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The Jewish Moneylenders of Late Trecento Venice: a Revisitation

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The occasional presence of Jews in Venice prior to 1508 and to their segregation in the Ghetto in 1516 remains a topic of unsure contours.¹ While Jewish merchants came and went and Jewish medical doctors can sometimes be found practicing, the only sector of economic activity in which one can clearly define the periods and nature of the Jewish presence is that of moneylending. The prohibition of pawnbroking in Venice itself was a pluri-secular tradition. A Venetian law of 1254 forbade 'manifest' usury *tout court* in the city and in about 1301 doge Pietro Gradenigo boasted that Venice and Venetians were more free of the taint of usury than other peoples² - that in a period when the pawnbrokers were Christians and were relegated to nearby Mestre, then still foreign soil. In 1483, well over a century after Jews had been invited to lend money in Mestre and in many other cities and towns of the Veneto where they took the place of Christian usurers, Marin Sanudo wrote of the castle of Mestre: 'Qui sta molti Zudei et à una bella sinagoga; et quivi se impegna, perché Venetiani non vol Hebrei stagi a Veniexia'; and a decade later he again noted, with undisguised satisfaction, that Jews were prohibited from lending in Venice: 'Et nota una eccellente cosa di Venetia che niun Zudìo, sotto grandissime pene, puol tegnir banco d'imprestar qui a Venetia danari, ma ben a Mestre'. An anonymous French tract of about 1500 similarly points out that Jews did not live in Venice but in Mestre, where they lent at usury of 15 per cent on the security of pawns. The lenders were permitted to come to Venice periodically only to oversee the sale of unredeemed pawns left by Venetians, at auctions organized by the magistracy of the *Sopraconsoli dei Mercanti*.³ The only period in the Middle Ages during which Jews were invited to lend in Venice, an exception to the rule, were the years of the economic crisis following the war of Chioggia, a short period of fifteen years, 1382-97, governed by two charters or 'condotte'. That interlude has been studied primarily on the basis of laws and of

¹ Documents that mention Jews in periods not regulated by charters leave open the question of their juridical status. There are several cases, pointed out by David Jacoby, in which Jews, at various times during the Quattrocento, were accused of having had sexual intercourse with Christian women in Venice; see D. Jacoby, 'Les Juifs à Venise du XIV^e au milieu du XVI^e siècle', in A.G. Beck *et al.*, eds., *Venezia centro di mediazione tra Oriente e Occidente (secoli XV-XVI). Aspetti e problemi*, Acts of the international convention, Venice, 1973 (Florence, 1977), pp. 163-216 (esp. 181-2). See also B. Ravid, 'The Legal Status of the Jew in Venice to 1509', *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, 54 (1987), 169-202.

² 'Terra nostra et cives nostri sunt inter omnes alios huius mundi ab usurae maculis mondiore...'. A. S. Minotto, *Documenta ad Bellunum, Cenetam, Feltria, Tarvisium spectantia* (Venice, 1871), sect. I, p. 84 (the context was a suit concerning the penalty formula then commonly used in Venetian loan contracts).

³ R. Brown, (ed.), *L'itinerario di Marin Sanudo per la terraferma veneziana nell'anno 1483* (Padua, 1847), p. 117, where Sanudo writes that the castle of Mestre lay ten miles by water from Venice, a fact that obviously increased the cost of loans on collateral; A. Caracciolo Aricò (ed.), *De origine, situ et magistratibus urbis Venetae ovvero la città di Venetia (1493-1530)*, (Milan, 1980), p. 136. For Sanudo's notes of 1514-15 on Jewish bankers, already established in Venice, and the subterfuges ('manzarie') they employed in order to increase their rates of interest beyond the legal limit, see *ibid.*, pp. 195, 209, 265-66; compare Jacoby, 'Les Juifs à Venise', 192, n. 133. The passage in the tract entitled *Description ou traictie du gouvernement et regime de la cité et seigneurie de Venise*, chap. 34 (regarding the *Sopraconsoli*), reads: "Lesquelz juifz ne demeurent pas à Venise mais ilz demeurent en une petite ville qui est près Venise environ quatre lieues nommees Mestre ou ilz tiennent des banques et baillent à usure et prouffit de XV pour cent pour chascun an et ne peuvent prendre en gaigne fors seulement des biens meubles et non pas biens immeubles". A critical edition of this tract is being prepared by Ph. Braunstein and R. C. Mueller.

notarial acts.⁴ The scope of the present note is to add to the picture as it is known the testimony of correspondence, business accounts and criminal records on two unconnected themes, the dissatisfaction of the Jews in 1388-89 and their readiness to abandon Venice, and the inter-cultural tie between Venice and the Jews of Spain, victims of the 'pogroms' of 1391.

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The very articles of the second charter, negotiated in late 1385 but effective beginning 21 February 1387, contained the seeds of dissent.⁵ While under the earlier charter Jews were lending at legal rates of interest of 10 per cent on pawns and 12 per cent on written and notarized personal guarantees, the new agreement left it up to the community of lenders to choose whether to retain these maximums and pay a tax of 4000 ducats per year to the Commune, or to avoid the tax but lend at maximums of 8 per cent on pawns and 10 per cent on written guarantees. The Venetian side hoped for the former option, and foresaw that more Jews would be attracted to come to lend in Venice under those conditions. On the basis of the notarial acts that constituted the written guarantees and that are extant for the period in which the new charter was in effect, however, it is clear that the Jews opted for the second solution, for the acts indicate without exception the maximum allowed rate of 10 per cent.⁶

That means that they foresaw lending a total amount annually of less than 200,000 ducats - the limit beyond which it would have been to their advantage to pay the annual tax and charge the higher rates. Moreover, even before the senatorial committee had been named to negotiate the new charter with the Jews, the ducal councillor Pietro Morosini, proponent of early renegotiation, had sustained his position by saying that the Jews had let it be known that they were willing to lend at 8 per cent, especially if the charter were to extend their sojourn till the year 1400.⁷

While the new charter was valid for ten years, that is, not quite until the goal of 1400, the ceiling of 8 per cent placed on loans granted on pawns seems to have created dissent when the charter went into effect. The Jews were willing to lend on pawns of high value, as is to be expected and as they demonstrated in 1387 when three Jews lent some 40,000 ducats to Antonio della Scala, at the request and under the guarantee of the Commune of Venice, on the family jewels of the former lord of Verona - whether at interest or not is undisclosed. On the other hand, they were unwilling to lend relatively small sums on pawns of lesser value at 8 per cent interest, a rate of profit that they knew would be much reduced by administrative and warehousing costs. This was the complaint brought against them by the ducal councillor Michele Contarini and the head of the Forty Rosso Marino on 24 September 1388; their proposal, passed in the Senate, sought to force Jews - under pain of fine - to lend on petty surety. The very existence of the Jews in Venice, they said, was countenanced especially for the aid of the poor, those in need of loans for sums of 30 ducats and less. Such applicants for loans, with pawns in hand, were being turned away by the Jews on the pretext that they had exhausted

⁴ See R. Mueller, *The Procuratori di San Marco and the Venetian Credit Market: A Study of the Development of Credit and Banking in the Trecento* ([1969], New York, 1977), Ch. III, part 4 (summary in *Journal of Economic History*, 30 [1970], 240-3); idem, 'Charitable Institutions, the Jewish Community, and Venetian Society', *Studi veneziani*, 14 (1972), 62-74; idem, 'Les prêteurs juifs de Venise au Moyen Age', *Annales, ESC*, 30 (1975), 1277-1302. Also Jacoby, 'Les Juifs à Venise'; Ravid, 'The Legal Status', 173-82.

⁵ The original and official copy, in a register of Senato, Secreta, is no longer extant; fortunately, a copy was made in a capitulary: Archivio di Stato, Venice (hereafter ASV), Sopraconsoli, b. 1, fol. 66v.

⁶ I had previously based this conclusion on only three acts (see 'Prêteurs juifs', 1285, 1295. Since then I have seen many more, in particular those of the notary Marco Raffanelli, who dealt regularly with Jews and recorded not only their loans, beginning in 1388; see ASV, Cancelleria inferiore, notai, b. 168-70.

⁷ ASV, Senato, Misti, reg. 39, fol. 120 (4 August 1385), not passed. When he re-presented the bill, which then passed (ibid., fol. 139v, 1 Sept. 1385), Morosini substituted the phrase concerning the rate of eight per cent with a more generic 'quod sint [isti Judei] contenti de prestando ad quam minus poterunt'.

their supply of lendable capital; or they were indeed receiving loans but were forced, by devious and underhanded methods, to pay high rates of usury.⁸ On the same day, a law proposed by the same two men warned Jewish pawnbrokers under pain of heavy fine not to accept - from clerics or others - pawns that were objects of cult: altar paintings, chalices, statues of saints and other furnishings of churches. In both cases jurisdiction was given to the Sopraconsoli.⁹

Tension between the authorities and the Jewish community remained high during the following months. While the authorities, in the last article of the new charter, had promised to identify a quarter where the Jews could stay together, in rental properties, 'for their own convenience',¹⁰ and had failed to do so, the same head of the Forty, Rosso Marino, repropoed in October 1388 the same obligation that the state had assumed earlier, but now in the sense of a necessary segregation. The 'honor of the state' was at stake and the Jews, scattered in various parishes throughout the city, were to be given a quarter 'where they would have to stay together... and separate from others'.¹¹ On 31 December a proposal placed before the Senate stated that the Jews were 'indignati et turbati' against the authorities as a result of the law of 24 September which sought to force them to lend sums of 30 ducats or less to the poor; to make their opposition to the law felt, they were refusing to lend the money necessary to get the Flanders galleys off. The bill, which counted on the Provveditori di Comun to force them to lend, was too harshly worded to gain a majority and failed after four ballots.¹² The tension between the two communities reflected in the proposal did not abate; on the contrary, over the next six months it increased and came to a head in the following summer.

This is the immediate background for the letter written from Venice in August 1389 by Biagio di Ruberto of Siena and addressed to the government of his native city.¹³ (See Appendix, document 1.) Biagio was a merchant active in trade with Venice by 1380; he went bankrupt in Venice in 1394.¹⁴ In

⁸ ASV, Senato, Secreta, reg. E (original), fol. 38v. The charter had been renewed, the law states, 'spetialiter pro subventionem pauperum personarum et, sicut clare constat, istud non servatur ullo modo, quia ipsi Iudei alicui pauperi persone volenti mutuo ducatos 30 vel inde infra nolunt aliquid mutuare, sed sciunt ipsi Iudei tenere modos extraneos et indirrectos cum maximis usuris subtus manum cum desertatione pauperum personarum, quod est totum contrarium intentionis terre'.

⁹ Ibid., fol. 39r.

¹⁰ '[Q]uod per nos providentur de stantia eorum, ita quod poterunt stare simul pro comodo eorum'.

¹¹ ASV, Senato, Secreta, reg. E (original), fol. 41v (24 October 1388). When recalling the clause from the charter, Rosso substituted 'debere' for 'potere' and dropped the phrase 'pro comodo eorum': the charter, he said, 'contineatur quod debeat provideri de loco vel stantia ubi isti Iudei debeant stare insimul, et usque ad presens nil factum fuerit nec provisum, quod non est bene factum, quia ipsi Iudei non possent stare peius sicut stant ad presens; et pro honore terre nostre faciat providere super hoc, ita quod ipsi Iudei stent insimul per se et seperati ab aliis in aliquo loco abili et sufficienti pro eorum stantia.' The law was passed with only 12 nays and 3 'non sinceri' votes.

¹² ASV, Senato, Misti, reg. 40, fol. 143v (31 December 1388). The proponents, the Savi agli Ordini, praised the September law as 'sancta et iusta et secundum Deum et equitatem et honorem nostre dominationis; et sicut sentitur, clare et manifeste, dicti Iudei sunt ingignati et turbati propter dictam partem, que eis non placuit nec placet...'

¹³ This letter was kindly passed on to me in photocopy by Gene Brucker; my transcription was checked against the original and corrected by Giuliano Catoni, who also checked the relevant series of deliberations in the Archivio di Stato di Siena (Concistoro 148-50, Consiglio generale 196 as well as the rest of the correspondence in Concistoro 1826) without finding any echo of the writer or of the matters touched upon in the letter. My sincere thanks to both. For the background on the Sienese side, see Sofia Boesch Gajano, 'Il Comune di Siena e il prestito ebraico nei secoli XIV e XV: fonti e problemi', in *Aspetti e problemi della presenza ebraica nell'Italia centro-settentrionale (secoli XIV e XV)*, Sofia Boesch Gajano, ed., Quaderni dell'Istituto di Scienze Storiche dell'Università di Roma, 2 (Rome, 1983), 175-225.

¹⁴ He is mentioned as involved in shipping wheat to Venice during the war of Chioggia in the account book of Zaccaria and Tommaso Talenti (ASV, Procuratori di S. Marco, citra, b. 141, fols. 1v, 25v, 1380); he is recorded in 1391 as dealing in pearls for a Venetian nobleman (ASV, Giudici di Petizion, Frammenti antichi, b. 10, quaternus testificationum, fol. 17r-v, 30 Jan. 1391); the bankruptcy is known first from a letter by the merchant Salvi di Giovanni Lippi written from Venice to his partners, the Del Bene, in Padua: 'Biagio di Ruberto è falito; à debito da 20,000-25,000 [ducati]'; Archivio di Stato di

the present instance, he appears as representative of the Sienese government, which had engaged his services specifically in relation to contacts with the Venetian Jewish community. Clearly, news of the dissention existing among Jewish lenders in Venice had spread widely and the news had prompted Siena to try to lure them away from Venice to the Tuscan city. Biagio recounts that when he arrived in Venice on 16 June, the hostility ('dischoncordia') of the whole Jewish community against the authorities had reached a peak and many lenders were leaving Venice for such centers in the Veneto as Treviso, Padova, Vicenza and Verona. He recalls to the government of the Nine that he had already reported to them on his first meeting with the leaders of the community, when he had invited the Jews to Siena. This was still the situation in early August, when Biagio received orders dated 21 July to continue trying to convince them to move to Siena, which he did and promised he would do once more before leaving Venice again.

At this point, however, we must suspend the chronological commentary on Biagio's relation, for in the meantime a move had been made by the Venetian authorities that was meant as a compromise measure, though it may not have satisfied the Jews. On 22 June, the ducal councillor Michele Giustinian proposed a series of eight amendments to the charter of 1385, in the hopes of eliminating the major points of contention.¹⁵ The clauses themselves, he stated, were intended to modify a text (not extant) that the Signory had passed on to the Provveditori di Comun, chief negotiators with the Jewish lenders. The thrust of the proposal was this: the Jews would raise among themselves a special fund of 20,000 ducats, to be lent in amounts of 1-30 ducats at 8 per cent interest; they could not be forced to lend sums of less than one ducat nor more than the stated total at any given time. A certain turnover among the Jews was foreseen: the departure of one lender would reduce the total by the amount he had agreed to contribute, but a new arrival would in turn have to contribute to the fund. The remaining clauses were largely attempts at reducing friction by defining the kinds of security (such as boats and iron objects) that the lenders could refuse to accept and the manner of redeeming pawns. The proposal failed to pass after three ballots. But a solution was in sight that differed little from this proposal and it is Biagio di Ruberto who reports it.

Sometime in July the Venetians (whom Biagio calls 'questi ricchi') came to an agreement with the community. The Jews would lend on pawns of high value, such as silver and spices, at 8 per cent, and on personal guarantees at ten per cent; furthermore, they would institute a fund (after the manner suggested by Giustinian) of 50,000 ducats to lend in small sums - in fact from 1 to 30 ducats - to the poor, 'at 10 per cent' (seemingly an error for 8 per cent, as we shall see presently).

Agreements made that summer and fall between Venice and newly arrived nuclei of Jewish lenders all indicate the specific portion of the special fund that each newcomer would contribute, and all fix the interest at 8 per cent. The brevity of some of the accords - six to eight weeks - probably means that the lenders were stepping in momentarily to keep the total available up to the figure of 50,000 ducats reportedly agreed upon. Those who remained in Venice on the basis of the charter of 1385 had presumably worked out within the Jewish *universitas* itself the contribution of each to the fund, as had been proposed by Giustinian. The few supplementary, short-term agreements to lend 'ad minutum' that are extant can be summarized as follows:

Firenze, Del Bene, b. 49, no. 64 (26 Aug. 1394); then from the safeconduct granted in early 1395, on which see G. I. Cassandro, *Le rappresaglie e il fallimento a Venezia nei secoli XIII-XVI* (Turin, 1938), p. 118, n. 2, citing Senato, Misti, reg. 43, fol. 47. He is never labeled as citizen of Venice and thus seems not to be the son of the 'Rubertus qui fuit de Senis' who was naturalized in 1384, after residing in Venice for 15 years; Senato, Misti, reg. 38, fol. 98.

¹⁵ ASV, Senato, Misti, reg. 41, fol. 15.

DATE	LENDER	AMOUNT (in ducats)	TERM
1389			
12 July	Levi and his sister	5000	1 Sept.
3 Aug.	Simon, Jacob and Solomon, brothers, of Nuremberg	3000	1 Oct.
3 Sept.	Joseph 'de Vult' and his son-in-law, Ansel of Nuremberg	4000	to open on 1 Oct.
9 Sept.	Moses son of Joseph de Francia	2000	15 Oct.
1392			
23 Dec.	Robert of Nuremberg	2000-4000	---

Their contributions represent only a small portion of the whole fund. The newcomers were otherwise bound by the terms of the second charter, that is, they could lend unlimited amounts of money at 8 per cent on pawns of high value or at 10 per cent on personal guarantees recorded in notarized contracts. In the contract of 1392, Robert ('Ber') agreed to lend 'ad minutum' half of whatever capital he disposed of.¹⁶

Two final observations are worth making on this episode and regard conditions in both Venice and Siena.

First of all, extant documents, largely notarial and only now being studied, suggest that the role of Jewish women was important in the organization, not only of the *universitas* but of the pawnbanks themselves during this last decade of residence in Venice. The fact that a contract was made with 'Levi and his sister' - unnamed in the document - indicates that a woman could form an essential part of a family company ('fraterna compagnia'). Furthermore, several documents reflect the independent lending activity of a certain Guotela Rapin, 'iudea', who in one case lent 2000 ducats on jewels belonging to Carlo Malatesta of Rimini, with the very wealthy citizen merchant Tommaso Talenti as guarantor. She and other women obviously had considerable freedom to operate on their own, for we find them coming and going, and granting power of attorney to persons meant to act in their name during their absence.¹⁷

Secondly, the aspiration of the commune of Siena to attract Jews away from Venice by inviting them to lend in Siena came to naught both because of the agreement finally reached between the Jews and Venetian authorities and because of the state of war in which Siena found itself. On the one hand, Jewish lenders had decided to remain in Venice and maintain the flow of credit, still in demand on the part both of the well-to-do and of the poor. The compromise according to which a special fund was set aside for small loans for the poor relieved the tension that had characterized relations between the two communities during the previous year. On the other hand, the Jews of Venice had been informed - as Biagio wrote - that Siena was at war with Florence and that enemy troops had entered Siense territory (on 20 July they had reached the very walls of the city), creating a situation of dearth and

¹⁶ 'Les prêteurs juifs', n. 58-59.

¹⁷ ASV, estate of Tommaso Talenti (cited above, n. 14), copies of acts of the notary Marco Rafanelli (Aug. 1392-Feb. 1393). See also that notary's cartularies (cited above, n. 6), which mention Guotela and other Jewish women; the volumes are preceded by indices ('rubriche') which permit identification of the parties who took the initiative in formalizing the acts. Jewish women have been found to have had an active role in lending also elsewhere and in other periods; see the observations of K. R. Stow and S. Debenedetti Stow, 'Donne ebreo a Roma nell'età del ghetto: affetto, dipendenza, autonomia', *La rassegna mensile di Israel*, 52 (1986), 67-68.

social tension that further reduced the attractiveness of the Sienese invitation.¹⁸ Biagio had met again with a leader of the Jewish community, which had promised to send a representative to Siena to negotiate directly, but news of the military situation caused the discussions to be suspended. Finally, Biagio's letter indicates that the government of the Nine at the same time was carrying on negotiations with other Jewish lenders, for he advised his superiors to reject any agreement that would permit interest rates exceeding 15 per cent per annum; on the basis of his experience in Venice, albeit in a much larger credit market, he clearly felt that an agreement with lower rates could be obtained; the facts would prove him wrong, for Siena was forced to agree to a ceiling of exactly double the rate Biagio had envisioned.¹⁹

2

A second episode, which can contribute to our understanding of inter-cultural relations in the Mediterranean world in the same years, takes us initially outside Italy. In a letter of 19 July 1391, the correspondent of the company of Francesco di Marco Datini in Barcelona, Giovanni Jacopi, reports to the main office of the company in Florence, in the midst of detailed commercial information, on the 'pogroms' that were taking place in Spain at the time: in Castile, in nearby Valencia, and finally in Barcelona, where he was an eye-witness of events. (See Appendix, document 2.) It is not my aim here to delve into a topic that has been much studied in depth and in breadth.²⁰ Suffice it here to underscore some of the points made by this merchant who in part relays information received from Valencia, in part recounts his own observations. First of all, after describing the marauding and despoiling, the killing and the forced conversions in Valencia, Giovanni writes that the authorities there - he singles out 'il ducha', the infante Martin - did their best to protect the Jews against the populace and had some of the agitators hanged. He seems to tie the strongest reaction of the authorities to news that the next target of the rioters, after the Jews, was to be the *barrío* of the 'mori.' Finally, the correspondent - on 19-20 July - foresaw the decisive assault and destruction of the *judería* of Barcelona, which occurred in fact on 7-8 August.²¹ He already characterized the pogroms as a kind of final solution: 'Puosi dire l'anno della distruzione de' giudei.'

Rather than for the sake of discussing the pogroms themselves, however, this letter is introduced here primarily to direct attention to Venice, where some Spanish Jews appeared and where the Jewish community seems to have taken action upon arrival of the news from Spain.

¹⁸ *Annales Senenses*, *Rerum italicarum scriptores*, XIX (Milan, 1731), col. 390-92 (owed once again to the generosity of Giuliano Catoni) and Boesch Gaiano, 'Il Comune di Siena e il prestito ebraico', 188, n. 26.

¹⁹ The Sienese charter of 1392 set a ceiling of 30 per cent on secured loans; Boesch Gaiano, 'Il Comune di Siena e il prestito ebraico', 188-9.

²⁰ See, for the general context, A. Foa, *Ebrei in Europa dalla peste nera all'emancipazione, XIV-XVIII secolo* (Bari, 1992), pp. 109-16; on Barcellona in particular, Ph. Wolff, 'The 1391 pogrom in Spain. Social crisis or not?', *Past and Present*, 50 (1971), 4-18; for a recent careful reconstruction of the facts, Luis Suárez Fernández, *Judíos españoles en la Edad Media* (Madrid, 1980), chap. VIII, 'La solución total,' esp. pp. 205-21.

²¹ The same merchant wrote to the Datini branch in Valencia on 20 July: 'Abbiamo visto come costà avete acconci i giudei; qui stanno in grande paura, ed è dieci di che non escono fuori; credesi alla fine piglierano purga.' E. Bensa, *Francesco di Marco da Prato* (Milan, 1928), pp. 275-76. These letters seem to reflect continued tension in Barcelona in the last two weeks of July, rather than the 'continued calm' attested by Wolff ('The 1391 Pogrom', 10). I was unable to find other letters in the Datini network, between Italian cities and Spanish cities, relating to the pogroms; in Archivio Datini, Prato, b. 633, after the letter of Giovanni Jacopi of 19 July, there is a lacuna until 13 September; the letter of that date mentions one of 25 August, which is not extant. In b. 931, fasc. entitled 'Lettere dirette ad altre compagnie', there is one of October 1391 written by Uberto di Carlo in Valencia to Luca del Sera in Barcelona that reports the expulsion of Genoese merchants from Valencia and the whole kingdom of Catalonia, as does Antonio di Guccio in his first extant letter to Florence on 30 October (b. 633).

Records of criminal trials mention some Jews of Spanish origin who seem to have fled to Italy after the pogroms. As early as May 1392 a certain Abraam di Benedetto di Salamone, 'Judeus de Hispania, vagabundus', was arrested for stealing rings from the table of a jeweler at the market in piazza San Marco. During the trial he was baptised (with the name Agostino) and after sentencing was hung. Five years later, the tailor Jacomo, a converso said to be of Recanati but born in Spain, was arrested for theft and fraud, together with three accomplices, a cleric from Genoa and two Jews, Ventura and Cohen. While the latter were not tried, for reasons unknown, Jacomo died 'ex spasmo' as a result of the repeated and particularly brutal tortures to which he had been subjected. Finally, Salamone di Samuele 'de Hispania', then of Mestre, was tried in 1402 for having engaged an assassin to eliminate a man who had wronged him.²²

The Florence office of the Datini company, recipient of the letter of Giovanni Jacopi, surely forwarded the news of the pogroms to Venice, where Zanobi di Taddeo Gaddi, chief correspondent of Francesco di Marco Datini, was much involved with Venetian *lanaiuoli* who invested heavily in Spanish wool; since correspondence of the company in the direction of Venice is lacking nearly altogether, however, the relay itself cannot be documented. The Jews of Venice, on the other hand, must have had their own sources of information. Arrival of the news seems to have prompted the trip of a Venetian Jew to Catalonia, which is interesting even though the evidence so far uncovered is limited to skeletal accounting entries and a letter of credit.

'Salamone Sansone di Vinegia' probably travelled to Barcelona soon after the pogrom, perhaps as representative of the Venetian community or even of several Jewish communities. We learn of him and his voyage, however, only when he was already on his way back to the port of Pisa, in 1392; it is then that we learn that his mission, or one of his missions, was to salvage Hebrew books that risked destruction in the wake of the persecutions and forced baptisms and accompany them back to Italy. He or his principals commissioned the Florentine company of Antonio di Guccio and Matteo di Miniato in Barcelona to transport two packs of books - 'due balle di libri giuedaschi' - from Barcelona to Pisa. Carried by a round ship, they were unloaded in the port of Livorno and carted to Pisa by the local branch of the Datini company.²³

Before taking ship in Barcelona, Salamone bought a letter of credit on the same company for ten gold florins. The order to pay to the bearer, Salamone Sansone, was formulated initially so as to mature six days after presentation ('vista'), but was amended so as to be payable on demand; it was addressed on the reverse in Italian to the Datini branch, 'Franciescho di Marcho e Manno d'Albizo in Pisa', and in Hebrew simply 'A Francesco di Marco da Prato'. A postscript on the same letter of credit instructed the Datini branch to allow Salamone to repack the two bales into smaller packages, but only in their own quarters ('in casa vostra'), and ordered them to await further orders from Miniato di Nuccio di Firenze, the actual addressee. Should Salamone desire to take one of the books for himself, wrote the Barcelona company, the Pisan correspondents were to allow him to do so. This means that the books did not belong to Salamone personally but that he accompanied them and was responsible for

²² ASV, Signori di notte al criminal, reg. 12, fols. 27v (13 May 1392) and 48v-50 (4 April 1402), listed as nos. 1188 and 1206 in the repertory of thefts compiled by Stefano Piasentini (*Alla luce della luna. I furti a Venezia, 1270-1403* [Venice, 1992], appendix, and p. 36), who kindly drew my attention to them. Also Avogaria di comun, reg. 3645, fol. 36v (10 May 1402), cited by Jacoby, 'Les Juifs a Venise', 184, and Sopraconsoli, b. 1, fol. 66v.

²³ The documents discussed here and in the next paragraph were published by Bensa, *Francesco di Marco da Prato*, docs. XXIX and CXL (respectively from Archivio Datini, Prato, 1147, Barcellona-Pisa [21 Oct. 1392], and 380, fol. 33v). In December 1391 converted Jews in Barcelona tried to recover goods stolen from them; see Wolff, 'The 1391 Pogrom', 17, n. 40. Among the goods there were surely also books, which the converts, given their new status, would not have been permitted to retain. While the names Salamone and Sansone are both recurrent in Venetian notarial documents of the same years, I have not found corroborating documentation for a person with the same combination of names indicated by the Datini papers.

dividing them up. In fact, the accounts registered on 4 December show that he had made four packages (materials cost 53 Pisan soldi) and that an export license ('poliza di tratta') had been obtained. There is no reference to the final destination of the four packages, but one can imagine that at least some of the books were meant for Venice, Salamone's declared city of origin.²⁴

Exactly a year later a Spanish Jew, Arnaldo of Villareal, near Valencia, shipped two further bales of Hebrew books ('due balle di libri giudaichi') with the same company in Barcelona to the same Pisan branch of the Datini firm. He seems to have accompanied them, as had Salamone, but there is no further indication of their destination; the only hint is the fact that Arnaldo was payer in Bologna of a bill of exchange drawn on him there by the Datini branch in Pisa.²⁵

* * *

In 1394, as is well known, the Venetian Senate decreed the expulsion of the Jewish lenders, effective in early 1397. The reason given for the decision was that the Jews had not lived up to their promise to lend small sums on petty surety to poor persons or to lend on personal guarantee; there was a risk that all personal property ('totum mobile Venetiarum') would end up in their hands. Actually, their credit services must have been considered superfluous then, as the Venetian economy recovered from the war of Chioggia. The age-old law against lending at usury in Venice, publicly or secretly, was reinstated; furthermore, no Jew could remain in Venice for over fifteen days per visit and each had to wear a visible yellow badge.²⁶ While the decree, the 'Iudeorum expulsio', was aimed primarily at moneylenders, it was interpreted a year later as including all Jews, even those medical doctors who had been approved by the magistracy of the Giustizia Vecchia.²⁷ The worsened atmosphere also caused Jewish merchants to abandon the Venetian marketplace. In 1408 the Senate welcomed the latter back, saying that of old ('antiquitus') Jews of Apulia, Abruzzi, the Marches, Romagna and elsewhere used to import silk cocoons, silken cloth, victuals and other merchandise; the fact that they had, since the expulsion, taken their wares instead to Ancona hurt the Venetian silk industry and in general meant a loss to the economy and to the commune estimated at 60,000 ducats per year. Such merchants were reassured that they could come 'more mercatorio' like all other foreign merchants and that only if they engaged in usury would they come under the restrictions and fines passed in 1394 and later.²⁸ Jewish merchants, then, from cities along the Adriatic coast but especially those from Crete, who were subjects of Venice, are the Jews we can sometimes find living as more or less

²⁴ Bensa (*Francesco di Marco da Prato*, p. 250) took it for granted that all were forwarded to Venice, although the matter is not proven by the documents he published. My thanks to Amos Luzzatto and Renata Segre for deciphering the words in Hebrew.

²⁵ See Archivio Datini, Prato, 380, 'Quaderno di ricevute di bale del 1392 al 1394 di Pixa', fol. 76 (23 Oct. 1393), where the shipowner (Sancio Desa) and the carters who forwarded the bales from Livorno are named, and fol. 87 (29 Dec. 1393), where the expenses are listed (including the cost of two crates into which the books were repacked). The two bales of books 'd'Arnaldo da Vilare, giudeo, avemo da Barzalona d'Antonio di Ghuccio e compagni', were part of a shipment of twelve bales, primarily of wool. The totals were carried forward to the memoriale, no. 371, fols. 72 and 215v, where payment of one florin by a Bondi di Giusepo giudeo in Arnaldo's name and the bill of exchange are registered; see also the ledger, no. 361, fol. 357. (The first reference, to the same quaderno from which he extracted the accounts for Salamone's shipment, was noted by Bensa, *Francesco di Marco da Prato*, p. 423, n. 1.)

²⁶ ASV, Senato, Misti, reg. 43, fol. 24.

²⁷ ASV, Maggior Consiglio, Leona, fol. 78v (3 April 1395). The Minor Consiglio had split on the strict or loose interpretation of the senatorial deliberation and thus had to bring the matter before the Great Council, where the strict interpretation passed 325 to 119, with 22 abstentions; the minority had intended to safeguard the position of the doctor magister Salamon and others like him.

²⁸ ASV, Senato, Misti, reg. 48, fols. 39v-40, and Luca Molà, *La comunità dei lucchesi a Venezia. Immigrazione e industria della seta nel tardo Medioevo* (Venice, 1994), pp. 211-12.

temporary residents in the parish of San Cassian but about whom there is so little information, except for their occasional encounters with the criminal courts.

The documents analysed here were an excuse to revisit a period and a subject studied some time ago. While they do not change the essence of what was previously known, they contribute elements of inter-cultural exchange and underscore the mobility of Jewish communities and the potential competition among them, especially in the sector of consumer credit where their services were sometimes in demand, sometimes considered superfluous, but always judged undesirable. In the first instance, Venetian authorities were surely aware of the competition from Siena for the services of the lenders with whom they were having difficulties, some of whom had already left for other cities in the Veneto. Such competitive negotiations with communities of Jewish lenders active in other cities were common and other contemporary examples relating to Tuscany are well known.²⁹ In the second instance it was possible only to follow the faint tracks of a member of the Venetian Jewish community who took serious risks in travelling to Spain in the wake of the persecutions of the summer of 1391, a decision made on the basis of news current within the mercantile community. Whatever his principal mission may have been, he was able to rescue a number of sacred, rabbinical and perhaps mystical books, some of which probably made their way back to Venice.

APPENDIX

1. Biagio di Ruberto da Siena writes to the government of Siena to report on his contacts with the Jewish pawnbrokers of Venice.

20 August 1389.

Archivio di Stato di Siena, Concistoro, 1826, no. 14, fol. 1r.

Al nome di Dio, amen.

Magnifici e potenti signori miei. Debita e senpre e umile recommendatio premissa. E' più di ricevetti una vostra lettera fata di 21 del mese pasato. Vegho per Ventura d'Andrea e per Cione di ser Paulo s'ette statti avisatti chome qui aveo auto cierti ragionamenti chon codesti g[i]udei di venire abitare chostà e prestare a XV per cento a ragione d'uno an[n]o e chossì fu la verità, che quando giunsi qui che fu di 16 di giungno pasato, tuti erano in dischoncordia con questa signoria. Per tale molti se ne partiro'; andorono a Trevigi, a Padova e a Verona e a Vicenza; e po' questi richi s'achordaro' chon questa chomunità a prestare sopra argento e spezie a 8 per cento e sopra a carte a X per cento, e debeno fare uno presto a minuto per la povera gente di ducati 50000 a X per cento.

Di che avendo auta la vostra lettera fui da que' g[i]udei' chon chui aveo auto il ragionamento, dicendolo da voi aveo auto il mandato e mostralo la vostra lettera; risposemi sarebeno insieme e tra loro deliberebeno uno venisse chostà a provvedere; e chossì arebeno fato. E venute poi le novele della compagnia venuta chostà, e che sentono noi dobbiamo avere ghuera e però soprasteno. No'dimeno m'ano promiso, quando sarà tenpo, sarano da me e meterano il fato a seguizone e voi in questo mezo

²⁹ In November 1396, a few months before the expulsion from Venice became effective, the Priors of Florence were authorized to negotiate with Jews and invite them to lend in Florence, at a maximum interest rate of 15 per cent; the project came to naught; see U. Cassuto, *Gli Ebrei a Firenze nell'età del Rinascimento* (Florence, 1918, repr. 1965), pp. 13-14 and Appendice, doc. 1. In 1399 Arezzo succeeded in attracting several Jewish lenders away from Siena; see Anthony Molho, 'A Note on Jewish Moneylenders in Tuscany in the Late Trecento and Early Quattrocento', in A. Molho and J. A. Tedeschi (eds.) *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Hans Baron* (Florence, 1971), pp. 99-117, and compare the names (p. 117) with those indexed by Boesch Gaiano, 'Il Comune di Siena e il prestito ebraico', appendice 2.

operate che chotesti sono chostà no' prestano sino a XV per cento, save[n]do voi che a lasa'li prestare a più è grand[i]simo dano de la vostra chomunità. Nondimeno, io ina'zi parti darò buono ordine per a[d]empire il vostro chomandamento, e sarete di tuto avisati.

[... *The rest of the letter concerns diplomatic questions, the envoys then present in Venice, and so forth.*]

2. Giovanni Jacopi writes to the head office in Florence of the company of Francesco di Marco Datini and Stoldo di Lorenzo, and, in the midst of the commercial news, reports on the 'pogroms' in Castille, Valencia and Barcelona. 19 July 1391.

Archivio Datini, Prato, 633, Barcelona to Florence
fol. 1v, bottom, to 2r, top

[...]

Crediamo avete sentito il buono acholglimento àno fatto in Castella a' giudei, che gl'èno tutti morti e rubati e sonsene fatti cristiani assai, e a Valenza a dì 9 di questo chominciorono andare per la tera 10 o 12 fantuleli chon una + [croce] di channa, e vanosene ove stavano e giudei e fanno chon loro a sassi, e poi vi si mescholò altro che fantuleli e sonvene morti da 100 e fattosene cristiani 300 o più. Tutti gl'altri sono stati rubati insino alle brache, e non vi si potè dare rimedio veruno. // [2r]

E avendo fatto questo a' giudei, volono ire a fare il simile a' mori, di che il ducha che vi si trovò ne fecie impicchare alchuno e la cosa è così rimas[t]a. El simile àno fatto per tutto il Rengo di Valenza de' giudei, che tutti sono stati rubati e morti e tornatosene cristiani grande parte.

Questi di qui àno auto grandissima paura e sono stati bene 8 dì serati e cittadini e uficiali del re àno fatto e fanno per loro bonissima guardia el dì e lla notte; potranole fugire alchuno dì, ma alla fine non la possono iscapare, perochè il popolo è forte indegnato contro di loro e in questo ballo sono 'per tutto questo paese. Puosi dire l'anno della distruzione de' giudei.

[... *The letter continues with commercial information.*]