing he requested or tried to negotiate was exemption from the requirement to wear the badge. Penalties for non-compliance varied from fines and lashes to other sanctions. Exemptions—at great expense—were given to practicing physicians and communal leaders. Only in 1798, when the French troops entered Rome, was wearing the yellow badge abolished, then reinstated by the Nazis in 1939 in the form of the Star of David.

Despite proscriptions about dressing too similarly to non-Jews, found both in biblical injunctions and Christian laws, Italian Jews tried to clothe themselves like their neighbors—even as the growing hostility toward Jews in the late 15th century led Italian cities and towns to insist on the thorough application of the badge laws and to add new ones. The exquisitely illuminated manuscripts produced during this turbulent period bear witness to the creative impulses that remained central to the Jewish experience. The manuscripts capture Jewish visions of their own lives and aspirations in



Jewish marriage ceremony, Padua, 1477

Lord and Tailor, continued from previous page

highly idealized representations. Therefore, it is both surprising and disturbing to find a few depictions of the yellow badge. For example, in an elaborately illustrated Hebrew treatise on regulations pertaining to women, copied in Padua around 1477, the badge is depicted on the bridegroom's mantle (see illustration on previous page). Scholarly explanations



Above: Moses Receiving the Tablets of the Law, Rothschild Mahzor, fol. 139r (Florence, 1492). Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York. Reproduced in The Rothschild Mahzor (New York, 1983), pl. VII.

Below: Celebrating Sukkot and Purim, Mishne Tora of Maimonides, fol. 85v (Northern Italy, c. 1450). Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. Reproduced in Thérèse and Mendel Metzger, Jewish Life in the Middle Ages (New York, 1982), fig. 372.

nations range from attributing the image to a Christian artist, rather than a Jewish workshop, to the patron's having insufficiently inspected the final manuscript. Yet such elite patrons were themselves among the select Jews permitted to forgo wearing the hated badge, so why allow its inclusion? Answers still elude the modern viewer.

The splendid manuscripts testify to the rich visual culture of the Italian Jewish communities even under increasing duress. Ritual objects made of precious metals, delicately embroidered cloths to drape sacred Torah scrolls, and finely carved and gilded holy arks provide treasured glimpses into religious and ceremonial practices of Italian Jewry. Still more vividly, the exquisitely illuminated books fashion remarkable images of the very fabric of Renaissance Jewish life. **B**

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was dead, and he was not a rabbi.

This plague of 1629–1631 decimated the Accademia. In 1639 Modena still worked with a music academy, now called *Compagnia dei Musici del Ghetto di Venezia*. Modena reflects on the once vibrant Jewish musical scene in Venice by noting that now it no longer met regularly, lost the best members it had, and lacked productive composers. In August, Modena wrote on behalf of the society to accept an offer from another music society to collaborate, further evidence of the popularity of Jewish music.

By the 1640s Rossi had died and Modena was aged and limited in his activities, but synagogue music continued in Italy and so did opposition to it. In places like Pesaro and Senegallia dual choirs continued to perform on Shemini Atzeret, which produced opposition, interruptions of the service, extensive rabbinic responsa, and involvement by the secular authorities. Some rabbis continued to rely on the same passages to oppose music, to overlook the passages which allowed it, and to insist on an absolute ban against it. To resolve these conflicts, proponents of synagogue music invoked Modena's responsum of 1605. This work continued to circulate in manuscript and was republished a few times. The issue of synagogue music again erupted in the 19th century, especially around the question of the use of the organ in early Reform temples. One of the authorities invoked at this time was Hayyim Ventura, the name of the man who served as Leon Modena's assistant cantor. The communal politics in Venice that prevented Modena from entering the rabbinate in Venice at a younger age put him in a position where his work in music and publishing enabled him to preserve the legacy of Salamone Rossi both as an advocate of Jewish music and as an editor of his Hebrew music books, music that still lives today. **B**

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Leon Modena's Autobiography

Prof. Mark R. Cohen

From "IN PRACTICE: From the Middle Ages through the Early Modern Period", Lawrence Fine, Editor. (Princeton Readings in Religions, Princeton University Press)

Leon Modena (1571–1648) was one of the most enigmatic and captivating figures of the Venetian ghetto in the Age of the Baroque. Rabbi, preacher, translator, and teacher, seller of amulets, matchmaker, musician, printers' proofreader, commercial broker, and gambler—he broke the mold for Jews in that period. He was the friend of Christian intellectuals and public figures, and the author of an extraordinary range of books from rabbinic opinions to a dialogue both praising and condemning gambling.

Modena descended from French Ashkenazic Jews, probably victims of one of the expulsions from France in the 14th century. As moneylenders, they had settled in northern Italy, whose city-states were then just opening up their doors to Jewish creditors. Leon (his Hebrew name, Judah Aryeh, corresponds to the Italian, for Aryeh means "lion" and the lion is the symbol of the tribe of Judah) was born in 1571. He was a precocious child and student (at least, to hear him tell it in his autobiography). Like others of his breed, he studied both Jewish and secular subjects, the latter including poetry, voice, dancing, and Latin.

Though initially prosperous, his family experienced much financial hardship when Leon was growing up. In his own adult life, Leon also suffered from lack of financial success. He yearned to become a professional rabbi, even though in Venice at that time rabbis were not salaried. Rather, they were paid per rabbinic service, mainly responsa (legal opinions based on Jewish law). But even his rabbinical ordination did not come until he was nearly forty. Before then, and even after, and despite his many intellectual gifts, he often had to resort to tutoring children, something he did not enjoy. He earned also from other jobs outside the rabbinate, for instance, singing as a cantor, composing flowery Hebrew letters for people, drawing up contracts, serving as secretary for Jewish confraternities, and more. Stricken with anxieties, financial and other, he often gambled away what he accumulated.

He recorded the stresses of his personal and family life and also some of his personal triumphs in a Hebrew manuscript that he entitled *Hayye Yehudah* (The Life of Judah). This is one of the first Jewish autobiographies, discounting Josephus's *Life*, which that ancient author wrote in Greek and for a Roman audience. *Hayye Yehudah* was meant to be kept in the family, and also for his students to read—not, unlike most of his writings, to be published. The text bears similarities to but also telling differences from contemporary Christian autobiography, as Natalie Zemon Davis has shown

in an important comparative essay. It paints a vivid picture of a family, including its women, embedded in the bustling Jewish (and Italian) society of the seventeenth century.

Hayye Yehudah reveals much about the religious atmosphere in Modena's still premodern Jewish society. Everywhere in the book the presence of God is to be felt. He is thanked and praised. His blessings are invoked. His mercy is sought. And when the writer suffers, he states, "I do not know why God continues to treat me so roughly."

By Modena's time, the Kabbalah, Jewish mysticism, esoteric in earlier centuries, had permeated Italian-Jewish religiosity. Modena knew many kabbalists and had studied its doctrines. Ultimately, he came to oppose it, and he wrote a treatise against it, appropriately titled *Ari nohem* (The Roaring Lion), a pun on his name. A staunch defender of Judaism against Christianity, he also composed a book against that religion, *Magen va-herav* (Shield and Sword). Like the autobiography, neither of these polemical works was published during the author's lifetime.

Nor was his defense of Judaism against a vituperous treatise challenging the validity of the Oral Law (the Talmud) and of rabbinic Judaism in general. He claimed to have come across it in 1622 and to have copied it in order to refute it. Modena's defense was called (punning again on his name) *Shaagat aryeh* (The Roar of the Lion), and the attack on the rabbis, *Kol sakhal* (Voice of a Fool). A recent book attempts to settle an old debate by attempting to prove that Modena was a closet critic of rabbinic Judaism and himself the author of *Kol sakhal*.

Rabbinic responsa, commentaries, and polemical works reflect the ambiance of the religious elite. But the "Autobiography" is special in that it depicts religious life "on the ground." The Jewish life cycle of births, marriages, and above all confessions, elegies, burials, and mourning—the religious rites surrounding death—play a prominent role in the narrative. When, on the eve of their wedding, Modena's intended wife Esther is about to die, she summons a sage (*hakham*) to her bedside to make confession, a pious practice introduced to Ashkenazic Jewry in the Middle Ages.

Life in the synagogue dominated Jewish existence in the ghetto. There were several synagogues in Modena's Venice, and some of them can still be visited by tourists today. Leon was an outstanding preacher. As was customary, he preached in Italian (when he published his sermons, however, he used Hebrew). Thus, non-Jews could attend and understand, and his renown as an orator attracted Christians to the ghetto to hear him. His reputation among Christian intellectuals abroad was based, in part, on his rhetorical skill on the synagogue pulpit. Among Jews, Leon was also a much-sought-after teacher for what we would call adult



Modena's *History of Hebrew Rituals*, featuring a portrait of the author

Leon Modena's Autobiography, continued from previous page
 education, which, like services and sermons, formed part of the robust synagogue life of the ghetto.

In the 17th century, much organized religious life took place outside the synagogue, especially in Jewish confraternities (Heb. *hevrot*), which imitated the Christian model. Modena supplemented his income by preaching and teaching for the Ashkenazic Torah Study Society. He even compiled a confessional for the burial confraternity known as the *Gemilut Hasadim* Society (Society for Good Deeds). And he contributed a poem to a book for the *Shomerim la-Boker* Society, a confraternity influenced by Kabbalah whose members arose early in the morning to hold penitential vigils.

Alongside synagogue, confraternity, and expressions of faith in the supreme being, the autobiography provides a healthy dose of what we call "popular religion." Modena's life, like that of many of his Jewish contemporaries, attests to the characteristic *modus vivendi* in Judaism between certain types of popular magic or superstition and "official" rabbinic religion, the law-oriented religion of the Talmud and of the divinely ordained duties. Bibliomancy—seeking an omen by asking a child what biblical verse he had learned that day in school—figures as a favored device when trouble looms. The same Rabbi Leon Modena who preaches, teaches, and issues responsa also writes, teaches, and traffics in amulets and engages in dream divination. Astrology is a commonplace for him, as when he expresses the conviction that the heavens are battling against him and his family.

In one of the segments from his autobiography, Modena has his horoscope foretold "by four astrologers, two Jews and two Christians." When he learns that the stars predict his death in just two years time (and this is confirmed by a palm reading), Modena regrets having requested the horoscope. As if to cancel it after the fact, he dons his cap as rabbi and exponent of "official" Judaism and acknowledges that engaging in the very act runs counter to the belief in God's omnipotence. "So here I am today, pained on account of the past and anxious about the future. But God will do as He pleases."

The autobiography also presents the author (and others) engaged (often along with Christians) in the popular pastime of alchemy. Modena's uncle was attracted to alchemy. Leon himself (in one of the episodes selected) pursued the magical art. And his son Mordecai set up an alchemy laboratory in the ghetto, only to fall ill and die from exposure to the chemical fumes. This tragedy in Modena's life—the loss of his firstborn son—repeated itself later on when another son, named Zebulun, was murdered by a gang of Jews to

which he belonged, practically before Modena's eyes.

The autobiography provides glimpses of living under suffering in Christian society, with its double-edged sword. Modena basked in the attention proffered upon him by Christians. Though locked at night, the ghetto was far from isolated from Christian society. Modena, like his fellow Jews, mingled with Christians during the day in other parts of Venice, and we have already noted that Christians were to be found mingling with Jews in the ghetto. Yet Jewish life was tenuous. Anti-Semitism did not dissolve in Jewish-Christian interfaith sociability. When individual Jews were suspected of wrongdoing, often the entire community was held responsible. In a long episode from the years 1636 to 1637, two Jews received stolen goods and hid them in the ghetto. During the investigation, arrest, and trial, a threat of general expulsion hung over the heads of all the Venetian Jews. The terror subsided only after the sentence was handed down, in which banishment was extended-unprecedentedly-to relatives of the guilty parties. One of Modena's sons-in-law was among those so punished.

Perhaps it is a precursor of a new age to come that Modena could hope to change Christian attitudes toward the Jews and thereby foster their integration into general society. He was fully aware of the centuries-old Christian belief in the inferiority of Judaism and misanthropy of the Jews. So he wrote a small book in Italian, but only in manuscript, describing Jewish rites and beliefs, the first such book ever written by a Jew primarily for non-Jewish readers. It was an apologetic treatise in which Modena countered Christian stereotypes, depicted rabbinic Judaism as rational (he denied that Kabbalah was central in Jewish life), and portrayed Jews as nonsuperstitious and ethical. But, typical of the ghetto mentality with which he lived, Modena panicked when he learned that a Catholic friend had published the manuscript in Paris (in 1637). The author immediately pulled out an old copy and rushed it to the Venetian inquisitorial office, hoping to preempt penalization. After receiving the Paris edition, he published a revised one in Venice (in 1638), expurgating passages he believed Catholics would find objectionable. In similar vein, Jews during the emancipation era two centuries later would defend Judaism and the Jewish people against Christian revulsion in an attempt to win civil and social equality. B

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		Later orders will be held at the door.

Changing Mentalities of Italian Jews Between the Periods Of The Renaissance And The Baroque

Prof. Robert Bonfil

Zamir is grateful to Prof. Bonfil for allowing us to condense and paraphrase his scholarly article. For those who would like to see this excellent article in its original form, please visit our website.

Let us begin with an apparently insignificant *fait guementiel*, for trivial as it might seem, it may perhaps illustrate the changing ways of thinking on the issue which will form the bulk of our discussion below. The letter before us was written on Nov. 14, 1586, by a Jewish teacher in Lugo, a small town some twenty-five miles south of Ferrara, to his brother-in-law in the not too distant town of Finale:

I heard your apology from the words of your letter that reached me written in Christian writing (*bi-ktav nozri*). It is strange to me to see your fingers' markings written with the finger of a foreign God. You, blessed by God, seed of sanctity, whom only a few days ago I urged to write in Hebrew. You have reverted to your former deviation after I have only just left you, it has become a burden for you to write in the writing of truth, as if you had to climb over hills and mountains. Now, Josef, you behave foolishly and you have lost stature in my mind, for you have thus provided me with a true sign that you, God forbid, do not dedicate yourself to the study of Torah at fixed times, and therefore you find it difficult to write even two lines in the Holy Tongue. If this is true, you must know that your sin is great.... Therefore I, your humble brother-in-law, who loves you like a close brother, warn you and urge you to the good. Even though I know that daily concerns weigh heavily upon you, you should never neglect the essence in order to concentrate on what is of secondary importance. On the contrary, the man who fears the word of God turns his heart away from the worries of this world and turns his mind to study, so that he will learn to act as it is written.

Do this, then, my dear brother-in-law: prepare yourself from now on, each and every night after the day's business of the bottega is over, to raise your heart to Heaven and learn some book in the synagogue or in your bedchamber. Do the following: begin with a book you like, and do not put it down until you have completed it; do not let anything in the world divert you from this book and from this set time—hold on to it and do not let go. Read every week Rashi's commentary on the Torah, in addition to reading the weekly portion, twice in Hebrew and once in Aramaic. The saying of our holy sages "Excellent is the study of the Torah together with a wordly occupation" will thus apply to you. And before going to sleep, read one chapter from the Pentateuch, or from the Prophets or even one single Psalm, be it short or long; do not by any means sleep until you have fulfilled your duty, because this is what protects like a sharp sword from night's harm, and its protection extends to the day as well. If you do this, then you will sleep and have rest.

As a principle, highly worthy of praise is the study that informs action—your actions will draw you close to

all Jews, near and far, and you will be able to write in Jewish [i.e. Hebrew, cf. II Kings 28:16], as much as you desire. Now, please, do not be angry with me if perhaps I have suspected you wrongly, for I only intended to warn you because it's a duty rooted in love, brotherhood, kinship, and peace. Therefore, when you come again to me through your letters, write in Jewish and thus you will do what I deem to be right.

Obviously, we would have been surprised to find this letter written by a Jew of our own times, since there are few Jews today who see anything wrong in using the vernacular for private correspondence, no matter how holy and sacred they regard the Hebrew tongue. And for the opposite reason, we would be equally surprised had the letter been written prior to the turn of the 16th century, since no Italian Jew before this time would have dreamt of corresponding with a fellow Jew in any language but Hebrew. While countless such letters exist in Hebrew, one could scarcely point to even a single example in the vernacular.

But the difference which set in during the subsequent period is equally self-evident. Many of the most outstanding Italian representatives of Jewish culture now wrote their letters in the vernacular, and these exist by the thousands. Among this category we may include the learned rabbis and scholars of Italy, who were undoubtedly fluent in Hebrew. Despite the lack of a sound statistical basis, one may safely say that from the 17th century on, writing in Italian became gradually the norm for any Jew who wrote to a coreligionist, and not only for the uneducated or those prepared to surrender to the charm of assimilation, as our 16th-century teacher from Lugo would presumably have it. All considered, therefore, it comes as no surprise to find that our particular letter was written precisely at the turning point of this linguistic crossroads, such is to say, at the close of the 16th century. I would further submit that this changing attitude towards language was but one particular aspect of a larger phenomenon, indeed a major cultural change, which ultimately led to our modern outlook.

To be sure, learned Jewish scholars of the period, most of them rabbis, would indeed choose to write in Hebrew under specific circumstances: for example, when the subject matter hardly lent itself to any language but Hebrew, as in the case of rabbinic responsa. A writer might also choose to pen his letter in Hebrew in order to present his cultural credentials, as it were, and to prove membership in the elite circle of Jewish intellectuals. Even more simply, a letter might also be written in Hebrew when special secrecy was required. Yet the rabbinic correspondence regarding the controversy over Sabbetai Tzvi, in which secrecy might have seemed incumbent, reveals that Hebrew was steadily losing its claims of exclusivity in Jewish epistolography, even in cases dealing with the minutiae of Jewish law. On the whole, then, we may say that Hebrew letter-writing was on the wane, and that its

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presence signals the existence of unusual conditions.

Letter-writing is but one field in which we can discern a changing attitude towards Hebrew. In fact, one could list many other fields in which the phenomenon is equally in evidence. Gravestones in the cemeteries of Padua and Venice from the 16th and 17th centuries also bear witness to this changing attitude. All the known community protocols (*pinkessim*) switched from Hebrew to Italian during the 17th century, after having made increased use of Italian terms in Hebrew transliteration. The same is true of vernacular sermons, such as those preached by Mordechai Dato, whose entire known collection is also written in Hebrew characters. At this time, original works in Latin or Italian also begin to make their first appearance. It would seem that Jewish literary production had cast off its traditional reluctance to appear in any but the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and that it had gradually become willing to unveil itself before a wider audience—of both Jews and Gentiles—than the Hebrew-reading elite it had formerly commanded. We may find something of a paradigm of this phenomenon in the publishing history of Leone Modena's famous youthful fling in macaronic poetry, *Chi nasce muor*; or, in its Hebrew title: קינה שמור. For when this poem was first published in 1602, both the Hebrew and Italian versions were printed in Hebrew letters. By 1640, however, when the poem was reissued, the Italian version appeared in Roman letters.

Whenever a language becomes obsolete, knowledge and fluency in the language decay as well. It takes no great effort to realize that Hebrew knowledge and usage are inextricably intertwined, and that some mutation in the actual knowledge of Hebrew was also occurring. And indeed, there is plenty of evidence that knowledge of Hebrew was on the decline. No one was quicker than Leone Modena, whose Italian virtuosity we have just noticed, to complain that the Jews of his days could scarcely put together two consecutive sentences in Hebrew.

No doubt he was exaggerating, and yet he was not the only one to note that Jews found it difficult to express themselves properly in Hebrew. There were those adherents of the Italian language who would not admit to any inadequacy in the Hebrew language but, on the contrary, justified their linguistic choice on the grounds that Hebrew lacked the richness of Italian. For such people, the adoption of Italian was, at least at the level of consciousness, an act of choice, not the result of any deficiency in Hebrew.

Such was not the case with our shopkeeper from Finale, however, at least in the eyes of his brother-in-law. The teacher from Lugo, as we recall, viewed the Italian writing of his brother-in-law as a symptom of cultural impoverishment, of plain and simple ignorance rising out of intellectual apathy, and not the result of a carefully weighed choice. Modern historians, armed with the benefits of hindsight and

perhaps less emotionally involved than our teacher, perhaps even more broadminded than he, may prefer to remove the charge of cultural lassitude from the sphere of the individual to that of the more general social context. Among the possible causes they might list are all the well-known events which, from the mid-16th-century on, conspired to make the life of Italian Jewry increasingly less pleasant. Jews were herded into ghettos and exposed to intensified missionary pressure, while the potential for properly remunerative activity was reduced more than ever. Within this general context, Jewish culture was seriously jeopardized by the burning of the Talmud and the stiffening of the papal censorship. Given this state of affairs, cultural impoverishment might thus be interpreted as a consequence of outside pressure, much in the way that medieval Jewish thought linked it to the loss of political independence and to the socio-economic oppression of the gentile world.

We find that despite the reproaches of his disapproving brother-in-law, and the historical hindsight of modern historians, cultural lassitude is not necessarily present even in this case. Confined though he was to the ghetto, our shopkeeper from Finale was apparently not consigned in the least to intellectual apathy by the conditions of ghetto life. Rather, his behavior also seems to have been the result of a conscious and well-considered choice. If he found it tiresome to write in Hebrew, it turns out that writing in Italian came naturally. Far from considering himself as wallowing in cultural inactivity, our shopkeeper may very well have prided himself on his accomplishments. As is well known, the literacy rate in sixteenth century Italy was hardly what it is today, and mastery of pen and paper was something of a rarity. True, our Finale shopkeeper was no Jewish scholar, but he was also no ignoramus. We may safely assume that his youthful education conformed to the standards then current among the Jews of Italy, and that he was taught to read and write in both Hebrew and Italian. Otherwise, he would surely not have earned his brother-in-law's reproach, or have received it in such flowery Hebrew.

Unlike the young Jews of earlier generations, therefore, who unfailingly gave Hebrew pride of place over Italian, this young Jew consciously chose to reverse his priorities. Instead of poring over the sacred Torah in his gloomy bottega, during the long moments when customers left it deserted, he may have relieved his boredom by preferring some more relaxing form of reading: a book of *utili e dilettevoli ragionamenti*, or one of those *libri de bataia* ("books of battle"), as Menocchio of Ginzburg dubbed the popular histories in his *The Cheese and the Worms*. Or, he may have settled in with the latest *avviso*, the forerunner of our modern newspapers. In other words, he would satisfy ordinary cultural needs by turning to Italian literary production.

Our young shopkeeper was probably not unique. Like him, most Italian Jews also turned to the literature written in the vernacular for their pleasure reading. This is elo-

קינה שמור אוי מה כפס אוצר בו
Chi nasce, muor. Oimè, che pass' acerbo!
כל טוב אילים כוסי אור דין אל צלו
Colto vien l'uom, così ordina 'l Cielo
משה מורי משה יקר דבר בו
Mosè mori, Mosè: già car'di verbo
שם תושיה און יום כפור הוא זה לו
Santo sia ogn'uom, con puro zelo
כלה מיטב ימי שן צרי אשר בו
Ch'alla metà, già mai senza riserbo
ציוון זה מות רע אין כאן ירפה לו
Si guinge, ma vedrà in cangiar pelo
ספינה בים קל צל עובר ימינו
Se fin' abbiam, ch'al cielo vero ameno
הלים יובא שבי ושי שמנו
Ah! l'uomo va, se viv' assai, se meno.

Modena's macronic poem (one that reads the same in Italian and Hebrew) Chi nasce muor

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quently testified by the fact that during the first half of the sixteenth century, the publication of such literature in Hebrew came to a virtual halt. Just as eloquent is the growing presence of vernacular works in possession of the Mantuan Jews at the turn of the sixteenth century, as we learn from no less a source than the files of the Mantuan Inquisition. To be sure, the number of these books still falls well short of those in Hebrew, which were mostly *siddurim* or other books of religious nature, yet they are unmistakable signs of the changing climate. In an age when pastime literary production had become so flourishing—low-quality though much of it was—the vein of Hebrew literature seems to have dried up from its inability to provoke a positive response from the Jewish public. To cite but one notable example, Joseph ha-Kohen never did find an audience for his ambitious *History of the French Kings and the Ottoman Empire*.

In this climate, then, our shopkeeper in Finale was not quite the anomaly that his brother-in-law would have it. This was not a case of cultural apathy, and certainly not of ignorance, but rather a manifestation of the changing attitude towards language and its role in the broad complex of culture. As such, he must have been a fairly good representative of the times.

All in all, a diverse process of change, rooted in “internal” as well as in “external” causes, interwoven in a highly complex way, was taking place. The aversion to Hebrew, which our teacher in Lugo would attribute to the intellectual apathy of his brother-in-law, would in fact be symptomatic of the more general restructuring of Jewish cultural self-definition in a changing world. By being assigned to the realm of the extraordinary, Hebrew was by no means pushed outside the arena of Jewish culture. It was rather promoted to a more central point of that area. It was assigned the characteristic of a sacred language, suited to the sacred realms of cultural life. Such is to say, that it had specifically become the language of religion. Yet, as we have already noted, if medieval people tended to think of culture and religion as “coextensive or coterminus categories,” by the close of the 16th century things had taken a radical turn. By this time, the secularization of entire sectors of culture had become something of a *fait accompli*. Therefore, assuming the honorable role of language of religion was for Hebrew very much some kind of *promoveatur ut amoveatur*. Room was now made for Italian to legitimately enter Jewish life in its non-religious aspects.

One may perhaps detect a hint of the process of change even in the words of our teacher from Lugo, which might be thought, *prima facie*, to point to the contrary. By exhorting his brother-in-law to keep up his Hebrew through reading the Bible, “even one single psalm” before sleep, he was in fact assigning the language a religious function, indeed a sacred one, quite remote from ordinary life. The reading was to be performed at the close of the day, in the religious context of “getting out of the world” (the *saeculum* of medieval Latin parlance). Or, as the rabbis would have it, just before “delivering one’s soul to God.” If we are not prepared to assume that our teacher was suggesting some kind of para-hypnotic

system of learning, we may very much doubt the efficacy of such mechanical reading while falling asleep. While such sleep-inducing effects were probably the last thing on our teacher’s mind, he was, most probably unconsciously, formulating a wistful allusion to the sacred, almost magical ones.

To be sure, the restructuring of the Jewish identity was moving away from the realm of the sacred and closer to the realm of secularization. Yet, for religious men, as most of them still regarded themselves, secularization did not mean casting one’s religion to the wayside, but rather raising a barrier between the religious and secular fields of human activity. By exempting himself from the considerable effort of writing his homely letters in Hebrew, our Finale shopkeeper would certainly distance himself from the Hebrew language; he would certainly contribute to the making of a new kind of Jew, one whose thought would be founded on the vernacular rather than any *diglossy*, one whose cultural self-perception would be more “Italian.” No doubt this was precisely what frightened his Lugo brother-in-law, unable as he was to see the entire picture. Be this as it may, in pulling down one barrier and raising another, our Finale shopkeeper was thus adding his small contribution to the making of what was later to become one of the pillars of enlightened Jewish ideology; one that remains firm to our own day.

In this sense one may certainly agree with that axiom of Jewish historiography, which roots the foundations of the modern Jewish identity in the beginning of secularization. One may even agree that the deepest roots of this secularization are to be found in *ancien regime* Italy. Yet, axiomatic as this would sound, it now seems that the process of secularization was one and the same for Jews and Christians, and, what is perhaps more important, its first concrete expression among Jews belongs to the Counter-Reformation or the Baroque, within the same context of painful ghettoization. Should one still prefer to adopt the current terminology of openness vs. insularity in order to characterize the relationship towards secularization, openness were better assigned to the period of the Counter-Reformation or the Baroque, and insularity to that of the Renaissance. Following a natural syllogism of thought—even if it does bring us rather close to the “lachrymose conception” of Jewish history—one might then be authorized to conclude that the conquest of modernity was fraught with more tension, pain and struggle for the Jews than was the case for their gentile neighbors. B

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At the Intersection of Cultures: The Historical Legacy of Italian Jewry

Prof. David Ruderman

Zamir is grateful to Prof. Ruderman for allowing us to condense and paraphrase his scholarly article. For those who would like to see this excellent article in its original form, please visit www.zamir.org/Notes

Among the precious artifacts included in the Jewish Museum's exhibition on Italian-Jewish life is a work of singular importance. It is a lexicon of rabbinic literature called the *Arukh*, written by Nathan ben Jehiel of Rome (1035–c. 1110) at the beginning of the 12th century. Why so modest a work, a mere dictionary of words and phrases, should elicit special attention requires some elucidation.

Nathan headed the Talmudic academy of Rome, a post he held with his two brothers and one that had earlier been held by his father, who died in 1070. Nathan apparently belonged to the well-known Anau (Anav) family, an ancient clan that, according to its tradition, descended from one of four aristocratic families that Titus brought from Jerusalem to Rome after the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. That his family were no mere newcomers to the glorious city of the popes but claimed an ancestry that even predated the emergence of Rome as the center of Western Christendom was not an insignificant fact for either Nathan's coreligionists or his other Italian neighbors. For Jews it underscored their longstanding and uninterrupted residence in the first important beachhead of Jewish settlement in Europe in the aftermath of Jerusalem's defeat at the hands of Rome. For non-Jews it suggested that the longevity of Jewish residency in Italy for some one thousand years should not be taken for granted, for it entitled them to a place of honor in the political and cultural life of their community.

Nathan's *Arukh* was a work of prodigious scholarship, a glossary of encyclopedic proportions. The author presented both the meaning and etymology of difficult or unusual terms found in the Talmud and Midrashim, drawing on his impressive knowledge of Hebrew, Aramaic, Latin, Greek, Persian, and Arabic. Nathan's most significant achievement was his amalgamation of the individual exegetical and legal traditions of his day: first and foremost, that of the Babylonian Talmud and the legal decisions of the gaonate of Baghdad. He also incorporated the Palestinian Targum, Tosefta, Midrashim, and Talmud; the rabbinic commentary of Hananel ben Hushi'el of Kairouan (d. 1055–56), who had quoted extensively from the Palestinian Talmud and compared it with its Babylonian counterpart; and finally, the emerging rabbinic scholarship of northern Europe, especially Germany and Provence, in particular the commentaries of Rabbenu Gershom (960–1028) and "the scholars of Mainz." Nathan even occasionally consulted the latest books on mathematics and medicine.

In correlating and fusing all of these diverse traditions and sources in the pages of his massive compendium, Nathan initiated a creative process that was to become the most consistent and characteristic feature of Italian-Jewish scholarship for centuries to come. It is no coincidence that one of the

most significant products of Italian-Jewish culture in the early modern era was also a Talmudic encyclopedia, the *Pahad Yitzhak* of Isaac Lampronti (1679–1756) of Ferrara, written in the eighteenth century. In their efforts to integrate and mediate disparate traditions, to reconcile and accommodate conflicting legal opinions and religious ideals, in short, to tolerate, to cultivate, and even to be enlivened by diversity, a long line of Italian-Jewish writers from Nathan to Isaac adopted the genre of the encyclopedia. Accordingly one might argue that Nathan's literary undertaking came to represent the most typical and unique signature of Italian-Jewish culture.

One additional facet of the *Arukh* should be mentioned: its publication date. A good indication of its enduring popularity and usefulness to students of Talmudic and Jewish civilization was the fact that it was one of the first books to be printed by a Hebrew press, fittingly in the same city in which it was written, between 1469 and 1472. From the fifteenth century on, the work enjoyed wide circulation through numerous editions. Furthermore a number of authors saw fit to enlarge and emend the original work. For example, Menahem de Lonzano (1550–c. 1624) and Benjamin Mussafia (1606–1675) both published important expansions of the *Arukh*. Through Nathan's writing, particularly in its printed versions, the study of rabbinic texts, of comparative philology, customs, and legal traditions has been stimulated in communities outside Italy until the present day.

Through the assumed ancestry of its author, the *Arukh* testifies to the longevity of Italian Jewry's residency on the European continent. Moreover, as a mediator and harmonizer of disparate and even conflicting traditions and values, it embodies the characteristic mode of Italian-Jewish civilization, at least until the threshold of the modern era. And finally, it underscores the importance of Italy as a nerve center, as a conduit, and as a critical disseminator of knowledge to Jewish communities throughout the continent and beyond. In exemplifying these three major themes of Jewish cultural history in Italy, Nathan's *Arukh* offers a fitting introduction to the subject of this essay.

The Modest Beginnings of Italian-Jewish Culture in the Roman Empire

In the absence of much concrete documentation of Jewish life in ancient Italy, only the bare outlines are discernible. As early as the Hasmonean era in the 2nd century B.C.E., Jewish delegations from Palestine visited Rome, and perhaps some individuals remained to settle there. A more substantial presence of Jews in Rome and southern Italy is visible in the middle decades of the next century, consisting primarily of slaves deposited in Rome and probably also of merchants from the East. Jews flourished under the protection of Julius Caesar and Augustus, who allowed them to practice their ancestral laws. Despite occasional disruptions and murmurings of certain intellectuals and public figures, Jewish life was

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generally unmolested during the first Christian centuries.

A large number of Jewish prisoners were deported to Rome after the failure of the revolt in Judaea. The majestic Arch of Titus in Rome still bears the sculpted record of Roman triumph and Jewish humiliation. Despite the continued insurrections of Jews throughout the empire, culminating in the defeat of Bar Kochba in Palestine in 135 C.E., the emperors generally treated their Jewish subjects in Italy benevolently. Even with the adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the empire by the 4th century, the passage of discriminatory legislation in the name of Theodosius and Justinian in the 5th and 6th centuries, and periodic expressions of public hostility by individual church leaders, Jewish life in Italy apparently remained surprisingly stable, to the extent that it is known. In Rome itself many Jews were engaged in humble occupations and hardly attained prominence economically or socially.

There is even less to say about the status of Jewish cultural and intellectual activity in ancient Italy. With the exception of the Jewish historian Josephus, who settled in Rome after the revolt, and the mention of a Palestinian rabbi, Matiah ben Heresh, who lived in Rome in the 2nd century, one is struck by the sheer absence of literary activity and intellectual life among Italian Jews before the 9th century C.E. With the lack of writings, there remain only synagogue ruins and tombstone inscriptions offering testimony of Jewish settlement in Ostia, Naples, Salerno, Bari, Otranto, Taranto, Venosa, Reggio, and elsewhere, but little more. More telling is the language of the inscriptions: either Greek or Latin, interspersed occasionally with simple Hebrew words (*shalom*, *shalom al Yisrael*, etc.), and decorated with pagan symbols or a simple figure of a menorah, testifying to a low level of Hebraic literacy and a high degree of assimilation.

In the Orbit of Byzantine Influence: Jewish Culture in Southern Italy in the 9th and 10th Centuries

The Hebrew revival of the 9th century reveals the end product of a long political and cultural development that is shrouded in considerable obscurity. The steady disintegration of the western Roman Empire, the barbarian incursions into Italy, and the gradual isolation of western Europe as a result of the Muslim hegemony in the East all play a part in this transition. The fate of this miniscule Jewish minority in Italy could not have been unaffected by these larger upheavals. Certainly the apparent arrival of North African Jews in Italy as a result of the Muslim raids into Italy may have constituted one important factor in the subsequent rise in Hebrew literacy.

Whatever the precise cause of this mutation, the small communities of Jews living in southern Italy under Byzantine rule in the ninth century were of a different character than those who had earlier left their cryptic messages on tombstones in Rome, Venosa, and elsewhere. Their economic life had not radically changed, to the extent that it can be reconstructed. They were artisans and merchants, dyers and silk weavers, and even landowning farmers. In

the sphere of culture and intellectual creativity, however, they were profoundly different. Literary sources opaquely describe the existence of institutions of rabbinic learning in Rome and Lucca, in Bari, Otranto, Venosa, and Oria. After a complete absence of Hebrew writings for centuries, Italian Jewry suddenly and dramatically rediscovered its link with the language of scripture and the rabbis.

What is striking about the Hebrew revival of the 9th and 10th centuries is not only its seeming "creation out of nothing" but also its variegated and colorful nature. While Italian rabbis were presumably engaged in the teaching of Torah in a manner similar to their counterparts in the centers of Israel, Baghdad, and North Africa, they left little trace of their scholarship prior to the lexicon of Nathan of Rome. What remains instead is a small but innovative literary output in such diverse fields as ancient and local family history, liturgical poetry, medicine and science, and even a faint echo of early Jewish mystical traditions.

Only a small number of works survive, but they reveal in their totality the existence of a highly complex society, receptive to the strains and influences of powerful Jewish centers outside Italy and stimulated by cultural contacts with the non-Jewish world. At the crossroads between Palestinian and Babylonian rabbinic spheres of domination, between Eastern and Western Christendom, and between Christianity and Islam, these fledgling Jewish communities could hardly be immune to intense cultural stimulation, confusion, and even conflict.

Among the most important literary products of this age was *Sefer Josipphon*, a historical narrative composed in Hebrew describing the later biblical period and that of the Second Temple. The work is usually dated to 953 C.E. and is attributed to an anonymous author living in southern Italy who utilized a Latin manuscript based on Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* and *The Jewish War*, called the *Hegessippus*. Among the interpolations found in the narrative is a description of ancient Italy and the founding of Rome as well as a listing of the boundaries of the world more appropriate for the tenth century than for antiquity. While celebrating the glorious history of ancient Israel, the work appears to betray little or no rabbinic cultural influence, especially that emanating from the Talmudic centers of Baghdad and North Africa. Throughout the Middle Ages *Sefer Josipphon* enjoyed enormous popularity. Its earliest printed edition appeared in Mantua around 1480, testifying to the continued fascination with this book among Italian-Jewish circles.

A historical work of a different sort is that of the 11th-century chronicler Ahimaaz ben Paltiel, generally called *Megillat Ahimaaz*. The author, a resident of Capua and Oria in southern Italy, compiled in rhymed Hebrew prose a genealogy of his family from the 9th century on. The author's ancestors, such as Amittai, Silano, and Shephatiah, known through the liturgical poems they also composed, lived colorful and active lives and engaged in magic and wonder-working miracles. Given the author's penchant for telling fabulous tales of his family heroes, the work has often been discounted as an unreliable historical source and perceived as an unsophisticated product of the early medieval his-



Detail from the Arch of Titus

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torical imagination. More recently the imaginative stories of Ahimaaz have been deemed significant in revealing vividly the transition from the Palestinian sphere of influence to the Babylonian. Treating especially the story of the scholar Abu Aaron of Baghdad, who arrived in Italy, one recent scholar has attempted to focus on the Palestinian cultural substrate that existed in Italy prior to the introduction of the Babylonian influence, and then to show how the latter ultimately engaged and overtook the former in Italy and eventually throughout Europe.”

The Palestinian layer of Italian-Jewish culture is particularly prominent in the religious poetry composed during this period. The early liturgical creations of Silano and Amittai, for example, dwell on the memory of Israel’s glorious past and are heavily indebted to the Palestinian *piyyut* form and to midrashic materials centering in the land of Israel. Yet they also reflect their own ambiance in their use of Latin, Greek, Italian, and even Arabic words. From the 10th century on, the writing of poetry extended beyond southern Italy to Rome and to Lucca in the north. In Rome Solomon ha-Bavli in the late 10th century composed a number of major poems that entered the hymnology of the Ashkenazic service. In Lucca members of the famous Kalonymus family also actively pursued the writing of liturgical poems for the synagogue.”

The most extraordinary Jewish intellectual figure of southern Italy in the tenth century was surely Shabbetai Donnolo, the pharmacist, physician, and commentator on the ancient mystical text the *Sefer Yezirah*. Well versed in rabbinic literature, in Greek and Latin medical and scientific writings, conversant in colloquial Italian, and even an occasional poet of Hebrew verse, Donnolo fully embodied the multifaceted character of Italian-Jewish culture long before its efflorescence in the Renaissance period. Donnolo’s *Sefer ha-Mirkabot* (The Book of Remedies), a treatise on pharmacology, and his commentary constitute his principal extant works. In interpreting the mystical cosmology of the *Sefer Yezirah* within the context of the scientific knowledge of his day, Donnolo prefigured a major preoccupation of later Italian-Jewish thinkers in correlating and harmonizing potentially competing and conflicting epistemologies.

Donnolo’s fascination with a text of mystical speculation underscores the importance of Italy as a point of origin and dissemination of Jewish mysticism and pietism throughout Europe. According to a tradition preserved by the later Ashkenazic pietists, the Kalonymus family, who left Lucca for Mainz in the 9th century, was supposedly well versed in esoteric lore. In German pietistic circles Abu Aaron, considered to be the principal representative of Babylonian rabbinic learning in *Megillat Ahimaaz*, was also held to be simultaneously a master of secret names and a progenitor of early Jewish mysticism. The contradictory images of this sage of Baghdad illustrate, at the very least, how conflicting ideologies and values competed for legitimization in the fertile soil of early medieval Italy.

The importance of Italy as a conduit of ancient Jewish mysticism to northern Europe constitutes only a part of the larger cultural role this Jewish community was to play in

the creation of other European centers of Jewish culture. The Kalonymus family was also well known for its rabbinic scholarship and for its leadership role in the Rhine communities in a later period. The ultimate product of the dialectical encounter between Palestinian and Babylonian traditions in Italy was thus eventually transmitted to the north. And if a twelfth-century account of the ransoming of four rabbinic captives to North Africa and Spain can be seen to reflect the reality of a power shift of Jewish authority from the East to the West, its casual mention of Bari as the port of embarkation of the rabbis suggests an Italian cultural role in the transmission of Jewish culture to the West as well. Whatever the case, the substantial repercussions of the creative processes of self-definition emerging within the tiny Italian communities of the ninth and tenth centuries were to be felt far beyond Italy and for centuries to come.

A Shift Northward: The Late Middle Ages

The Jewish community of Rome, notwithstanding periodic setbacks, continued to flourish throughout the Middle Ages and constitutes the one continuous thread in Jewish settlement in Europe from antiquity to the modern era. By the time of Rabbi Nathan ben Jehiel of Rome, in the late 11th and early 12th centuries, Jewish intellectual life was certainly thriving. Benjamin of Tudela reported on a sizable Jewish community there later in the 12th century, and despite certain setbacks in the 13th century, Jewish residence remained constant.

The real change in Jewish settlement took place in the northern communities. Before the 13th century only a handful of Jews were allowed to live north of Rome. The northern Italian communities had initially prohibited Jewish merchants and artisans from settling in their neighborhoods out of a fear of economic competition. This situation was gradually altered in the 13th and 14th centuries by the simultaneous rise to prominence of Jewish money-lending, spurred by the church’s campaign against Christian usury, and by the burgeoning populations and economies of the northern Italian communes, which created an increasing need for capital. With the gradual decline of Jewish life in the south, and the eventual removal of Jews from trade and the textile industry, increasing numbers of Jews emigrated from the area and invested in pawn-broking banks in cities throughout northern and central Italy.

Subject to the vagaries of an agrarian economy and constantly in need of cash to support their standing militia and public projects, the petty city-states of northern and central Italy were predisposed to invite individual Jewish bankers to settle in their communities. Usually such Jews were offered a *condotta* (charter) by the civic authorities for a limited number of years with the possibility of extensions of residency. The arrival of relatively affluent Jews in cities such as Ancona, Urbino, Perugia, Forli, Padua, Bologna, Milan, and Ferrara eventually paved the way for the entrance of their coreligionists. Jewish moneylenders thus became the economic mainstay of the small Jewish settlements sprouting up north of Rome and the chief source of communal leadership. When their economic power and position were

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threatened, the welfare of every member of the Jewish community was adversely affected.

Not surprisingly the major luminaries of Jewish culture—rabbinic scholars, poets, physicians, astrologers, or philosophers (quite often the same individual) usually aligned themselves with these families. Their intellectual activities were supported by those privileged patrons of higher culture in a manner not unlike that of their counterparts in the Christian world of letters. This system of Jewish patronage, which continued to expand during the Renaissance, could not help but broaden the range of cultural interests pursued by an intellectual class directly dependent on the personal whim and will of economic magnates and their families.

The new demographic and economic order influenced Jewish cultural life in two other ways. In the first place the primary immigration of Jews to northern and central Italy was initially an internal one from the south. Despite the cultural differences they surely encountered, the majority of the new Jewish residents were still Italian-speaking. They traced their origins to imperial Rome or to other ancient communities in the south, and in some ways they saw themselves as Italian as much as Jewish. The opportunities for social, economic, and cultural interaction with their Christian neighbors were enhanced given the relative ease in which they adjusted to their new surroundings. With the later immigration of Jews from France, Germany, and Spain from the fourteenth century on, the alien character of the Jewish minority was more pronounced. Nevertheless the Italian indigenous element was still the dominant one, and it continued to set the tone for dialogue with the majority culture.

In the second place the relatively small size of the political states and their Jewish neighborhoods also facilitated maximum interaction between Jews and Christians. Individual Jews lived in close proximity not only to their Christian neighbors but also to the local duke or public officials. Under such circumstances Jews naturally felt an integral part of their surroundings to a greater degree than in most other communities in Christian Europe. In sum the stimulus of the Christian cultural environment was profoundly felt by individual Jews because of the personal position of Jewish bankers, because most Jews spoke and read Italian, and because of their constant and unavoidably close contacts with their Christian neighbors.

Yet it would be wrong to infer from the above that Italian Jews were not often violated spiritually and physically by the Christian majority. Jewish existence was still precarious in the central and northern communities: moneylenders were constantly subjected to vilification and physical harm, and conversionist activities often threatened to undermine Jewish morale, even under the special conditions of the new surroundings. Nevertheless it should be emphasized that in this most intense period of Christian assault against Judaism throughout most of western Europe, the Jews of northern and central Italy fared better than most of their coreligionists elsewhere.

In considering the cultural creativity of Italian Jews in the 13th and 14th centuries, one is struck by its vitality and diversity and its profound interaction with the outside world.

From at least the time of Nathan ben Yehiel, rabbinic learning in Italy flourished, producing a number of well known exegetes and codifiers. Under the stimulus of first the Norman, then the Hohenstaufen, and finally the Angevin kings of the south, a number of individual Jewish savants were specifically employed in translating the important philosophic and scientific works of the Muslim world from Arabic to Hebrew and sometimes directly into Latin. This critical work of cultural intermediation not only left its mark on Latin culture from the twelfth century on; it also stimulated Jewish intellectual life through its encounter with Arabic philosophy and science.

The scholars who had undertaken translations were clearly engaged in a larger cultural process far weightier than the mere technical function for which they had been commissioned. Their renderings into Hebrew and Latin were an integral part of a more intense *translatio scientiae* engendered by the encounter of Arabic culture with the West. Jewish scholars in Italy were hardly immune to this deeper “translation” process. Jacob Anatoli, for example, imbibed the new philosophic spirit in his own homiletic work called *Mamad ha-Talmidim* (A Goad to Scholars). He often quoted Aristotle, Plato, Averroës, and even his contemporary Michael Scot; he defended Maimonides and argued for an allegorical-philosophical understanding of the biblical text.

The most illustrious member of this group of philosophical exegetes was certainly Immanuel ben Solomon of Rome (c. 1260–c. 1328), who wrote commentaries on most of the books of the Bible. Although born in Rome, he was part of the northern migration of the 13th and 14th centuries, living in such communities as Perugia, Gubbio, Ancona, and Verona while probably serving as a tutor in the home of wealthy banking faniffles. His most important work was the *Mahberot* (Compositions), a large collection of poems structured within a loose narrative framework. His style and imagery are reminiscent of Spanish-Jewish precedents, but the Italian influence of the sonnets of Petrarch and Dante on Immanuel’s poems is unmistakable, and so is their licentious spirit. The last composition in his long work, entitled *Tofet and Eden*, is an account of an imaginary journey to heaven and hell closely modeled on Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. The heaven of Immanuel, however, is a Judaized one teeming with patriarchs, rabbis, contemporary Jews, and righteous Gentiles. Immanuel apparently never knew Dante, but he did correspond with the poets Bosone da Gubbio and Cinco da Pistola and was highly appreciated by them both. Immanuel was undoubtedly the most original of the Italian-Jewish writers of his day and the most brilliant representative of the fusion of Latin, Italian, and Jewish cultures. Clearly affiliated with the philosophical world of the southern Jewish translators and exegetes, Manuel da Gubbio, as he was known in the Christian world, introduced a new literary genre to Hebrew writing and accordingly moved Jewish culture in Italy in altogether novel directions.

In short, the culture of Italian Jews in the 13th and 14th centuries reflected profound changes in their environment: the stimulus of the enlightened monarchs of the south in promoting the translation of Arabic culture in the Latin West, the eventual deterioration of Jewish life in those regions, the

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steady movement to and settlement of the north, the rise of Jewish loan banking, the stimulation of new forms of Latin and Italian literature, and the impact of philosophic and mystical currents from Spain and Provence. Jewish intellectual life remained multifaceted and energized by these new developments. Individual writers excelled in rabbinics, philosophy, medicine and science, poetry, homiletics, and kabbalah. And all of this creative activity was in some ways a mere prelude to the cultural efflorescence of the Renaissance.

Jewish Culture in Renaissance Italy

By the 15th century Jewish loan bankers were a noticeable element in the major urban centers of northern and central Italy and in many of the smaller towns as well. In a few instances Jewish families such as the Da Pisa or Norsa had succeeded in amassing a considerable fortune and had established a rather intricate network of loan banks in several communities. Jewish loan banking was well entrenched in such cities as Florence, Siena, Ferrara, Mantua, Pesaro, Reggio, Modena, Padua, and Bologna.

With the gradual increase of Jewish residents in these cities, encouraged by economic opportunities engendered by the loan bankers, recurrent signs of organized Jewish communal activity became more visible by the 15th century. One notes the appearance of cemeteries, synagogues, community schools, and later, voluntary associations to maintain basic social services for the community. In this same era immigrants from Germany and southern France joined the original native Italian element in settling these regions. The expulsion of the Jews of Spain resulted in a new influx of Sephardic Jews, who arrived in Italy as early as 1493. They were later joined by a steady stream of Marrano immigrants throughout the 16th century, fleeing the Iberian peninsula in search of more tolerant surroundings. The new Italian communities became more international in flavor, and understandably the process of political and social self-definition and differentiation that these increasingly complex communities underwent was sometimes accompanied by considerable stress, internal conflict, and even bitter struggles over religious and political authority.

The infusion of larger numbers of Jews into these regions evoked hostile reactions from elements of the local populace as well. The concentrated and conspicuous presence of Jewish moneylenders was particularly offensive to churchmen, especially members of the Franciscan order. The most vigorous attacks against Jewish usury in the 15th century came from such preachers as Bernardino of Siena and Antonino of Florence, who openly deplored the economic basis of the Jewish community and its supposed cancerous effect upon the local Christian populace. Such campaigns often had painful consequences for Jewish victims: riots, physical harassment, even loss of life. In some cases Jews were expelled from various cities, although these measures were often temporary. Sometimes the results of such provocations were more disastrous. Bernardino of Feltre's charge of ritual murder in the city of Trent in 1475 had serious repercussions for Jews not only in that city but throughout northern Italy.

If there was a safety valve from such disasters, it was to be found in the fragmented political nature of the Italian city-states. The Jewish victims of persecution often sought refuge in neighboring communities and on occasion even succeeded in returning to their original neighborhoods when the hostilities had subsided. An outburst in one locality, however, could easily trigger a similar explosion in another contiguous with it. The friars' inflammatory sermons, accompanied by severe public pressure against the local Jewish citizenry, usually traveled from town to town with the same predictable results. Yet such disruptions, no matter how harmful, lacked the finality and drastic consequences associated with anti-Semitism elsewhere in Western Europe. Because of the localized and circumscribed nature of the outbursts, Jewish life in Italy was never fully suppressed and continued to flourish through the modern era.

Incessant hostility was also counterbalanced by the relatively benign relations that existed between certain Jewish and Christian intellectuals in Italy at the height of the Renaissance and long after. The new cultural intimacy could not dissipate the recurrent animosities between Jews and Christians, but it did allow some Jews greater access to Christian society than before, and accordingly their impact on certain sectors of the majority culture was more profound. This intense interaction between intellectuals of different faiths would have significant impact on the cultural concerns of both communities.

An illuminating example of the dialogue between Renaissance and Jewish culture is the case of Judah Messer Leon, a Jewish physician, rabbinic scholar, and master of Aristotelian philosophy, who lived in a number of cities in north-central Italy in the second half of the 15th century. Sometime before 1480 Messer Leon composed a Hebrew book entitled *Nofet Zufim* (The Book of the Honeycomb's Flow), in which he introduced to his Jewish readers a new genre of rhetorical writing, placing himself squarely in the center of a new and ultimately dominant expression of Renaissance culture, that of Italian humanism. As early as the 14th century, with the revival and imitation of classical antiquity, the humanists had reclaimed rhetoric as a significant and independent part of the new *studia humanitatis*, which also included grammar, poetry, history, and moral philosophy. As a reaction to the more technical philosophical interests of Aristotelian scholars, the humanists revived the ideal of the ancient Latinists Cicero and Quintilian, believing that the integration of rhetoric with philosophy would shape a new breed of educated persons endowed with both wisdom and eloquence.

Messer Leon's rhetorical compendium likewise projected to its Hebrew readers the ideal of a good and righteous man, gifted in the oratorical art, who thus combined his knowledge and noble character to produce a new and effective leadership for the Jewish community. Furthermore, in grafting the Ciceronian ideal onto Judaism, Messer Leon boldly attempted to portray his new image of leadership as an intrinsic part of Jewish tradition in the first place. He designated his new Jewish leader the *khakham kolel* (a direct Hebrew translation of the expression *homo universalis*), a person obliged to lead his community by virtue of a unique

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combination of broad and substantive learning together with good character. As Messer Leon Judaized the civic orator, so too did he treat the entire field of rhetoric. The model of classical oratory initially was conceived not in Greece or Rome but in ancient Israel itself, so he claimed. If indeed the entire Hebrew Bible, especially its prophetic orations, was the font and exemplar of the rhetorical art, it followed not only that rhetoric was a subject worthy for Jews but also that it was incumbent upon them to appreciate and to master a discipline that had been theirs in the first place. Moreover the idea that rhetoric had been perfected first by the Hebrews offered to Jews of the 15th century a satisfying reassurance regarding the intrinsic worth of their own cultural legacy.

Even more decisive than the impact of humanism on Italian-Jewish culture was that of the encounter of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494), the famous Florentine philosopher, and his colleagues with a number of contemporary Jews. Out of a mutually stimulating interaction between Pico and his Jewish associates and a prolonged study of Jewish texts emerged one of the most unusual and exotic currents in the intellectual history of the Renaissance, the Christian kabbalah. In a relatively unprecedented manner a select but influential group of Christian scholars actively desired to understand the Jewish religion and its sacred texts in order to penetrate their own spiritual roots more deeply. Such a major reevaluation of contemporary Jewish culture by Christians would leave a noticeable mark on both Christian and Jewish self-understanding in this and later periods.

Pico and his intellectual circle were drawn to Jewish study partially out of a sincere devotion to missionary activity, as were earlier Christians before them, especially in Spain. But Pico's attraction to Jewish texts in general and to the kabbalah in particular had more to do with the philosophical and theological currents among his Florentine contemporaries. From Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), the leading Neo-platonist in Florence, Pico derived the vital concept of ancient theology, the notion that a single truth pervades all periods and all cultures, and that among the ancient writers—pagan, Jewish, or Christian, a unity and harmony of religious insight can be discerned. By universalizing all religious knowledge, Ficino and Pico fashioned a more open and tolerant Christian theology. In searching for truth in cultural and religious settings distant from their own, they ultimately came to appreciate the centrality and priority of Hebraic wisdom in Western civilization.

The interaction between the new Christian Hebraists such as Pico and Italian Jews was significant in offering Jews a novel challenge to their own national existence. It introduced the image of a universal culture transcending both Christianity and Judaism in their present forms. Renaissance culture, of course, was still pervaded by traditional religious values; it was neither as secular nor as rational as some earlier historians had conceived it to be. Nor was Jewish communal life, its longstanding educational and social institutions, and its strong commitment to the traditional study of rabbinic texts, on the whole, radically different from what had existed in previous eras. And as we have seen, some

Christians still attacked Jews, publicly ridiculed their faith, and sought to convert them. But perhaps in one respect the dialogue between Judaism and Christianity was different in the Renaissance era. In sensing a greater urgency to justify their own particularity before an intellectual community increasingly ecumenical in spirit if not in practice, a certain number of Jews were offered a preview of the intellectual and spiritual challenges their descendants would face with growing regularity and intensity in the centuries to come.

The Age of the Ghetto

The relatively tolerant climate Italy had offered its small Jewish community during the Renaissance was short-lived. As a result of the oppressive policy of Pope Paul IV (1476–1559) and his successors, the Italian-Jewish communities of the papal states as well as the rest of Italy experienced a radical deterioration of their legal status and physical state. Italian Jews suddenly faced a major offensive against their community and its religious heritage, culminating in the public burning of the Talmud in 1553 and in restrictive legislation leading to increased impoverishment, ghettoization, and expulsion. Jews had been expelled from the areas under the jurisdiction of Naples in 1541. In 1569 they were removed from the papal states, with the major exceptions of Ancona and Rome. Those who sought refuge in Tuscany, Venice, or Milan faced oppressive conditions as well. The only tolerable haven was in the territory controlled by the Gonzaga of Mantua or that of the Estensi of Ferrara.

The most conspicuous phenomenon associated with these changes was the erection of the ghetto itself. The word was probably first used to describe an island of Venice supposedly once the site of a foundry (*getto*), selected in 1516 as the compulsory residential quarter for Jews. The real impetus for the proliferation of the ghetto throughout Italy, however, came only in 1555, when Pope Paul IV ordered that all Jews living within the papal states be confined to one street or to a few adjacent ones, and that the new quarter should have no more than one entrance and one exit. The Jews of Rome were the first to relocate to a compulsory quarter, and numerous other Italian communities soon followed Rome's example: Florence and Siena in 1571, Verona in 1600, Mirandola in 1602, Padua in 1603, Mantua in 1612, Rovigo in 1613, Ferrara in 1624, and so on, continuing until the end of the 18th century.

The period of the ghetto, extending well into the beginning of the 19th century, has usually been described as a radical break with a more tolerable past, an era of economic and political decline, and of the growing cultural isolation of Italian Jewry. No doubt Jews confined to a heavily congested area surrounded by a wall shutting them off from the rest of the city, except for entrances bolted at night, were subjected to considerably more misery, impoverishment, and humiliation than before. And clearly the result of ghettoization was the erosion of ongoing liaisons between Christians and Jews, including intellectual ones. But the social and cultural results of this new confinement were indeed more paradoxical than one might initially assume.

Jewish cultural priorities did in fact shift considerably by the

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second half of the 16th century; a kind of “turning in,” an internalization of Jewish culture, did emerge among certain sectors of Italian Jews. But it is unclear whether the imposition of the ghetto was its primary cause. Even before the 1550s, a growing insecurity and spiritual crisis over the inadequacy of philosophical speculation was felt among some Jews. And by the end of the century a pervasive Jewish mysticism, with its emphasis on practical acts of piety, came to challenge and supplant the crumbling edifice of Jewish scholasticism of the previous age. Also, with the erection of the ghetto, there was a dramatic proliferation of pious confraternities (*hevrot*) in every major Italian town, providing Jewish men and women an opportunity to engage in charity, the care of the sick and the growing number of indigent Jews, as well as the burial of the dead. No doubt these voluntary associations were partially stimulated by similar Christian sodalities, but they were also an expression of internal Jewish needs, both economic and religious. They provided an outlet for enhanced public prayer, even innovations in times and texts of liturgy, and intense spiritual fellowship. They were particularly receptive settings for the new pietistic and mystical trends emanating from Israel into Italy.

At the same time, within the ghetto walls themselves, Jewish intellectual life displayed a remarkable openness to external culture. Ironically, Jewish writers and official communal scribes expressed themselves more frequently in Italian than they had done during the Renaissance. Jewish intellectuals, to an even greater extent than before, studied Latin and Italian literature (a few even Greek), rhetoric, history, music, and art; read and wrote poetry in Hebrew and Italian; and especially mastered medicine and the sciences. Conventional Jewish history textbooks usually offer the erudite Azariah de’ Rossi (c. 1511–1578) or the prodigious Leone Modena as the most typical exemplars of Renaissance Jewish culture. The first penned the most significant work of Jewish historiography among Italian Jews called the *Me’or Einayim* (Enlightenment to the Eyes), a critical historical evaluation of Talmudic chronology correlated with non Jewish sources of late antiquity, in 1575. The second was a prolific writer, a gifted preacher, and skillful polemicist who served the Venetian Jewish community in the early seventeenth century. Yet both pursued their “Renaissance” interests in a post-Renaissance age, or more precisely within the cultural world of the counter-Reformation and emerging ghetto environment. Similarly, Salamone Rossi (c. 1570–c. 1630) composed his famous “Renaissance” madrigals within the confines of the Mantuan ghetto.

The limitations of ghetto life do not appear to have inhibited numerous Jews from attending Italian medical schools, especially in Padua, in unprecedented numbers in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries. In fact, during the ghetto era more rabbis and communal leaders than ever before possessed medical educations, were literate in a variety of scientific literatures in addition to rabbinics, were conversant with Italian literature and music, and enjoyed writing and reading poetry. Despite the apparent intentions of the planners of the ghetto, its ultimate products were hardly isolationists. On the contrary, the enclosure in a restricted space might even have accentuated the desire of many Jewish intellectuals to engage more intensely in the

enticing cultural world just beyond the suffocating walls of their enclosed neighborhoods.

The ghetto ironically became the setting for an explosive diffusion of Jewish culture of all varieties—rabbinic, kabbalistic, moralistic, scientific, and literary—through the agency of the printing press. Despite the threat of church censorship, the Italian-Jewish communities of the late 16th to 18th centuries, especially Venice, became publishing capitals of the Jewish world. Indeed many of the first great publishers of Hebrew books were Christians, and because of the pressing need for literary competence in typesetting and proofreading, their collaborators were usually Jews. The publishing houses were yet another example of how the church’s attempt to impoverish Jewish life and erect a barrier between Jews and the outside world had manifestly failed.

In sum, long before the coming of emancipation, the Risorgimento, and the demolishing of the ghetto walls by the mid-19th century, the Jews of Italy were prepared for the transition out of the ghetto. While faithfully entrenched in the Jewish traditions of their past, they had long accepted worldly culture as a natural part of that heritage and were constantly engaged in harmonizing the old with the new and in reconciling the disparate elements of a richly complex Jewish cultural environment.

Epilogue

Having surveyed some 1800 years of Jewish life in Italy, we finally are obliged to reflect on the lines of continuity in this vast cultural legacy and on its significance for Jewish and general history. We have found three recurrent themes: the longevity of Jewish residence and culture in Italy, the role this community played in the mediation and correlation of Jewish and non Jewish cultures, and its function as a channel of ideas and values to other Jewish communities.

In absorbing diverse Jewish and non Jewish cultural forms and creatively molding them into constantly novel configurations, in patiently tolerating diversity and discord, in channeling ideas and values from one place to another as a clearinghouse of merchandise, and in allowing individuality to blossom within a framework of communal consensus, Italian Jewry was expressing its own vitality, its own creativity. From the perspective of the post-modern world in which we live, one of diverse cultural lifestyles and values where no single ideology reigns supreme but where bitter acrimony and extremism hold sway, the image of Italian Jewry seems refreshingly appealing. Perhaps in its quiet sanity and dignified restraint, in its mutual respect and tolerance for competing and dissenting parties, and in its harmonizing and integrative capacities, can be located not only the essential legacy of Italian-Jewish civilization but also its enduring significance for contemporary culture. B

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Livorno: A Crossroads in the History of Sephardic Religious Music

Prof. Edwin Seroussi

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Several musical traditions developed among Italian Jews: the “Italiano” rite (centered in Rome), the “Tedesco” (German, i.e. Ashkenazic) tradition in the North and, from the early 16th century, several Sephardic traditions of different geographical origin. The vitality of these distinctive traditions declined steadily from the late 19th century, and even more sharply after World War II. The influence of Italian opera and other concert music, particularly noticeable from the 19th century on, was a significant factor in the shaping of their present state.

In this article we shall attempt to understand the nature of synagogue music from Livorno (Leghorn) from the 18th century onwards. Livorno was a fascinating community, serving as a cultural crossroads, a nexus where the carriers of different Sephardic traditions from the Eastern and Western Mediterranean encountered and enriched each other. Melodies from the Italian-Sephardic synagogue tradition as practiced in Livorno were transmitted to other Sephardic communities in Italy and around the Mediterranean in the early 20th century. Livornese-trained cantors served and introduced melodies from their musical heritage at their new posts in Bucharest, Alexandria, Marseilles, Tunis, Tripoli, Rhodes and Gibraltar. The choral tradition from Livorno spread to other cities in Italy, particularly to Florence, often superseding the old Italian rite.

Our knowledge of the early Livornese synagogue music derives from several sources. The oral traditions were recorded by Dr. Leo Levi and Federico Consolo. We have surviving manuscripts of choral music dating from the second half of the 19th century. There are also descriptions of musical activities in various periodicals, books, prayer books and song collections. In addition, an important, unpublished source is a series of letters written by Italian scholars to A. Z. Idelsohn in 1933–34, in response to his inquiries on the music of Italian Jews.

What transpires from these various sources is that the Livornese synagogue music consists of a synthesized patchwork where several Sephardic traditions merge. This synthesis symbolizes the peculiar history of this particular community: its converso, Portuguese origins; its position as a center of learning, attracting Jews from North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean; and the accelerated process of modernization that characterized most Italian Jewish communities from the second half of the 19th century on.

Thus, in the sources from Livorno we find Spanish-Portuguese traditions common to the synagogues from Amsterdam, London, and Hamburg; traditions from Morocco, Tunisia, and Salonika; and original compositions in the Baroque, Classic, and Romantic styles of Western art music and choral arrange-

ments of traditional melodies written by professional composers who served the Livornese community. Pieces from the repertoires of synagogues in other Italian cities (Venice in particular) and from Paris are also found in Livornese sources.

The earliest musical scores from Jewish Livorno are connected to the kabbalist Rabbi Raphael Emmanuel Hay Ricchi (Ferrara 1688–Modena 1743). Having visited Florence, Trieste, Venice, Constantinople, Izmir, Salonika, Amsterdam, London, and Safed, Ricchi had rich international experience, and probably gathered musical traditions from different sources within the Sephardic sphere.

Ricchi composed melodies for two *piyyutim* (liturgical poems) from the circumcision ceremony. They were notated

at his request by the renowned Jewish composer from Amsterdam, Abraham Caceres, and published in Ricchi’s commentary on the Mishnah, *Hon ‘Ashir* (Amsterdam, 1730/1). Ricchi also included in his *Parpera’ot le-Hokhma* (published in Livorno, 1742) libretti for several short cantatas intended for musical performance during the Jewish festivals and several other festive occasions. The titles of these texts leave no doubt as to their intended musical performance: “Recitativa [sic]—Arietta.” Moreover, two of them bear the explicit title *al pi ha-musiqā*, i.e., “accord to [composed or instrumental] music.”

From Ricchi’s evidence we can see that Hebrew art music in the Baroque style, probably with instrumental accompaniment, was customary among the Jews in Livorno as early as the 1740s. On the other hand, the notations in *Hon ‘Ashir* unveil his acquaintance with melodies of Ottoman Sephardic origin. The tune that Ricchi adapted to one of his *piyyutim* is a variant of the melody for *Lekha dodi* that was still sung by the Turkish Jews in Vienna in the late 19th century.

Art music was also performed at 18th-century Jewish weddings in Livorno. At the wedding of Jacob and Anne Aghib, music composed especially for this occasion by Maestro Horacion Mei, organist of the Cathedral of Livorno, was performed. At the same wedding, the Livornese Pietro Nardini, chief musician at the Court of Florence and one of the most distinguished Italian violinists of the 18th century, played a Sonata and the bride sang an aria “as an amateur.”

The propensity to incorporate Western art music into the synagogue further increased at the beginning of the 19th century. The tenure of composer Michele Bolaffi (1768–1842) as musical director can be considered a turning point in the development of choral and instrumental music in the Great Synagogue of Livorno. Bolaffi was a figure of international stature, having served in England, Germany, and France.

The choral repertoire of Livorno was not limited to works by local composers. The influence of French synagogue music is apparent in the inclusion of works by the liturgical composers Samuel Naumbourg (1817–80) and Emile Jonas (1927–1905) in the Livornese collections. Also present in the



The first page of Michele Bolaffi's Mizmor Ledavid

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Livornese repertoire is a work found in the choral repertoire of the Portuguese synagogue in Bayonne. *Ezrekha el mi-qodesh*, which is attributed to rabbi "Cologna," is based on the tune of "Gott erhalte Franz den Kaiser" (the hymn of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, set to the melody by Joseph Haydn).

The development of the choral elements in the music of the services during this period was reflected in the architecture of Livorno's Great Synagogue. In the years 1846–48, when the ark was reconstructed and enlarged, a special area was reserved for the choir.

The growing role of choral music at all the public events held in the Livorno synagogue is also documented in news items. From *Il Vessillo Israelitico* we learn that choral music with instrumental accompaniment was performed at weddings, funerals, anniversaries of the foundation of communal institutions, and also events related to the Jewish schools. The funeral services of Fortunata Milul, for example, were presided over by the chief cantor Moise Ventura accompanied by the choir conducted by his son, Ernesto Ventura. On the occasion of a party on behalf of the *Società di Soccorso agli Asfittici*, Cantor Moise Ventura officiated. He sang Psalm 61 and the blessing for the well-being of the king and the people of Italy with organ accompaniment. As a contemporary testimony recalls: "This...party left a lasting impression on the public, who attends each year to enjoy the sublime music of the immortal Maestro Garzia."

Purim celebrations at the synagogue were particularly grandiose. Unlike the traditional folk songs that were sung during the festive meal at private homes, the services at the synagogue were occasions for elaborate musical performances. An account from 1888 states:

The *Società coral* deserves special praise because it sings without salary.... The solemn *mincha* service on the day of Purim was a great success. Never in the past were so many people seen at the synagogue.... The *pizmonim* were sung this year to music by the immortal Maestro Garzia accompanied by harmonium. The youngsters Veroli and Ventura formed with the others an ensemble of voices for the pleasure of the large and cultured public. Once the prayer ended, the choir director Giuseppe Pontecorboli was praised and the members of the community presented him with a smoking kit.

The influence of the synagogue music from Livorno is also evident in the mobility of cantors from this city who were employed by Jewish communities in other parts of Italy and France. Some compositions by Livornese cantors and composers were disseminated by Sephardic scholars who had attended yeshivot in Livorno on their return to their communities in North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean. The best example of this phenomenon is the setting of Mizmor le-David by Michele Bolaffi, which is sung to this day in many Sephardic and non-Sephardic communities around the globe. [The first page of this music is reproduced on the preceding page, and it will be heard at Zamir's concert on June 8.]

The new synagogue music by 19th-century composers such as Bolaffi coexisted in Livorno with the traditional repertoire of Sephardic origin chanted by the cantor. The latter, however, was eroded at the expense of the former. This

phenomenon was lamented, in retrospect, by Cantor Ernesto Ventura in the 1930s. In his own words:

Rabbi [Elia] Benamozegh was right and...I myself am guilty [of substituting new music in place of the traditional]. In fact one could compose magnificent pieces, by harmonizing and, in a certain manner, developing the traditional melodies and modes of our tradition. It is necessary, however, to have in mind that today the mentality is different and diverse and, let's face it, more healthy than that of old times. In the synagogues of Bolaffi the so-called intellectuals...had little appreciation for the traditional chants then in use.

In summation, the diversity of musical traditions found in Livorno stem from the composite character of the Jewish population of this city. The Livornese synagogues served as a crossroads where diverse Sephardic traditions met, were assimilated by visiting scholars, and were transmitted by them to other Sephardic centers in the Mediterranean basin. Moreover, Livorno was at the vanguard of the Jewish communities of Europe in the modernization process of liturgical music. An organ was used in its main synagogue already in the late 18th century, and original choral music replaced much of the traditional repertoire during the 19th century. This is the complex picture that emerges from the rich musical traditions of Livorno. B

Edwin Seroussi is Associate Professor of Musicology and Director of the Jewish Music Research Centre at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He is considered one of the leading ethnomusicologists in the fields of Jewish and Israeli music.

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The Song of *I-Tal-Yah**

A Sound-Guided Tour Across Jewish Italy

Francesco Spagnolo

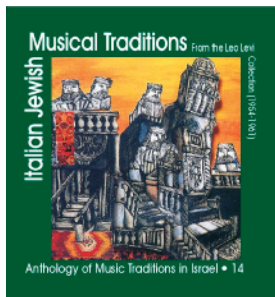
An old joke tells that in Jewish Hell (if there is such thing, of course), people study *gemarah* [part of the Talmud] day and night. And that in Jewish Heaven (ditto), people also study *gemarah* day and night, only understanding it. In my Jewish music version of this joke, I paint quite a different scenario: in Hell we would keep hearing the same old songs over and over again (call up the tune of your choice), and in *gan eden* [heaven] we would get to continuously discover new melodies. Unexpected *nigunim* [devotional tunes], forgotten lyrics, fantastic *nusah* [modes], all working together to shape an extraordinary Jewish musical past which would become alive before our ears *'ad ein sof*, without interruption.

This kind of Paradise can be found on earth: it has a real address—even an Internet one—and visiting hours. I am referring, of course, to the National Sound Archives (NSA) of the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem (<http://www.jnul.ac.il>). Since their foundation by Israel Adler in 1964, their rooms host a magnificent collection of sound recordings from all corners of the Diaspora.

I have been an *aficionado* of the NSA for some years now. My presence there recently culminated in the publication of the CD *Italian Jewish Musical Traditions from the Leo Levi Collection (1954-1961)*, an anthology consisting forty-two songs drawn from field recordings, issued by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome. In this article, I will use this CD as our sound companion to a musical journey into the past, attempting to fill the now almost empty synagogues of Italy with their original music, and to understand the melodies that are still sung there. If Jewish heritage travelers to Italy consider musical memory as an essential part of their travel gear, my publication will have reached its goal.

Thanks to scholarly research on the extraordinary activities of Salamone Rossi, Leone Modena and other musicians, today we know a lot about the Italian Jewish “art music scene” of the late Renaissance and the Baroque era. Rossi’s *Ha-shirim asher lishlomo* (1622), Carlo Grossi’s *Cantata Hebraica in dialogo* (1682), and the fascinating compositions for the *Hosha’na Rabbah* celebrations in the Piedmont synagogue of Casale Monferrato (1730s), give us a vivid image of the vitality of ghetto life and the far-reaching cultural ambitions of those segregated Jews. These compositions—often featured in concerts in Europe and in the U.S., and recorded by various artists—are now a most welcome ingredient in the wide spectrum of the Jewish musical world. Yet, in spite of all this, we still have very little knowledge of the music that was *ordinarily* a part of Italian Jewish everyday life in the past.

* The author is citing a wonderful Jewish wordplay. “Italia” is not merely the name of the country. The three words – I TAL YAH – in Hebrew mean “the island of God’s [blessings of] dew.”—The Editors



Not all Italian Jewish music was art music, and not all Italian Jewish art music was composed in the 17th and 18th centuries. Indeed, in synagogues and in private homes, in liturgy and in life-cycle celebrations, in Hebrew and Judeo-Italian, tunes for the cantillation of the Bible and the Passover *Hagaddah*, melodies for prayers, psalms and *piyyutim* (liturgical poems) were, and some still are, sung by the Jews throughout Italy. Most of this orally transmitted heritage was lost over the first half of the 20th century, and can only be heard through the recordings made by Leo Levi in the 1950s. Together with what one can still hear today in the synagogues of a few Italian cities—travelers should definitely consider Rome, Livorno, Florence, Venice and Turin for this purpose—archival sounds help us paint an unexpected landscape.

The music preserved as oral tradition by the Jews of Italy in the 20th century takes us back into history, and tells us a great deal about the life of the Italian communities in the past. Leo Levi’s recordings are the remnants of what Italian Jews sang before the Second World War. This was a time of decadence in traditional Jewish life. The glorious days of the Emancipation and the massive Jewish participation in Italy’s own national struggle, the Risorgimento (iconized by Verdi’s *Nabucco*), were followed by a wave of unrestrained assimilation, and later by the *shoah*. Retrospectively, we should be thankful for this decadence. In the first decades of the 20th century, Jewish traditional life somehow “froze” into a static condition that today enables us to “peek” backwards across history. Thanks to the tools of ethnomusicology, we can draw a fairly accurate picture of what happened in earlier times.

Throughout the 19th century, the Jewish communities enjoyed the benefits of the Emancipation. With the exception of Rome (whose Jews remained under Papal rule until 1870), the Emancipation edicts of 1848 put an end to the humiliations of ghetto life, allowed nation-wide access to public education, and left Jews free to engage in a wide spectrum of activities which included politics, business, liberal professions, culture and art. The middle of the century was marked by a loudly announced need for “modernization.” This included toying with the European Reform movement (which found a very subtle way into Italian Jewry), welcoming the introduction of the organ and of choral music into the ritual, “rediscovering” the music of Salamone Rossi (the finding of an original copy of his *Ha-shirim* in Parma in 1873, four years before Samuel Naumbourg reissued them in Paris, gave way to a harsh disapproval of the orthodox criticism of the “new” musical practices), and more generally creating a whole new genre of “sacred music” in the synagogue.

Beginning in the 1840s, the communities of Verona, Trieste, Mantova and Vercelli began spreading the word of

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The Dishes of the Jews of Italy: A Historical Survey

Claudia Roden

Much of this material reflects my research for The Book of Jewish Food, published by Alfred A. Knopf in the United States and by Viking/Penguin in the United Kingdom, 1997.

Every cuisine tells a story—usually it is the story of a country. Jewish cooking tells the history of a people and its vanished worlds. It is about ancestral memories and holding on to an ancient culture and a very old identity. The Jewish food of Italy is an integral part of the history and culture of the Jews in Italy. Where there is a fresco with a menorah, a tombstone with Hebrew lettering, a *via della Sinagoga*, or a *piazza Giudea*, there is also a dish from that place. And behind every dish there is a story. This largely untold story has generally been ignored by the large number of writers of Jewish cultural history, who usually consider the subject as a relatively minor aspect—only of interest to women—of Jewish life. So what follows is an attempt at explaining how the subject of Italian Jewish food is closely connected with the history of the Jewish communities in Italy.

Most Italian Jews live now in large cities such as Rome, Milan, and Turin. Many of the old historic communities that were once scattered throughout Italy have disappeared or have lost their identity, but the old Jewish recipes remain as a testimony to their existence. Looking at the alphabetical index of recipes in a book titled *La cucina nella tradizione ebraica*, a collection of recipes from members of the Jewish women's ADEI WIZO organization, there are arancini candidi di Padova, baccald e spinaci all'uso fiorentino, biscotti di Ancona, biscotti senza burro (Pavia); brassadel di Purim (Trieste); buricchi di pasta frolla (Ferrara), budino di zucca gialla Veneto; cacciucco alla livornese and cuscuzzi livornese (Leghorn); cefali in umido di Modena. Such recipes are a witness to once famous and thriving communities that have declined or disappeared altogether.

What was it that made a dish Jewish? Adaptations of local produce and recipes to comply with dietary laws meant that oil or goose fat were used instead of butter or pork fat for cooking. For the same reason many dairy and vegetable dishes were developed to provide substantial meatless meals. The need to find substitutes for forbidden foods like pork and seafood resulted in the creation of specialities like goose prosciutto and salami in Ancona, and a white-fish soup in Livorno.

In the days when cooking revolved around the Sabbath and religious holidays, dishes that were chosen to celebrate these occasions acquired embellishments such as coloring with saffron or sprinkling with raisins and pine nuts. The laws of the Sabbath, which prohibit any work, gave rise to complex meals-in-one-pot to be prepared on Friday afternoon and left to cook overnight for Saturday. An example is the *hamin toscano* or *polpettone difagioli*—a veal loaf cooked with white beans, beef sausages, hard boiled eggs, and tomatoes. Another result of the prohibition is a large repertoire of dishes to be eaten cold on Saturday. Centuries before Americans popularized pasta salads Jews were the only Italians to eat cold pasta.

At Pesach ground almonds, potato flour, matzo meal, and matzos were used to make all kinds of pizzas, cakes, pies, dumplings, pancakes, and fritters. There is no end of little Pesach cakes like amaretti, marza-pane, moscardini, mucchiatti, scodelline, zuccherini, ciambellette, mustaccioni—to name a few. Certain foods became symbolic dishes to celebrate festivals, like pollo fritto, chicken dipped in batter and fried in oil, at Hanukkah.

Most importantly it was their mobility and the impact of Jewish immigrants from abroad that made Jewish food distinctive. Jews were often expelled from their countries, but, as Italy was a patchwork of independent states, they could escape from one to the other. Since each state was entirely ignorant of the cooking of its neighbors, the foods Jews brought from one state to another remained forever linked with them. Vegetables like aubergines, artichokes, and spinach, for instance, were thought of as Jewish—although it is the Arabs who brought them to Sicily—as it was the Jews who introduced them in the north of Italy.

The earliest and largest settlements of Jews had been in Rome and southern Italy, and especially in Sicily, until their expulsion in the late 15th century. The Jewish communities in Sicily had been at one time the richest in culture and tradition among the Jews of the diaspora. They benefited from their position at the heart of the Mediterranean traffic and from the cultural and economic impact of foreign occupiers, who included Arabs, Normans, Angevins, and Aragonese. Under Muslim rule from 831 to 1061 the Jewish population increased greatly with new immigrants from Muslim lands. The communities traded with the East and became Arabized in their tastes.

In 1492, on the orders of Ferdinand of Spain, Jews were banished from Sicily and Sardinia and, a few years later, from the whole of southern Italy. Around thirty-five thousand Jews left Sicily alone. There has been little or no Jewish population in those parts since, but the foods they took with them when they fled to the central and northern cities are still associated with them. Many of the dishes labelled “alla giudia” or “all’ebraica,” such as pasta with anchovies and garlic, *concia di zucchini*, fried courgettes marinated in vinegar, *caponata*, a sweet and sour aubergine dish, are the dishes of Sicily, Puglia, Basilicata, and Naples. Some, like the ricotta pancake *cassola*, are an archaic version of modern cheese cakes. (Among their activities in Sicily Jews made ricotta cheese. They also grew oranges.)

The mass migration of Jews from the south to cities of central and northern Italy coincided with the arrival there of refugees from German lands at the same time as refugees from Spain and Portugal. After the institution of the ghettos (decreed by Pope Paul IV in 1559) the Jews were segregated in special quarters, which were walled in, and severe restrictions were imposed on them. In almost all the major cities the Jews were confined in ghettos for up to three hundred years.

It is in the ghettos that the various Jewish styles of cook-

The Dishes of Italy, Continued from previous page

ing developed. They were different in every ghetto and reflected the local regional styles as well as those of the foreign refugees who joined the communities. The economic situation also had a bearing on food. Some communities were very poor while others were close to the courts and the nobility.

The ghetto of Rome was the most desperately cramped one and its inhabitants, who were the poorest in Italy, were forbidden to own property and were excluded from most professions except money-lending, dealing in old clothes and bric-a-brac, and selling food in the street. Many of them became friggitori—street vendors of deep-frying morsels, mainly of fish and vegetables—for which they became famous.

Several of the old dishes, like the chickpea dish *ceci coipennerelli* and the *aliciotti con l'indivia* (anchovies with chicory), reflect the poverty of the community (anchovies being the cheapest fish). Many other dishes also reflect the diversity of the Roman community, which included refugees from Sicily and the south.

In the Venice ghetto, on the other hand, Jewish cooking was exotic and cosmopolitan. The first Jews allowed in the city were loan bankers from Germany. In the 15th and 16th centuries waves of Jews came from Provence and from around the Veneto area, as well as Ponen. The city authorities dealt with the newcomers by separating the communities into three ghettos linked to each other. Despite the squalid conditions, the ever-decreasing space, the vulnerable position of its dwellers, and the restrictions imposed on their professional activities, the ghetto knew an extraordinary intensity of artistic and intellectual life and commercial prosperity. It became an intellectual capital and center for travelling Jews. The coming together of Jews of different backgrounds was also reflected in their style of cooking.

The Levantini brought *riso pilaf* and *riso colle uvette* (rice with raisins eaten cold, as in Istanbul). The Ponentini introduced salt cod dishes, *frittate* (vegetable omelettes) and almond sweets, orange cakes and flans, and chocolate cakes. The Levantini and Ponentini, who controlled the spice trade and the commerce in fruit and nuts, introduced a range of spices and flavorings. The Arab combination of pine nuts and raisins came with the Sicilians and the Levantini.

The Tedeschi introduced goose and duck, beef sausages and goose salami, *pesce in gelatina* (jellied fish) and *polpettine di pesce* (gefilte fish), *penini de vedelo in gelatina* (calf's foot jelly) and *kneidlach*, which became *cugoli*. An example of this mixture of cultures is *pastizzo dipolenta* with raisins and pine nuts. Another is the *boricche*—small pies half way between Portuguese *empanadas* and Turkish *boreks* but with fillings unique to Italy, such as fish with hard-boiled egg, anchovies, and capers, with fried aubergines and courgettes or pumpkin with crushed amaretti and chopped crystallized citrus peel.

In his book *La cucina veneziana* Giuseppe Maffioli writes that Jewish cooking had a great impact on the local cuisine and that, despite their forbidden foods, the Jews had a more varied diet than the Christians. Among the Jewish dishes adopted by Venice, he cites many vegetables 'alla giudia,' salt

cod dishes, almond pastries, and puff pastry. There is the famous *pesce in saor*—fried fish marinated in vinegar with raisins, pine nuts, and aubergines, which the Venetians at first feared would drive them mad, and the tradition of making risotti with every possible type of vegetable. The famous Milanese *riso giallo* is the Sabbath *riso col zafran*.

Persecutions in Germany and the Rhinelands sent waves of refugees across the Alps from as early as the 11th century. They represent the origin of the majority of communities of northern Italy and they brought with them stuffed goose, potato cakes, cabbage, apple fritters, and other specialities from those parts.

In Piedmont, in the old Kingdom of Savoy, a large part of the communities there can be traced back to an influx of Jews from Provence and the Comtat Venaissin, which began in the 15th century. One of the French-style dishes is *apolpettone di tacchino*—a galantine of turkey or chicken with minced veal and pistachios. Other Provençal dishes that have been adapted to the Jewish tradition are the *patate epomodori* of Ferrara, which is like *atian* with baked layers of potatoes and tomatoes, and the curious Tuscan sweet spinach tart, *torta di mandorle e spinaci*, which is only to be found in the South of France.

Since the 14th and 15th centuries, loan banking had developed all over Italy, and as this activity was forbidden to Christians, the Jews were called upon to provide this service. They were invited into many cities where they financed economic expansion as well as the local nobility, who became their protectors. Thousands of Jews came to live in cities such as Ferrara and Modena, Mantua, Verona and Padua, Florence, Pisa, Lucca and Siena, where they prospered, and where Jewish life flourished and Jewish cooking reached a high level of sophistication. Many exquisite and refined dishes like the *buriccheferraresi* (little pies), the *arancini canditi patiorani* and the *tortelli di zucca* (pasta filled with pumpkin) of Mantova, are associated with these cities.

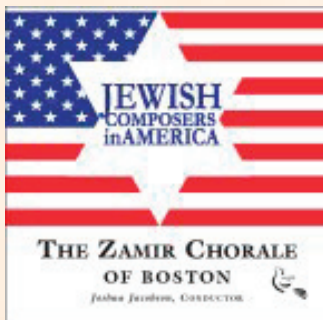
The 16th and 17th centuries was the age of great Jewish merchants. Many were Sephardim and conversos. Their wide-ranging commercial activities were centered in northern and central cities such as Ancona, Ferrara, Livorno, and Venice. They traded with their relatives and co-religionists around the Mediterranean, including their new Christian connections in Spain and Portugal and those in South America. Through these contacts they introduced New World food products such as tomatoes, pumpkin, maize, and haricot beans. (That is why red mullet cooked with tomatoes in Livorno is called *triglie alla mosaica*, and a tomato sauce in Venice is called *alia giudia*.) Pumpkin too—despised for a long time by the general population—was considered Jewish. Many pumpkin dishes are still Jewish favorites.

Livorno is particularly important in Jewish gastronomy. In 1593 the Grand Duke Ferdinando del Medici turned the city into a free port and invited in merchants of all nations and Jews in particular. In a statute, known as the *Livornina*, he granted them tax exemptions, freedom of commerce, freedom of religious practice, including the opportunity to revert to Judaism if they wished, and permission to build synagogues, as well

Continued on page 30



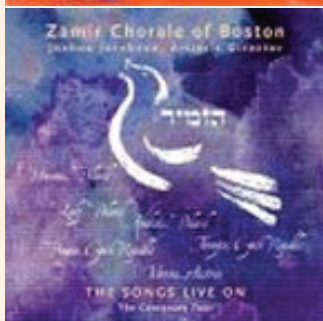
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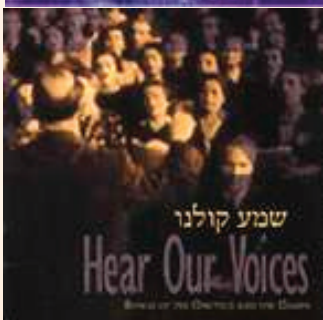
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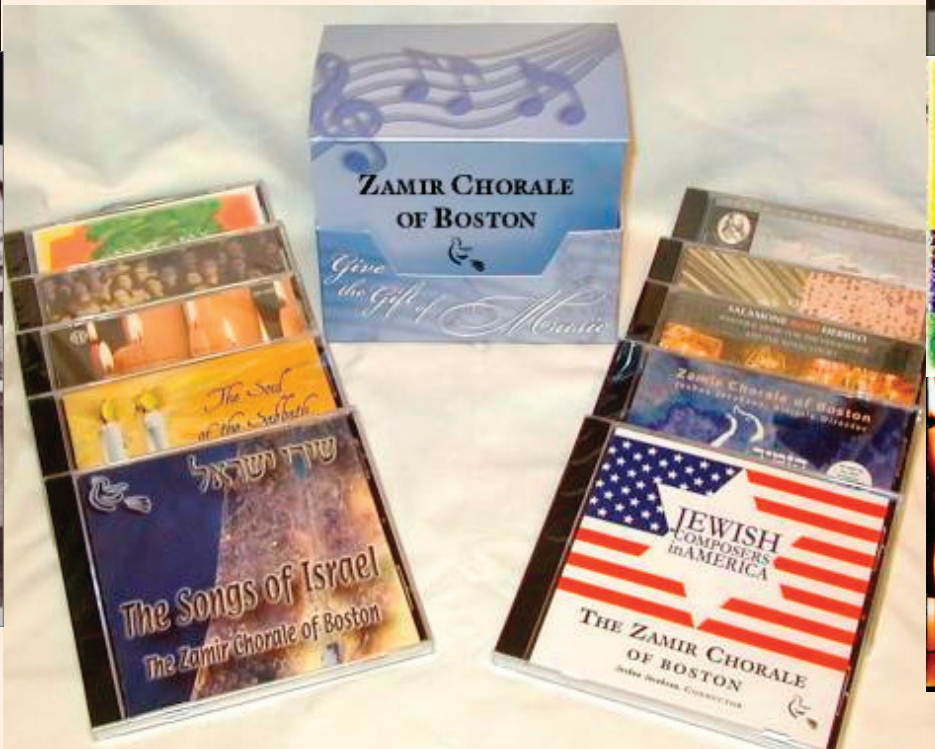
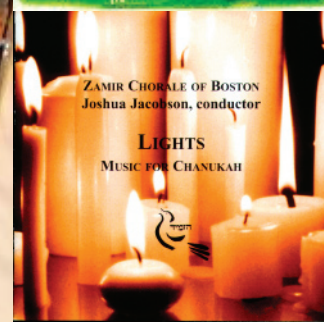
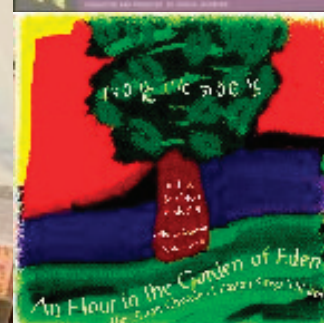
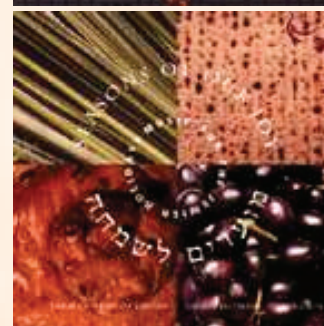
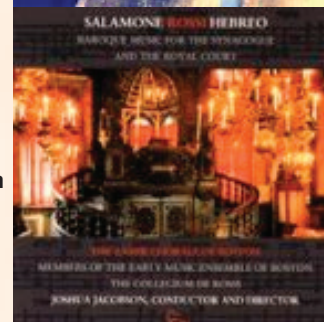
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The Songs of Italy, continued from page 26

musical innovation. New celebrations were created. *Bar* and *bat mitzva* celebrations became customary in many communities, and since 1848 the “*Khag Ha-kherut*”—an annual religious commemoration of the Emancipation edict—gave the opportunity for writing new poems and devising new musical settings. Since the 1860s, a new genre of musical celebration became customary: that for the inaugurations of the newly built monumental synagogues, as in Florence, Vercelli, and Trieste. Many tunes, sung as solo pieces by the cantors in the 20th century, bear the traces of their polyphonic origins. Almost every community took pride in creating a choral society (which operated on a volunteer basis as a form of *tsedaqah* [righteous action] offered by the performers to the community) and in providing musical training to the youth in order to “add to the decorum” of the new synagogues (for example, Psalm 29 from Casale Monferrato and *Yigdal* from Gorizia).

However, not everything was “innovated,” and pockets of earlier forms of music remained a part of the tradition in spite of the openly declared intent to erase the memory of the ghettos. Thus the melodies transmitted orally into the 20th century are a fantastic tool towards understanding what kinds of music were sung in the various communities before the Emancipation. The cantillation (public singing) of the Torah was not touched; until today, each community has preserved different ways of interpreting the *te’amim*, the musical accents of the Bible, according to its *minhag* [tradition]. Six different traditions can be discerned in Italy: two Italian variants, two Sep-

hardi variants from East and West, Ashkenazi, and *Apam*, the latter a French ritual preserved in Piedmont. Moreover, entire sections of the liturgy seem to have remained faithful to older sources. In particular, this applies to the liturgy of the High Holy Days, which generally bear traces of modality and of little innovation. The great quantity of melodies drawn from the operatic repertoire—all inspired by the canons of *bel canto*—are also of an earlier origin. Strongly criticized by the supporters of the Reform in the 1850s, operatic arias were stigmatized as “*musica del teatro*,” tasteless leftovers of ghetto life.

Finally, the wealth of paraliturgical songs is particularly instructive in this domain. The *zemirot* [table hymns] for the Sabbath, several Judeo-Italian versions of *khad gadya* and *ekhad mi yodea* for the Passover Seder, Purim party songs, and tunes for weddings and circumcisions, all point to life in the 18th century ghettos. The *zemer* “*Tsur mishelo akhalnu*” from Ferrara, the Piedmontese adaptation of *khad gadya*, the aria-like wedding song by Samuel Archivolti, and the *Bar Yokhai* hymn for Roman pre-circumcision ceremonies portray a different world. We also learn of a world of women’s repertoire sung in private homes, popular rituals discouraged by the rabbinical authorities, revealing a deep connection between Jews and non-Jews in their daily lives.

These songs come to us from the same ghettos in which Salamone Rossi and other privileged Jewish intellectuals and artists also dwelled, but they speak of a life that was different, less glamorous, but perhaps even more revealing. **B**
Francesco Spagnolo is the founder and director of YUVAL Italia—The Italian Center for the Study of Jewish Music in Milan.

The Dishes of Italy, continued from page 28

as personal protection. The great majority of Jews who came to the city were Portuguese conversos and it is they who shaped the character of the community as well as the style of cooking. They were rich and cultured and had had a century of life as Christians, mingling and marrying into the Iberian upper classes. Portuguese delicacies like *uovafilate orfili d’oro* (threads of egg yolk cooked in syrup), *Monte Sinai*, *bocca di ciama*, and *scodelini* are among their legacies. Their chocolate cakes are a result of their trade with the converso community of Amsterdam. That community had started the first chocolate industry with cocoa sent to them by New Christians in South America.

The dishes of Livorno had an impact beyond the borders of Italy, because the Livornese Jews sent relatives to various North African and Levantine cities such as Tunis, Tripoli (in Libya), Izmir, Aleppo, and Alexandria to develop interfamily commerce. And the cooking habits of these cities were influenced by these new settlers.

In the 16th century a group of Livornese Jews who went to Tunis to finance ransoms and arrange the release of converso hostages captured by pirates were invited to stay on by the local Beys as treasury officials, diplomats, and consuls. The flow of Livornese immigrants to Tunis continued until the 19th century, and they formed their own community, separate from the native Berber Jews. It was a two-way traffic and their cooking—a mixture of Tunisian, Italian and Portuguese—found its way back to Livorno. The many North African dishes including cuscuss, and an extraordinary and unusual vegetable and meatball stew called *msoky*, date-filled pastries and dates

stuffed with marzipan, are among the foods that reflect this continuing connection with North Africa.

Another city that has an important Jewish community is Trieste. It was an important port city and its community was indeed cosmopolitan. Since the 11th century, German, Spanish, French, and Levantine Jews had settled there, and when Iberian Jews came in large numbers their synagogue rites were adopted. In the 19th century Jews came from Corfu fleeing the Greeks and, when Austria annexed the city, many came to the city from all over the Hapsburg empire. The Jews of Trieste were professionals and intellectuals. They became affluent and some became part of the Habsburg nobility and acquired titles. Their cooking was a varied mix with dishes such as *gulyas* and *paracinche* (stuffed pancakes) of Hungarian origin, the yeast cake *potizza* of Austrian descent, and the Yugoslav bean soup called *jota*, all of which they made in their own particular way.

Unfortunately, in spite of the rich tradition of Italian Jewish cuisine going back many centuries, hardly anything is known abroad or even in Italy today of the many different types of foods and ways of preparing them—apart from the artichokes deep-fried whole with the leaves opened out like a sunflower. In fact, with very few exceptions, you cannot find this food in any restaurant. But there is now a revival of interest in Jewish dishes in Italy, as in many other countries, and it is hoped that this precious link with the past will not be allowed to disappear. **B**

Claudia Roden was born and raised in Cairo. In 1989 she received the two most prestigious food prizes of Italy—the Premio Orto Vergani and the Premio Maria Luigia, Duchessa di Parma—for her London Sunday Times Magazine series “The Taste of Italy.”

Healing Israel Through Song

Deborah A. Sosin

In Spring 2002, when Josh Jacobson announced we'd been invited to sing at Israel's 50th Zimriyah, an international choral festival, I didn't even hesitate. Travel to a war zone? Fly out on a Tuesday and return Sunday, with three concerts in three days? No way.

And the October trip was dubbed a "mission?" Ludicrous! How is it a mission to bring Jewish music to Jews? Sing Israeli songs to Israelis? We wouldn't be helping anyone. We wouldn't be feeding the hungry, planting trees, building houses.

Then I started to think, read, ask questions. Friends and colleagues from Zamir and Hebrew College regularly flew back and forth safely—for business, weddings, funerals and family visits. I sought their counsel. "It's a personal choice," some offered. "There are no guarantees."

Others urged, "You must go! Israel needs to know Americans still care—we must express our solidarity. How can you not go?"

Josh said it was a mission just to show up. Still I wavered.

I'm not a politician. I'm not a hero or even much of a risk taker. I'm a singer. And Zamir is my musical and spiritual family. We work, play, travel, share meals, kvetch, celebrate and mourn together. It could be a great experience, but... what if?

Life is random, fragile. I thought of 9/11 and watched news of the Maryland sniper attacks saturate the airwaves. Suicide bombers continued their deadly work throughout the summer and into the fall.

There are no guarantees. I would show up. And I would sing.

It was humid in Tel Aviv the morning of October 31. Twenty-four of us trooped up Dizengoff from the Cinema Hotel to Mann Auditorium for our dress rehearsal. Shoppers, students, soldiers and workers crowded the sidewalks. I sensed no fear. Only a hint of wariness, perhaps mine. When our bags were searched at the stage entrance, I felt safe.

Rehearsal went smoothly. During one break, Yael, a thirtysomething soprano, told me softly, "I used to love attending the ballet. I went every chance I could. Now, the artists don't come to Israel anymore. No one comes." I nodded. She turned away.

That night, packed in hip-to-hip along the risers on the vast stage, we joined hundreds of Israeli choristers as well as the New York Zamir Chorale—the only other non-Israeli choir there. Before an audience of 2,000, including Israel's President Moshe Katzav, we stood for "Hatikvah." I recalled

summer camp, 1967, just after the war. Singing the same anthem in the same auditorium. Israel felt invincible then. Hope was pure, unguarded.

After intermission, the two Zamirs formed a two-row horseshoe on the empty stage. Silence. No cell phones beeping, as we had been warned. We sang Gerald Cohen's "Adonai Ro'i," a stunning setting of Psalm 23, and a swinging "Hatsi-Kaddish" by Jack Gottlieb.

"I felt calm, happy, listening to you," a frail, gray-haired woman said later, sighing. "What a gift to us."

Other groups performed and, finally, the massed choirs sang Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms*. Then the entire audience repeated the last a cappella phrase, a shimmering pianissimo chant: "*Hinei mah tov u'mah na'im shevet achim gam yachad*—How wonderful for humankind to dwell in unity."

Our Friday noontime concert in Hadera included a set by the lively Na'ama Women's Choir. Our take on Gershwin's "It Ain't Necessarily So" had them singing along, and Israeli favorites such as "Simona mi-Dimona" triggered rhythmic clapping.

"Terrific!" exclaimed Batya, a Na'ama member, after the show. "We love the old songs!"

On the third day—a glorious, sunny Shabbat in Haifa—I toured the Baha'i Gardens and swam in the Mediterranean at sunset. Families strolled together, young couples clasped hands, elderly men chatted and smoked at busy cafés. Was this the same Israel as I watched on CNN at home?

Hosted by CJP's Boston-Haifa connection, our concert with the Gittit Choir of Haifa capped our odyssey Saturday evening. The sellout audience embraced the American numbers: liturgy meets jazz in Eretz Yisrael. Both choirs joined forces for the finale, Nurit Hirsch's boisterous "Oseh Shalom." Again, the rhythmic clapping. For those moments, we were one—smiling, swaying, carefree.

At the reception, Yuval, a balding, middle-aged Gittit tenor, grabbed my hand. "Here, the economy is depressed. The government is unstable," he said intensely. "But you've cheered us up. Thank you, thank you for coming."

With just a few hours till our 4:00 a.m. bus to the airport, I packed up, still humming "Oseh Shalom": "The Creator of peace in His heights will surely create peace among us, and throughout Israel. And let us say: Amen." B

Deborah Sosin is publications director at Hebrew College, where Zamir is choir-in-residence. This article first appeared in the Jewish Advocate in November 2002 and is reprinted with permission.



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