



Portrait of Italian Jewish Life  
(1800s – 1930s)

edited by *Tullia Catalan, Cristiana Facchini*

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## Portrait of Italian Jewish Life (1800s-1930s)

*Edited by Tullia Catalan, Cristiana Facchini*

### Six Authors in Search of a Narrative

*by Cristiana Facchini*

*(Alma Mater Studiorum, Università di Bologna; Max Weber Kolleg, Erfurt)*

“Few Italian political men are so well known, at least outside the Peninsula, as Luigi Luzzatti. At home his untiring political, economic and scientific activity and his long parliamentary career have kept him constantly in the public eye. Abroad he is known because he negotiated important commercial treaties and represented Italy at international congresses, while his writings have had the honor of being translated into several languages. [...] He is the most encyclopedic man of the Kingdom.”<sup>1</sup>

Luigi Luzzatti (1841-1927) was probably one of the most famous Jewish politicians of his time, and one of the few to become a prime minister in Italy.<sup>2</sup> In contrast to other Jews of the period, Luzzatti was well-known abroad for his active involvement in Jewish politics, especially in regards to matters related to Romanian and East European Jews.<sup>3</sup> An accomplished politician and economist, Luzzatti’s endeavors were thoroughly described by Helen Zimmern, a writer who had shown a continuous interest in Italian culture. Zimmern, a British woman of German-Jewish origin, was a journalist who had moved to Florence by the turn of the nineteenth century. Most likely inspired by the work of the Galician rabbi Samuel Hirsch Margulies, she had written a long article on David Levi, whose life and works attracted the attention of a wide spectrum of Jewish

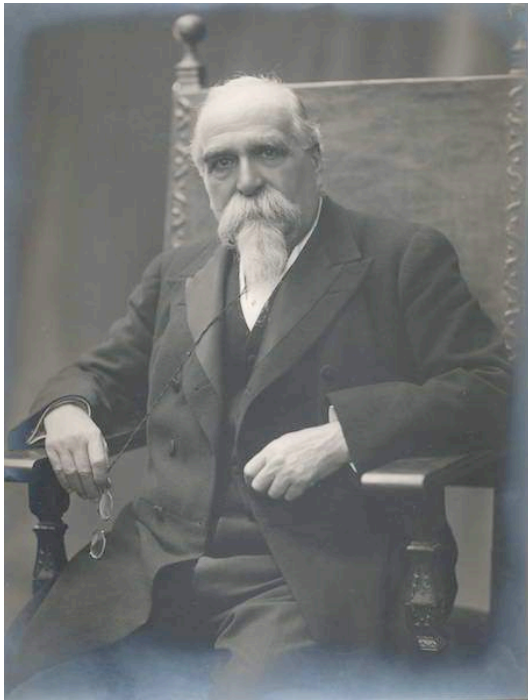
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<sup>1</sup> Helen Zimmern, *Italian Leaders of to-day*, (London: William and Norgate, 1915), 246.

<sup>2</sup> The first Jewish prime minister is, according to some scholars, Alessandro Fortis, who became prime minister in 1905. There is no evidence, though, for such a claim.

<sup>3</sup> For some of his articles on the Jews of Eastern Europe see: Luigi Luzzatto, *God in Freedom: Studies on the Relation between Church and State*, [English translation] (New York: MacMillan, 1930). A recent edition of the same book was published in 2005. For references to Luzzatti’s Jewish culture see: Marino Berengo, “Luigi Luzzatti e l’ebraismo del suo tempo,” in *Luigi Luzzatti e il suo tempo*, eds. Pier Luigi Ballini, Paolo Pecorari (Venezia: Istituto Veneto di Scienze ed Arti, 1994). See also Cristiana Facchini, *God in Freedom. Il primo ministro ebreo e la teoria della tolleranza religiosa*, in ASE 33/1 (2016).

intellectuals.<sup>4</sup> Both Luzzatti and Levi were outstanding Jewish Italian politicians, who also engaged in issues related to the “religious question,” as it unfolded during the nineteenth century. In Luzzatti’s brief biography, Zimmern emphasized his enormous influence on economy and politics, and highlighted his interest in religious matters. In the article devoted to David Levi, Zimmern stressed his untiring attention to the question of religion, and his attempt to offer a theory of Judaism and modernity viable for the nineteenth century.



Luigi Luzzatti (1841-1927)

Fondazione CDEC, Photographic Archive, Giorgio Sacerdoti’s Collection.

Two decades later, another portrait of Luzzatti appeared. Many things had changed in Europe: The Italian politician had died in 1927, a devastating world war had broken out and destroyed any remnant of optimism, and new forms of dictatorship emerged. In 1934 Hector Bolitho published a collection of articles devoted to Jewish biographies. Luzzatti now appeared among “twelve eminent Jews,” in the company of Lord Bearstead (Marcus Samuel, the founder of Shell), Benjamin Disraeli (the famed British politician), Paul Erlich (a scientist), Jacob Epstein (a sculptor of some renown), Sigmund Freud (the founder of

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<sup>4</sup> Especially Samuel Hirsch Margulies, *Dichter und Patriot: Das Leben und die Werke D. Levis*, (Trier: Sigmund Mager, 1896); Helen Zimmern, “David Levi. Poet and Patriot,” in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 9/3 (April 1897): 363-402. See in this issue, Alessandro Grazi.

psychoanalysis), Ludwig Mond (a scientist), Marcel Proust (the famous French novelist), Walther Rathenau (the German minister of Foreign Affairs), Max Reinhardt (a film director), Leon Trotsky (the Russian revolutionary) and Chaim Weizman (a Zionist leader and scientist).<sup>5</sup> The book was planned before the rise of Nazism, and according to the author, was conceived as an attempt to respond to European anti-Semitism.<sup>6</sup>

This monographic issue of *Quest* resumes this old practice of biographical trajectories, and aims at presenting six Italian Jewish characters whose lives and work span from the early nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century. The six characters in search of a narrative are respectively David Levi (1816-1898), Tullo Massarani (1826-1915), Elena Raffalovich Comparetti (1842-1918), Bernardo Dessau, (1863-1949) Alfonso Pacifici (1889-1983), and Laura Orvieto (1876-1953), whose lives were entwined with Italian and European history. Their biographical trajectories intersect the local, national, and transnational dimensions of nineteenth and early twentieth century history. The Jewish facet of their lives tells a great deal about the diversity of their choices as Jews and as Italians, in respect to culture, politics, and religion. These six stories will give us the chance to delve into some tenets of Jewish culture in the nineteenth century from a perspective that will also offer new insight into concepts of Judaism and religion.

#### *Children of the nineteenth century*

This monographic issue opens with Alessandro Grazi's article, which is devoted to David Levi, "Poet and Patriot," as his peers often dubbed him. Levi was an active member of Freemasonry, and an advocate of socialist ideas. Historiography on Levi analyzed his work against the background of European socialism and the history of Freemasonry. More recently, Francesca Sofia offered a nuanced depiction of Levi's notion of Judaism as a way to conceptualize and understand the relationship between representations of Judaism and modernity.<sup>7</sup> Alessandro Grazi's article engages therefore with an author whose work has received some attention, though he remains quite unknown to an English audience. A biographical tour is accompanied by a description of his general intellectual work, both published and unpublished. Levi's biography is indicative of a path that some social segments of Italian Jewry constructed through the

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<sup>5</sup> Hector Bolitho, *Twelve Jews* (London: Rich Cowan, 1934).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> For references see article of Alessandro Grazi and Maurizio Bertolotti.

nineteenth century. Levi's intellectual and political culture was extremely eclectic, and was characterized by entanglements that are difficult to unknot. He was a santsimonian, a mazzinian, a freemason, and, to an extent, an advocate for the importance of Jewish values in what he conceived to be "Western civilization." There are at least four significant elements in Levi's work as far as it concerns Jewish culture.

1. The first one, as identified by Grazi and others, is related to his positive reading of Christianity, not exclusively as part of a deist's tradition, but as supporting a viable path to political emancipation and Italian unification. Levi was, among others, a strong supporter of Pope Pius IX, who had for a brief moment emerged as a possible leader of the Italian unification.<sup>8</sup>

After the revolution of 1848, Pius IX rejected from this perspective, and in so doing created a serious problem for the advocates of a moderate and liberal form of Catholicism that could pursue the unification. Levi's poem to Pope Pius IX and his friendship with the influential patriot Nicolò Tommaseo are therefore perfectly understandable against this background. Although Jewish engagement with different currents of Catholicism was not shared by all members of the elite, it certainly held an important role in defining representations of Judaism.<sup>9</sup>

2) The second element that characterizes Levi's biography, as well as that of Tullo Massarani, is related to the history of both their families, which provides information on the path to integration within Italian society. Levi and Massarani were both raised in Jewish families that had already integrated into the social and economic fabric of their cities and villages, providing their children with good educations for the pursuit of their careers.

3) The third significant element in relation to Levi is his interpretation of Judaism *vis-à-vis* other representations that were developed among Jews during the nineteenth century. More precisely, Levi highlighted the symbolic Jewish role in the evolution of Western society and attributed great relevance to the role of religion in history. According to recent scholarship his notion of Judaism must be paralleled with the one developed by the Reform Judaism movement in Germany.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Most recently Alessandro Grazi, "A Jewish Construction of a Catholic Hero: David Levi's *A Pio IX*, *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations*, 6/1 (2011): 2-15. For references to this relationship see: Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, *Il prezzo dell'eguaglianza. Il dibattito sull'emancipazione degli ebrei in Italia (1871-1848)* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1998).

<sup>9</sup> On this topic see: Cristiana Facchini, *Judaism: An Inquiry into the Historical Discourse*, in *History and Religion: Narrating a Religious Past*, eds. Bernd-Christian Otto, Susanne Rao, Joerg Ruepke, (Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten) (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 371-392.

<sup>10</sup> Francesca Sofia, "Gli ebrei risorgimentali fra tradizione biblica, libera muratoria e nazione," in



4) The fourth and most overlooked aspect of Levi's intellectual legacy is related to his interest in religious history, to which much of his work testifies. Levi was especially interested in ancient religions and their symbolism, as were many members of the Masonic Lodges. Egyptian symbolism and oriental religions were deemed very relevant, and contributed to the spread of a sort of cultural orientalism that never seriously challenged either the Catholic Church or popular Italian belief systems. In this regard, his interest in religion, though distinct in its way, may be paralleled to Luzzatti's personal endeavor to use scholarship on religions to elaborate a very personal and original theory of religious tolerance.<sup>11</sup>

David Levi's efforts to interpret Jewish history and Jewish tradition is broadly explored, as Grazi remarks, in the work he published from the 1860s onward. Grazi rightly highlights that the style and language Levi chose for his enterprise -- that is, historical drama and poetry -- was in consonance with the culture of the time. It is remarkable that Levi's most important work was conceived as a



theatrical drama whose focus was on the biblical context, and namely the role of Prophetism. *Il profeta* is one of his most notable "orientalist" works, even if, as Grazi stresses, he never was an orientalist himself. The theme of orientalism is quite relevant as it follows a course of thought that has been inadequately investigated and at times overshadowed by Edward Said's critical account.

David Levi (1816-1898)

Retrieved from [https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/David\\_Levi#/media/File:David\\_Levi\\_Italian\\_Poet.jpg](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Levi#/media/File:David_Levi_Italian_Poet.jpg)

The work of David Levi may be analyzed both in conflict and in concert with the biography of Tullo Massarani. Maurizio Bertolotti's detailed reconstruction of selected moments in Tullo Massarani's biography follows in the footsteps of micro-history and proves to be instructive indeed, depicting the likely path that Jewish elite might have taken during the nineteenth century. The article is particularly informative in regards to the relationship between Massarani and his father, focusing on the intergenerational perspective. Tullo Massarani was born into a wealthy Jewish family in 1826 in the small Renaissance town of Mantua,

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*Storia d'Italia: La massoneria (Annali 21)*, ed. Gian Mario Cazzaniga (Turin: Einaudi, 2006), 244–65, and Maurizio Bertolotti in this issue.

<sup>11</sup> On this topic see Cristiana Facchini, "Luigi Luzzatti e la teoria della tolleranza religiosa," in *Annali di storia dell'esegesi*, 33/1 (2016), forthcoming.

situated in the north-eastern area of the Italian peninsula. Mantua had hosted a relatively large Jewish community that during the Renaissance had blossomed and produced a thriving cultural world.<sup>12</sup> Despite the autonomy of the Gonzagas, a ghetto was built in the center of the city in 1610. By the end of the eighteenth century, Mantua became, along with Milan, Venice, and Padua, part of the Habsburg Empire, when the Republic of Venice and its dominions, together with Lombardy, were given to the Austrians after the Napoleonic demise. This is a key historical detail, as it partially explains some of the most significant elements of the article.

Under the Habsburgs, Jews of the north-eastern part of Italy -- including Trieste, which was the main port city of the multinational empire -- were introduced, just as Catholics were, to religious modernization. This was implemented through the introduction of substantial reforms aimed at stressing the role of education and acculturation, in order to support and integrate different groups into the social fabric of the empire.<sup>13</sup> It was under the supervision of the Habsburgs that the first Rabbinical Seminary was planned and then opened. The first site of the Rabbinical Seminary was initially Mantua, and later on it was moved to Padua. The Seminary was destined to forge the Italian rabbinical class, even though in the nineteenth century other sites of Jewish learning were still active.<sup>14</sup>

Tullo Massarani lived in the same city where Marco Mortara (1815-1894) served as the Chief Rabbi. Marco Mortara, father of one of the most important Italian jurists, taught at the Rabbinical Seminary in Padua, and accordingly became a renowned member of the Italian elite and a member of the wider *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, where at different stages he represented Italian Jewry.<sup>15</sup> Of note is his short, yet terse, pamphlet devoted to the notion of Jewish messianism as a response to one of the most significant anti-Semitic moments of Liberal Italy, which occurred between 1872 and 1873.

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<sup>12</sup> Literature on Mantua during the Renaissance is extensive. See especially Shlomo Simonsohn, *History of the Jews of Mantua* (Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1977).

<sup>13</sup> On the Jews of Trieste see: Lois Dubin, *The Port Jews of Habsburg Trieste: Absolutist Politics and Enlightenment Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Tullia Catalan, *La comunità ebraica di Trieste (1781-1914): Politica, società e cultura* (Trieste: Lint, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> See Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, "La cultura ebraica in Italia nel secolo XIX," in *Storia d'Italia: Gli ebrei*, ed. Vivanti, vol. 2, (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), 1211-41; Cristiana Facchini, "The Making of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in a Catholic Country. The Case of Italy," in *Wissenschaft des Judentums in Europe: Comparative and Transnational Perspectives*, eds. Christian Wiese, Mirjam Thulin, (Studia Judaica) (Berlin: De Gruyter, forthcoming).

<sup>15</sup> For the edition of his epistolary see Asher Salah, *L'epistolario di Marco Mortara (1815-1894). Un rabbino italiano tra riforma e ortodossia* (Florence: Giuntina, 2012).



Marco Mortara (1815-1894), 1890 ca.

Fondazione CDEC, Photographic Archive, Angelo Piattelli's Collection

The “Pasqualigo case” has often been described as the most important case of Italian anti-Semitism in Liberal Italy, and it is related to the appointment of Isacco Pesaro Maurogonato (1817-1892) as minister of finance. Maurogonato was a Venetian Jew and a prominent and active member of the Italian Risorgimento. Recent research indicates that Maurogonato felt uncomfortable with national policies related to the confiscation of Church properties, and refused to take this office twice, in 1869 and 1873.<sup>16</sup> However, between 1872 and 1873 the PM Francesco Pasqualigo addressed the question publicly, with several articles highlighting how Maurogonato was unfit for a ministerial role due to his Jewish dual loyalty. Even if the case might have ultimately been a product of political

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<sup>16</sup> Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, “Maurogonato Pesaro, Isacco, *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 72 (2008), retrieved from [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/isacco-maurogonato-pesaro\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/isacco-maurogonato-pesaro_(Dizionario-Biografico)/)

wars among the Liberal elite, it exploited religious anxiety.<sup>17</sup>

Although Massarani spent most of his adult life in Milan, it is not difficult to imagine Mortara and Massarani crossing paths throughout their lives in the little town at the center of the Po valleys, surrounded by lands that were areas of secular turmoil and extreme poverty. The modernization of agriculture in this area is related both to the rise of socialist movements and to the birth of a Jewish landed gentry. It is a fascinating history that we can only glimpse at, thanks to Bertolotti's article which describes the slow rise of the agrarian Jewish middle class.

Extensive research on eighteenth century Jewish social history in Italy is still overlooked, and we can at least underline how this specific story mirrors a process that needs to be more broadly analyzed. In their articles Francesca Bregoli identifies a process of land acquisition in Livorno and Tuscany in the second half of the eighteenth century, and Fabio Levi highlights the course of Jewish economic growth in Piedmont, while Emanuele D'Antonio describes the path to Jewish gentrification in smaller Italian areas of the Hapsburg Empire.<sup>18</sup> This path might have been quite similar in Ferrara, Modena and the other small towns scattered around the Po valleys.

The process of land acquisition began earlier than the political emancipation, which was exported to Italy by Napoleon at the end of the eighteenth century (1797-1799), reissued in 1848 by Carlo Alberto of Savoy, and extended to the Italian Kingdom in 1861.<sup>19</sup> Bertolotti suggests a fascinating hypothesis in interpreting cultural changes. He claims that the loosening of the ties of the communal bond were not the byproduct of the political emancipation, as much as the result of a more nuanced process of economic change, which in turn supported shifts in cultural patterns. It is particularly in regard to Tullo's father,

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<sup>17</sup> Cristiana Facchini, *David Castelli. Ebraismo e scienze delle religioni tra Otto e Novecento*, (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> Francesca Bregoli, *Mediterranean Enlightenment: Livornese Jews, Tuscan Culture, and Eighteenth-Century Reform* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014); Fabio Levi, *Gli ebrei nella vita economica dell'Ottocento*, in *Storia degli ebrei in Italia*, ed. Corrado Vivanti, vol. 2, (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), 1171-1210; Emanuele D'Antonio, *La società udinese e gli ebrei fra la Restaurazione e l'Unità d'Italia. Mondi cattolici, emancipazione e integrazione della minoranza ebraica a Udine 1830-1866/70* (Udine: Istituto Pio Paschini, 2012). For a general discussion see: David Cesarani, *Port Jews: Jewish Communities in Cosmopolitan Maritime Trading Centres, 1550-1950*, (London and Portland: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002).

<sup>19</sup> Tullia Catalan, *Italian Jews and the 1848-49 Revolutions: Patriotism and Multiple Identities*, in *The Risorgimento Revisited: Nationalism and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Italy*, eds. Silvana Patriarca and Lucy Riall (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 214-231.

Giacobbe, that we find some important information about the tradition of Enlightenment that influenced Jews and Catholics alike.

The story of Giacobbe and his teacher, a former Catholic who soon became disillusioned, or the story of Tullo's teacher, a Jew who eventually converted to Catholicism, invite historians to pay more attention to the complexities of historical experiences, to the fluidity of cultural and religious identities, and to the crossing of borders, especially in small cities.

Those forms of Deism that were inherited from the eighteenth century reappeared quite often in nineteenth century public discourse, particularly among Jews who were state echelons (or *Juifs d'état*). The tradition of Deism among Jews should be taken into account alongside Masonic symbolism and its religious ideology because it implied a notion of religion shared by Jews and Christians of liberal faith. This tradition remained ideologically vague and was sometimes translated into a general notion of a 'religion of humanity', which could be used by different political groups, from sansimonians to followers of Mazzini. Its vagueness proved relatively flexible and attractive, yet it never influenced organized religion, which kept its strong ties to tradition, especially among Catholics.

Religion without ritual seemed to appeal to some members of the Jewish elite, as it did to liberal Catholics, who played a significant role in the construction of national state until at least 1848, and still occupied, despite the promulgation of the *Syllabus*, some important positions in the construction of the national state. This form of religion, deeply individual and class oriented was in tune with patriotism, whose features were destined to change during the first decades of the twentieth century.

Massarani and Levi held different ideas about religion and their commitment to Judaism diverged greatly. Massarani attributed less relevance to the Jewish past, as it never came to represent an ideal or idealized form of culture or civilization. Bertolotti is convincing in detecting currents of Enlightenment traditions in Massarani's thought, which he likely received from his father. Although Massarani might at times stress his origins as part of a "persecuted lot," which was a common trope among Jews, his life was primarily devoted to national politics in the ranks of the so-called "historical Right," and he became the first Jewish senator of the Kingdom. Massarani's biography is fascinating as it offers insight into the rise of a well-to-do upper bourgeoisie, which was devoted to public affairs, committed to culture and art, and preoccupied with one of the most striking features of nineteenth century culture; that is, the question of

education.

*“Comme l’oiseau sur la branche”*

It is through the commitment to education that we may connect the biographies of both Elena Raffalovich and the younger Laura Orvieto, the two female figures of this issue. Asher Salah’s article on Elena Raffalovich offers both a gender perspective and a transnational reading of Italian Jewish history. Although nineteenth century Italy was surely no country for Jewish immigration, there had been an interesting and gradual wave of Jewish Russian and Russian emigration. Florence was one of the most important intellectual centers of Italy. Raffalovich, the daughter of a dynasty of wealthy Jews from Odessa, was connected to Italy through relatives who lived in Trieste, the most important port city of the Habsburg Empire. Elena Raffalovich entered Italian history, as Salah claims, as the great-grandmother of one of the most prominent radical Catholic priests of the twentieth century, Don Milani. She is also often mentioned as the wife of Domenico Comparetti, an acknowledged philologist and academic who might have been too patronizing for Elena who, after ten years, left her marriage to pursue her own career. Salah offers a vivid reconstruction of Elena Raffalovich’s enterprises in children’s education, to which she was deeply committed. Through her connections, many of which were Jewish, Raffalovich attempted to introduce Froebelian schools in Italy, a country still under the control of the Catholic Church and skeptical about modern education without a religious foundation. The fascinating story of Elena Raffalovich is one of determination and independence. She was a woman attracted by “revolutionary nationalism,” be it Polish or Ukrainian. Her stance, like that of her husband and their friends and acquaintances in Pisa, Paris, or Florence, was radical and materialistic, committed to the improvement of women’s conditions and the advancement of human rights.

Elena’s religious convictions are similar to Massarani’s vague notion of Deism, which was a shared belief among many Jews of the period. Comparing her biographical trajectory with Jewish women as well as women from other religious groups, one may recognize, following Salah, some cultural trends, such as a clear alignment with the Protestant commitment to educational reforms. At the same time, the family structure she was bound to was more typical among the cosmopolitan mercantile Jewish elite who, while keeping strong kin ties and familial solidarity through male lines, were more inclined to pursue exogamic marriages for the daughters.

Her life trajectory corresponds to one of the symbolic acts that most affected the

lived Jewish experience in modern times: ‘Conversion’. Conversion is usually a technical term that describes the passage from one religion to another one. It also entails a process of strengthening religious feelings, and a path to an individual return to God or to the religious community.<sup>20</sup> In a historical view conversion might have been a matter of choice or the outcome of a violent campaign, as often happened in the Middle Ages. Recent scholarship has emphasized the relevance of border-crossing and conversion from one religion to another in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Whether it was a passage to other religions or an escape from traditional life, border crossing and conversion constituted an important part of the Jewish historical experience.<sup>21</sup>

As is seen in Massarani’s biographical portrait illustrated in this issue, patterns of cultural shifts were established well before the impact of political emancipation. One may rightly ask if leaving the fold of religious tradition was not a common feature in other religious communities, as the case of Massarani should aptly indicate.

However the story of Elena is particularly striking for she, as one of the many Jewish women who pursued their education and career in Western Europe, was not just another among numerous outstanding Russian Jewish women who came to Italy. She also stood out in her search for freedom and independence, choosing liberty over marriage, pursuing her life “comme l’oiseau sur la branche.”<sup>22</sup>

Although the history of Eastern European Jews in Italy has yet to be narrated, it is worth mentioning the importance of female characters who actively engaged in radical political movements, such as Anna Kuliscioff, Angela Balabanoff, or the Sereni brothers’ grandmother, Xenia, a revolutionary activist from the Russian Empire. Although Xenia was not Jewish, her circle of social acquaintances and friends was mainly Jewish.<sup>23</sup>

Eastern European Jews might have entered the Italian imagination principally as a persecuted lot, as one can easily perceive reading reports in the newspapers, or through Luigi Luzzatti’s untiring activity. “Jewish suffering” was an important cultural trope which represented both the history of the Jews as well as their

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<sup>20</sup> Literature on religious conversion is massive. For one of the most influential scholarly interpretation see: William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York and London: Longman, Green & Co., 1902).

<sup>21</sup> Todd M. Endelman, *Leaving the Jewish Fold: Conversion and Jewish Assimilation in Modern Jewish History* (Princeton – Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014).

<sup>22</sup> See Asher Salah in this issue.

<sup>23</sup> Clara Sereni, *Il gioco dei regni* (Florence: Giunti, 1993).

current problems, especially in regards to East Europe or Romania.<sup>24</sup> However, one should bear in mind that the history of Eastern European Jews is also characterized by responses to persecution and a great dynamism. The examples mentioned by Salah offer a different perception of Eastern Jews, through the history of Jewish women, who strove to find their way, embracing values and projects they deemed beneficial for the progress of humanity. Moreover, the story of Elena suggests a more nuanced interpretation of models and patterns of women's emancipation in the nineteenth century.



*Rosa Errera (1864-1946), Cleofe Pellegrini (1854-1936), Aurelia Josz (1869-1944), 1900 ca.* They were all deeply involved in educational activities.

Fondazione CDEC, Photographic Archive, Exhibitions Collection ("Donne ebreo nell'Italia unita", 2011).

Laura Orvieto did not arrive in Florence from Odessa, nor was she a political activist like Anna Kuliscioff or other Jewish Russian young women mentioned by Salah. She was born in Milan in 1876 and when she arrived in Florence, the city that hosted an important Russian community had become an important hub of Italian culture.

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<sup>24</sup> See Jeffrey Veidlinger, *Jewish Public Culture in Late Imperial Russia*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).



## QUEST N. 8 – FOCUS

As Laura recalled in her attempt to write the history of her family in 1938 (right after the implementation of the racial laws), Florence was home to a special cultural atmosphere, due to it having been the capital of Italy for a very short period, and attracting much interest for its Renaissance history.

As in the majority of other Italian cities, Florence built a ghetto in the center of the town.

By the end of the nineteenth century the ghetto was destroyed and a magnificent synagogue was built instead, as a reminder that radical changes had occurred.

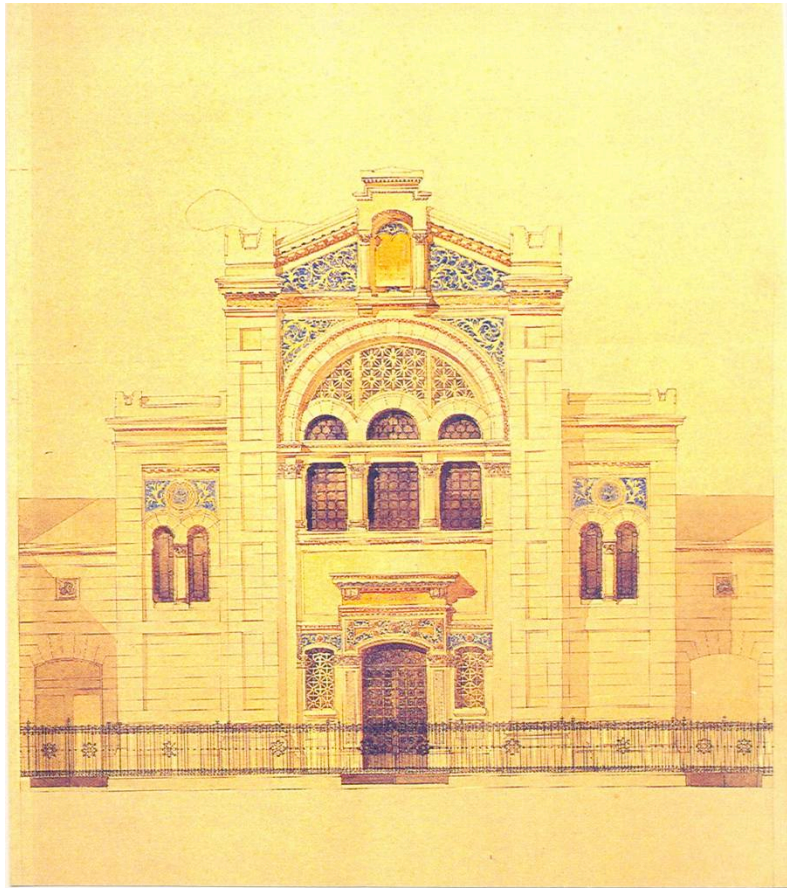


*Florence, "Mercato vecchio," before 1881.*

Piero Bargellini, *Com'era Firenze 100 anni fa*, (Florence, 1998). Retrieved from

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mercato\\_vecchio\\_before\\_1881,\\_torre\\_dei\\_caponsacchi.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mercato_vecchio_before_1881,_torre_dei_caponsacchi.jpg)

The Jewish urban landscape changed in many Italian cities. Beautiful synagogues became the markers of political and social integration. No serious research has been conducted on the real impact of aesthetic and architectural modifications on nineteenth century Judaism, or how the ecology of the religious system contributed to the transformation of religion itself.



Drawing of the central Synagogue of Milan. Luca Beltrami, 1891-1892.  
Fondazione CDEC, Photographic Archive, Exhibitions Collection. ("Milano, crogiuolo di ebrei," Milan, 2000)

Laura married Angiolo Orvieto, who was a member of a leading family of Jewish intellectuals, and, in fact, a distant relative. Laura's story of personal empowerment and intellectual achievements as a writer is rooted in the world of prominent Italian Jewish families. Nevertheless, although she married within the Jewish community, she was also educated and inspired by a Scottish Puritan enlightened teacher, Lily Marshall. The story of Laura, as recounted by Ruth Natterman in her article, traverses the nineteenth century and reaches the period of racial laws, when her written works were censored and banned.

Laura's career as an author was supported and definitely promoted by her husband who had founded, together with his brother, *Il Marzocco*, a periodical publication, which brought together important Italian authors and *litterati*. The story of Laura as a Jewish author is, as the author herself stressed, "*italianissima*," and situates the reader in the Florence of the early twentieth century. Reading Natterman's story of Laura Orvieto (nèe Cantoni) one is reminded that Laura

herself felt obliged to describe what “religion” was for her and her family. In her private writings she confided that Angiolo followed religious practices she deemed a bit “superstitious,” and how he and his brother were introduced to Jewish religion by their radical private tutor, David Castelli, a prominent Jewish scholar at the University of Florence.<sup>25</sup>

Angiolo himself penned a moving portrait of the *maestro* after his death in 1901, highlighting the notion of biblical Prophetism as a form of universal Judaism that Castelli contributed to spreading, together with other intellectuals. References to “biblical Prophetism” evoked the religion of the prophets that David Levi had performed as a theatrical play, celebrating the unification of Italy. That notion of religion was still quite vibrant in the early twentieth century, both in Italy and abroad. The young Giacomo Debenedetti, the author of the acclaimed *Otto ebrei* and *16 Ottobre 1943* offered his own rendering of the biblical prophets in some of his first public lectures in Turin.<sup>26</sup> More could be developed on the relationship between biblical scholarship, public discourse, and literary imagination. For now it is enough to mention, as a concluding remark, the moving lectures on this same theme delivered by the great orientalist and anti-fascist Giorgio Levi della Vida at the Collège de France in 1938, before he emigrated to the United States.<sup>27</sup>

Florence was also the place where Samuel Zwi Margulies (1858-1922) arrived in 1890 from Polish Galicia. Margulies is generally considered the rabbi who brought new life to Italian Judaism. Educated at the University and at the Rabbinical Seminary of Breslau (Wrocław, now Poland), Margulies contributed greatly to the renewal of Jewish studies and Orthodox Jewish life in Italy. However, perhaps as a ritual of cultural integration, Margulies paid tribute, as I already mentioned, to David Levi, *Dichter und Poet* of the nineteenth century. Margulies belonged to a small group of outstanding *Galizianer* who animated the scholarly world of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* between Italy, Europe, and the United States in the first decades of the twentieth century. The biographical

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<sup>25</sup> Laura Orvieto, *Storia di Angiolo e Laura*, ed. Caterina Del Vivo (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2001); see also Cristiana Facchini, *David Castelli*.

<sup>26</sup> Giacomo Debenedetti, *I profeti. Cinque conferenze del 1924*, Milan: Mondadori, 1998. Ead. *Otto ebrei*, Rome, 1944 and *16 Ottobre 1943*, Rome 1945. For a fuller understanding of this period see: Alberto Cavaglion, *Felice Momigliano*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 1988.

<sup>27</sup> Facchini, *David Castelli*. Ead. *Orientalistica ed Ebraismo. Una storia ai margini. David Castelli e Giorgio Levi della Vida*, in *La storiografia storico-religiosa italiana tra la fine dell'800 e la seconda guerra mondiale*, eds. Mario Mazza, Natale Spineto (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso 2014), 111-139 (forthcoming in English).

trajectories of Samuel Z. Margulies, Israel Zoller, Ismar Elbogen, Zwi P. Chajes, and Isaiah Sonne, just to mention those who came from Galicia, constitute an important chapter of the intertwined history of scholarship and culture between Europe, the United States, and Israel, and which spanned across the dramatic events of European history. We mention them here as they offer a perspective that calls for transnational intellectual and cultural history to be integrated within Italian historiography.

Though we do not offer a chapter on Italian *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, it is within this setting that we should read Sara Airoidi's article on Alfonso Pacifici. Pacifici was born in Florence in 1889 and soon became the favorite pupil of Margulies. He is the only rabbi we present in this issue, and his work may be interpreted along two lines of inquiry: his interpretation of Judaism and his commitment to Zionism.

Airoidi's internal approach meticulously describes connections within the Jewish world, especially those internal links to both German religious culture and some currents of Zionism. Pacifici's religious Zionism is scrutinized against the background of the national and international debate that animated certain segments of the intellectual Jewish elite, and stresses the ambivalence of his theological reading of Judaism and Zionism. Along with this, Pacifici's systematic thought included notions of Judaism, religion, and modernity which underwent criticism and changes in the broader cultural setting of the early twentieth century. His religious thought is imbued with the cultural atmosphere of his time, not only in reference to Italian idealism and historicism, but also in relation to the religious changes that were taking place in wider Christian society. 'Religious renewal' was a sort of catchphrase for a younger generation that wished to rebel against the 'fathers': it appears among Protestants, and to an extent among Catholics, alongside a process that called all religious communities to deepen their commitment to patriotism and nationalism. Airoidi's article keeps a fair balance in navigating through all these questions, while presenting a coherent image of the development of Pacifici's religious thought and the criticism it attracted.

Finally, Marco Bencich's article explores other facets of Italian Zionism, through the activities of Bernardo Dessau. Dessau was born in 1863 in Offenbach into a family of Orthodox Jews, and after graduating in Germany, he eventually found a job in Italian universities. At the beginning of the twentieth century, following his marriage, he moved to Perugia to teach Experimental Physics. By then he had already become a fervent Zionist, and though he hoped to eventually find a

position at one of the new research centers in Palestine, he ultimately settled in Italy.

Bencich offers insight into Dessau's interpretation of Zionism, which, in contrast to the one offered by Pacifici, was aligned with a political-nationalist concept of Zionism. Examining private correspondences and published material, the article reconstructs the development of the debate over the meaning of Zionism within the Italian Jewish world, as well as tackling the problems that surfaced with the rise of nationalism and the outbreak of World War I.

Some of the complicated entanglements of politics and religion that slowly emerged during the first two decades of the twentieth century and grew more complicated during the war are of great historiographical relevance, and are addressed by both authors.



*L'Idea Sionnista (1901-1910).  
Bernardo Dessau was one of the  
authors of the "L'Idea Sionnista"*

### *Emotions and imagined communities*

From its inception and through its development Zionism took its place within

the tiny world of Italian Jewry whose religious commitment had been officially Orthodox. The rise of Jewish nationalism vis-à-vis Italian patriotism opened up a number of concerns, which had already been long discussed in previous decades. The rise of Zionism amplified the possible conflict with questions of belonging, and it is not surprising that in many cases the voices speaking to this issues were emotional and dramatic, as is attested to in Alfonso Pacifici's thought. The definition of religion was not, as we can assume from these articles, clear and defined. Different cultural traditions, which had been developing since the late eighteenth century clashed and competed within the Jewish world and in the public arena in order to offer a response to a world that varied greatly from place to place, and was rapidly changing.

Debates over the nature and meaning of Judaism occupied, to a different degree, both the internal debate and the public outcome. In many cases, beyond Judaism, it was religion in general to be discussed, translated into the language of Deism, Masonic rites and symbolism, and other *ersatz* religions. Traditional communities facing these challenges responded in three main ways: adapting to new political discourses and other features of modernity, opposing them, or reinventing religion at large. Open commitment to the "religion of humanity" or to traditional religion were combined with refusal and criticism of religion as such. The diverse paths that individuals followed, their personal choices, must be positioned within a larger environment that includes family structures, nation-state building, professional changes, and cultural transformation.

Historians should pursue diversity and retrace the many trajectories that contributed to the cultural world of Jews in the modern period. Nevertheless, a common thread runs through these stories: all our authors searched for meaning in the world they inhabited. Zionism emerged both as a practical way to solve the problem of anti-Semitism and as a cultural discourse aimed at constructing an imagined community. Nostalgia for an ideal world was a common feature among scholars and intellectuals. This feeling might be projected to the past, though it was often combined with a positive vision of the future. Nostalgia for the past was embraced, accompanying active involvement with present-day political and cultural challenges, which inherently entailed shaping a vision for the future. This may be true both for Zionists and for Liberal Jews, whose cultural trajectories intersect here.

As some of these biographies demonstrate, Jewish thinkers and intellectuals who inhabited Italian and European culture in the nineteenth century were fully involved with the political issues of their time. Their lives tell a story of strong

commitments to social, political, and economic issues. They were often involved in religious questions and, despite their various paths to secularization, they contributed to a discussion that is often overlooked by historians: the construction of a modern world where the place of religion and tradition was debated. In pursuing their practical goals they acted as though they belonged to real and imagined communities, to recall Benedict Anderson’s famous notion.<sup>28</sup> However, it must be noted that the “imagined communities” they all contributed to creating were multiple, as they lived in the world they meant to change. Moreover, one should stress that their belonging to or criticism of any community implied emotional attachment to it: when translating Judaism into a modern language, working towards the implementation of religious tolerance in other European countries, or collecting financial aid to resettle Jews elsewhere, they all confronted their own Jewish identity, whatever it meant or implied. Our six *authors* offer historians a possible way to look at the history of modern Italian Jewry, combining individual agency with general issues of national and transnational history. A more complex and nuanced historical portrait emerges, as biographical trajectories convey more than a reproduction of social structure or a unique possible historical experience. They offer historians new questions and challenges in interpreting the past, and in this case they invite reflection on how the history of minorities contributes to a different understanding of historical phenomena.

### **Why biographies?**

by *Tullia Catalan*

(*Università di Trieste*)

In order to analyse some of the issues fundamental to the history of Jews in Italy, from the emancipation of 1848, to the Fascist period of the 1930s, the essays in this edition of *Quest* adopt a biographical approach. This decision is motivated by the fact that, following the Italian Jews’ acquisition of civil and political rights, their route towards integration in the majority society is composed of thousands of unique, individual experiences, rather than a single, monolithic vision.

Our decision to adopt biography as methodological approach permits the non-Italian speaker to identify, through the stories of the intellectual, political and even family lives of the people discussed here, some of the issues common to all

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<sup>28</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

of the Jewish middle class in this period, both within Italy and further afield. It also allows the reader to understand the peculiarities of the Italian Jewish experience during the “creation” of the State: first through their active participation in the *Risorgimento* process, and later in the shaping of the national and therefore of the new Italian identity, which for some Jews, was smoothly linked to the traditional Jewish one.<sup>29</sup>

A biographical reconstruction of the figures analysed in these essays helps us bring to light the coexistence of various different identities, linked in varying degrees to their shared Jewish origins, but permeated by religious, cultural and political stimuli from the wider society during the nineteenth- and twentieth-century.

Useful information on sentimental, intellectual, friendship and business links which characterised the lives of these six individuals emerges from the profiles. This biographical approach allows us analyse the networks of national and transnational relationships of them all. Indeed, we cannot fully appreciate Elena Raffalovich Comparetti's interest in Froebelian pedagogy without understanding her wide range of contacts throughout Europe; and Asher Salah's essay on Raffalovich Comparetti highlights the importance of this approach, revealing her links with Protestants, alongside whom Elena promoted Froebelian pedagogy in Italy. Elena received mixed responses across Italy, since the Catholic clergy were opposed to the Froebelian method. Laura Cantoni Orvieto, like other women belonging to the Jewish middle class in Italy and across Europe, also dedicated herself passionately to pedagogical issues. She was a follower of the educational method devised by Maria Montessori, and devoted part of her life to the education of infants, writing several books for children. As Ruth Natterman discusses, Orvieto took part in the process of women's emancipation in Italy: she often wrote for the Florentine journal 'Il Marzocco', and for other pro-emancipation journals of the period. There was a sort of process of double emancipation for Jewish women in Italy at that time: they were rising up against the traditional role Judaism held for them, as well as from the role which society

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<sup>29</sup> See, *Ebrei, minoranze, Risorgimento. Storia, cultura letteratura*, eds. Marina Beer Anna Foa (Roma: Viella, 2013); Carlotta Ferrara degli Uberti, *Fare gli ebrei italiani: autorappresentazioni di una minoranza (1861-1918)*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011); “Un'identità in bilico: l'ebraismo italiano tra liberalismo, fascismo e democrazia (1861-2011),” ed. Mario Toscano, *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel*, LXXVI/1-2 (2011); Tullia Catalan, “Ebrei e nazione dall'emancipazione alla crisi di fine secolo,” in *Storia della Shoah in Italia. Vicende, memorie, rappresentazioni*, vol.1, *Le premesse, le persecuzioni, lo sterminio*, eds. Marcello Flores, Simon Levis Sullam, Marie-Anne Bonucci, Enzo Traverso (Turin: UTET, 2010), 13-34.



reserved for all women in general.<sup>30</sup>

The social group represented in these six biographies is that of the upper middle class, and the “financial aristocracy,” this latter is characterised by Elena Raffalovich, who was originally from Odessa, the great Russian city on the Black Sea. Odessa was an important community of port-Jews<sup>31</sup> commercially connected with other significant port cities of the period, including Trieste - another port city with an important Jewish community.<sup>32</sup> Trieste also promoted the Froebelian kindergarten, which were already employing Jewish teachers from the 1870s. Elena is an example of just one of the many Jewish Russian women living in Italy during this period, and about whom there remains much to say, especially in a prosopographical perspective. Salah’s essay explores the importance of this group, whose level of education and independence belies the stereotypical assumption that Jewish women in Western Europe were largely uneducated, though of course the women discussed here belonged to the middle class, and not to the lower classes. Salah also discusses Anna Kuliscioff, Angelica Balabanoff and Julia Schucht, who were actively involved in the Socialist or Communist movements: Kuliscioff and Balabanoff were also engaged in the fight for the rights of women, especially female workers.

Most of the people discussed here were the children of bankers and merchants (Laura Cantoni Orvieto; Elena Raffalovich Comparetti; David Levi), of self-employed individuals or landowners, like Tullo Massarani, whose father was a lawyer. The particular case of Giacobbe and his son Tullo Massarani, discussed here by Maurizio Bertolotti through a dialogue between the two generations, explores the important role of landowners and modernisers in the development of new agricultural techniques by some Jewish Italian families, who lived also in Friulis and in Veneto during this period.<sup>33</sup>

Only two of the figures discussed here came from modest families, closely linked

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<sup>30</sup> See, Monica Miniati, *Les ‘Emancipées.’ Les femmes juives italiennes aux XIX et XX siècles, 1848-1924*, (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2003); *Donne nella storia degli ebrei d’Italia. Atti del 9° Convegno Internazionale Italia Judaica. Lucca 6-9 giugno 2005*, eds. Michele Luzzati Cristina Galasso, (Florence: Giuntina, 2007).

<sup>31</sup> See Asher Salah in this issue.

<sup>32</sup> See Lois Dubin, *The Port Jews of Habsburg Trieste. Absolutist Politics and Enlightenment Culture*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Tullia Catalan, “The Ambivalence of a Port-City. The Jews of Trieste from the 19th to the 20th Century” in *Modernity and the City of the Jews*, ed. Cristiana Facchini, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC*, 2 (2011), 69-98, url: [www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=232](http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=232)

<sup>33</sup> See Tullia Catalan, “Notabilato friulano e triestino (1866-1914): due realtà a confronto,” in *Notabili e storia d’Italia. Caratteri e geografia del notabilato italiano (1861-1922)*, eds. Renato Camurri and Luigi Musella (Florence: Le Monnier, forthcoming).

to the Jewish communities to which they belonged: Bernardo Dessau and Alfonso Pacifici, both of whom were actively involved in Zionism, though in very different ways.<sup>34</sup>

Retracing the lives of these six Jews living in Italy, from the dawn of the *Risorgimento* to the advent of Fascism, allows us to better understand the social, institutional, and above all the cultural contexts of the Liberal and later Fascist Italy in which these individuals interacted. We must, however, always remember the difficulties entailed in the biographical approach of emphasising the originality of the experience on the one hand, and on the other hand sympathising too much with the object of study.<sup>35</sup>

The authors of the essays published here confronted themselves with the various thematic and methodological approaches required for a modern biographical study.<sup>36</sup> The essays demonstrate these different approaches by addressing topics such as: education within a civil and political emancipatory context, and its diverse reception amongst men and women; family links across generations, marriage strategies and networks; the relationship with the traditional Jewish faith in a secularised society like Italy, and the fascination of conversion demonstrated by the generations studied here. The essays also discuss the revisited cultural significance of cosmopolitanism; types of political engagement, and different modes of expressing patriotism; the central topic of women emancipation; the transformation of the traditional Jewish solidarity into a more general notion of philanthropy, aimed at society in general and not just the Jewish community.

What emerges is a general picture of an Italian Jewish presence which was very flexible: linked to the traditions of its region of origin on the one hand, as can be seen by the relations between Tullo Massarani and the Mantuan notables, but intellectually able to overcome every boundary due to a cosmopolitan education and, in the majority of cases, a keen awareness of one's Jewish origins. This Jewishness was proudly proclaimed even during the Fascist period, as Ruth Natterman demonstrates in her discussion of Laura Orvieto's refusal, in 1929, to

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<sup>34</sup> See Gabriele Turi, "La biografia: un 'genere' della specie 'storia'" in *La biografia: un genere storiografico in trasformazione*, eds. Cristina Cassina and Francesca Traniello, *Contemporanea*, II /2 (1999): 300.

<sup>35</sup> Giovanni Levi, "Les usages de la biographie" in *Annales. Économie, Sociétés, Civilisation*, 6 (1989): 1331. Regina Pozzi, "Genere minore o impresa da maestri?" in *La biografia: un genere storiografico*, 290; Gabriele Turi, "La biografia: un 'genere' della specie 'storia,'" 302.

<sup>36</sup> See Lois W. Banner, "Biography as History" in *The American Historical Review*, 3 (2009): 581-583.

comply with her Jewish editor Bemporad's request that her work be censored in accordance with Fascist views.

The six essays collected here span three generations of Jewish men and women in Italy who lived during a period of great change which challenged the traditional world of Jewish communities and, as a consequence, the institution of the family. The civil and political emancipation granted by the House of Savoy in the Piedmont and Sardinia to Protestants, Waldesians and Jews with the Albertine Statute of 1848 was the true turning point for Italian Jews.

The life of David Levi, as outlined by Alessandro Grazi, moves from the very beginning of the process of Italian unification, discussing Levi's involvement with the Masonry and with Grand Orient of Italy, of which he was a founding member, an involvement shared by Tullo Massarani and by many other Italian Jews engaged in the political life of the country.<sup>37</sup> The lodge was in fact a place where people could meet without religious barriers, and it was a leveller for the liberal middle class of the period.<sup>38</sup>

After the struggle for the Unification of Italy, the Jewish middle class was largely moved by a profound patriotism, linked particularly to the figure of the King and to the House of Savoy, and Jews were largely well integrated in the fundamental elements of the State: the army, education—Parliament and bureaucracy.<sup>39</sup> David Levi and Tullo Massarani were worthy examples of the politically engaged, integrated, progressive Jew, and they were engaged on both a local administrative level and a national political level. The authors of these two profiles, Grazi and Bertolotti, have both chosen to focus on Levi and Massarani's process of formation and intellectual orientation, omitting the development of their political activities in Parliament. Given the wide experiences of these two figures, it would be impossible to do justice to all areas of their lives in such a brief space, especially when one considers that both men were also writers, poets and well-known journalists.

During the second half of the nineteenth-century, Jews were really active in Italy: they were closely linked to liberal politics, motivated by loyal patriotism, faithful to the ideas of progress and reassured by the anti-clerical stance of the Italian State. This climate, which was so idyllic when compared to the situations of other Jews in Europe, who were troubled by the enduring presence of anti-Semitism, suffered its first setback as a result of the first echoes of the Dreyfus

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<sup>37</sup> See Fulvio Conti, *Storia della massoneria italiana. Dal Risorgimento al fascismo*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006) (2° ed.).

<sup>38</sup> Jacob Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe. 1723-1939* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970).

<sup>39</sup> See Catalan, "Ebrei e nazione dall'emancipazione alla crisi di fine secolo."

case in France and the birth of political anti-Semitism. This setback was first felt by the more forward-thinking Italian Jews, including David Levi, who gave an important, though never published, interview to young Jewish students from Turin for the “Vessillo Israelitico,” the Italian Jewish newspaper,<sup>40</sup> in which he expressed strong concerns about the campaign of anti-Jewish political propaganda. Political anti-Semitism reached Italy in 1911, as a result of the war in Libya.<sup>41</sup>

The years before the First World War were unsettling for Italian Jews, and full of cultural and political changes. In place of David Levi and Tullo Massarani’s generation came a new one, more tormented by their intellectual and political choices, since they were the children of such tempestuous years. Alfonso Pacifici, whose life during precisely these tumultuous years is discussed by Sara Airoidi; and Bernardo Dessau, whose life is presented by Marco Bencich – two young historians not by chance fascinated by the lives of these outsiders – allow us to cast our gaze over the small, but complex world of Italian Zionism, and its journalistic production. Internally divided into various currents, but predominantly favouring a philanthropic bond to the national Jewish movement, this was however an important place of exchange for young Jews, who, thanks to the Florentine group led by the Rabbi Margulies, to which Alfonso Pacifici also belonged, created discussion and exchange groups which promoted the rediscovery of Jewish language and culture.<sup>42</sup> The Rosselli brothers also belonged to this young circle in Florence, and their mother Amalia Pincherle Rosselli – was great friend of Laura Orvieto, as Natterman discusses in her article.

There is, however, one final aspect on which I would like to focus the reader’s attention while concluding this short introduction: I believe it is useful to underline the desire for self-representation demonstrated by some of the people analysed here. David Levi, Tullo Massarani and Laura Orvieto all wrote autobiographical works,<sup>43</sup> which reveal their desire of auto-representation, and

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<sup>40</sup> See Il Comitato, “Ai lettori”, in *XXIX marzo. Numero unico a ricordo della Emancipazione Israelitica*, eds. Comitato di studenti, Turin, March 29, 1898.

<sup>41</sup> Mario Toscano, *Ebraismo e antisemitismo in Italia. Dal 1848 alla guerra dei sei giorni*, (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2003), 41-47.

<sup>42</sup> See Toscano, *Ebraismo e antisemitismo in Italia*, 71-89.

<sup>43</sup> See, David Levi, *Vita di pensiero-ricordi e liriche*, (Milan: Battezzati, 1875); ID., *Ausonia, vita d’azione (dal 1840 al 1870)*, (Turin: Loescher, 1882); Tullo Massarani, *Illustri e cari estinti. Commemorazioni ed epigrafi*, ed. Raffaello Barbiera, “Edizione postuma delle opere,” Gruppo IV, “Ricordi,” I (Florence: Successori Le Monnier, 1907); ID., *Una nobile vita. Carteggio inedito di T. M. Scelto, ordinato e postillato da Raffaello Barbiera*, “Edizione postuma delle opere,” Gruppo IV, “Ricordi,” VI (Florence: Successori Le Monnier, 1909), I (1851-1885); ID., *Ricordi*

by the first person narrator, their firm intention to transmit the most significant moments and reflections of their lives.<sup>44</sup> And this in itself: autobiography's use amongst the Jews of liberal Italy, could be an area for future studies stimulated by these essays.

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*While in the final stages of the preparation of this eighth issue of the journal, we were reached by the saddening news of David Cesarani's premature passing on October 25.*

*His career developed through posts at the University of Leeds, Queen Mary University of London, and the Wiener Library. Later he was professor of modern Jewish history at the University of Southampton from 2000 to 2004, and finally research professor in history at Royal Holloway College - London since 2004.*

*David was a brilliant and prolific scholar: his scholarship on the Holocaust and its memorialization, as well as his contributions to Jewish history – especially on Anglo-Jewry as well as on the peculiar phenomenon of port-Jews – had significant impact on the evolution of international historiography. His contributions to scholarship and the influence of his research will certainly deserve to be discussed more in depth in the near future. His research is known to all in the field, but his notoriety was by no means limited to specialists alone. His intense and passionate public engagement – from newspaper columns, to advisory roles for governmental agencies, to the work done for some very successful televised documentaries – made him a prominent public intellectual in the UK and beyond.*

*David was one of the first colleagues and friends to whom we illustrated the idea of creating an online journal devoted to the history of Jews and anti-Semitism in the modern world. As we discussed our project he proved, once more, to be perceptive and insightful. He was then an active member of our Editorial Advisory Board since the first issue of 'Quest', and repeatedly offered us his invaluable support, his discernment and his constructive criticism.*

*His generosity, his vibrant intellectual curiosity and his irony will be missed.*

*The Editors*

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*cittadini e patriottici*, ed. Raffaello Barbiera, (Florence: Successori Le Monnier, 1908); Laura Orvieto, *Storia di Angiolo e Laura*, ed. Caterina Del Vivo, (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2001).

<sup>44</sup> The debate about the use of autobiography in history is really large. For an overview on Italian case in XIXth century see, *Scritture di desiderio e di ricordo. Autobiografie, diari, memorie tra Settecento e Novecento*, eds. Luisa Betri, Daniela Maldini Chiarito (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2002); Luisa Tasca, *Le vite e la storia. Autobiografia nell'Italia dell'Ottocento*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2010).

**David Levi.**  
**A Child of the Nineteenth Century**

by *Alessandro Grazi*

**Abstract**

*The present paper examines the main biographical traits of the Italian author, politician and Risorgimento activist David Levi (1816-1898). Early in life, Levi abandoned the traditional religious spheres of Judaism but always remained attached to his Jewish heritage, as emerges from his oeuvre. Levi's relevance derives from his constant effort to amalgamate Italian and Jewish identities in a context of increasing secularity. An analysis of his figure and activities, therefore enables us to investigate some crucial issues at the center of current historiographical debate, such as the nineteenth-century Jewish transition from a traditional to a modern identity, the discussion around the concepts of "assimilation" and "integration," orientalist researches and the study of religions in nineteenth-century Italy, and the important role of Freemasonry and Saintsimonism in Levi's secularization modes. In fact, their concept of "Religion of Humanity" helped him to create a synthesis between Enlightenment's aspirations to universalism and Risorgimento's cosmopolitan nationalism.*

- David Levi
- David Levi's oeuvre
- Final remarks on David Levi

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**David Levi**

David Levi is a rather intriguing Jewish figure of the Italian *Ottocento*, a "child of the century," as he liked to define himself.<sup>1</sup> His relevance and fame reached a

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<sup>1</sup> Quotation from an extract of David Levi's Autobiography typed in 1938 by Emanuele Artom

European dimension around the *fin de siècle*, when essays on his life and oeuvre appeared in English and German, and several intellectuals praised his writings.<sup>2</sup> At the top of his fame, he earned the title of “Poet and Patriot,” which efficiently summarized the two central aspects of his life: his literary writings and his active role in the Risorgimento. The Italian author and politician, however, was almost entirely forgotten by scholarship for the entire twentieth century, besides some sporadic analyses of his socialist ideas and brief descriptions of his literary activity.<sup>3</sup> Only in recent years, academics have started to re-discover and acknowledge Levi’s great importance not only for modern Jewish history and literature but also for the history of Italy’s unification and its subsequent years. These studies investigate some of the most interesting aspects of his multi-faceted life, such as his affiliation with Freemasonry and *Giovine Italia*, his active role in the *Risorgimento* national movement, his special relation with Christianity and Christological themes, his adherence to Saintsimonism, and his interest for the history of religions and orientalism.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, all these interesting researches

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and conserved in the Emanuele Artom Library of Turin’s Jewish community.

<sup>2</sup> Helen Zimmern, “David Levi, Poet and Patriot,” in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 9/3 (1897): 363-402; Samuel Hirsch Margulies, *Dichter und Patriot. Eine Studie über das Leben und die Werke D. Levis* (Trier: Sigmund Mayer, 1896) and Giulio Vindice, *La vita e le opere di David Levi* (Florence: G. Barbera, 1889).

<sup>3</sup> Luigi Bulferetti, *Socialismo risorgimentale* (Turin: Einaudi, 1975) 81-103; Leo Neppi Modona, “17 lettere di S. H. Margulies a David Levi,” in *La Rassegna Mensile d’Israel* 28/II (1962): 62-75; Delio Cantimori, *Utopisti e riformatori Italiani* (Florence: Industria Tipografica Fiorentina, 1943); Sabato Morais, *Italian Hebrew Literature* (New York: Hermon Press, 1926).

<sup>4</sup> Alessandro Grazi, “In Quest of a (Jewish) Identity: David Levi’s Il Mistero delle Tre Melarancie,” in *Zutot – Perspectives on Jewish Culture* 9 (2012): 97-110; Alessandro Grazi, “A Jewish Construction of a Catholic Hero: David Levi’s A Pio IX,” in *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations*, 6/ 1 (2011), <http://ejournals.bc.edu/ojs/index.php/scjr/article/view/1909>; Francesca Sofia, “Il vangelo eterno svelato: David Levi e la massoneria,” in *Massoneria e Unità d’Italia – La Libera Muratoria e la costruzione della nazione*, eds. Fulvio Conti and Marco Novarino (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011), 203-222; Francesca Sofia, “Gli Ebrei risorgimentali fra tradizione biblica, libera muratoria e nazione,” in *La Massoneria, Storia d’Italia – Annali 21*, ed. Gian Mario Cazzaniga (Turin: Einaudi, 2007) 244-265; Francesca Sofia, “La laicizzazione dell’immagine dell’ebreo errante,” in *Stato nazionale ed emancipazione ebraica. Atti del Convegno “Stato nazionale, società civile e minoranze religiose: l’emancipazione degli ebrei in Francia, Germania e Italia tra rigenerazione morale e intolleranza”* (Roma 23-25 Ottobre 1991) eds. Francesca Sofia and Mario Toscano (Rome: Bonacci Editore, 1992); Fulvio Conti, “David Levi,” in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 64 (2005); Augusto Comba, “Giuseppe David Levi profeta del Risorgimento,” in *Isacco Artom e gli Ebrei Italiani dai Risorgimenti al fascismo*, ed. Aldo Alessandro Mola (Foggia: Bastogi, 2002) 109-116; Aldo Alessandro Mola, *Storia della Massoneria italiana dall’Unità alla Repubblica* (Milan: Bompiani, 1976); Alberto Cavaglion, “Gli Ebrei italiani e il Risorgimento: la lezione di David Levi,” in *La Bibbia, la coccarda e il tricolore. I*

deal with a particular aspect of his life or with a specific perspective of his *Weltanschauung*, leaving the reader full of questions concerning a wider biographical context of Levi's endeavours. This essay wishes to fill this gap by presenting the salient traits of David Levi's life, contextualizing them in wider Italian and European frames and presenting some key historiographical questions this author allows us to address. The importance of Levi, indeed, lies in the fact that an analysis of his figure and activities enables us to investigate some crucial issues, at the center of current historiographical debate, not only concerning the more confined field of (Italian) Jewish studies, but also more general research areas, such as modern history, history of religions and the *Risorgimento*.

In the first place, we have the opportunity to examine a type of modern secular Jew, which has insofar received insufficient scholarly attention, especially within the Italian domain: one that relinquished the religious and traditional spheres of Judaism, yet remained strongly attached to his Jewish identity. Hitherto, the predominant view has been to consider only two possible outcomes for the Jewish encounter with modernity: either from within tradition and religion, or, alternatively, full assimilation in the hosting society with a total rejection of Jewish identity. Levi shows that there has been an alternative synchronous approach, which, in spite of its secular path, entailed a strong attachment to both Jewish *and* Italian identity. Levi's successful amalgamation of the Italian and the Jew through a secularization process is not unique in nineteenth-century Europe, but research on this re-defined type of Jewish identity is still at an initial phase and has not yet developed suitable tools to verify (and define) the existence of common European or Italian patterns followed by secular Jewish intellectuals. In the Italian context, which is unfortunately still quite marginal within current historiography on Jewish modernity, research has mainly focused on rabbinic milieus,<sup>5</sup> with only few studies on secular Jewish individuals.

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*valdesi fra due emancipazioni (1798-1848)* ed. Gian Paolo Romagnani, (Turin: Claudiana, 2001), 369-374; Bruno Di Porto, *Gli Ebrei di Pisa (secoli IX-XX). Atti del convegno internazionale, Pisa, 3-4 Ottobre 1994* (Ospedaletto, Pisa: Pacini, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Very important, in this respect, are the studies on Jewish culture in rabbinical milieus in nineteenth-century Italy carried out by Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, in his cornerstone works Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, *Il prezzo dell'uguaglianza. Il dibattito sull'emancipazione degli ebrei in Italia (1781-1848)* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1998) and Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, "Aspetti della cultura ebraica in Italia nel secolo XIX," in *Storia d'Italia. Annali. Volume 22, Gli Ebrei in Italia*, ed. Corrado Vivanti (Turin: Einaudi 1997), 1215-1244; Maddalena Del Bianco's researches on Padua's Rabbinical College, the most important Jewish cultural center in nineteenth-century Italy and a precursor of modern rabbinical education in Europe, with her Maddalena Del Bianco Cotrozzi, *Il*



Furthermore, this study wishes to contribute to the discussion around the concepts of “assimilation” and “integration.” Generally connected to analyses of secularization processes, the debate on assimilation has been biased by two opposing viewpoints. Its orthodox and Zionist detractors, on one side, gave it a negative connotation, as a total abandonment of one’s Jewish identity, while, on the other, its defenders emphasized its positive aspects. Current historiography, on the contrary, is trying to get rid of this bias, by simply pointing out the necessity of problematizing this phenomenon and investigating all of its numerous nuances and facets, in order to better grasp its complexity. David Levi’s biography will help us understand one of these numerous facets. Also the concept of integration to a certain extent suffers of historiographical misrepresentation, in particular within the Italian domain. The precursors and pioneers of the field of Italian Jewish history tended to describe the Italian Jews’ integration process in the hosting society after civil emancipation as swift and smooth, leading, in their view, to a seamless assimilation of Judaism within Italy’s cultural life.<sup>6</sup> This idea is present, for instance, in scholars like Attilio Milano,<sup>7</sup> Cecil Roth,<sup>8</sup> and Arnaldo Momigliano.<sup>9</sup> In recent years, a new historiographical stream has developed, which applied a more systematic analysis of documentary and literary sources. Thus, scholars like Alberto Cavaglion,<sup>10</sup> Francesca Sofia, Mario Toscano,<sup>11</sup> David Bidussa,<sup>12</sup> or even more recently Cristiana Facchini,<sup>13</sup>

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*Collegio Rabbinico di Padova. Un’istituzione religiosa dell’Ebraismo sulla via dell’emancipazione* (Florence: Olschki, 1995); Renzo De Felice’s and Alessandro Guetta’s studies on Leghorn’s kabbalist Rabbi Elia Benamozegh in Renzo De Felice, “Elia Benamozegh,” in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* (1966), 169-170 and Alessandro Guetta, *Philosophie et cabbale. Essai sur la pensée d’Elie Benamozegh* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1998); and finally Asher Salah’s work on Mantua’s rabbi Marco Mortara in Asher Salah, *L’epistolario di Marco Mortara (1815-1894). Un rabbino italiano tra riforma e ortodossia* (Florence: Giuntina, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> A thorough discussion on the different historiographical streams on Italian Judaism can be found in Cristiana Facchini, *David Castelli. Ebraismo e scienze delle religioni tra Otto e Novecento* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2005), 32-33.

<sup>7</sup> Attilio Milano, *Storia degli Ebrei in Italia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1963).

<sup>8</sup> Cecil Roth, *The History of the Jews of Italy* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1946).

<sup>9</sup> Arnaldo Momigliano, *Pagine ebraiche* (Turin: Einaudi, 1987).

<sup>10</sup> Cavaglion, “Gli Ebrei italiani e il Risorgimento,” 369-374.

<sup>11</sup> *Stato nazionale ed emancipazione ebraica. Atti del Convegno “Stato nazionale, società civile e minoranze religiose: l’emancipazione degli ebrei in Francia, Germania e Italia tra rigenerazione morale e intolleranza” (Roma 23-25 Ottobre 1991)*, eds. Francesca Sofia and Mario Toscano (Rome: Bonacci Editore, 1992).

<sup>12</sup> David Bidussa, “Gli ebrei in Italia in età moderno-contemporanea. Considerazioni per una

Carlotta Ferrara degli Uberti,<sup>14</sup> and Elizabeth Schächter<sup>15</sup> pointed out how the first generation of historians on Italian Judaism drew on misconceptions that were sometimes created by nineteenth-century Italian Jewish intellectuals, with the purpose of molding a grand narrative around the relation between Italian Judaism and nationalism. These myths and misconceptions endured almost up to the present day. The second side of the coin of the debate on Italian Jewish integration concerns its quality and extent in the pre-emancipation period. According to another old misconception, the Italian Jews have been happily integrated in surrounding society at all times. Recent studies are challenging this second myth as well, showing how an investigation of the Italian Jews' integration cannot be applied in a monolithic way to all Jewries of the peninsula, but it is important to distinguish between the strongly diverging geo-political contexts of pre-unification Italy and the different origins and cultural orientations of Italian Jewish communities, and to unravel individual peculiarities. This recent emphasis on the Italian Jewish communities' substantial fragmentation even led to problematizing the very term Italian Jewry.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, also the idea that the Italian Jews' integration process started only with the achievement of full civil rights does not describe this phenomenon appropriately. The term integration does not exclusively apply to the Jews' modernization process in the nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup>

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storia ancora da scrivere,” in *Bailamme* 15-16 (1994): 50-69.

<sup>13</sup> She elaborated on the concepts of Italian Jewish integration and assimilation and on the related historiographical issues in several essays and articles, but mainly on the aforementioned work Facchini, *David Castelli*, 17-35.

<sup>14</sup> Carlotta Ferrara degli Uberti, *Fare gli ebrei italiani. Autorappresentazioni di una minoranza (1861-1918)*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth Schächter, *The Jews of Italy 1848-1915. Between Tradition and Transformation* (London - Portland: Valentine Mitchell, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> In the 1800s Padua, Livorno and Turin were the three main demographic centers of Italian Judaism, having each a characterizing approach to Judaism and modernity. For instance, compared to the most studied milieu of Padua's rabbinical college, Turin and Piedmont have even been defined as “the other side of the world” by Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, “Aspetti della cultura ebraica in Italia nel secolo XIX,” in *Storia d'Italia. Annali. Vol. 22: Gli Ebrei in Italia*, ed. Corrado Vivanti (Turin: Einaudi, 1997) 1216. There is, however, increasing awareness of the necessity of a regional approach to the study of Italian Jewries: Ulrich Wyrwa, *Juden in der Toskana und in Preussen im Vergleich. Aufklärung und Emanzipation in Florenz, Livorno, Berlin und Königsberg i. Pr.*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003) or my own doctoral dissertation Alessandro Grazi, *Patria ed Affetti. Jewish Identity and Risorgimento Nationalism in the Oeuvres of Samuel Luzzatto, Isaac Reggio, and David Levi*, PhD Dissertation defended at the University of Groningen, 08 November 2012.

<sup>17</sup> Facchini, *David Castelli*, 25.

In recent years, the path for the exploration of secular Jewish figures in modern Italy has been opened by Cristiana Facchini's pioneering studies on David Castelli, a Livorno-born Jewish scholar, who followed a secular trajectory.<sup>18</sup> An exploration of Levi's life and oeuvre aims at adding a piece of the puzzle to this line of research. Clearly, this enables also reflections on the concept of Jewish identity, which is integral part of the debate around the distinction between religious/traditional and secular approaches to modernity.

A further input provided by Levi's biography and cultural engagement concerns orientalist researches and the study of religions in nineteenth-century Italy, from a Jewish perspective. David Levi was not a professional "orientalist" and scholar of religions, as he never pursued an academic career. Nevertheless, he deeply engaged himself in this type of researches and devoted a good part of his writings to them, as a way to investigate his Jewish heritage, as we will see. Just like in many other respects of his life, Levi followed nineteenth-century cultural trends in this case too. The study of oriental cultures and religions was fashionable among intellectuals in the 1800s, but from an Italian Jewish perspective is still an understudied phenomenon.

Finally, we will investigate the important role of Freemasonry, *Giovine Italia* and Saintsimonism in David Levi's secularization process. These secret societies and the utopian socialist doctrine occupied a large and important part of his life, from his youth until his death. They did not only constitute a mere biographical aspect of his existence, but also had a strong impact on his mind-set and literary activity. There is no doubt that their concept of "Religion of Humanity" helped Levi create a synthesis between Enlightenment's aspirations to universalism and Risorgimento's cosmopolitan nationalism. We will address the question: which role did they play in his secular synthesis of Jewish and Italian?

Levi's biography has to be reconstructed crossing data from different documentary and literary sources. The author did leave us a private diary and an autobiography but, at the present state of research, they are both still unpublished.<sup>19</sup> Luckily, he included parts of his autobiography in two of his published books: *Vita di pensiero: ricordi e liriche* (Life of Thought: memories and lyrics) and *Ausonia, vita d'azione (dal 1848 al 1870)* (Ausonia, Life of

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> The autograph manuscripts of his autobiography and private diary are conserved at the Museo Nazionale del Risorgimento, in Turin, in the private archive of David Levi. Parts of his autobiography were typed in 1938 by Emanuele Artom (1915-1944), a member of an important Jewish family in Turin, and are now conserved in the Emanuele Artom Library of Turin's Jewish community.

Action).<sup>20</sup> Besides these texts, anecdotes and facts about his life are scattered around his writings and have to be properly extrapolated and contextualized by researchers. In addition to this biographical information, I recently had the opportunity to carry out thorough research in David Levi's private archive, conserved at the National Museum of the Risorgimento in Turin. Thus, I recovered a large number of documents and unpublished texts, which allowed me to reconstruct his biography in more detail.

Levi himself liked to refer to his life as divided in two parts, as suggested by the two aforementioned works: "a life of thought," that is, the first part of his life, which was mainly devoted to his studies, the development of his political and philosophical ideas, and in which he started writing some of his literary works; and "a life of action," the time in which Levi "laid down the pen to seize the sword,"<sup>21</sup> in order to play an active role in the Risorgimento national movement and Italy's political life across the unification period. I would actually divide Levi's life in three parts: 1) the phase of his socio-philosophical education (life of thought); 2) his active participation in the Risorgimento and in Italy's political life (life of action); 3) his retired life after his last resignation from the Italian Parliament in 1880 until his death in 1898 (life of thought again). This is of course only a schematic subdivision in line with Levi's original conception, which helps to create a logical pattern of his endeavors. The various aspects of his life actually intertwined in a much more fluid way than this. His writing activity, for instance, took place in all three phases, although it was certainly more intense in the first and especially the last period. The present biography will mostly focus on the first two phases of Levi's life, as they are crucial for his formation and the development of his entire *Weltanschauung*. Methodologically, it will rely on both literary and archival/documentary sources, in accordance with current historiographical approaches.<sup>22</sup>

David Levi was born in Chieri, Piedmont, at that time part of the Kingdom of Sardinia, on November 6, 1816. In the past, there has been uncertainty concerning his date of birth. Emanuele Artom maintained that he was born on

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<sup>20</sup> David Levi, *Vita di pensiero – Ricordi e liriche* (Milan: Battezzati, 1875); and David Levi, *Ausonia. Vita d'azione (1848-1870)*, (Turin: Loescher, 1882).

<sup>21</sup> Morais, *Italian Hebrew Literature*, 187.

<sup>22</sup> The integration of fictional and documentary sources is methodologically conceptualized in *The Risorgimento Revisited. Nationalism and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Italy*, eds. Silvana Patriarca and Lucy Riall, (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 2-7 but has been already applied in the last decade but several historians, such as the renowned Risorgimento historian Mario Banti in several of his works.

November 9, 1816.<sup>23</sup> Other sources indicated even a different year, 1820<sup>24</sup> or 1821.<sup>25</sup> We can exclude the years 1820 and 1821, since they would be in contrast with the dates of his school enrollment and of his graduation from university. Once established 1816 as the year of his birth, November 6 (as maintained by the author himself in his memoirs) seems to be a more plausible date of birth than November 9. In fact, in the past it happened relatively often that newborn babies were registered in local archives a few days after their birth, and the registration day was recorded as the date of birth. Furthermore, it seems unlikely that the author reports a wrong date of his own birth.

David was a member of the Levis, an important and wealthy family, part of Piedmont's emerging middle class, which would become one of the pillars of the Italian bourgeoisie. David Levi Senior, his grandfather, was a successful business man, who combined an elevated education with a keen interest in politics. His good economic condition assured him and his family privileges that were denied to most Jews in Piedmont and in the rest of the Italian peninsula. They owned land and houses, in spite of the prohibition, and ran successful companies. During the so-called "first emancipation" (Piedmont's Napoleonic era), David Levi senior served as a mayor of Chieri and was Piedmont's Jewish representative at the Sanhedrin in Paris, the famous institution established by Napoleon.<sup>26</sup> The pivotal role played by the Levi family in their hometown, situated in the area of Turin, the leading political and economic center of the Risorgimento, favored their inclusion in high society circles, which encompassed Jewish and non-Jewish families, such as the Pellicos, the Artoms and the Cavour. David Levi's grandfather was a key figure in his life, as he was David's main contributor to his Jewish and secular education.

David's grandfather had four children. Each one of them inherited one of the

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<sup>23</sup> Civil register of Chieri's Jews conserved in the archives of Turin's Jewish community, as reported by Emanuele Artom's unpublished biography of Levi, conserved in Biblioteca Emanuele Artom of Turin's Jewish community, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Telesforo Sarti, *I rappresentanti del Piemonte e d'Italia nelle tredici legislature del Regno* (Rome: Paolini, 1880).

<sup>25</sup> Angelo De Gubernatis, *Dizionario biografico degli scrittori contemporanei* (Florence, 1879); Leone Carpi, *Il Risorgimento Italiano: Biografie Storico-Politiche d'Illustri Italiani Contemporanei*, (Milan, 1884), 331; Ersilio Michel, *Dizionario del Risorgimento nazionale* (Milan: Vallardi, 1933) and Guido Mazzoni, *L'Ottocento* (Milan: Vallardi, 1934), 1345.

<sup>26</sup> See the Italian edition of the documents related to the institution of the Sanhedrin: Raccolta degli atti dell'assemblea degli Israeliti di Francia e del Regno d'Italia convocata a Parigi con decreto di S.M.I. e R. del 30 maggio 1806. Pubblicata dal sig. Diogene Tama e seguita dai processi verbali e decisioni del Gran Sinedrio tomo 1.-2.

four different activities their family owned. One was chosen to run a cotton textile factory (which was the Levis' original economic activity), another a silk factory, the third possessed a bank (founded by David Levi senior) and the fourth received land. The wealthy condition of his family allowed young David to be raised in a highly educated and acculturated milieu. In this stimulating environment, he grew curious and desirous of knowledge and culture. His early education was taken care of by private tutors but was also fostered within his family. He was taught not only the traditional Jewish subjects, but also general secular culture, as was habitual among acculturated and highly integrated Italian Jewish families. Levi refers that during his childhood he was considered to be rather temperamental and rebellious. His family was forced to change his private tutor several times and nicknamed him *piccolo demone* [Little Demon].<sup>27</sup> This impulsive nature seems to have characterized also his adult life, especially his times as a university student.

The socio-economic condition of the Levis offers the opportunity for a first reflection on the theme of integration. In the first place, it suggests that we approach this theme in a much more nuanced and precise way. The “Italian Jews” cannot be taken as a whole homogeneous block, but fundamental distinctions have to be made concerning the geo-political region where they lived, but also as regards their socio-economic situation. In other words, if for an average Piedmont's Jewish family the traditional scheme “first emancipation” → positive condition, Restoration → regression to a negative condition, 1848 → definitive acquisition of civil rights, could work, for a family with a privileged socio-economic condition, like the Levis, this scheme is not entirely accurate. It is true that the “first emancipation” gave them the chance to start activities they were previously forbidden to carry out, which in turn allowed David's grandfather to reach top levels in society. At the same time, the Jews' legal regression starting in 1815 (corresponding to David's childhood and youth) did not necessarily have a catastrophic impact on the Levis, who, on the ground of economic utility for the Kingdom of Sardinia, were by and large allowed to keep their properties and run their businesses. This leads to a second consideration, that the process of integration, if not legal at least cultural and economic, is a lot more fluid and less schematized than initially thought and is not exclusively linked to the emancipation period.

In order to understand and correctly contextualize Levi's choices as a teenager first and then as an adult in relation to Judaism, it is fundamental to elaborate on

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<sup>27</sup> Reported by Zimmern, “David Levi, Poet and Patriot,” 364. The author, however, does not provide the source of this piece of information.

the religious environment in which he grew up. The Levis were an observant Jewish family, whose strong traditions combined the centuries-old Jewish ones and the local customs of Piedmont's middle class. They celebrated all the Jewish festivities with large family reunions and opened their spacious house to the local Jewish community as a meeting place for the Sabbath rituals.

In 1830 Levi enrolled in the Jewish College of Vercelli, called the "Foà Institute."<sup>28</sup> This was an exclusively Jewish institution, which, like other Italian Jewish institutions of the time, imparted also a secular education on all subjects. Therefore, next to the traditional Jewish curriculum and the study of the Hebrew language, David also acquired a deep knowledge in Italian history and literature. Many important Italian Jewish personalities were educated in this school, such as the orientalist Salvatore De Benedetti (Novara 1818 – Pisa 1891) and the politician Isacco Artom (Asti 1829 – Rome 1900). Here Levi learned to love Italian history and literature as much as he admired his Jewish descent and showed a special inclination for writing and poetry. It is clear that both family and education fostered a high sense of Italian patriotism in David and instilled a great enthusiasm in him not only for the Jewish side of his identity but equally for his patriotic Italian side.

In addition to his grandfather, a further influential person in Levi's formative years was one of his mentors, Giuseppe Vitalevi.<sup>29</sup> Professor Vitalevi was a fervent Italian patriot and a follower and admirer of Giuseppe Mazzini. Vitalevi possessed a private library, where David Levi spent long hours reading texts related to Italian history, literature and nationalism. Most importantly, it was in Vitalevi's collection that Levi became acquainted with the writings of Giordano Bruno, who had a deep impact in his life and thought.

Already as a young boy, Levi had ambivalent feelings as regards his Jewish identity. On the one hand, he certainly felt the pride and synchronous rage of being part of an oppressed minority, which at that time was still denied equal rights. This feeling is strongly detectable in his writings and was present in spite of his family's privileged socio-economic condition. As a matter of fact, Levi maintains that this feeling of oppression was not so much due to their legal or economic situation, but to the anti-Semitic attitude of a part of the population, of which he was a victim on several occasions in his life. Next to this pride, however, Levi started to develop a feeling of inadequacy towards the traditional

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<sup>28</sup> This institute was founded in 1829, as stated in Rossella Bottini Treves, "Nascita di un'istituzione culturale vercellese: il Collegio Foa," in *Bollettino storico vercellese* 3/1 (1994): 99-104, therefore shortly before David Levi's enrollment.

<sup>29</sup> On Giuseppe Vitalevi see Mario Battistini, *Esuli italiani in Belgio* (Florence: Brunetti, 1968).

and religious spheres of Judaism, which made him feel restricted. This led him to abandon religion, tradition, and the community still as a young boy. Levi's childhood and early youth already clarify how Enlightenment's, Jewish and patriotic Italian sentiments could simultaneously intertwine in his mind and heart at such an early stage.

In the early 1830s, his desire to leave the strict boundaries of the Jewish community, his wish to pursue academic studies (which were interdicted to Jews in Piedmont at the time) but also episodes of anti-Semitism, formed a powerful combination of contrasting factors, which convinced David to leave Chieri. He suddenly and secretly ran away from his family, heading to the Duchy of Parma, where Jews were admitted into university. After attending a few courses in Parma, he moved to the University of Pisa, in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, one of the few States in pre-unification Italy where Jews could enroll in universities. His stay in Pisa became a fundamental step in his life. In the Tuscan city, he had the chance to meet Giuseppe Montanelli (Fucecchio 1813 – 1862), who had a great influence on Levi's socio-political views. Montanelli introduced Levi to the utopian socialist ideas of Henri de Saint-Simon<sup>30</sup> (Paris 1760 – 1825), initiator of the philosophical doctrine of Saintsimonism. The saintsimonian theories would influence the rest of Levi's life and form a large segment of his *Weltanschauung*. In Montanelli's cultural milieu, he also met other influential intellectuals, such as Giovan Pietro Vieusseux<sup>31</sup> (Oneglia 1769 – Florence 1863), Giovan Battista Niccolini<sup>32</sup> (Bagni di San Giuliano 1782 – Florence 1861) and Luigi De Cambray-Digny<sup>33</sup> (Florence 1778 – 1843). His life as a young student was thus characterized by revolutionary impulses and innovative cultural experiences.<sup>34</sup> The Italian author narrates that in Pisa he devoured countless books on other religions, as a consequence of his doubts and reflections on Judaism, and lay the foundations for his vast familiarity with oriental cultures and religions.

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<sup>30</sup> Claude Henri de Rouvroy, comte de Saint-Simon, often referred to as Henri de Saint-Simon (17 October 1760 – 19 May 1825) was a French early socialist theorist whose thought influenced the foundations of various nineteenth-century philosophies.

<sup>31</sup> Italian editor, who founded a literary circle and a number of literary journals.

<sup>32</sup> Italian writer of historical dramas.

<sup>33</sup> Italian architect.

<sup>34</sup> Comba, "Giuseppe David Levi profeta del Risorgimento," 110.





Fig. 1 Certificate of David Levi's admission to obtain his university degree in Civil Law, at the University of Pisa, June 5, 1838. Folder 31.3.15 of David Levi's private archive, at the National Museum of Risorgimento, Turin.

Reconstructing exact dates in David Levi's life, just like in the aforementioned case of his birth, is not an easy task. For example, he claims he arrived in Pisa for his studies around 1840, but other sources report he reached the Tuscan city in 1836 and graduated in 1840. The same discrepancy is found concerning other important episodes. The reason for this disagreement among the different sources is partly due to the scarcity of documents in our possession and partly to the fact that Levi wrote his memoirs at an old age. At that point in his life, he reconstructed certain details of his biography in an approximate way. At any rate, archival research revealed that in June 1838 Levi was admitted to the final exam of the Doctorate in Civil Law at the University of Pisa (Fig. 1). In addition, we know that in 1837 he was initiated to Freemasonry and *Giovine Italia* in Livorno, as we will see later. These documentary elements make 1836 a rather likely date of his arrival in Pisa and categorically exclude 1840.

Even though he was already close to obtaining his Law Degree in Pisa, as we have seen, Levi graduated in 1840 from the University of Siena. Why did he leave Pisa when he was so close to his target and completed his studies in Siena? The reason for this seemingly irrational choice is narrated by Levi himself in an excerpt of his autobiography reported by Emanuele Artom, who tells of an

episode of anti-Semitism that sparked his violent reaction, for which he was arrested and forced to flee back to Chieri.<sup>35</sup> He then returned to Tuscany, in order to complete his studies and obtain a Law Degree, but this time in Siena, as Pisa might have been a dangerous place for the Italian poet.

The Tuscan period turned out to be crucial in David Levi's formation not only thanks to the aforementioned enrollment in saintsimonian circles and achievement of a university degree, but also due to his affiliation with Freemasonry and *Giovine Italia*. As we learn from his notes,<sup>36</sup> he was affiliated to both societies in 1837 in Livorno. He maintains that, at the time, in Livorno the two associations were closely connected and basically managed by the same people,<sup>37</sup> following an opinion which was quite diffused among Italian Jewish Freemasons.<sup>38</sup>

His life within secret societies and saintsimonian circles did not only represent an important biographical element, but had also a major impact on his philosophical and cultural views, which permeated his entire literary oeuvre and political activity. For this reason, it is opportune to elaborate further on the significance they had in Levi's life.

In this analysis, we are fortunately not operating in a scholarly vacuum, although thorough investigations on the relation between Freemasonry, Saintsimonism and nineteenth-century Judaism are still insufficient. The inclusion of Jews in Masonic lodges in modern Europe has been examined by Jacob Katz's pioneering work *Jews and Freemasons in Europe, 1723-1939*.<sup>39</sup> This study, however, mainly deals with German Jews and only briefly describes the situations of other European Jewries. It provides a socio-historical investigation of the Jews'

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<sup>35</sup> Emanuele Artom's unpublished biography of Levi conserved in Biblioteca Emanuele Artom of Turin's Jewish community, p. 25.

<sup>36</sup> Levi actually wrote a pamphlet, called *La Carboneria*, which was never published, where he talks extensively of Italian secret societies and of his own experience within them. This pamphlet is conserved in David Levi's private archive, folder 30.6.14 (2) at the Museo Nazionale del Risorgimento, Turin.

<sup>37</sup> This would be a rather interesting element for the study of the history of Freemasonry. Up to recent times, it was widespread opinion that Italian Freemasonry basically did not exist in the Restoration period, until the opening of the Italian national lodge in 1859 (in which Levi played a role). Recent studies report sources that witness the existence of some lodges, which should have played an important role in plotting in favor of Italy's unification. Levi's unpublished pamphlet constitutes a further important testimony in favor of this argument.

<sup>38</sup> Sofia, "Gli Ebrei risorgimentali fra tradizione biblica, libera muratoria e nazione," 247.

<sup>39</sup> Jacob Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe 1723-1939* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).

progressive inclusion in different Masonic lodges but does not elaborate on the profound meaning of their belonging to these societies. Other studies on the Jews' participation in Freemasonry have followed Katz's investigations, but also these researches paint a socio-historical picture.<sup>40</sup> To our advantage, some interesting researches on the Jews' affiliation with Freemasonry and other secret societies focus exactly on the Italian case.<sup>41</sup> In recent years, the scholar Francesca Sofia has carried out a punctual examination of this phenomenon, proposing some illuminating analyses on the common thread between Freemasonry, Saintsimonism and Judaism in nineteenth-century Italy.<sup>42</sup> This is a suitable point of departure for the current discussion. The roles of Freemasonry and Saintsimonism in David Levi's life, in fact, should follow a parallel investigation path, since, as we will see, the former can be considered as a tool for the divulgation of the Enlightenment values proposed by the latter.

In the first place, we should not forget that the first reason why a number of Italian Jews sought initiation in Freemasonry in the first half of the nineteenth century was their desire for inclusion in wider non-Jewish society, which was still largely precluded (in different terms) in the pre-unification Italian states. This took place on two levels: 1. "Here and now," in the sense of immediate participation within a Masonic lodge, that accepted members from all backgrounds; 2. with a future perspective, since Freemasonry and *Giovine Italia* were considered by several Italian Jews as the best means to achieve Italy's unification and consequent legal emancipation of the Jews. This was the case also for David Levi.<sup>43</sup> Unlike other European contexts, for Italian Jews, Freemasonry

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<sup>40</sup> See for instance Luc Nefontaine and Jean-Philippe Schreiber, *Judaïsme et franc-maçonnerie. Histoire d'une fraternité* (Paris: Michel 2000); Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, "Brothers or Strangers? Jews and Freemasons in Nineteenth-century Germany," in *German History*, 18/2 (2000): 143-161 and Daniel Beresniak, *Juifs et Franc-Maçons* (Paris : Bibliophane 1989).

<sup>41</sup> Aldo Alessandro Mola, "Ebraismo Italiano e Massoneria," in *La Rassegna Mensile d'Israel*, XLVII (1981): 120-127. More recently the scholar Tullia Catalan has offered one of the deepest examinations of the subject in Tullia Catalan, "Italian Jews and the 1848-49 Revolutions: Patriotism and Multiple Identities," in *The Risorgimento Revisited. Nationalism and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Italy*, eds. Silvana Patriarca and Lucy Riall (Basingstoke: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2012).

<sup>42</sup> The aforementioned Sofia, "Gli Ebrei risorgimentali fra tradizione biblica, libera muratoria e nazione," 247 but also Francesca Sofia, "Il vangelo eterno svelato: David Levi e la massoneria," in *Massoneria e Unità d'Italia. La Libera Muratoria e la costruzione della nazione*, eds. Fulvio Conti and Marco Novarino (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011) 203-222, which deals precisely with the case of David Levi.

<sup>43</sup> As he narrates in his *La Carboneria*, David Levi's private archive folder 30.6.14 (2) at the Museo Nazionale del Risorgimento, Turin.

worked as a proper “entrance ticket” for civil society.<sup>44</sup> Many Jews, according to Levi, were members of Freemasonry and *Giovine Italia* at that time in Livorno:<sup>45</sup>

(...) mi recavo spesso da Pisa a Livorno, ove specialmente fra gli Israeliti erano numerosi gli adepti della Giovine Italia e della Massoneria.

[ (...) I was often going from Pisa to Livorno, where, especially among the Israelites, there were many adherents of Giovine Italia and Freemasonry]

If certainly sense of inclusion in society and the perspective of future legal equality attracted a number of Italian Jews to Freemasonry, these cannot be considered the only reasons of their affiliation. This, otherwise, would not explain the fact that after the achievement of full civic emancipation the number of Jewish freemasons rapidly increased.<sup>46</sup> Apart from the socio-political aspects, what did it mean for David Levi his affiliation with Freemasonry and *Giovine Italia* and his attending saintsimonian circles? Did he attribute these societies a higher religious significance?

The Italian patriot definitely used a religious jargon in his narrations about all these societies. In his account on Saintsimonism, Levi describes its followers as “apostles,” its meeting place and organization as a “church,” its leaders as “priests,” the philosophy itself as a “creed,” and the new adepts of this doctrine embraced it through a “conversion.”<sup>47</sup> Also in his account on his affiliation with *Giovine Italia*, Levi borrowed Mazzini’s religious language, using the expressions “God and the People.”<sup>48</sup> Finally, Freemasonry’s religious connotation is self-evident not just in Levi’s words, but its entire structure and organization rotates around the temple, specific rites, rituals, and so on.

This strong religious connotation, therefore, is the first step in our search for Freemasonry’s and Saintsimonism’s role in Levi’s (secular) synthesis between Judaism and Italian nationalism. A further important feature they have in

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<sup>44</sup> Expression used in Sofia, “Gli Ebrei risorgimentali fra tradizione biblica, libera muratoria e nazione,” 247.

<sup>45</sup> In La Carboneria, David Levi’s private archive folder 30.6.14 (2) at the Museo Nazionale del Risorgimento, Turin. However, this is also confirmed by other sources. See Roberto G. Salvadori, *Gli ebrei toscani nell’età della Restaurazione (1814-1848)*, (Florence: Centro Editoriale Toscano, 1993).

<sup>46</sup> Sofia, “Gli Ebrei risorgimentali fra tradizione biblica, libera muratoria e nazione,” 247.

<sup>47</sup> David Levi, “Prima fase del socialismo in Italia: il Sansimonismo”, in *Nuova Antologia* LXIX/1 (1897): 7.

<sup>48</sup> “Dio e Popolo” in the Italian original in La Carboneria, David Levi’s private archive folder 30.6.14 (2) at the Museo Nazionale del Risorgimento, Turin.

common is their universalistic approach, rooted in Enlightenment's ideals, aiming at the moral improvement of the individual and of society as a whole, and merging in a future universalistic "religion of humanity," in which moral and social values would have the priority over dogmas and faith. These elements convinced past scholarship of the great similarities between the values of Freemasonry and those proposed by Reform Judaism, which had a comparable universalistic approach.<sup>49</sup> Nefontaine and Schreiber even pointed out that almost all reformed rabbis in Germany and the United States were Freemasons.<sup>50</sup> If it is true that in Italy Reform Judaism did not take deep roots as a movement, universalism, primacy of moral values over dogmas, and particular attention to social issues, were common elements in the variegated regional approaches of Italian orthodoxy. Levi, therefore, could recognize in Freemasonry and Saintsimonism some of the foundations that constituted his socio-educational background and wittingly drew a straight line between these values and what he considered original prophetic Judaism, mediated by the Enlightenment.<sup>51</sup> Thus, Enlightenment values were the connecting element among Freemasonry, Saintsimonism and Judaism and helped Levi's synthesis of his aspirations to universalism and *Risorgimento's* cosmopolitan nationalism. In the writer's view, however, the Enlightenment's ideals did not penetrate Judaism just as much as they penetrated Freemasonry and Saintsimonism. On the contrary, these values already pre-existed within original prophetic Judaism, which then becomes the actual precursor of the Enlightenment, but were partly lost throughout the historical developments of his forefathers' religion.<sup>52</sup> His duty, through the tools of Freemasonry and Saintsimonism, was to recuperate these values and promote them until the institution of a "religion of humanity," based exactly on these ideals. This way, Levi emphatically lays claim to his Jewish identity and finds the proper place for Judaism within the world's history.

In 1840 after his graduation, Levi returned to Piedmont but did not feel at ease in his home region, which would grant the Jews full civil rights only eight years later. Taking advantage of his family's prosperous condition, the Italian poet decided to further his studies abroad and headed to France, which was one of

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<sup>49</sup> This was noticed by Jacob Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe 1723-1939* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1970) chapter VIII; Michael A. Meyer, *Response to modernity. A history of the Reform movement in Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>50</sup> Nefontaine and Schreiber, *Judaïsme et franc-maçonnerie*, 153.

<sup>51</sup> This connection is explicitly drawn by Levi in his *Ahasvero nell'isola del diavolo: Versi, preceduti da uno studio sull'ebraismo e la rivoluzione francese*, (Turin: R. Streglio, 1898) particularly in its introduction.

<sup>52</sup> See *Ibid.*, Introduction.

Europe's most thriving intellectual centers of the time and was ideal for Levi's foreign experience, as French was a well-known language among Piedmont's educated middle-class, due to the region's traditional French cultural orientation. No less than Pisa, Paris played a key role in Levi's education, both thanks to the illustrious intellectuals he met at the university and to the other Italian exiles he befriended. Paris's impact on his continuing cultural formation and on his enthusiasm for the *Risorgimento* values was outstanding. The Italian author decided to attend several lectures at the prestigious *Collège de France*, due to his interest in social and political subjects. He followed courses of renowned scholars like Pierre Paul Royer-Collard (Sompuis 1763 – Chateaufieux in the Berry 1845), French statesman and philosopher), Pellegrino Rossi<sup>53</sup> (Carrara 1787 – Rome 1848), Edgar Quinet (Bourg-en-Bresse 1803 – Versailles 1875), French historian and intellectual, and Jules Michelet<sup>54</sup> (Paris 1798 – 1874). These philosophers enriched David Levi's socio-political ideas, reinforcing his socialist thought, based on Enlightenment's universalistic views, and his Saintsimonism. Levi himself, however, refers how his socialism was even more strongly nourished by his acquaintance with the Parisian lower classes than by the great teachers he had at the university. At any event, historians like Quinet and Michelet would constitute, together with the writer Joseph Salvador, Levi's main inspiration for his writings on Jewish and Christian history, on the relation between Judaism and Christianity, and for his views on the theme of the historical Jesus.<sup>55</sup>

It is by now clear how, if we want to find a common thread in the development of Levi's views, this has to be traced back to Enlightenment values. It is in fact possible to draw an almost direct line in the author's life connecting events and experiences having Enlightened ideals as a common denominator: his childhood and youth education, his stay in Pisa and encounter with saintsimonian circles and secret societies, his Parisian intellectual experience, his protagonist role as a *Risorgimento* patriot, and his political activity within the Historical Left. This almost straight cultural line prompted his literary activity, the best witness of his world view. The Enlightenment is the catalyst of all of his philosophical conceptions and the mediator between his universalist/cosmopolitan ideas, promoted by Saintsimonism and Freemasonry, and the nationalist feelings of a

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<sup>53</sup> Italian economist and law expert, who had an important role in France's "July Monarchy" and was Minister of Justice, in the Vatican Government of Pius IX.

<sup>54</sup> French historian of Huguenot traditions. Levi's meeting with these important characters are also reported by Comba, "Giuseppe David Levi profeta del Risorgimento," III.

<sup>55</sup> A full-fledged analysis of David Levi's writings on these themes is still missing. A brief overview on some of his writings related to Christianity and Christological themes can be found in Grazi, "A Jewish Construction of a Catholic Hero: David Levi's A Pio IX."

*Risorgimento* patriot. Which enlightenment?

Parallel to his cultural education, David did not neglect his active political involvement and engaged in assiduous meetings with Italian patriots in exile, some of which were important collaborators of Mazzini.<sup>56</sup> By the mid-1840s, Levi could well be considered a prominent member of the *Risorgimento* elite of conspirators. During his Parisian experience (1841-1843), Levi was even nominated spokesman of the Italian exiles' community. The relevance he acquired granted him the opportunity to even meet Giuseppe Mazzini in a couple of occasions and to take part in the organization of a rather important, albeit unsuccessful, mission, that of the Bandiera brothers.<sup>57</sup>

Concluded his stay in Paris, Levi headed back to Italy. After a brief return to his native Piedmont, Levi decided to move to Venice. Venice constituted a further important phase in the poet's life, not so much for his formation, as rather for the possibility of dedicating time to his writings and for additional important encounters. Among them, the most illustrious was the Catholic writer, intellectual, and patriot Niccolò Tommaseo, with whom he engaged in most interesting discussions on Jewish emancipation and the relation between Judaism and Christianity.<sup>58</sup>

After a new short parenthesis in Paris, David Levi definitively settled in Italy in the second half of the 1840s. In his life, 1846 was a key year not only for his temporary return to Italy but also for the election of Pope Pius IX, who was initially thought to be of liberal views by the Italian patriots. Theirs and the Jews' hopes, including Levi's, were that a liberal Pope would favor Italy's unification by accepting a decrease, if not a complete demise, of his temporal power, thus preparing the annexation of Rome and the Papal State to the future Italian country.<sup>59</sup> The apparently positive attitude the Pontiff had during the first two years of his reign was sufficient to spur a number of authors to write poems praising the Pope. David Levi was among them, as his *A Pio IX* [To Pious IX] attests.<sup>60</sup> *A Pio IX* was published in 1848 within an anthology of poems,

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<sup>56</sup> Comba, "Giuseppe David Levi profeta del Risorgimento," III.

<sup>57</sup> Attilio Bandiera (Split 1818 – Vallone di Rovito 1844) and Emilio Bandiera (Venice 1819 – Vallone di Rovito 1844) attempted to organize an expedition in order to free southern Italy. They sailed from Corfù, Greece, headed to Calabria, but their enterprise failed, they were captured and shot together as martyrs in Vallone di Rovito, Calabria, in 1844.

<sup>58</sup> These discussions continued also after Levi left Paris. These letters are conserved in his private archive at Turin's National Museum of Risorgimento.

<sup>59</sup> Frank John Coppa, "Pio Nono and the Jews: From 'Reform' to 'Reaction': 1846-1878," in *The Catholic Historical Review* 89/4 (2003): 671-695.

<sup>60</sup> Concerning David Levi's poem for Pope Pius IX refer to my article Grazi, "A Jewish

collected by the author himself, called *Patria ed affetti. Canti storici e liriche*<sup>61</sup> [Homeland and affections. Historical poems and lyrics]. This poem is highly relevant, as it does not only demonstrate some Jews' desire to praise the newly elected Pope, but from a historical perspective also illustrates how their objectives in the 1840s coincided with those of other liberals and patriots. On a more specific viewpoint, this poem's most striking feature is perhaps Levi's use, along with the more secular symbolism of the Enlightenment, of Catholic and Christological symbolism, which is a rather impressive feature, as it comes from a Jewish author.<sup>62</sup> Just like other Italian patriots, we can assume Levi was bitterly disappointed, when in 1848 Pius IX had a radical change of attitude and turned out to be just as conservative as previous popes and to not wish any kind of weakening, let alone relinquishment, of his temporal power. However, Levi did not leave any literary trace of this specific disappointment, nor rejected, to my knowledge, his poem dedicated to the Pontiff. Towards the end of the century, instead, his disillusionment with the *Risorgimento* in general and the lack of application of its values clearly emerges in his oeuvre as well. This is particularly evident in his only comedy, *Il Mistero delle Tre Melarancie*, about which we will discuss further. This type of disillusionment was a common feature among European intellectuals around the turn of the nineteenth-century.<sup>63</sup>

It is not by chance that 1848, besides being a fundamental year for Europe's national movements, was also the year of David Levi's official political debut. In March, he gave a successful speech to King Carlo Alberto, in order to uphold the cause of Piedmont's religious minorities, which wanted to obtain full civil rights. He met the king as spokesman of Piedmont's Jewry and, not long after his speech, both the Waldensian and the Jewish communities obtained full civil equality within the Kingdom of Sardinia.<sup>64</sup> This speech had great echo and helped him obtaining publicity and fame, which would favor his future election as one of the first Jewish members of the Parliaments of the Kingdom of Sardinia first and of Italy right after the unification (1861). He was elected as a militant of the Historical Left.

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Construction of a Catholic Hero: David Levi's A Pio IX.”

<sup>61</sup> David Levi, *Patria ed affetti. Canti storici e liriche* (Turin: Zecchi & Bona, 1848). *Patria ed affetti* was chosen as the title of this dissertation.

<sup>62</sup> For a detailed analysis and more precise contextualization of this poem see Grazi, “A Jewish Construction of a Catholic Hero: David Levi's A Pio IX.”

<sup>63</sup> Facchini, *David Castelli*, 17.

<sup>64</sup> Comba, “Giuseppe David Levi profeta del Risorgimento,” 112.



In the 1850s, Levi extended the domain of his divulgation of *Risorgimento* ideals and started cooperating with other liberal and socialist intellectuals. Among them were Felice Govean (Racconigi 1819 – Turin 1898), founder of a journal called *Gazzetta del Popolo* [The People's Gazette] and Ausonio Franchi (Pegli 1821 – Genoa 1895), an ex-Catholic priest and founder of the journal *La ragione* [The reason]. These journals had the goal of promoting Enlightenment values, as it is already clear by their titles. *La Gazzetta del Popolo* and *La Ragione* supported a socialist/reformist orientation within the republican political line, thus positioning themselves in an area of the republican spectrum, which was rather distant from the more strongly liberal views of Giuseppe Mazzini. Arguably, David Levi's cooperation with these socio-political periodicals with a deeper socialist orientation might indicate his progressive departure from Mazzini's more liberal positions. The Italian historian of the *Risorgimento* Luigi Bulferetti (1915-1992) described David Levi as a *socialista risorgimentale* [*Risorgimento* socialist], a type of socialist that conjugated liberal and socialist views, therefore taking a stance that distanced itself from both the ultra-liberal positions and the radical Marxist socialism and communism.<sup>65</sup> This sort of socialism was synthesized by the utopian views of Saint-Simonism. The same Bulferetti, however, followed an older interpretation of Levi's political views, that of Delio Cantimori, an Italian historian and politician, who argued that Levi was a saintsimonian only in the first part of his life, while in the second half he shifted towards a more accentuated "Masonic liberalism."<sup>66</sup> On the contrary, I am convinced that throughout his life the Italian poet had quite consistent socio-political ideas, rooted in the Enlightenment and mediated by Saintsimonism and Freemasonry, as I tried to demonstrate in a recent article.<sup>67</sup>

The 1850s saw also an intensification of David Levi's activity within Freemasonry, or at least we possess more documental sources concerning his role within this secret society during the years immediately preceding and following Italy's unification. In particular, we know of his frequent attempts to change its political orientation towards a more socialist direction. The secret nature of Freemasonry in those years makes it difficult for historians to reconstruct Levi's activity within it with precision. Certainly, his hierarchical position and importance within the association rose to a rather high level, that of *Gran Segretario* [Great Secretary], one of Freemasonry's highest offices. The evidence of this is an extremely relevant speech the Italian author gave in 1861, on the

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<sup>65</sup> Luigi Bulferetti, *Socialismo risorgimentale* (Turin: Einaudi, 1975) 81-103.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82, where he accepts a view exposed in Cantimori, *Utopisti e riformatori*, 9-52.

<sup>67</sup> Grazi, "In Quest of a (Jewish) Identity: David Levi's Il Mistero delle Tre Melarancie," 97-110.

occasion of the official opening of *Grande Oriente Italiano* [Italian Grand Orient] in Turin,<sup>68</sup> Italy's first National Lodge.<sup>69</sup> This is a second important oration after the aforementioned one before King Carlo Alberto in 1848. In this speech, he offered an excursus about the history of Italian Freemasonry and the intellectual origins of its ideas and tried once again to influence its political orientation. The last 30 years of the poet's life were characterized by two elections and two resignations from the Italian Parliament and by an intensification of his writing activity. In fact, during these years he completed or wrote most of his works: in particular his *Memoirs*, *Il Profeta*, his *Opus Magnum* (which he had started during his Venice stay), and the comedy *Il Mistero delle Tre Melarancie*,<sup>70</sup> which I discovered in his private archive, conserved in the National Museum of the Risorgimento in Turin.<sup>71</sup> Levi died in Turin on October 27, 1898, thus fully remaining a child of the Nineteenth century.

### David Levi's oeuvre

A biography of David Levi cannot leave out a brief analysis of his literary activity and oeuvre, as his works constitute not only a relevant part of his life but also an important source about it and an efficient insight into his thought.

The main genre in Levi's literary corpus consists of what he himself calls "historical dramas."<sup>72</sup> Historical drama was a common genre within the context of nineteenth-century Italian and European literature. It combined the

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<sup>68</sup> This speech had been printed with the name *Programma massonico adottato dalla Massoneria Italiana risocstituita*, presentato al G.O.I. nella seduta della V.L. 5861 dal Gran Segretario David Levi, Turin, 1861, and is entirely reported and discussed in Marco Novarino and Giuseppe M. Vatri, *Uomini e logge nella Torino capitale. Dalla fondazione della loggia "Ausonia" alla rinascita del Grande Oriente Italiano (1859-1862)* (Turin: L'Età dell'Acquario, 2009) 321-328.

<sup>69</sup> Fulvio Conti, "La rinascita della massoneria dalla loggia Ausonia al Grande Oriente d'Italia," in *Massoneria e Unità d'Italia. La Libera Muratoria e la costruzione della nazione*, eds. Fulvio Conti and Marco Novarino (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011) 111-144.

<sup>70</sup> On this text see my article Grazi, "In Quest of a (Jewish) Identity: David Levi's *Il Mistero delle Tre Melarancie*," 97-110.

<sup>71</sup> Folder 31.4-12 of David Levi's private archive, at the National Museum of Risorgimento, Turin.

<sup>72</sup> Historical dramas are Levi's main genre not much in quantitative but rather in qualitative terms. In fact, we count only 3 historical dramas out of a corpus of 24 books. However, in terms of impact, representativeness of his views and mere literary quality, historical dramas can certainly be considered Levi's main genre.

description of the “historical truth,” a fashionable approach in the European Ottocento, with romantic elements, such as feelings, passions and moral values. If history’s centrality permeated Europe’s philosophical and literary approaches of the time, historical drama was a specific characteristic of Italian Romanticism, which promoted this form of drama in opposition to the classical one. The main features of this kind of drama were its nationalist spirit and the constant reference to current events through the reconstruction of the past. Historical drama differentiated itself from its classical counterpart in its lack of consideration of the classical drama’s main characteristics (Aristotelian unity of time and place) and was inspired by Shakespeare, Schiller and Goethe. This genre was often utilized by those authors who wanted to deal with patriotic and nationalist themes. In Italy, the best known realizations of this consisted of Alessandro Manzoni’s *Il Conte di Carmagnola* (1820) and *Adelchi* (1822) and Silvio Pellico’s *Francesca da Rimini* (1815). Another relevant Italian writer of historical dramas was Giovan Battista Niccolini with his *Arnaldo da Brescia* (1843). David Levi was directly inspired by these works and openly placed himself within this Italian cultural stream.<sup>73</sup> In Levi’s view, however, the Italian poet Vittorio Alfieri and the German Friedrich Schiller were the real “initiators of the national theater,”<sup>74</sup> although modern critics define Alfieri as an author of classical drama.

Why did David Levi choose the form of historical drama as his favorite writing genre? The answer, I believe, cannot be found in a mere stylistic choice but in the nature of the message he wanted to convey. He wished to awaken the Italian consciences and instill in his readers (or theater viewers) enthusiasm for the *Risorgimento* through the exemplary use of history and its passions. For Levi, the role of a writer was to represent history to his contemporaries and to *riprodurla in tutta la sua realtà*<sup>75</sup> [reproduce it in all its reality]. This idea of the historian’s role was also prominent among *Wissenschaft des Judentums*’ scholars, who followed the principles of Historicism and Leopold von Ranke’s idea to describe history *wie es eigentlich gewesen* [as it actually was].<sup>76</sup> The dramatic

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<sup>73</sup> They are quoted in David Levi, *Emma Liona o I martiri di Napoli, dramma storico in cinque atti e otto quadri*, (Turin: Tip. G. Benedetto e Comp., 1852) iv.

<sup>74</sup> Quotation from *Ibid.*, pp. iii-iv.

<sup>75</sup> Quotation from *Ibid.*, iv.

<sup>76</sup> On Jewish historiography and usages of Historicism see Ulrich Wyrwa, *Judentum und Historismus. Zur Entstehung der jüdischen Geschichtswissenschaft in Europa*, (Frankfurt – New York: Campus Verlag, 2003). Within this volume see in particular Jacques Ehrenfreund, “Erinnerungspolitik und historisches Gedächtnis: Zur Entstehung einer deutsch-jüdischen Wissenschaft im Kaiserreich (1870-1914),” and for the Italian case Gadi Luzzatto-Voghera, “Die

poet, however, had to go well beyond the work of both the historian and the novelist. He had to combine the fictional and the historical, the material and event-related side of history with a representation of its deeper spiritual and passionate side. The dramatic poet saw in history the full manifestation of the national spirit and of every aspect related to it.<sup>77</sup> Thus, historical drama was exactly the ideal genre for David Levi, as it allowed him to discuss current issues under the guise of fiction. *Il Profeta*<sup>78</sup> and Giordano Bruno<sup>79</sup> have been considered the climax of his production.<sup>80</sup> His third historical drama is the aforementioned *Emma Liona*.<sup>81</sup> In nineteenth-century Italy, the genre of the “historical drama” was closely related to the contents and themes of the Opera.<sup>82</sup> Both theatrical genres promoted romantic and nationalist feelings and, albeit with different poetic and artistic forms, aimed to inflame the audience with enthusiasm for the *Risorgimento*. The content similarities, for instance, between *Il Profeta* and Giuseppe Verdi’s famous opera *Nabucco* are striking.<sup>83</sup> In good nineteenth-century fashion,<sup>84</sup> Levi wrote also three biographies. One was dedicated to his philosophical hero, Giordano Bruno,<sup>85</sup> coupling with the

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Jüdische Geschichtsschreibung in Italien im 19. Jahrhundert.”

<sup>77</sup> Levi, *Emma Liona*, iii-iv.

<sup>78</sup> This was published in two editions. The first David Levi, *Il profeta o la passione di un popolo: dramma*, (Turin: Società Tipografica Editrice, 1866) and later David Levi, *Il profeta o la passione di un popolo: dramma, Vol. I Oriente – Vol. II Occidente*, (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice, 1884).

<sup>79</sup> Also published in two editions: David Levi, *Giordano Bruno o le Lotte del pensiero: Dramma in cinque atti*, (Rome: E. Perino, 1889) and David Levi, *Giordano Bruno o le Lotte del pensiero: Dramma in cinque atti*, (Rome: E. Perino, 1891).

<sup>80</sup> Morais, *Italian Hebrew Literature*, 187; Helen Zimmern, “David Levi, Poet and Patriot,” 363-402; Margulies, *Dichter und Patriot*, and Vindice, *La vita e le opere di David Levi*.

<sup>81</sup> This drama was also published in two different editions: David Levi, *Emma Liona o I martiri di Napoli: dramma storico in cinque atti e otto quadri*, (Turin: Tip. G. Benedetto e C., 1852) and David Levi, *Emma Liona o I martiri di Napoli: dramma storico in cinque atti e otto quadri*, (Naples: S. De Angelis, 1878).

<sup>82</sup> On the importance of Opera in nineteenth-century Italian and European nationalisms see Carlotta Sorba, “Between cosmopolitanism and nationhood: Italian opera in the early nineteenth century,” in *Modern Italy*, 19/1 (2014): 53-67 and Krisztina Lajosi, *Opera and Nineteenth-Century Nation-Building*, (Leiden: Brill 2011).

<sup>83</sup> *Nabucco* premiered in Milan in 1842. This enables us to assume it was a possible model for Levi’s *Il Profeta*, although the author never mentions any form of inspiration from Verdi’s opera.

<sup>84</sup> On the writing of biographies in nineteenth-century Italy see Maria Pia Casalena, *Biografie. La scrittura delle vite in Italia tra politica, società e cultura (1796-1915)* (Milan: Mondadori 2012).

<sup>85</sup> David Levi, *Giordano Bruno o La religione del pensiero: l’uomo, l’apostolo e il martire* (Turin: Carlo Triverio, 1887).

mentioned historical drama on the same philosopher. Levi's biographies too, just like his historical dramas, did not only wish to tell the story of a particular individual, but aimed to deliver a higher message. Two other biographies had the same didactical intentions and were dedicated to Antonio Gallenga<sup>86</sup> and Michelangelo.<sup>87</sup> This last work was rather successful and had a strong impact particularly in France, where it received public recognition by the Ministry of Education and sold thousands of copies.

His treatises were mostly dedicated to the study of religions (including Judaism and Christianity) but also to other more general themes connected to orientalism. In 1884 he published *Il semitismo nella civiltà dei popoli* [Semitism in the peoples' civilization] about the concept of Semitic cultures and languages in their historical development, which contained large parts of the introduction to *Il Profeta*. His second orientalist monograph was published in Pitigliano in 1895 with the title *Il simbolismo nell'antico Egitto e l'idea ebraica* [Ancient Egypt's symbolism and the Jewish idea]. As we have seen, Levi's passion for oriental cultures and the history of religions blossomed during his stay in Pisa. It actually started as the author's attempt to investigate his own Jewish roots and to scan other religions, which could fill the empty spaces left by his relinquished Judaism. Levi was not a professional researcher; he never held a university chair or published on these themes with rigorous academic methodology. Nevertheless, his passion led him to accumulate substantial knowledge on religions and oriental cultures, and to write several essays and books, which could suitably take part in contemporary scientific debates on these subjects. Levi's orientalist and religious studies well fit within nineteenth-century European and Italian trends. A historiographical issue, here, is the lack of full-fledged researches on this phenomenon in Italy. Italian Orientalist studies in general in the second half of the 1800s, not necessarily carried out by Jewish scholars, mainly focused on Judaism and biblical exegesis, but also included the history of religions. Actually, little is known on these researches from a Jewish perspective, except for the works on Jewish history published in particular by rabbinical scholars from Padua's milieu, Shadal in primis. With the notable exception of Facchini's examination of David Castelli<sup>88</sup> and sporadic studies on the illustrious

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<sup>86</sup> Gallenga (Parma 1810 - Llandogo 1895) was a contemporary of Levi's and had a similar life experience. He too was from a Piedmontese family, and was a patriot, an exile, a politician, member of the Italian Parliament and a writer. Gallenga's biography appeared within the volume, *Il Risorgimento Italiano. Biografie storico-politiche d'illustri italiani contemporanei*, Vol. 3, ed. Leone Carpi (Milan: Vallardi, 1887).

<sup>87</sup> David Levi, *La mente di Michelangelo*, (Milan: G. Bringola di G. Ottino e C, 1883).

<sup>88</sup> The aforementioned Facchini, *David Castelli*.

philologist Graziadio Isaia Ascoli,<sup>89</sup> we know little about secular Jewish scholars, who held chairs in oriental studies, Jewish and Christian history, Hebrew language, and biblical studies. It is true, however, that in Italy the debate on the Bible and religions was a lot less vibrant than in other European countries, where, according to Levi Della Vida,<sup>90</sup> these discussions were favored by the *vis polemica* among different Christian confessions. Thus, Levi can also contribute to the reconstruction of the development of orientalist studies in Italy. He did not embark in writing a comprehensive history of the Jews. His largest work on Jewish history is perhaps the introduction to *Il Profeta*. Nevertheless, he scattered many of his works with analyses of Jewish history, not much with the purpose of reconstructing its chronological order of events, but rather to investigate its deep meaning within general history and to single out the original values of prophetic Judaism, which would serve the generation of a future “Religion of Humanity.” In other words, he once again placed himself within an existing contemporary trend of secular scholars,<sup>91</sup> who, inspired by Enlightenment ideals, wished to “rewrite the history of religions (...) with the intention of regenerating them in the direction of a future religion, that aspired to find the purity of their origins and to de-ritualize their institutional historical elements.”<sup>92</sup> Here again, we can see the centrality of Saintsimonism in Levi’s views.

Levi wrote also five political texts: *La convenzione e il voto del 19 Ottobre* [The convention and vote of October 19] and *La convenzione e il voto del 19 Novembre* [The convention and vote of November 19] were published in 1864 and were simply the commented description of two discussions of the Italian Parliament. If these two are interesting to understand his political position on a contingent matter, his other political works offered a more global view of his political ideas. *Questione romana: unità cattolica e l’unità moderna* [Roman question: catholic unity and modern unity], published in Turin in 1860 under the pseudonym of Julius, dealt with the abolition of the Catholic Church’s temporal power. It is interesting to notice how still in 1860, on the eve of Italy’s

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<sup>89</sup> Felice Israel, “Graziadio Isaia Ascoli. Gli studi ebraici in Italia e il suo rapporto con Isacco Samuele Reggio,” in *Materia Giudaica* 15-16 (2010-2011): 229-249 and Maria Elisabetta Loricchio, “Graziadio Isaia Ascoli. Materiali per una biografia intellettuale,” in *Ha-Tikva’-La Speranza* (1991): 77-86.

<sup>90</sup> Giorgio Levi Della Vida, *Fantasmî ritrovati* (Venice: Neri Pozza, 1966), 66.

<sup>91</sup> For instance, Ernest Renan and Joseph Salvador, who were themselves saintsimonians and important sources for David Levi.

<sup>92</sup> Quotation from Facchini, *David Castelli*, 30. The English translation from the Italian original is mine.

unification and consequent emancipation for all Italian Jews, Levi decided to publish a book on such a delicate topic under a pseudonym. Just a few years later, however, after Italy's unification and Rome's annexation to the Kingdom, Levi could openly argue against the political power of the Catholic Church in Italy in his *Lo Stato in Italia: nuovo programma* [The State in Italy: new program], published in Rome in 1878. The most important treatise to understand Levi's philosophical-political views in relation to Saintsimonism is *Prima fase del socialismo in Italia: il Sansimonismo* [First phase of Italian socialism: Saintsimonism], also due to the fact that it is one of Levi's last works. In this long essay, he made a full-fledged analysis of Saint-Simonism's philosophical foundations and narrated its historical origins in France first and its later Italian developments. His adherence to Saintsimonism frequently brought Levi to reflect on women's role in society. These reflections led him to two publications. The first was also his very first literary work and was titled *La donna* [The Woman], published in Turin in 1838, when he was only 22. The second was a much later publication (Turin, 1880) called *Il femminile eterno: Cantico dei Cantici* [The eternal feminine: Song of Songs].

In line with Italian Jewish literary tradition, Levi wrote also numerous poems. Poetry was actually his most distinctive (and maybe favorite) form of literary expression. Most of his poems were scattered around different books, sometimes even mixed with prose. For example, his autobiographies alternate prose and poetry. Some were published in literary journals, while others are still unpublished and exist only as manuscripts. Nevertheless, some of them were collected by the author himself as anthologies. These were generally organized around a theme, mostly related to patriotism and Risorgimento. Thus, as early as 1848 he published *Patria ed affetti: canti storici e liriche* [Hearth and Homeland: historical songs and poems]; in 1859 *Maritrio e redenzione: canti patrii* [Martyrdom and redemption: patriotic poems]; in 1860 *Novara e Magenta: cantica* [Novara and Magenta: poem] and finally, in 1891, he literally published his *Ultimo Canto* [Last poem].

Last but not least, Levi's only comedy: the aforementioned *Il Mistero delle Tre Melarancie*.<sup>93</sup> This is an unpublished text contained in an autographic manuscript I have found in David Levi's private archive, at the National Museum of Risorgimento in Turin.<sup>94</sup> This text is rather relevant, since, in a

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<sup>93</sup> On David Levi's only comedy see my article Grazi, "In Quest of a (Jewish) Identity: David Levi's *Il Mistero delle Tre Melarancie*," 97-110.

<sup>94</sup> Folder 31.4-12 of David Levi's private archive, at the National Museum of Risorgimento, Turin, 5

comic key, it represents a sort of final *manifesto* of Levi's thought, particularly concerning his stance on Judaism, Italian identity, and the history of religions. It is important and intriguing for three reasons: 1. it is an unpublished work of Levi, which is still unknown by scholars, as it is not mentioned in any of the secondary sources; 2. it provides a global insight on Levi's entire *Weltanschauung*, encompassing virtually all the themes he dealt with in his oeuvre; 3. it was written in the last years of David Levi's life, providing further evidence of his views' great consistency throughout his existence.

### **Final remarks on David Levi**

As his biography clearly shows, David Levi was a rather interesting Jewish intellectual in nineteenth-century Italy, and offers us the opportunity to discuss several relevant historiographical issues. His constant effort to amalgamate the two main sides of his personality, the Jew and the Italian, and the evident tension within this dualism are his greatest legacy. His originality, however, lies in his alternative approach to modernity: he relinquished the religious and traditional spheres of Judaism but, at the same time, kept a strong attachment to his Jewish heritage. This is particularly relevant as Levi reinterpreted his Jewish identity in a secular key, finding a synthesis which was neither religious nor national, in a word a new modern interpretation of Jewish identity. Catalysts of Levi's secularization modes were certainly Saintsimonism and Freemasonry, his two main affiliations that would accompany the Italian author throughout his entire life and form the core of his socialist and universalistic philosophical ideas. Their concept of "Religion of Humanity" helped Levi create a synthesis between Enlightenment's aspirations to universalism and *Risorgimento's* cosmopolitan nationalism. Further considerations cajoled by an examination of Levi's life and oeuvre concern the concepts of Jewish integration and assimilation in modern society. Finally, his literary works, particularly his historical dramas, are the greatest source for our understanding of this unique character. A large part of his literary corpus, including some of his historical dramas, focuses on the history of religions (preeminently Judaism and Christianity) and on orientalist themes, offering a contribution to scholarship on Italian "orientalism" in the 1800s, which is still an understudied subject, in spite of its many charming facets. The vast quantity of unstudied material, both published and unpublished, promises new intriguing perspectives, not only on his life and oeuvre, but also on modern Italian and European Jewry more in general.



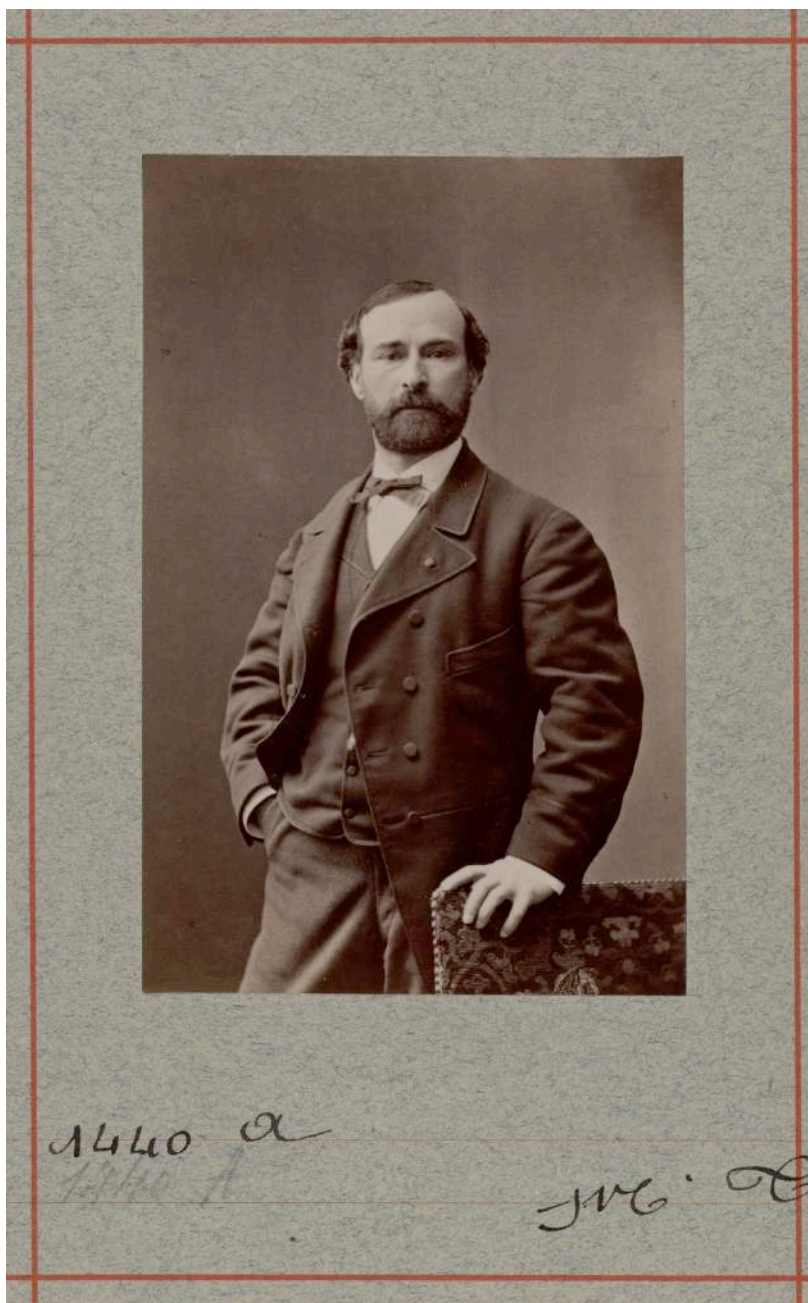
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**Giacobbe and Tullo Massarani**

*by Maurizio Bertolotti*



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*Tullo Massarani (1826-1905)*

## Abstract

*The essay outlines the biographies of Jacob and his son Tullo in the context of the history of the Mantuan Jews in the age of emancipation. Giacobbe came from a family of the Jewish élite and was brought up to the Enlightenment ideas and to the principles of 1789. Following the path, which had been opened in Mantua by rabbis Simone Calimani and Jakob Rafael Jacob Saraval, Giacobbe turned toward the ideal of the reconcilability of faith with reason, in tune with prevailing tendencies also within non-Jewish bourgeoisie. The inclination to reduce religion to the “love of the neighbor” brought Giacobbe to the more or less explicit recognition of the equivalence of different faiths, which mirrored at a cultural level the social integration between Jewish elites and non-Jewish bourgeoisie.*

*Tullo’s detachment from traditional faith was even more radical, however a strong need for a faith survived and this was satisfied by the conversion to the religion of the nation. In this sense you can talk of a marked “assimilazionismo.” The animated opposition showed by Tullo in the 1890s against any proposals to make a Jewish identity reviving can be explained by his fear for the centrifugal tendencies, which - along with the escalation of the class struggle - could have endangered the unity of the new State. Massarani was obsessed with these risks and he consequently acted in order to prevent them.*

- The Life of the Father as Narrated by his Son
- From Merchant to Agricultural Entrepreneur and Land-Owner: the Massaranis in the Age of Emancipation
- The Social Ascent of the Family
- Reasonable Truth and Good Works: the Education and Religion of Giacobbe
- “More an inspiration than a certainty”: the Religion of Tullo
- The Fatherland as a Substitute for Religion: Tullo and Jewish Identity
- Tullo Massarani after 1861: the Obsession with Unity
- What Doctor Lorenzi Thought
- Conclusions

### The Life of the Father as Narrated by his Son

The pages in which Tullo Massarani recounts the life of his father Giacobbe, written and dated in 1865, constitute an important document of the history of Mantuan Jewry in the first half of the nineteenth century. It is reasonable to suppose that in this family memoir, the son focused on those traits of his father's personality and on those events that mostly influenced his own education. At the beginning of the text he clearly illustrates his opinion affirming that knowledge begins by learning family traditions.<sup>1</sup>

Born in Mantua on September 16, 1793 in a family characterized by “the honourable modesty of a hardworking life,” young Giacobbe grew up “among the noise, the violence, the battles that seemed – not only to the most timid – complete turmoil.”<sup>2</sup> Under the French bombs the young man and his family perceived “the arrival of the new times” knowing that “welcoming new guests” would bring “the Spartan foster-mother of genius: liberty.” After he studied art and literature at the *Accademia Virgiliana di Scienze* (Virgilian Academy of Science, Letters and Arts), where as professor he had the poet and philosopher Idelfonso Valdastri and the illustrious lawyer Luigi Casali, who then became “a close family friend,” he enrolled at the recommendation of the latter in the Faculty of Law at the University of Bologna. Tullo observed that “The invigorating spirit of the eighteenth century pervaded and innovated science.” Among the learned teachers his father had at Bologna, he recalled the Mantuan abbot Girolamo Prandi, “a liberal pupil of that vilified philosophy that disarmed the oppressor and founded kindergartens and hospices.”<sup>3</sup> The light shining on him dimmed, however, with the return of Lombardy under Habsburg dominion. Excluded from public office Giacobbe returned to his studies and profession. He settled in Milan and became acquainted with Gian Domenico

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<sup>1</sup> Tullo Massarani, “L’Avvocato Giacobbe Massarani,” Id., *Illustri e cari estinti. Commemorazioni ed epigrafi*, ed. Raffaello Barbiera, “Edizione postuma delle opere,” Gruppo IV, “Ricordi,” I (Florence: Successori Le Monnier, 1907), 269-295, 269-272.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 273; the quotations following in this paragraph are from 274 and 275. The impression of turmoil in the face of the revolutionary events was common to varied Mantuan milieux: see Maurizio Bertolotti, “Ceti, conflitti, identità” *Storia di Mantova. Uomini - ambiente - economia - società - istituzioni*, II, *Le radici del presente 1792-1960*, ed. Marzio A. Romani (Mantova: Tre Lune Edizioni, 2008), 339-429, 339-349.

<sup>3</sup> Massarani, “L’Avvocato Giacobbe Massarani,” 276.

Romagnosi, under whose “great wing” he rose “to the divine speculation of science.”<sup>4</sup>

In 1818, at the age of twenty-five, he returned to Mantua<sup>5</sup>. His admirable industriousness in these years was mainly due, according to Tullo, to the affection of his family. Giacobbe both “helped his brothers, not because of his age but because his wisdom, becoming right-arm, brain and soul of their affairs,” as well as his new family. In 1822 he married Elena Fano, a “damsel from a family of good lineage in the city” with whom he settled in Ostiglia, a small but important town to the east of Mantua, where he was allowed to exercise his profession despite being excluded from the city bar. His success relied not only on the quality of his practice, but on his “ability in financial matters.” In fact, he was entrusted with the administration of delicate assets and estates that eventually greatly flourished under his management.

Just as careful with his own property and assets, lawyer Massarani “diligently manages his family business which little by little developed in new nuclei and offshoots as his activities expanded into new companies with the happiness of all the parties involved.”<sup>6</sup> The pursuit of a successful and brilliant life involved, according to Tullo, the constant collaboration with other businessmen: in correspondence with the principles of mutuality and association promoted by his father. Giacobbe seemed to operate in the same spirit in the field of charity. Generous in dispensing help to those in need of support, he galvanized the strengths in those who asked for help, allowing them to begin again and walk on their own feet.<sup>7</sup> Since the religious inspiration for these works of charity is undeniable, it is no surprise that at this stage, Tullo decides to describe his father’s religion:

Born into a religious minority, he was holding it dear like any honest man holds dear the cause of the weak because of the ancient persecutions and senseless prohibitions, all of which had not yet disappeared. Nevertheless he still loved all men; his deep faith, was not wasted on vain appearances, but directed in heartfelt prayer that animated him to carry out good deeds. Intolerance was abhorrent to him but more in the moral perversion it created rather than in the usual offence or damage it caused.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 277. For the following quotation in this paragraph, 278-282.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 283.

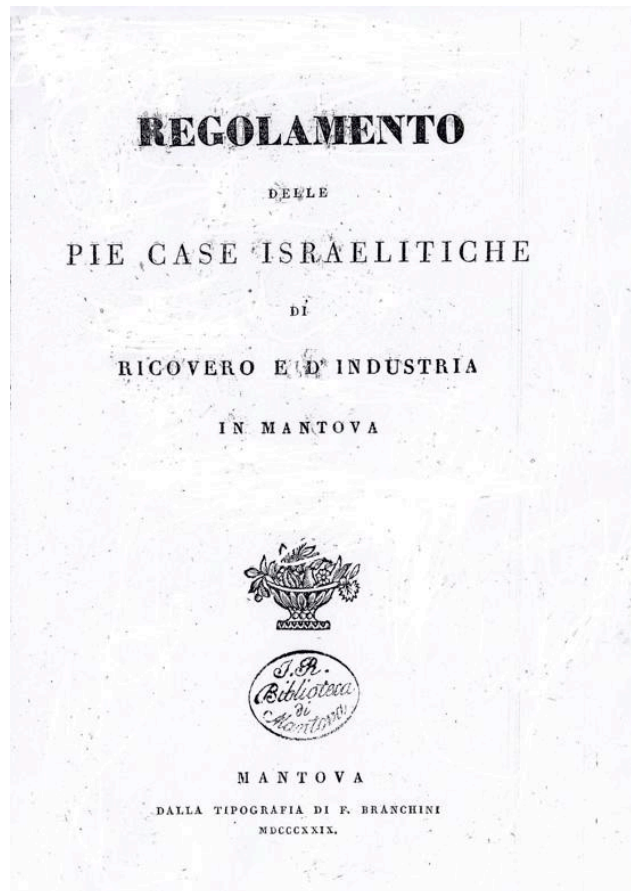
<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 284-285.

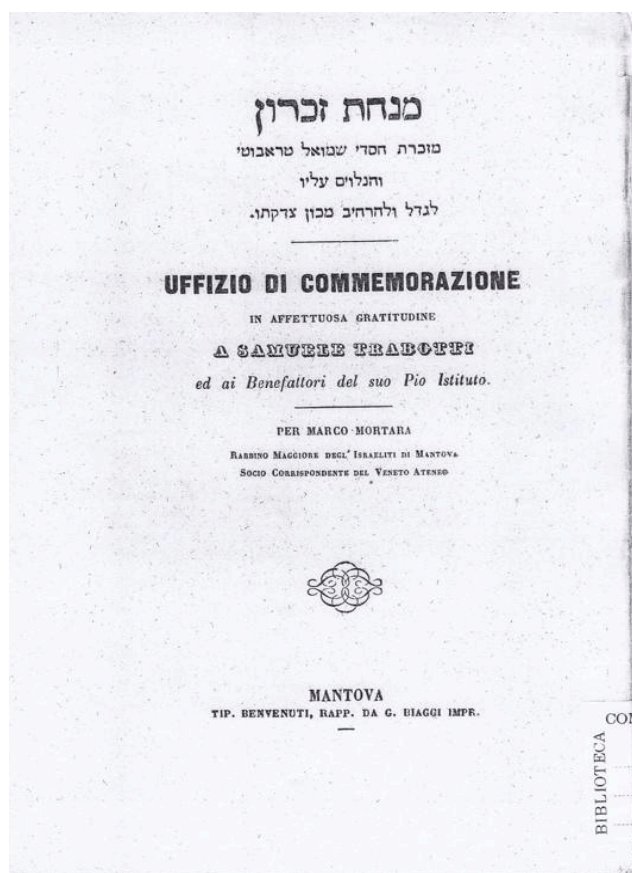
This important information becomes particularly significant, as it is emphasized by Tullo’s subsequent statement about his father’s industriousness in the community,<sup>9</sup> a field that occupied those who wished to affirm their right to justice. Tullo’s father did not like “education closed behind the gates of a cult, but available to everyone within the womb of a secular society.” In this area the work of lawyer Massarani was carried out above all in the bosom of the city’s Jewish community. He was interested in spreading “among men accused of being inclined towards trafficking (a more widespread vice among the institutions than among individuals),” not only liberal arts (*arti liberali*), but also feverish industries, deemed “rigorous teachers of a dignity that only arising from fatigue”. Massarani assumed and maintained for a certain time the direction of the Chamber of Industry for the youth together with a hospice for the poor and elderly that was opened in the Jewish community in 1825. For the next ten years, making the most of the generosity of his co-religionist Samuel Trabotti, he developed the project for an institute to which he would be legal consultant until his death. The institute was meant to provide education for the adolescents, assistance to the infirm, grants to the young of poor families, and encouragement prizes for workers. [ *Fig 1a; Fig. 1b* ]

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<sup>9</sup> For the commitment of Jacob in the fields of care and education, see *ibid.*, 285-286.



*Fig.1a Regolamento delle Pie Case Israelitiche di Ricovero ed Industria in Mantova (Mantua: Tip. F. Branchini, 1829).  
Biblioteca Teresiana, Mantua.*



*Fig. 1b* Marco Mortara, *Uffizio di Commemorazione in affettuosa gratitudine a Samuele Trabotti ed ai Benefattori del suo Pio Istituto* etc. (Mantua: Tip. Benevenuti, s.d.).  
Biblioteca Teresiana, Mantua.

In 1842 determined to support “wider horizons for the studies” of his son, Giacobbe moved his family to Milan, where he soon became highly esteemed.<sup>10</sup> Here, when the Habsburg lost power, in 1848, he immediately states his own political position:

He held steadfastly to his cornerstone: the need to unite with the Italian province that would remain armed and pointed at liberty; to stop any domestic quarrels, to put off every type of dispute on the form of government and to rely, until the

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.



Austrians remain on a patch of Italian land, on Piedmontese *Statuto* and arms – our only hope, he said, and, if we use them wisely, infallible.<sup>11</sup>

There is no doubt that Giacobbe was convinced of the need to entrust the destinies of Lombardy and Italy to an armed constitutional Piedmont. From Tullo's testimony we cannot infer that he was favourable to the merger of Lombardy with the Kingdom of Sardinia as proposed by the monarchists of the provisional government in opposition to the republicans led by Carlo Cattaneo, Giuseppe Ferrari and Enrico Cernuschi. Rather, it could be stated that he shared the idea, to which they all agreed in principle, to defer the definition of the institutional framework to apply at the moment of the complete liberation of Italy from foreign dominance. It would not, however, be rash to presume that, like his son, he had not approved of the decision taken on 12<sup>th</sup> May by the provisional Government to hold a referendum on the proposed merger.<sup>12</sup>

Giacobbe's support of the Piedmont of Vittorio Emanuele II and of Cavour was confirmed in the second half of the 1850s during a meeting in Paris with Daniele Manin.<sup>13</sup> Now, however, it is no longer the story of the father only, but rather of Tullo, who was in this period undergoing his definitive break with Giuseppe Mazzini, one of the most important leaders of the Italian Risorgimento:

We talked and listened with reverence to the ruler of the Venetian Republic about the king who, loyal and a soldier, pledged himself to Italy; we celebrated the new dawn of the Latin people; we exulted at the flash of the guns, the waving of those flags that to the French announced the taking of Sebastopol: to us, to our minds, a premonition of a free Milan and Venice.... Venice! – Poor Manin, poor father!<sup>14</sup> [Fig. 2]

From Paris, where he had arrived, the story of Giacobbe turns to domestic affection, to which he wished to quietly devote the last part of his life. The

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 288 e 289.

<sup>12</sup> On the disagreements about the fusion, see Enrico Francia, 1848. *La rivoluzione del Risorgimento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2012), 182-188. Tullo's position is documented by Massarani, *Carlo Tenca e il pensiero civile del suo tempo. Con una scelta di Poesie postume inedite e Ritratto* (Milan: Hoepli, 1886), 61 e 62.

<sup>13</sup> We do not know how many meetings with Manin they had. If one only, it would date to 1856 because Tullo writes ("L'avvocato Giacobbe Massarani," 290) that he and his father went and made their "offer for Manin's guns" and we know that the subscription for "hundred guns" was announced by Manin on September 8, 1856: *Daniele Manin e Giorgio Pallavicino. Epistolario politico 1855-1857*, ed. Emanuele Baccio Maineri (Milan: L. Bortolotti, 1878), 419-421; but the following mention of common exultation for the capture of Sebastopoli would lead us to suppose a previous meeting in 1855.

<sup>14</sup> "L'avvocato Giacobbe Massarani," 291.

longing for serenity was broken by the death of his wife.<sup>15</sup> These were the days of the battles of Magenta and Solferino that gave new hope to Giacobbe. They were to be the last for Giacobbe, who died on 14<sup>th</sup> December, 1860 after “nine days of perfidious illness.” Before his coffin a “contrite and reverent multitude” gathered and the “testimony of the illustrious” was mixed with “simple words of the most humble and obscure.”<sup>16</sup>



*Fig.2 Daniele Manin, Paris, Verry Fils. 1855 ca.*  
Roma, Museo Centrale del Risorgimento

### **From Merchant to Agricultural Entrepreneur and Land-Owner: The Massaranis in the Age of Emancipation**

We have devoted particular attention to Tullo’s memoirs of his father in as much as the biography of Giacobbe mirrors with great accuracy the history of the

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

emerging middle class of rural origins. This middle class was the initiator of a modest capitalist modernization of Mantuan agriculture, which took place between the end of the eighteenth century and the mid nineteenth century, and contributed to the formation of a rural elite who in turn widely joined the patriotic conscription of 1848.

We are dealing with a class of farmers who, thanks to favourable circumstances and a prudent application of capitalist agricultural principles, accumulated considerable fortunes in a few decades. Some of them reached the fortunes of the nobility land-owners (landed gentry), which ranked the highest in property classifications. Speaking of the entrepreneurial Jewish élite as a sector of this broader class may appear as a long stretch. This may seem especially so when considering that the majority of families constituting the Jewish élite were long-term city dwellers, and when knowing that the capital that they invested in challenging and lucrative agricultural endeavours originated not from agriculture, but mainly from the commercial and manufacturing business. Nonetheless, the percentage of Jewish elite that lived in rural areas was not insignificant and, in the second-half of the eighteenth century, agriculture represented for them already an important sphere of activity.<sup>17</sup> For the important families of the city ghetto, the factor tying them to those belonging to the emerging countryside middle-class, regardless of residence or origin of the capital invested, was the fact that agriculture quickly became an important part of their activity if not the key to their economic rise. In 1762, much earlier than the Patents issued by Maria Theresa in 1779 and Joseph II in 1781 that gave the Jews the liberty to lease, a government inquiry counted eighteen Jewish companies that leased out farms, the majority of which were of large dimensions.<sup>18</sup> Among these was the Eredi company of Moisé Coen who took on the lease of the large

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<sup>17</sup> In western Mantua, for example, according to an inquiry held by the government in 1779, thirteen of the Jewish houses were of renters, notwithstanding the interdictions (these would be abolished soon after by the decrees of Mary Theresa in 1779 and Joseph in 1781): see *Elenco generale delle Famiglie Ebee, del loro traffico, della loro industria, degli stabili che possiedono in proprietà, della Popolazione, o del numero personale componente le dette Famiglie degli Ebrei sparsi nel Principato di Bozolo, e nel Ducato di Sabioneta, specificati e descritti negli elenchi A. B. C. D. E. F.*, Commercio, p.a., b. 55, Archivio di Stato, Milano, the document is published in the appendix to Daniele Montanari, "Da prestatori a mercanti. Gli ebrei del Bozzolese e del Sabbionetano in età moderna," *Annali di Storia moderna e contemporanea*, IV, 1978, n. 4, 73-95.

<sup>18</sup> Archivio Gonzaga, b. 3390, Archivio di Stato, Mantova (after ASMn), quoted by Corrado Vivanti, *Le campagne del Mantovano nell'età delle riforme* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1959), 180-182 and Mario Vaini, *La distribuzione della proprietà terriera e la società mantovana dal 1785 al 1845*, I, *Il catasto teresiano e la società mantovana nell'età delle riforme* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1973), 227-228.

Virgiliana Estate of the Counts Zanardi in 1767. He converted 400 biolche (one biolche is approximately equivalent to 3,138 m<sup>2</sup>) of marshy land into rice fields. It is worth noting that Jewish investments in agriculture were characterized by the intention to intensify productivity and profits, through appropriate improvements, intention which entailed a fair amount of risks<sup>19</sup>.

Against this background, we place the story of the Massarani family. In 1797 Leon Vita, Giacobbe's father and a cloth and textile merchant,<sup>20</sup> acquired the workshop in the ghetto at number 2865, a short distance from his home,<sup>21</sup> from which he had probably carried out his business for years.<sup>22</sup> This represents a testimony of his initial rise that will be confirmed in the Napoleonic era by the purchase of other properties in the ghetto.<sup>23</sup>

When exactly Massarani's expansion of the agricultural activity began is unknown, but from the large quantity of notarial documents involving the family it is quite clear that the decisive steps in this area were taken by the sons of Leon Vita, who until 1827 were in close partnership<sup>24</sup> which confirms what Tullo writes, not only about the collaboration of the father in the family business, but also about his strong adherence to the principle of association. In 1816 two of his sons rented out a tenancy at San Giorgio, a municipality neighbouring Mantua.<sup>25</sup> The circumstance is significant considering that the leasing of agricultural land constituted the main source of enrichment for the emerging Mantuan middle-class. At the end of the 1820s and the beginning of the 1830s we can witness a series of acquisitions of large and small farms in different districts in the province

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<sup>19</sup> This aspect is underlined in *Promemoria dell'Università degli Ebrei per il rinnovo della tolleranza*, May 1776, quoted by Paolo Bernardini, *La sfida dell'uguaglianza. Gli ebrei a Mantova nell'età della rivoluzione francese* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1996), 43, and in the answer of Benedetto Frizzi to the pamphlet against the Jews by Giovan Battista Gherardo d'Arco: see Benedetto Frizzi, *Difesa contro gli attacchi fatti alla nazione ebrea nel libro intitolato "Della influenza del Ghetto nello Stato"* (Bologna: Forni, 1977, facsimile of 1st ed., Pavia, 1784), 131.

<sup>20</sup> See *Elenco degli esercenti, artieri e mercanti, 1786-89 e 1792*, Archivio della Camera di Commercio, b. 136, ASMn.

<sup>21</sup> Act of notary Vincenzo Codogni of Mantova, July 5, 1797, Archivio notarile, ASMn.

<sup>22</sup> See the contract between Leon Vita and counts Hercules and Louis Bulgarini, , notary Adamo Nicola Rossi of Mantua, July 13, 1789, Archivio Notarile, ASMn.

<sup>23</sup> Acts of notary Adamo Nicola Rossi, June 9, 1812; notary Francesco Bacchi di Mantova, July 6, 1814 and June 6, 1816, Archivio Notarile, ASMn.

<sup>24</sup> Act of notary Ferdinando Rodoni, February 13, 1827, Archivio Notarile, ASMn: this act dissolved the partnership between Emanuel and Salomon and their brothers Jacob and Daniel.

<sup>25</sup> Act of notary Francesco Bacchi, September 19, 1816, Archivio Notarile, ASMn.

made by Giacobbe, some of which purchased jointly with his brother Daniele:<sup>26</sup> Giacobbe made the most numerous and important property and land investments between the 1830s and 1840s. It is significant, in this respect, that according to the Austrian surveys from 1824 – 1834, given his ownership over estates of approximately 400 *biolche*, he was considered among the top twenty-eight landowners in the province of Mantua (thirteen of these were Jews).<sup>27</sup>

At the beginning of the 1840s most of the holdings were concentrated in Poggio Rusco, a village in the surroundings, where in 1841 Giacobbe had purchased 377 *biolche*<sup>28</sup> while, at the same time, selling property and land that he owned in other councils in the province of Mantua.<sup>29</sup> This frenetic buying and selling in the early 1840s should be read in relation to the transfer of the Massarani family to Milan. It can be inferred that, in doing so, Giacobbe attempted to obviate the excessive fragmentation of his property, which would not have been easy to manage from far-away Milan. In the following two decades the rents from the numerous farms at Poggio Rusco<sup>30</sup> and the income from practicing his profession, constituted an important part of Giacobbe's income, whose economic and social position appears to be a mix of professional practitioner and *rentier*.

His son Tullo, 34 years old at the time he inherited his father's entire fortune on February 26, 1826, was instead a *rentier* "puro." In the following decades and indeed up to his death (Milan, 8<sup>th</sup> August 1905) the conspicuous income from his companies assured him a considerable wealth, which allowed him to dedicate himself to his studies and administrative and political life. [Fig. 3]

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<sup>26</sup> Acts of notary Francesco Bacchi, December 31, 1827; notary Pietro Pelosi of Gazzuolo (Mn), August 24, 1830, May 8, 1832, November 30, 1835, November 10, 1836; notary Ferdinando Rodoni of Mantova, January 14, 1833 (these are contracts of purchase or contracts of sale implying previous purchases), Archivio Notarile, ASMn

<sup>27</sup> This data from Mario Vaini, *La società censitaria nel Mantovano 1750-1866* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1992) 68, tab. 3.

<sup>28</sup> See Libri partitari di Poggio Rusco, reg. 1338, fol. 507, Archivio del Catasto, ASMn.

<sup>29</sup> I limit myself to the sales in the first half of the decade: see the following acts : notary Atanasio Siliprandi of Mantua, September 13, 1841 and March 30, 1845; notary Pietro Cessi of Mantova, September 30, 1842; notary Francesco Bacchi, February 13, 1843; notary Stefano Bertolini of Mantova, June 13, 1844, March 26, and November 14, 1845, Archivio Notarile, ASMn.

<sup>30</sup> Many letting contracts are kept among the papers of the notary Domenico Zibordi of Poggio Rusco: see *Indice delle parti*, series of 1800, MAS, Archivio Notarile, ASMn.



*Fig. 3 Poggio Rusco Palace, Town Hall. Designed by Luca Fancelli, it belonged to the Gonzagas noble family since the XV century. In the mid-nineteenth century it became the property of Tullo Massarani. He sold the Palace to the City of Poggio Rusco in 1904.*

### **The Social Ascent of the Family**

In the early years of the nineteenth century, when Leon Vita prepared his son Giacobbe for his studies, he was being influenced by his enormous wealth and by the possibility to provide his youngest son with a career that he had not been capable to offer to his oldest sons . Tullo stressed that his grandfather “thought that his house might gain prestige from such a ministry to studies.”<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the main pathways to up-ward social mobility pursued by members of the new rural middle-class started with the acquisition of a house in the city, and the enrolment of their sons at the lyceum and then at university. For well-to-do Jews a house in the city was a remarkable achievement that permitted them to dwell outside the ghetto. It was likely that initially property purchases were limited to areas next to the ghetto and then spread to the rest of the city, including the most fashionable *contrade*. In fact, the provincial delegate De Villata in 1842 stressed that “the authorization that the Israelites have to own farms means that now they find

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<sup>31</sup> Massarani, “L’Avvocato Giacobbe Massarani,” 274.

themselves owners of the best estates around Mantua and the most conspicuous dwellings in the city.”<sup>32</sup>

As for the Massarani, we know of significant acquisitions dating back to the early 1830s: two houses, one in Piazza Erbe the other in the Santissima Trinità *contrada*<sup>33</sup> (today via Roberto Ardigò). In Piazza Erbe, where the market was located, stood the medieval communal buildings, whereas in the Trinità *contrada* one could find the university, the lyceum, and the library founded by Maria Theresa in 1780. Other properties, which Giacobbe bought towards the end of the decade, were in areas relatively distant from the ghetto: a large building with workshops adjacent to the San Domenico complex (today via Mazzini) and a refined mansion in corso Pradella<sup>34</sup> (now corso Vittorio Emanuele II) “the widest and grandest in the city, a meeting place of the middle-classes, especially in the winter.”<sup>35</sup>

It is likely that these property purchases and residential choices, together with the desire to up-ward social mobility, reflect Leon Vita’s propensity to loosen his ties with his original community, which were already manifest in the decisions regarding Giacobbe’s education. We don’t know whether Giacobbe received his first education from private tutors, from the Jewish school, which since 1788 had been modernized through the introduction of secular subjects and the Italian language,<sup>36</sup> or in the state school opened in the ghetto after 1787. In the latter, the superintendent Giovan Battista Gherardo d’Arco had replaced the teaching of the Catholic religion with teaching “of sound morals that could be reconciled with the principles of their religion.”<sup>37</sup> Certainly, from the moment of his enrolment at the *Ginnasio* (junior high school) of the Academy in the early years of the century, the education of Giacobbe was no longer exclusively influenced by the culture of his family or by the social group from which he came.

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<sup>32</sup> I quote from the report that the provincial delegate sent to the government of Milan, July 13, 1842, about the anti-Jewish riots of the previous days, I.R. Delegazione Provinciale, Affari riservati, b. 102, ASMn.

<sup>33</sup> For these two purchases see the acts of notary Stefano Bertolini, June 13, 1844 and January 23, 1843 (these are acts of sale, from which we know the dates of purchase), Archivio Notarile, ASMn.

<sup>34</sup> Acts of notary Stefano Bertolini, November 14, 1845 and notary Francesco Bacchi, April 7, 1846 (these too are acts of sale, from which we know the dates of purchase), Archivio Notarile, ASMn.

<sup>35</sup> Claudia Bonora Previdi, Luciano Roncai, “L’architettura: da città ducale a capoluogo di provincia,” *Storia di Mantova. Uomini - ambiente - economia - società - istituzioni*, II, 116.

<sup>36</sup> Bernardini, *La sfida dell’uguaglianza*, 108-110.

<sup>37</sup> Letter of G. B. G. d’Arco to Consiglio di Governo of Milano, August 13, 1788, Regia intendenza politica, b. 219, fasc. 5, ASMn, quoted by Bernardini, *La sfida dell’uguaglianza*, 206.

### Reasonable Truth and Good Works: the Education and Religion of Giacobbe

Even in its vagueness, the characterization that Tullo gives to the dominant tendency of the era in which – it is 1811 – his father enrolled at the Faculty of Law at the University of Bologna is significant: “the refreshing spirit of the eighteenth century pervades and innovates the sciences.” Less vague is the note following note, with which he recalls the teaching of natural law by Abbot Prandi “a liberal pupil of that vilified philosophy that disarmed the oppressor and founded kindergartens and hospices.” Nominated professor at Bologna University in 1802, the Mantuan Prandi had previously been a teacher at the lyceum of the Academy of Mantua,<sup>38</sup> where Giacobbe’s thought began to develop. Giacobbe had also studied with Idelfonso Valdastri, the successor of Prandi to the chair of logic and metaphysics at the lyceum in 1803, who taught him the rudiments of philosophy.<sup>39</sup> Tullo underlined how his father grasped “those few elements of John Locke’s philosophy” that his maestro “did not succeed in drowning in his own logic”<sup>40</sup>, thus evoking the empiric orientation prevalent in the Academy of Mantua.

It is worth recalling that the Mantuan professor, while trying to reconcile the Christian faith with reason, vividly criticized the deists, guilty of openly questioning the truths of the Catholic religion<sup>41</sup>. In another work he vehemently attacked not only superstition in general, but also, although with caution, the yielding to superstition of those same Mosaic and Catholic religions of which he affirmed the truth.<sup>42</sup>

Valdastri did not exclusively criticised the “common people” guilty of being attracted by the material aspects of the cult, but also those ministers who— out of idiocy, vested interests, and desire to dominate— multiplied these exterior

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<sup>38</sup> See the short obituary in *Antologia. Giornale di Scienze, Lettere e Arti*, XLV, January, February and March 1832, 156 e 157.

<sup>39</sup> See the biography of Valdastri in Marialuisa Baldi, *Filosofia e cultura a Mantova nella seconda metà del Settecento. I manoscritti filosofici dell’Accademia Virgiliana* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1979), 197 e 198, with extensive bibliographical references.

<sup>40</sup> Massarani, “L’Avvocato Giacobbe Massarani,” 275.

<sup>41</sup> Idelfonso Valdastri, “Discorso filosofico inedito-postumo in difesa de’ principali Misteri della Religione Cristiana, ed analisi ragionata di altri punti del Cristianesimo,” Id., *Vigilie filosofiche. Inedite-postume* (Mantova: Tipografia Giovanni Agazzi, 1857), 3-31.

<sup>42</sup> Valdastri, “Dissertazione filosofica sulla superstizione,” Id., *Vigilie filosofiche*, 33-62.



elements against good sense and the religion itself.<sup>43</sup> According to him the roots of the abuses of the Inquisition and the vileness of the crusades<sup>44</sup>, alongside with the absurdity of the opinion that “the virtue of great men born into the errors of paganism had remained without reward after death” contrasted with the deepest truth according to which “to the eyes of religious good sense, love for your neighbour will always, after the love of God, be the most sublime virtue.”<sup>45</sup> Rational religion tend to merge with the notion of Christianity reduced to its evangelical moral teachings, as confirmed by the affirmation of the coincidence between the teachings of stoic philosophy and those of of Christ, which might be well summarized with the maxim that one should strive “for the common good of human society and for the pursuing of good for all according to one’s strengths.” On the one hand, Valdastri believed that “God was the author of Christianity,” while on the other hand the logic of reasoning led him to recognize the insignificance of the superficial and dogmatic differences between the religions. He concludes, despite “the superstitious fanatics croak, virtue doesn’t change its nature because of the difference between the Cults and the different systems of the dogmatic moralists.”<sup>46</sup>

The opinions of Valdastri represent an orientation that (as documented by the essays submitted to the competition of philosophy announced by the Academy) in the last decades of the eighteenth century was prevalent in the Mantuan milieu. In this environment, the apologia for the scorned Christian religion co-existed with the criticism both of superstition and, more generally, of the ingrained prejudices that were considered the main obstacles to the diffusion of knowledge for the good and public felicity.<sup>47</sup> Among the main characters of that milieu was the Jesuit Saverio Bettinelli, who had penned in 1774 a warm eulogy of Piero Pomponazzi, “the foremost prophet among the blind followers of

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 45 e 46.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 57 e 58.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-54.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-57.

<sup>47</sup> See for example the dissertation *Veritas filia temporis*, written for the competition of philosophy Accademia Reale di Scienze e Belle Lettere announced in 1776 on the question *Se il presente Secolo sia stato a ragione chiamato da molti il secolo della Filosofia*, ms., Memorie di Filosofia, Archivio della Vecchia Accademia, b. 42, Accademia Virgiliana, Mantova; also dissertation by Ambrogio Zecchi, *La magia screditata*, *Ibid.*, is significant: the author wrote it to get the “accademicato,” presumably between 1770 and 1775, as supposed by Baldi, *Filosofia e cultura*, 107.



Fig. 4 Benedetto Frizzi, XIX century.  
Cremona, Museo Civico Ala Ponzone

Peripato who confused religion with scholastic philosophy,”<sup>48</sup> and Juan Andrés who in his essay of 1776 on the philosophy of Galileo<sup>49</sup>, had highlighted the negative consequences that the trial of the Pisan scientist provoked on science and philosophy in Italy. The Jewish thinker of the Enlightenment Benedetto Frizzi had been a pupil of Bettinelli and Andrés at the Mantuan Academy.

In a speech delivered in 1791 Frizzi praised the “firmness” with which his Jewish teachers, rabbis Simone Calimani and Jakob Rafael Saraval, had combined faith and reason<sup>50</sup>, a eulogy that recapitulated the ideal which had inspired all his work, according to which the rationality of Mosaic teaching was embodied in his belief that tradition and modern science could cooperate for the good of humanity. [Fig. 4]

<sup>48</sup> Saverio Bettinelli, *Delle lettere e delle arti mantovane discorsi due accademici ed annotazioni* (1774), ed. Luigi Pescasio (Mantova: Padus, 1974), 79, 128 and 129. The pages Franco Venturi dedicated to Bettinelli are still fundamental: see Venturi, *Settecento riformatore*, V, *l’Italia dei lumi (1764-1790)*, I, *La rivoluzione di Corsica. Le grandi carestie degli anni sessanta. La Lombardia delle riforme* (Turin: Einaudi, 1987), 621-636.

<sup>49</sup> Juan Andrés, *Saggio della filosofia del Galileo dell’abate d. Giovanni Andres* (Mantova: Eredi di Alberto Pazzoni, 1776). On this Spanish Jesuit you can still usefully consult Miquel Batllori “Andrés, Giovanni,” *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, 3 (Roma; Istituto dell’Enciclopedia Italiana, 1961), *ad vocem*; the most recent study is Damian Carlos Fuentes Fos, *Juan Andrés, Entre España y Europa* (Valencia: Institució Alfons el Magnanim, 2008).

<sup>50</sup> Benedetto Frizzi, *Elogio dei Rabbini Simone Calimani e Giacobbe Saravale* (Trieste: Giovan Battista Sperandio 1791). On the life and works of Frizzi see, in addition to Christine Wollner, “Benedetto Frizzi un die jüdische Aufklärung in Norditalien,” *Kairos. Zeitschrift für Religionwissenschaft und Theologie*, 36 (1994): 48-72, the essays in *Benedetto Frizzi. Un illuminista ebreo nell’età dell’emancipazione* (proceedings of the conference of the same name, Ostiano, November 7, 2008), eds. Marida Brignani and Maurizio Bertolotti (Florence: Giuntina, 2009).

It can be easily imagined how the Academic context influenced Giacobbe's religious education, not only directly but also indirectly, having perhaps propitiated the sensitivity of Giacobbe to the rationalist tendencies of thought present in Mantuan Jewish culture. Tullo's apparently simple description cannot conceal the complexity of the processes through which such opinions were formed. Let us re-read:

Born into a religious minority, he was holding it dear like any honest man holds dear the cause of the weak because of the ancient persecutions and senseless prohibitions, all of which had not yet disappeared. Nevertheless he still loved all men; his deep faith, not wasted on vain appearances but directed in heartfelt prayer, animated him to carry out good deeds. Intolerance was abhorrent to him but more in the moral perversion it created rather than in the usual offence or damage it caused.

From "vain appearances" to the "concentration in prayer" we can see a path that is above all a distancing from the religion of the community into which Giacobbe was born, as confirmed by the observation that his solidarity with the Jewish "minority" was not inspired by any particular spirit of belonging, but rather by a universal sentiment of compassion towards the oppressed. Thus, such a distancing implies his separation from any form of positive religion, while calling for a belief in faith manifested through love for all men. This faith also includes respect for other people's religious beliefs and it emphasizes the importance of good deeds rooted in love. The ideal, which Tullo attributes to Giacobbe, of an education "not closed behind the gates of a cult, but available to everyone within the womb of a secular society" fits perfectly into the picture, confirmed furthermore by his son recollections of the philanthropy of his father, and above all of the fundamental contribution that he made to the development of the charitable institutions of the Jewish community in Mantua.

Though the resemblance between Giacobbe's opinions and Verdastrì's teachings corroborates the hypothesis of the importance that his earliest studies had on his education, one must take into account that this education took place in the wider context of an epoch marked – also for Mantua's Jewish community – by profound transformations. By the second half of eighteenth century, Jewish communities encountered strong internal criticism, which ranged from failure to respect fiscal rules, habits of not-attending meetings of the governing organs, non-observance of ritual precepts to the abandonment of inveterate traditions. This criticism was especially voiced against the Jewish "elite."<sup>51</sup> These attitudes offer clear clues on the progressive weakening of the ties between the community

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<sup>51</sup> These behaviours are well documented by Bernardini, *La sfida del'uguaglianza*, 111-119; 127-129.

and some members of the elite. The strong entrepreneurial and capitalistic orientation of this group might explain part of this process. The progressively widening range of business dealings that led to ever closer business relations with non Jews, and the experience of different cultural environments, alongside with the competition between Jewish companies leading to marked quarrelsomeness contributed to these changes and to the weakening of the traditional society.<sup>52</sup> The Massaranis were not different in this regard. Apart from the close business relations with non Jews that are well documented by the notarial acts, particularly significant are the pages where Tullo records the friendship with lawyer Luigi Casali, teacher of civil institutions at the lyceum, who eventually became “a close family friend” by virtue of the close relationship established between Giacobbe and his favourite *maestro*.

Moreover, Giacobbe’s university studies exerted a great influence in defining his cultural orientation. During his stay in Bologna, the young Mantuan Jew definitively identified himself with the traditions of the Italian, and especially Lombard, Enlightenment. The allusion of the son to the irrationality of the traditions and institutions of the past and the commitment to the application of knowledge to social progress pays tribute to the work of the great Enlightenment thinker Cesare Beccaria. A further proof of this relationship may be documented by the friendship Giacobbe established in Milan with one of the most important members of the Italian Risorgimento, Gian Domenico Romagnosi. Suffice to note that Romagnosi was “throughout the length of his life a deist if not atheist, proudly adverse to every metaphysical speculation, champion of a method founded on the analysis of positive facts and the systematic organization of the same,” as well as “convinced from an ethical and civil point of view of the primacy of society and social values.”<sup>53</sup>

### **“More an inspiration than a certainty”: the Religion of Tullo**

The penchant of Giacobbe for an education “not closed behind the gates of a cult, but available to everyone within the womb of a secular society” would be contradicted by his decision to entrust Tullo’s earliest education to his co-religionist David Aron Norsa. In correspondence with his *maestro* until his death in 1886, Tullo was always grateful and devoted, speaking of the education

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<sup>52</sup> See *ibid*, 105-107, 158-162.

<sup>53</sup> Sergio Moravia, *Introduzione* to Giandomenico Romagnosi, *Scritti filosofici* (Milan: Ceschina, 1974), I, 7-63, 8.

he received from him as an “adventure” that had “opened the horizons of thought,”<sup>54</sup> but without ever precisely defining what Norsa had added to his education. As we learn from an introductory biographical note to the small book *Pensieri d’un cattolico* [Thoughts of a Catholic], first edited in 1850, the period in which he was Massarani’s teacher (coinciding more or less with the 1830s), Norsa experienced a most intense spiritual crisis that will eventually lead him, after a meeting with the famous writer Alessandro Manzoni, to convert to Catholicism.<sup>55</sup> His uneasy search for the truth and for good did not find answers in the religion of his fore-fathers. He turned, at first, to the teachings of stoic philosophy to reach eventually the “perfect morality” of Christianity. Norsa, however, could not find peace because he was tormented by an unbearable need to believe. The long crisis was resolved through baptism, which opened the way – as he recounts – towards the recognition of the necessity to ask for the gift of faith through the grace of God.<sup>56</sup> Once converted to the religion of the oppressors, Norsa continued to deprecate intolerance, in particular in the form of fanaticism, while wishing that propaganda inspired by the evangelic spirit would allow those who were still in error to embrace the true faith.<sup>57</sup> Neither did he manage to refrain from controversy, at times bitter, against those who claimed that it was enough “to be a good person, without accepting the mysteries of Christianity.”<sup>58</sup>

Massarani was, moreover, a disciple of Norsa in the years in which skeptical rationalism still dominated the spirit of the *maestro*.<sup>59</sup> One could presume that this teachings would have encouraged in the young man a critical disposition (a basis laid down by his family education) towards the religion into which he was

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<sup>54</sup> Tullio Massarani a Davide Norsa, Milan, October 5, 1870, Massarani, *Una nobile vita. Carteggio inedito di T. M. Scelto, ordinato e postillato da Raffaello Barbiera*, “Edizione postuma delle opere”, Gruppo IV, “Ricordi”, VI (Florence: Successori Le Monnier, 1909), I (1851-1885), 123-124. October 5 was the day when Norsa had received Tullio as a pupil, and every year on this date the disciple used to write to his “maestro.” For a profile of Massarani’s teacher see Bruno Di Porto, “Norsa, David Aron,” *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 78 (Roma: Istituto dell’Enciclopedia Italiana, 2013), *ad vocem*.

<sup>55</sup> Davide Norsa, *Pensieri d’un cattolico, Seconda edizione accresciuta con lettere del Manzoni, del Lambruschini e di mons. Corti. Con proemio sulle condizioni attuali d’Italia e con note alle meditazioni del Mamiani* (Florence: Tipografia Cooperativa, 1874), 29-31.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-32.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 36 e 37.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>59</sup> See *ibid.*, 42, what Norsa writes: “The difficulty of believing really is a terrible obstacle for our miserable reason. I felt it too much myself not to appreciate it.”

born. This would allow us, among other things, to consider in the right light Giacobbe's decision to entrust his son's education to the troubled co-religionist.

The impatience of Norsa affected not only the Jewish religion but also other aspects of the culture of the community to which Tullo belonged: "Right from an early age," he wrote<sup>60</sup>, "I loved to study and had instead to deal with business." His distaste for business was combined with the drive for emancipation and the rejection of tradition. This distaste ended, he recounts, in 1840.

The disciple trod in his footsteps: for Tullo the position of *rentier* and the refusal to practice the profession of lawyer, as urged by his father, represented a choice dictated essentially by the vocation of studying, which Norsa had instilled in him. In a letter of 5 October 1885 Tullo wrote of his early education as "an ancient and patient initiation" that had accustomed him "to recognize from the exercise of intelligence the comforts that were less precarious, less uncertain, less fleeting and less subject to chance and fortune," and "to live in the serene sphere of ideas rather than in the tumult of interests and ambitions."<sup>61</sup>

Although Norsa proved to be an influential teacher for Tullo, the point of arrival of the disciple was somewhat distant from that of the *maestro*. One must bear in mind the acceleration that the 1848 revolution impressed on social and cultural life, and namely on the understanding of religion among the educated classes.<sup>62</sup>

The development of Tullo's thought in the direction of an explicit atheist position demonstrates a generational fracture and divergence from his father's and teacher's ideas caused by the revolution. Massarani gave more than one testimony on his inability to believe. Recalling his teacher's faith, at his funeral oration on 23 November 1886, he observed that if not to all were granted the "ineffable comforts" that Norsa acquired through the "faithful, tranquil and impassioned contemplation of the Supreme idea" to all was given "the search for reflected light in the best."<sup>63</sup> Ten years earlier, in a letter to Giuseppe Guerzoni, who had been a *Garibaldino*, he confessed that while for him the idea of religion was "more an aspiration than a certainty," he understood and praised the "noble

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>61</sup> Tullo Massarani to Davide Norsa, Milano, October 5, 1885, Massarani, *Una nobile vita*, I, 493-495.

<sup>62</sup> You find a wide examination of the religious aspects of the revolution in Francia, 1848. The author, who offers an accurate reconstruction of the dynamics of the revolution, is less interested to their connection with the long-running processes.

<sup>63</sup> Massarani, "Davide Norsa," *Id.*, *Illustri e cari estinti*, 318-321; 321.

sentiment” that had suggested his friend “to give a generous part to faith” in his university teaching.<sup>64</sup> The thoughtful attention that Massarani gave to religious feeling is more accurately motivated in a letter in 1884 to Gaetano Trezza, who had given him his book *La religione e le religioni (Religion and Religions)*.<sup>65</sup> Massarani thought that “behind the ruins of that Medieval castle, which Trezza thoroughly scrutinized— religion still remained “an innocent and impregnable refuge,” where the human conscience could “peacefully recover with dreams of the Divine.” He stressed how the infinite and moral laws were sufficient concepts “to build a soaring idealism” which, “accessible to sentiment without the help of scientific reason” was beneficial and continued to live and shine for all those for whom “not only science but also subtle reasoning” would remain “on perpetual fast.”

This form of idealism underwent numerous changes, developing out of mythical and ritual structures that were slowly dismissed. It therefore did not disappear, because it still proved its “educational efficacy” not only for “the majority of men” but also for those of who were gifted with “subtle reasoning.”

At this point he wrote by way of conclusion: “Thanks to our Mazzinian education with its idealistic binomial [God and the People], have we not come out better men than the revolutionaries of today, who have torn out from the symbol all the idealistic parts?”<sup>66</sup>

### **The Fatherland as a Substitute for Religion: Tullo and Jewish Identity**

These concluding remarks convey two recurring themes in the writings of Massarani. First of all, he seems to stress the religious inspiration of the national ideals shared by the patriots of the Risorgimento; secondly, he highlights the deprecation of forms of materialism which became ever more powerful after the end of the heroic season of political unification.

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<sup>64</sup> Tullo Massarani to Giuseppe Guerzoni, Milan, February 6, 1876, Massarani, *Una nobile vita*, I, 236 and 237.

<sup>65</sup> Gaetano Trezza, *La religione e le religioni* (Verona e Padova: Drucker e Tedeschi, 1884).

<sup>66</sup> Tullo Massarani to Gaetano Trezza, Milan, March 13, 1884, Massarani, *Una nobile vita*, I, 462-464.



*Fig. 5 Portrait of Tullo Massarani*

Retrieved from <http://www.lombardiabeniculturali.it/opere-arte/schede/31110-00107/>

In the chapter “Rome and the religious idea” from the book *Come la pensava il dottor Lorenzi. Confidenze postume di un onesto Borghese* (*What Doctor Lorenzi thought. Posthumous Confidences of an Honest Bourgeois*), where



Massarani/Lorenzi dialogues with professor Antidei/Trezza,<sup>67</sup> the author observes that the religious character of the Mazzinian apostleship, which seduced the young people of his generation, was similar to the teachings of Cesare Balbo and Vincenzo Gioberti, who had inspired the “generation before 1848.” This perspective, applied to the previous generation, tended to manifest itself in a general interpretation of nationalism as a substitution for traditional faith. One cannot but recognise Massarani’s perspicacity (that was certainly not only his<sup>68</sup>) in observing the cultural dynamics of his era, in which he himself, like his father before him, was deeply involved, especially when stressing the religious interpretation of nationalism. [Fig. 5]

If for Jews and Christians alike the common point of departure is the estrangement from belief and traditional religion determined by the widening sphere of activity beyond the confines of one’s original community<sup>69</sup>— alongside with the encounter with rationalist thought— one does not find, however, a reassuring place of arrival. The painful feeling of contingency and social fragmentation instigate the search for a new belonging in virtue of which, as has already been written, the conversion “of fatality into continuity, into meaning” becomes possible.”<sup>70</sup> The point of arrival also for those in the bosom of the same tradition, are most diverse due to the weaker or stronger ties with their culture of origin, apart from the diversity of their social condition or the intellectual milieu they frequent. The point of arrival could be a renewal of Judaism or a return to evangelism, Saint Simonism or freemasonry, the religion of the fatherland or the religion of progress, but some significant traits unite all those who live these experiences of crisis and transition. Firstly, the powerful need to believe in the face of one’s own incredulity. Secondly, the aspiration to a form of religion in which the attenuation of the most visible and external characteristics of the cult

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<sup>67</sup> Tullo Massarani, *Come la pensava il dottor Lorenzi. Confidenze postume di un onesto borghese*, “Edizione postuma delle opere,” Gruppo I, “Studii civili,” IV (Florence: Le Monnier, 1907, 1st ed. Rome: Forzani, 1894), 146-159.

<sup>68</sup> David Levi showed the same acuity: see his essay “Prime fasi del socialismo in Italia. Il sansimonismo,” *Nuova Antologia*, 153 (1897): 454-458, reproduced in Francesca Sofia, “David Levi,” *Gli ebrei e l’orgoglio di essere italiani. Un ampio ventaglio di posizioni tra ‘800 e primo ‘900*, ed. Fabio Levi (Turin: Zamorani, 2011), 23-60, 43-47.

<sup>69</sup> The distancing from traditional cultures in the development of nationalism is examined especially by Ernest Gellner, *Nations and nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983) and “Il mito della nazione e quello delle classi,” in *Storia d’Europa Einaudi*, I (Turin: Einaudi, 1993), 635-689. I discussed Gellner’s theory in Maurizio Bertolotti, *Le complicazioni della vita. Storie del Risorgimento* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1998), 118ff.

<sup>70</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised ed. (London-New York: Verso, 1991), 10-12.

favour the brotherhood with the faithful of other religions, in which the imperatives of conscience and the needs of reason are put before the prescriptions and proscriptions of the religious authorities, in which love for your neighbour gains an unprecedented importance and autonomy compared to the love for God, and in which the prospect of salvation takes the form of the progress of humanity in this world instead of, or before, the reunification with God in the other. Thirdly and finally, the propensity to profess more than one of these new faiths at the same time and to “blend” them as one prefers.

A comparison – even if rapid – of the paths taken by David Norsa, David Levi<sup>71</sup> and Tullo Massarani (the latter, following the path opened by his father) is very instructive. The point of departure for all three was the same: a distancing from the old faith. The point of arrival, however, was to an extent different. If Norsa converted to Christianity, Levi adhered to Saint Simonism and freemasonry, advocating eventually for a renewal of Judaism, whilst Massarani’s Masonic activism is attested. All three embraced at the same time the religion of the fatherland; Norsa in the form of moderate monarchism,<sup>72</sup> while the other two in a form of Mazzinianism from which, however, Massarani distanced himself in the 1850s, to eventually identify himself with the constitutional monarchism of Cavour.

As far as Tullo’s pledge to Masonic lodges is concerned, his correspondence might result quite informative. With the exception of some letters to the presidents of the *Insubria*, *La Ragione* and *Cisalpina*, three important lodges, together with a commemoration of Giovanni Faldella,<sup>73</sup> Massarani never referred to this allegiance, nor, as far as I am aware, ever wrote about freemasonry. Even if his declared, yet moderate atheism might have proven incompatible with the

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<sup>71</sup> With regard to Levi the essays by Francesca Sofia are essential: see “Gli ebrei risorgimentali fra tradizione biblica, libera muratoria e nazione,” *Storia d’Italia Einaudi, Annali*, 21, *La Massoneria*, ed. Gian Mario Cazzaniga (Turin: Einaudi, 2006), 244-265; “David Levi;” “Il vangelo eterno svelato: David Levi e la Massoneria,” *Massoneria e unità d’Italia. La Libera Muratoria e la costruzione della nazione* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011), 203-221.

<sup>72</sup> Norsa’s political opinions are well documented in the *Nuovo Proemio* to the 2nd edition of his *Pensieri d’un cattolico*, 9-25.

<sup>73</sup> The letter, dated Milan, April 11, 1878, is in Massarani, *Una nobile vita*, I, 312-313. Here first of all Massarani recalls the lay character of the Municipality and the freedom of everybody to choose “the rite with which he wishes his grave would be consecrated;” then he declares his agreement with the presidents of the lodges who dissented from the Municipality’s decision to build a Christian altar on the ossuary of the Monumental Cemetery;” yet he observes that the matter demands “moderation,” in order that “the defence of one’s own freedom would not seem intolerance of the freedom of others.”

Masonic faith, one would be led to think that his propensity for a religion rooted in his innermost conscience,<sup>74</sup> would have instilled him with a certain diffidence towards the exuberant rituals of the lodges.

This may lead one to think that on this issue Tullo followed a little servilely in the footsteps of his father. In fact, the latter could have been affiliated with his teacher and friend Romagnosi whose important role in the Gioseffina Lodge in Milan is attested by documents published by Alessandro Luzio.<sup>75</sup> Certainly Tullo would have acknowledge the opinion that Romagnosi expressed in one of the speeches published by Alessandro Luzio, where he stated that “ the Mason is called upon to procure the happiness of the human species, fostering and accelerating the intellectual, moral and political development of the same.”<sup>76</sup> However this is not sufficient to sustain that Masonic activism had a very important role in his life. [Fig. 6]



Fig. 6 Ernesta Bisi, *Portrait of Gian Domenico Romagnosi*.  
Retrieved from: *Opere edite e inedite di Gian Domenico Romagnosi*,  
riordinate e illustrate da Alessandro De Giorgi, I, Perelli e Mariani, 1841.

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<sup>74</sup> See the letter to Mauro Macchi which I quote further on in the text.

<sup>75</sup> They are two speeches delivered during two rites of his lodge, in 1807 and 1808, and a report testifying the presence of Romagnosi in another rite in 1811: they are published in Alessandro Luzio, *La Massoneria e il Risorgimento italiano. Saggio storico-critico con illustrazioni e molti documenti inediti* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1925), I, 81-92.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

Least of all does it seem feasible that there are elements allowing us to recognise in any of Massarani's texts the testimony of a relationship, even indirect, between Jewish identity and the humanitarian Masonic *credo*. Such a hypothesis was suggested by Francesca Sofia on the basis of an extract of a letter written in 1872 where Massarani replied to Mauro Macchi asking him his thoughts on a proposed law intended to concede the swearing of oaths following one's own personal religious rites.<sup>77</sup> The extract is of the greatest importance:

Either I'm fooling myself – writes Massarani – or here is the weak link in the theory. There is nothing more irrepressible nor anything that refuses to be defined or categorised more than belief. For me the sanctity of innermost conscience is violated from the moment that a person is obliged to suffer one of those definitions, to throw himself headlong into one of those categories pre-established by law. Suppose for example that one who belongs by birth to a religious minority— and does not wish to deny it if for no other reason than that it seems ungenerous to separate oneself from the few who were previously the weak and oppressed—would he not have the right to turn to the legislator and judge and to keep a language of this type: I do not repudiate the traditions of my fathers; but I do not recognise in these traditions anything that confers, with any ritual, the authority to bind my conscience more than the commitment of a solemn testimony of the truth [...]. Thus allow me to solemnly attest the truth without suffering a ritual that is not mine, and without repudiating my conscience?<sup>78</sup>

Neither from the text as a whole, nor from the context in which it was written could one, in my opinion, infer that in the moment in which he defended the right of a member of a minority to see the liberty of one's conscience respected without suffering rituals that did not pertain to him, does Massarani associate in his mind Jewish and Masonic thought, as Ernesto Natan, the future mayor of Rome, would do later.<sup>79</sup> Conversely, without any doubt and notable to our knowledge, the hypothesis that someone “who belongs by birth to a religious minority and does not wish to deny it if for no other reason than that it seems ungenerous to separate oneself from the few who were previously the weak and oppressed” was not in the least an abstract supposition but rather concrete reference to his father whose enduring bond to his original community— as we will be reminded— should be attributed in his son's opinion not to a spirit of belonging, but rather to a feeling of solidarity towards a minority that until not

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<sup>77</sup> Sofia, “Gli ebrei risorgimentali,” 261.

<sup>78</sup> Massarani, *Una nobile vita*, I, 145-146.

<sup>79</sup> Sofia, “Gli ebrei risorgimentali,” 262.

long before had been oppressed. This is a reference to himself too, as there is not the slightest doubt that his opinions and sentiments were the same as Giacobbe's. In 1891, on the occasion of the expulsion of the Jews from Moscow, he took part in a subscription in their favour promoted by his friend Antonio Allievi, accompanying his donation with a letter. Here he lamented the fate of those poor wretches and, even more so, the fate of the end of the century in which he was living: "after having boasted the many victories of humanity and of reason, is reduced to seeing inert (and for its inertia it is almost an accomplice) the Medieval, with all its injustices and with none of its excuses, re-lived." In the postscript he begged his friend, however, not to enrol in any subcommittee, as, he explained, the "humanitarian character" of the initiative should emerge clearly from the fact that its promoters had no motive to represent it "other than in the name of humanity."<sup>80</sup>

The following year he accepted the appeal by Leone Ravenna to speak out against the publication of an article in the "Standard," translated and published by a Milan newspaper, about the sacrificial killing of a child by Jews. However, he limited himself to writing a private letter to the article's author, because, as he explained to Ravenna, "I did not and do not believe it opportune to raise a fuss on a theme beyond the belief of men of good faith."<sup>81</sup>

The fact is that Massarani, seriously worried about the wave of anti-Semitism, was also afraid that Jews would protest as Jews, so reintroducing a distinction and a separation, the overcoming of which he strived for with all his force.<sup>82</sup> This explains his radical disagreement with David Levi.

In 1874 Levi had asked Massarani for his financial support for the renovation of the Jewish cemetery, but Tullo had made an eloquent refusal that, among other things, sheds light on the implications of the letter to Macchi two years earlier. "I believe" he explained "that civil laws should be applied indiscriminately to all religious faiths. All should have their last resting place in common, just as they

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<sup>80</sup> Tullo Massarani to Antonio Allievi, Milan, July 28, 1891, Massarani, *Una nobile vita*, II (1886-1905), 186 and 187.

<sup>81</sup> Tullo Massarani to Leone Ravenna, Milan, July 8, 1892, Massarani, *Una nobile vita*, II (1886-1905), 195-197.

<sup>82</sup> Another circumstance is no less significant: the lodges Insubria, La Ragione e Cisalpina had asked him to sponsor the opposition to the Municipality's decision to build a Christian altar on the ossuary of the Monumental Cemetery; he replied in the quoted letter on April 11, 1878 that "the action could avoid better the censures by partisan and intolerant persons if sponsored by people born in the religion of the majority: otherwise it would not be spared criticisms."

already shared, dwelling places, offices, relationships,” and added that he understood that “these ideas” as he wrote, “are not accepted by many, who find it easier to complain about the ancient divisions than to help make them disappear.”<sup>83</sup>

It is exactly with the shared memory of David Levi that a letter of 1898 is concerned. This can be considered as probably the most significant document on the relationship of Massarani with Jewish tradition and of his concept of relations between Jews and non-Jews. He received an article dedicated to Levi (who had just died) from the young Arturo Foà from Turin. Foà, who was born in 1877 and who became the pupil of renown literary critic Arturo Graf, would soon establish himself as a poet. He later became a fervent fascist, faithful to Mussolini notwithstanding the racial laws, and died at Auschwitz in 1944. Massarani returned the article to him considering it not opportune “at this time.” If and where the article was published and what its tenor was I have not been able to find out, but judging by Massarani’s comment, it must have been praise for the work carried out by Levi. Massarani wrote:

It is fortunate that in Italy the cancer of anti-Semitism has not taken root; this is due, I believe, in great part to the Israelites having made every effort to give a good account of themselves in all the intellectual and civil fields, without accentuating their countenance, that labels them as a distinct stock, not irrevocably mixed and merged in the bosom of the nation to which they belong. Israelitism is the cult of a minority and cannot and must not be a symbol of a separate literary or political movement. All of which makes me think of the existence of a separate cultural orientation which returns to damage that assimilation that must be in the wishes of all citizens devoted to their country and to equal rights.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Tullo Massarani to David Levi, Milan, March 5, 1874, Massarani, *Una nobile vita*, I, 194 e 195.

<sup>84</sup> Tullo Massarani to Arturo Foà, Milano, October 29, 1898 [here I must rectify the error of the editor of Massarani’s epistolary, Raffaele Barbiera, who dates the letter on October 29, 1893, which is impossibile because Levi died on October 18, 1898), Massarani, *Una nobile vita*, II, 230 e 231. The answer Massarani gave Dante Lattes who had sent him the text of his lecture on Max Nordau held in Trieste February 6, 1900 should also be quoted in full. Since Lattes had on that occasion complained that with the disappearance of the ghetto “a characteristic life,” which “was ours” had died out, while the new life represented “a break-up,” Massarani replied: “Where the victory of civilization is well advanced and the assimilation of all citizens is near to triumph both in the customs as in the laws, I cannot understand why we should redo the path so laboriously travelled, and go back to the ancient separation” (Massarani to Dante Lattes, Milan, 8 luglio 1904, *ibid.*, 502-504). Alberto Cavaglioni, “I vecchi e i giovani. Due generazioni ebraiche a confronto tra Otto e Novecento,” *Annali dell’Istituto Italiano per gli studi storici*, XXVIII, 2012-2013, II, 1025-1038, documents how Alessandro D’Ancona had answered in very similar terms (see 1035), and

If, as Francesca Sofia has observed, it is true that in the nineteenth century emancipated Judaism was confronted with the alternative between the embracing of modernity (of which the nation was the synthesis) “as a sort of substitute for religion” and affirming the “birthright of Judaism in comparison with modernity” on the basis of the “apparent analogy between the values established in the century and traditional teaching,”<sup>85</sup> and if it is true that David Levi followed the latter path, there is no doubt that Massarani chose the former. Nevertheless, to fully understand the radical assimilation he supported, as the letter to Foà demonstrates, it is essential to place his extreme position in the context of his conversion to the religion of his fatherland.

### **Tullo Massarani after 1861: the obsession with unity**

A moderate liberal, with a propensity for constitutional monarchy, in 1848 Giacobbe is among many who would prefer to entrust the Italian cause to Piedmont and Carlo Alberto. The son deviates from his father’s path and in those days looked towards Mazzini, participating, after the total failure of the revolution, in the conspiratorial initiatives he supported. In the volume dedicated to Carlo Tenca, Tullo admirably narrates how in the years immediately following, ever more critical of the ill-timed and unsuccessful insurrectional acts desired by the Apostle, and by now persuaded by the soundness of Cavour’s policies, he ended up recognising, along with many other patriots and in particular his *Crepuscolo* friends, that only the Savoy monarchy could lead Italy to its goal.<sup>86</sup> In this way Tullo, among other things, resolved the disagreements

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notes that if young people had listened to the voice of these “Great Old Men,” instead of “flying the flag of diversity with an air of nationalism,” becoming old they would not have been easily dazzled, as happened, by “the chimeras of Mussolini” and the number of Jewish fascists would not have been so considerable (see 1032). The contrary hypothesis – that would in any case be submitted to the verification of a specific investigation – seems more plausible to me: was not the passionate patriotism – that characterized, like Massarani, many Italian Jews and that fed their strong assimilationist tendencies – to induce them to acquiesce to fascism?

<sup>85</sup> Sofia, “La nazione degli ebrei risorgimentali,” in *Rassegna Mensile di Israel*, 76/1-2 (2010): 95-112; I should warn that in my opinion the option of how many supported the correspondence between the new values and the Jewish tradition was probably influenced by their institutional position; in fact the rabbis prevail: in the essay “Gli ebrei risorgimentali,” 248-252, the author recalls in this regard Lelio Della Torre, Giuseppe Levi, Marco Mortara, Elijah Benamozegh.

<sup>86</sup> Massarani, *Carlo Tenca*, chapt. IV. See also the letter of Tullo Massarani to Antonio Gallenga, Milan, November 7, 1895, Massarani, *Una nobile vita*, II, 273-275: “The high ideals and the attractiveness of the danger pushed me well to put me in connection with Mazzini; but I did not

with his father, and accompanied him to Paris to a decisive meeting with Daniele Manin.<sup>87</sup> Significant in his account is Massarani's tendency to attenuate the importance of this turning point. He extensively quoted the proclamation in the first number of "Italia del Popolo," May 20<sup>th</sup> 1848, in which Mazzini outlined his position about prospects of an Italian revolution, and underlined how the concept of unity was the fulcrum of this proclamation, evoking in particular the passage where Mazzini solemnly declared that if "an Italian prince" were to become "the living incarnation of Italian unification" he would without any hesitation be recognised as "the elect of the Nation."<sup>88</sup> Here we are talking about symbols, Massarani explained, "of which no-one should regret having accepted" and in the next chapter he adds as a conclusion to his reasoning that during the Crimean War, when Vittorio Emanuele had demonstrated the desire to raise the Italian flag from the dust and ashes, one could not but take cognizance of the fact that the prince yearned by Mazzini had finally arrived.<sup>89</sup> Even when one admits that here Massarani was concerned with demonstrating the coherence, to tell the truth not irrefutable, of his choices, these pages remain a testimony of the ever more notable demands unity made to his eyes after 1848. These demands informed his thinking for the greater part of his activity until his death.

Roberto Balzani has observed that, while after 1860 and up to his death Massarani's public activity was spread over many different fields – from culture to administration – his political work after Unity was in the form of "narration which was almost entirely posthumous,"<sup>90</sup> i.e., in the form of regret for an epoch in which the Risorgimental ideals were not suffocated as they were at that time by the alchemy of parliamentary life and the divisions between factions. If, as he wrote in a letter to Clara Maffei in 1865, these went at the expense of "public benefit,"<sup>91</sup> we can imagine that he was equally worried by the threat they

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want to ever pronounce vows that bind my conscience. I moved away from Mazzini, like many others, under the auspices of Daniele Manin, when the monarchy of Savoy gave the assurance, with the war of Crimea and afterwards at the Paris Congress, that it would vigorously take up the cause of Italy."

<sup>87</sup> Massarani, "L'Avvocato Giacobbe Massarani," 290-291.

<sup>88</sup> Massarani, *Carlo Tenca e il pensiero civile del suo tempo*, 62-65.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>90</sup> Roberto Balzani, "La politica postuma di Tullo Massarani," paper read at the meeting *Tullo Massarani: un patriota ebreo da Mantova a Milano*, Mantua and Milan, March 12 and 13, 2014 (the conference proceedings will be published soon). I warmly thank Balzani for allowing me to read and cite his text before publication.

<sup>91</sup> Tullo Massarani to Clara Maffei, Firenze, December 5, 1865, Massarani, *Una nobile vita*, II, 347.



represented for the unity of the nation.<sup>92</sup> It was impatience that contributed to his decision in 1860 to resign from the Chamber of Deputies, in which he entered in 1860 and to whose work he had made an effective contribution, involving himself in mutual societies, taxation, pious works, teachers and art property. Above all in significance, however, was the spirit in which he accepted in 1876 the nomination as Senator: a place (the Senate), he wrote to Norsa, in which “it seems to me one has the task of advising rather than that of battling.”<sup>93</sup>

Many important aspects of Massarani’s public work can be better understood in the light of this fundamental anxiety. For instance the commitment he showed right up to his last days towards the communal and provincial councils of Milan was sustained by the conviction that due to the closeness between government institutions and the citizen’s needs in the local administration, the action on behalf of the public good would be faster and more incisive.<sup>94</sup> Although the recognition of the fundamental role played by the autonomous communes constituted a cornerstone of Mazzini’s thinking, Massarani’s opinions certainly owed much to Carlo Cattaneo, whose essay *La città considerata come principio ideale delle istorie italiane* (*The City Considered as Ideal Principle of Italian History*) he had read with enthusiasm in 1858.<sup>95</sup> Despite his admiration for the Lombard scholar, especially for those elements of his thinking, Massarani could not be convinced of the effectiveness of a federalist solution because he was aware of the risks that national unity entailed. In 1897 he would recount to Felice Momigliano of having built a “great part” of his literary education, but not his political convictions, on the works of Cattaneo. In fact, he completely dissented

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<sup>92</sup> On this aspect of the thoughts of Massarani, apart from Balzani, Mariachiara Fugazza has opportunely persisted, in “Massarani and the memory of the Risorgimento,” a paper read at the conference quoted in the previous note. I also thank Fugazza for allowing me to read her text before publication. The interpretation proposed by Balzani and Fugazza was formulated *in nuce* in the essay that Benedetto Croce published on Massarani in n. 36 of 1938 of the *Critica*, in the section “Aggiunte alla *Letteratura della nuova Italia*”, 328-336; At 328 Croce writes: “The truth is that Massarani had lived and almost exhausted his affective and practical life during the long eve 1849-60, and he remained attached to that time with all his soul and wanted to preserve in his writings the high memories of it, for his comfort and for admonition of others.”

<sup>93</sup> Tullo Massarani to David Norsa, Milan, October 5, 1876, Massarani, *Una nobile vita*, I, 258. See Balzani, “Massarani, Tullo,” *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 71 (Roma: Istituto dell’Enciclopedia Italiana, 2008), *ad vocem*.

<sup>94</sup> On this point too there are valuable observations in Balzani, “La politica postuma.” The opinions of Massarani about the Municipality are expressed in broad form in *Come la pensava il dottor Lorenzi*, chapt. VIII.

<sup>95</sup> This information is in the letter of Tullo Massarani to Michele Amari, Milan, December 16, 1858, Massarani, *Una nobile vita*, I, 12.

with Cattaneo's political convictions: "I think," he explained, "that independence, nationality and unity are indispensable foundations for the political edifice of this our Italy, whose disintegration is owed to centuries long serfdom."<sup>96</sup>

National education should have strived to counter the effect of that disintegration, and Massarani certainly did not conceive it as an abstract form of preaching. Apart from what compulsory education could do,<sup>97</sup> it is notable how important he considered the function of knowledge and the safeguarding of the artistic and historic heritage, following the conviction Tenca had already highlighted from the time of the "Rivista Europea."<sup>98</sup> When in 1877 the Senate presented a law on the *Conservation of monuments and antique objects and art*, discussed five years previously, Massarani did not hesitate, in contrast with the majority of his colleagues, to support the proposal of Francesco di Giovanni to prohibit the exportation of valuable works. This stand was motivated by the consideration that, given the impossibility of the state to exercise the right of pre-emption on all the works on the market, it could not otherwise guarantee effective protection. To the many, like the Minister Coppini, that "bow to the *Deus Terminus* of private property," Massarani objected that "the history of judicial progress" was no other than the history of "perpetual compromise between the antique and boundless heroic right of the possessor and the new civil right of the legislator and judge."<sup>99</sup> If in this case a compromise, entailing without doubt a notable limitation to private property, seemed to him admissible and necessary, it was precisely because works of art reflected the history of the nation that their custody in Italy and their enjoyment, not only by the literary classes but also by the working class, would have provided irreplaceable function in the formation of a national identity and the consolidation of the country's unity. [Fig. 7]

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<sup>96</sup> Tullo Massarani to Felice Momigliano, Milan, October 5, 1897, Massarani, *Una nobile vita*, II, 327-330.

<sup>97</sup> Massarani, *Come la pensava il dottor Lorenzi*, chapt. VIII; the wide chapter X is reserved to the school.

<sup>98</sup> Massarani, *Carlo Tenca e il pensiero civile del suo tempo*, 49.

<sup>99</sup> I quote the intervention of Massarani in the session of November 23, 1877, Tullo Massarani, *Ricordi parlamentari*, Series II, *In Senato*, I (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1908), 32-34.

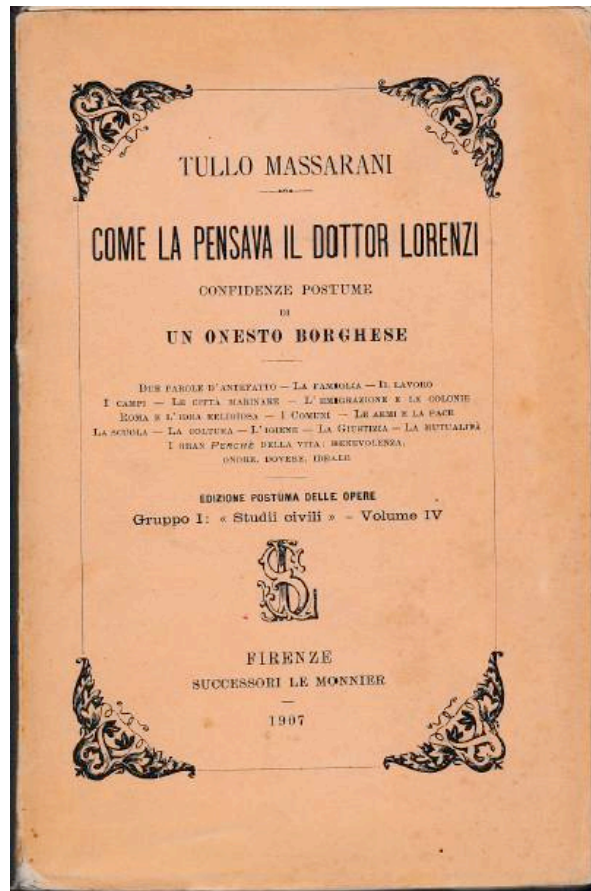


Fig. 7 Tullio Massarani, *Come la pensava il dottore Lorenzi. Confidenze postume di un onesto borghese* (Florence: Successori Le Monnier, 1907)

From the 1880s on, against the background of the successful rise of the socialist movements in Europe and Italy, Massarani's preoccupation for national unity became an obsession.<sup>100</sup> During the violent repression of the riots in Milan in May 1898 led by Fiorenzo Bava Beccaris, he called for national unity, along with courageous economic public interventions, “severe brakes” on the freedom of

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<sup>100</sup> Obsession: I take the concept and the word from Gramsci, who qualifies as such the unitarianism of Francesco Crispi in paragraph 24 of *Quaderno 19*: “For his programme Crispi was a moderate pure and simple. His nobler Jacobin ‘obsession’ was the political and territorial unity of the country;” I quote from Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderno 19. Risorgimento Italiano*, Introduction and notes by Corrado Vivanti (Turin: Einaudi, 1977), 105 (see also 107).

press, of association, and of teaching.<sup>101</sup> Anti-socialist polemics, a leitmotiv in letters of the period, is one of the threads in his 1894 volume.

### What Doctor Lorenzi Thought

With the aim of giving the maximum clarity to the concept he had at heart, i.e., to the conflict between the ideas of socialism and communism and the Risorgimental ideals, Massarani here gives way to Mazzini, quoting his appeal to the artisans in 1871,<sup>102</sup> in which he denounced the “wild intrusion [...] of arbitrary irrational negations of Russian, German and French demagogues [...] who came to announce that to be happy humanity must live without God, without a fatherland, without personal property and, for the most rational and daring, without the collective sanctity of the family.”<sup>103</sup> Dragged along by the passion of this deprecation of the present, Massarani did not hesitate to postulate a harmony between the Risorgimento forces that, in reality, never existed before:

For about ten years, or perhaps fifteen or twenty if I remember correctly, we all more or less loved one another. Oh, idyllic years of Congresses, of brotherhood, of canticles, of “fuori i lumi” (“everybody on the streets!”). And also of sword fighting! Oh, years tragically great and divine of conspiracies of each and all in one idea alone, of heroic silences, of magnanimous suicides, of the gallows met head-held-high as if a victory, greeted with tears like a promise of redemption, honoured in military actions, storybook fortunes and even undeserved victories!<sup>104</sup>

To a Jew who feared the dis-union of the country it is not surprising that even the development of new currents of thought within the Jewish world appeared as a threat. He saw in that, as in resurgent anti-Semitism, the manifestation of antagonism that he underlined in the previously quoted letter to Leone Ravenna in 1892, fueled by the war of 1870 that had aroused “among the most civil stock:”

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<sup>101</sup> See the letters to Gaspare Finali, Milan, May 12 and June 5, 1898, Massarani, *Una nobile vita*, II, 355 and 356, 362-364.

<sup>102</sup> This is the appeal to the artisans about to meet in the XII Congress of Workers’ Associations to be held in Rome in early November: it was published in *La Roma del Popolo* on October 12, 1871.

<sup>103</sup> Quoted in Massarani, *Come la pensava il dottor Lorenzi*, 350.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 356-357.

From here the rekindling of all the evil passions and the re-awakening of all the most forbidden prejudices in economics, judicial, and moral matters: intolerance leading to persecution, rancour against races, class struggles, price wars and all the rest.

In the eyes of Massarani, the Jewish question took shape as an aspect of the national question, but both presupposed the social question.

Where do you see more – he wondered in a page of *What Doctor Lorenzi Thought* – I’m speaking in general, that spontaneous and sincere benevolence is welcomed as it should be; the benevolence that, in the desire of every honest man and in the opinion of Spencer, would re-awake in the recipients of such help feelings of beatitude and affection and do good? Where can you find the recipients of help in good relations with their benefactors, to see stability and solidarity grow in the Community (as the great sociologist stated that thanks to reciprocal benevolence it should happen)?<sup>105</sup>

The preference Tullo had for the mutualism of Spencer, author of *Social Statics*, compared to the more extreme expression of the Spencerian social Darwinism, represents an orientation shared by the majority of the rural Mantuan middle-class in the nineteenth century. It was primarily this rural middle-class that raised the question of the improvement of the living conditions of the peasants and dealt extensively with their education and moralization, as an indispensable factor in the process of the capitalist transformation of agriculture and, more generally, economy.<sup>106</sup> Moise Susani, a Jewish land-owner and scholar, wrote in 1844 an essay on the request of Carlo Cattaneo for his unpublished second volume of *Natural and Civil Reports on Lombardy*, where he claimed that through education and above all through the extension of participation, i.e., *metayer* farming, the peasant would soon raise his position from his indolence in order to be part of the life of progress.<sup>107</sup> We recognize here the underlying direction of Giacobbe, who was decidedly inclined, as his son recalls, not to unproductive charity but to initiatives aimed at giving the poorest the possibility of earning dignity through work. As observed,<sup>108</sup> the welfare and educational institutions supported by the Jewish community (as well as those that thanks to

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 354.

<sup>106</sup> For a wider examination of these discussions see Bertolotti, *Le complicazioni della vita*, chapt.

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<sup>107</sup> Moise Susani, *Sulle attuali condizioni massime economiche dell'agricoltura nella provincia di Mantova*, ed. Renato Giusti, (Mantova: Museo del Risorgimento, 1971), 101.

<sup>108</sup> Monica Miniati, “L’insostituibile pesantezza del povero. La beneficenza ebraica fra tradizione e modernizzazione,” *Rassegna Mensile di Israel*, LXXVI, (2010): 1-2; 275-297.

the contribution of Giacobbe were among the first to be established in Mantua) answered the needs of a regeneration judged both by Jews and Gentiles as necessary in order to achieve complete integration. If this regeneration were to take place, these institutions would have had, like the analogous non-Jewish institutions, to meet the wishes of their supporters in encouraging solidarity between the social classes.

The above quoted passage by Massarani highlights how social concord was at the top of Tullo's priorities. Both direct and indirect testimonies indicate how selfless he was in trying to pursue it. The tenor of his reports with country dwellers is clear from a letter written in 1876 where he describes the warm reception he received during one of his visits to his lands in the countryside. The curator underlined that, as reported by an article in "Diritto" in Rome, his tenants went to meet him "with music and hurrahs."<sup>109</sup> There is no doubt that Massarani was not, unlike other landowners, the object of anti-Semitic hostility, which conversely was widely spread among countryside dwellers in nineteenth century Mantua.<sup>110</sup> This is probably due to the fact that he supported the *metayer* system, which he expressly praised in the fourth chapter of *What Doctor Lorenzi Thought*. In this context the action that he took in the Senate in favour of legal measures limiting the work of women and children and on safety at work acquire a particular significance.<sup>111</sup>

There is no need to underline the harmony – leaving aside differences of political direction - with important members of the rural Mantuan middle-class who in the same decades were promoters of the most significant local experiences of democratic mutualism and founded some of the most celebrated newspapers of Italian social democratic culture. These include "La Favilla" of Paride Suzzara Verdi and "La Provincia di Mantova" of Alberto Mario. Mid-way through the 1880s we find, however, important members of this group – for example Eugenio Sartori and Francesco Siliprandi – organizing the peasants in two associations, which were protagonists of the "la boje!" unrest. It is in this circumstance, in the face of the economic and social upheaval caused by the great depression, that the illusion of "bringing the classes together" as hoped for by Luigi Boldrini finally

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<sup>109</sup> Tullo Massarani to Davide Norsa, Milan, October 5, 1876, Massarani, *Una nobile vita*, I, 257-261. It was not possible to trace the article in the *Diritto* referenced by the editor.

<sup>110</sup> See Bertolotti, "I contesti sociali dell'ambiguità. Manifestazioni antisemitiche nel mondo socialista italiano dell'Ottocento," *Antisemitismi a confronto: Francia e Italia. Ideologie, retoriche, politiche*, eds. Michele Battini and Marie-Anne Matard Bonucci (Pisa: Pus, 2010) 57-78.

<sup>111</sup> This action is documented by Massarani, *Ricordi parlamentari*, Series II, *In Senato*, I and II (Florence: Le Monnier, 1908 and 1909).

fades away<sup>112</sup> (Boldrini was one of the most important figures of the great renters patriots, but an advocate of the small-scale farmer). Finally, a clear division took place within the rural democratic middle-class between the supporters of the cooperation among classes, and the ones who followed the socialist ideas stressing the cultural and political autonomy of the agricultural proletariat.<sup>113</sup> It is against this background that, in front of the rural movement known to history as “la boje,” Massarani joined the association created by the landowners and the renters in 1885 in order to safeguard their own interests.<sup>114</sup> Nevertheless, until 1885 a radical and magnanimous conception of progress had assured, above and beyond the various individual personalities, high degree of unity among the exponents of this social and political group, who committed both energy and resources to improve the material and “spiritual conditions” of the peasants, and worked for their full integration as members of the nation state. It is in this context that we may better understand the full sense of the disillusion and distrust in the present described by Massarani in his works in the 1880s and 1890s. Finally, it is on this backdrop that the lives and works of Giacobbe and Tullo Massarani bear an extraordinarily valuable witness of the history of the Jews in Mantua and Italy in the era of emancipation and, more widely, of the history of Italian society in the nineteenth century.

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<sup>112</sup> The quote is from an article that appeared in *I Contadi* (the magazine founded by Boldrini in Milan in 1868), 2, January 25, 1868.

<sup>113</sup> On this crisis and the story of Boldrini, (who was an exemplary expression of the crisis), I wrote in “Fine della fratellanza. La doppia memoria d’una festa,” *Memoria e Ricerca*, VI, new series, 2, July-December 1998, 43-60.

<sup>114</sup> See the first page of the *Gazzetta di Mantova*, January 22, 1885.

*Dalla Trinità di Rubens (1605) alla Madonna della Vittoria di Mantegna (1495-96), La fede degli italiani. Per Adriano Prosperi*, eds. Guido Dall'Olio, Adelisa Malena, Pierroberto Scaramella (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2011) 291-306.

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**From Odessa to Florence: Elena Comparetti Raffalovich.  
A Jewish Russian Woman in Nineteenth-Century Italy**

by *Asher Salah*



*Elena Comparetti Raffalovich (1842-1918)*

## Abstract

*In the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, Italy held a strong appeal for Russian travelers. Several of these Russian émigrés were women of Jewish lineage, who had come with their families or were sent abroad on their own in order to complete their education at one of the newborn kingdom's prestigious universities. Elena Raffalovich (Odessa 1842 – Florence 1918) is one of the earliest and most intriguing examples of this phenomenon. While her intellectual trajectory, as a pioneer in children's education and an advocate of women's rights, is representative of that of many other Russian Jewish women living in Italy at that time, it also challenges a number of historiographic commonplaces about Jewish women and their emancipation process in nineteenth-century Europe. Moreover, through the archives of different prominent members of the Raffalovich dynasty, it is possible to follow its vicissitudes over at least five generations, completing our knowledge of Elena's biography and reassessing the importance of her intellectual contribution to Italian culture.*

- Introduction

- Elena Raffalovich's Life

- Elena Raffalovich's Family

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## Introduction

In the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, Italy held a strong appeal for Russian bourgeois, exiled dissidents and ailing intellectuals, who were attracted by the mildness of the Italian climate, by its historical sites and by its liberal political regime.<sup>1</sup> Italy's artistic cities and summer resorts were, therefore,

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<sup>1</sup> The foremost scholar on the subject of Russians in Italy is Michail G. Talalay. Among his main works see in particular *Russkie v Italii: Kul'turnoe Nasledie Emigratsii, Mezhdunarodnaia Nauchnaia Konferentsiia (Russians in Italy: The Cultural Heritage of Emigration: International Scholarly Conference)* ed. Michail G. Talalay (Moscow: Russkii Put', 2006); ID., "Organizations of Russian immigrants in Florence (1917-1949)" in *Russia and Italy*, 5 (2003): 32-39 (in Russian). Other authors who wrote on the topic: Ettore Lo Gatto, *Russi in Italia: dal secolo 17 ad oggi* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1971); *I russi e l'Italia*, ed. Vittorio Strada (Milan: Scheiwiller, 1995); N. Komolova, "Russian Emigration in Italy in the Early Twentieth Century (1905-1914)" in *Russia and Italy*, 3 (1998): 283-306 (in Russian); I. Revyakina, "Russian Capri (1906-1914)" in *Russia and Italy*, 5 (2003): 12-32 (in Russian). For a general overview of the Russian Diaspora in Italy, the site <http://www.russinitalia.it> is very useful. I would like to thank my friend and colleague Professor Igor Aronov of the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design

included in the itinerary of many Russians' *Grand Tours*.<sup>2</sup> Among those Russians who sojourned in Italy for longer or shorter periods of time were many Jews born in Odessa, or its former residents,<sup>3</sup> such as Vladimir Jabotinsky (1880–1940)<sup>4</sup> and Isaac Babel (1894–1940).<sup>5</sup> Several of these Jewish Odessites eventually settled in Italy, taking an active part in its political and literary life, as did Alexander Pekelis (1902–1946),<sup>6</sup> a professor of jurisprudence at the universities of Florence and Rome, and Leone Ginzburg (1909–1944), one of the most prominent anti-Fascist activists and heroes of the Italian Resistance.<sup>7</sup>

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in Jerusalem for his bibliographical references in Russian, and to express my gratitude to Giulia Rispoli and Paolo De Luca for having allowed me to read their forthcoming article *Russian emigration in Italy in the pre-revolutionary period: the case of the school of Capri*.

<sup>2</sup> For a European perspective on the representation of Italy in the literature of the Grand Tour see Marie Madelaine Martinet, *Le voyage d'Italie dans les littératures européennes* (Paris: PUF 1996); Cesare Seta, *L'Italia del Grand Tour. Da Montaigne a Goethe* (Naples: Electa, 2001); Attilio Brilli, *Il viaggio in Italia: storia di una grande tradizione culturale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008). Concerning the Russian romantic fascination for Italy, which reached its peak in the middle of the nineteenth century see Olga Matich, *Erotic Utopia. The Decadent Imagination in Russia's Fin de Siècle* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005) and Sara Dickinson, *Breaking Ground: Travel and National Culture in Russia from Peter I to the Era of Pushkin*, (New York & Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> About the Russian Jewish diaspora in Europe, although with scant references to Italy, *The Russian Jewish Diaspora and European Culture, 1917-1937*, eds. Jörg Schulte, Olga Tabachnikova, Peter Wagstaff (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Michael Parkhomovskii, "Russians Jews in the Diaspora: Italy," *Notes on Jewish History*, 11/158 (2012) <http://berkovich-zametki.com/2012/Zametki/Nomer11/Parhomovsky1.php>.

<sup>4</sup> Jabotinsky published a number of articles and essays under the pseudonym *Altalena* ('swing' in Italian). During his long sojourns abroad he studied law at La Sapienza University in Rome, where he became associated with another Ukrainian Jewish emigrant, Pinhas Rutenberg (1879-1842), the father of the hydroelectric infrastructure of British Palestine. See Vincenzo Pinto, *Imparare a sparare: vita di Vladimir Ze'ev Jabotinsky padre del sionismo di destra* (Turin: Utet, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> On Babel's Italian journey during the Fascist era see Gregory Freidin, "La 'grande svolta'. L'Occidente e l'Italia nella biografia di I. E. Babel all'inizio degli anni '30" *Storia contemporanea: intellettuali e cultura antidemocratica tra le due guerre mondiali*, 6 (1991).

<sup>6</sup> On this important figure of jurisprudence and philosophy of law see his wife's biography, Carla Pekelis, *La mia versione dei fatti* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1996) [Engl. Trans. *My Version of the Facts*, (Evanston: Marlboro Press and Northwestern University Press, 2005)]; Massimo Giuliani, "Da Odessa a Firenze: Alexander Pekelis (1902-1946): ebreo russo emigrato in Italia," *Amicizia Ebraico-Cristiana*, 34/3-4 (1999): 113ff.; Massimo Mastrogregori, "Il Caso Pekelis. Croce, Russo, Calamandrei e la protezione degli studiosi ebrei nell'autunno 1938" *Storiografia*, 6 (2002): 127ff.

<sup>7</sup> An extensive bibliography exists on Leone Ginzburg. See Gianni Sofri, "Leone Ginzburg," in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Vol. 55 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 2001). For a first approach to his familiar story and his Odessian years see in particular *Da Odessa a Torino. Conversazioni con Marussia Ginzburg. In appendice: scritti giovanili inediti di Leone Ginzburg*, ed. Maria Chiara Avalle (Turin: Meynier, 1989).

The presence of a significant Russian colony in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Italy is a widely known fact. However, very little has been written about the travelers themselves, their motivations for (permanent or temporary) migration, and the effect of their political and intellectual activity on contemporary Italian culture. A lack of relevant statistical data makes it difficult to paint an accurate picture of the social, religious, ethnic, and gender characteristics of the Russian diaspora in the Italian Peninsula.



Fig. 1 Elena Raffalovich.

Retrieved from <http://www.barbiana.it/>

Noteworthy in any case is that several of these Russian *émigrés* were women of Jewish lineage, who had come with their families or were sent abroad on their own in order to complete their education at one of the newborn kingdom's prestigious universities. Elena Raffalovich (Odessa 1842 – Florence 1918) is one of the earliest and most intriguing examples of this phenomenon [Fig. 1]. While her intellectual trajectory is representative of that of many other Russian Jewish women living in Italy at that time, it also challenges a number of historiographic commonplaces about Jewish women and their emancipation process in

nineteenth-century Europe.

The past two decades have witnessed a considerable amount of scholarship devoted to Italian Jewish women,<sup>8</sup> but their stories are still largely absent from the master narratives of the Italian Jewish past.

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<sup>8</sup> Tullia Catalan, "Il rapporto padre e figlia in una famiglia ebraica dell'alta borghesia triestina. Elio ed Emilia Morpurgo (1845-1849)" in *Padre e figlia*, eds. L. Accati, M. Cattaruzza, M. Verzar Bass (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1994) 215-235; Luisa Levi D'Ancona Modena, "Famiglie ebraiche borghesi dell'Ottocento europeo: tre casi di studio" in *Passato e Presente*, 57 (2002): 73-84, Ead., "Notabili e dame nella filantropia ebraica ottocentesca: casi di studio in Francia, Italia e Inghilterra" in *Quaderni Storici*, 3 (2003): 741-776; Ead., "Jewish Women in Non-Jewish Philanthropy in Italy (1870-1938)" in *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues*, (2010): 9-33; Liana Elda Funaro, "Compagna e partecipe. Donne della comunità ebraica livornese nel secondo Ottocento" in *Sul filo della scrittura: Fonti e temi per la storia delle donne a Livorno*, eds. Lucia Frattarelli Fischer and Olimpia Vaccari (Pisa: Edizioni Plus 2005) 319-339; Marina Arbib, "Dmutah U-Mishnatah Shel Flora Randegger: Ha-Meni'im Le-Masaoteyah Li-Yerushalayim" [The Personality and Thought of Flora Randegger: Motivations for Her Jerusalem Journeys], in *Iggud: Selected Essays in Jewish Studies. Vol. II. History of the Jewish People and Contemporary Jewish Society*, eds. Gershon Bacon, Albert Baumgarten, Jacob Barnai, Chaim Waxman, and Israel J. Yuval (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies 2009) 149-164 (in Hebrew).

With the exception of an important congress held in Lucca in 2005,<sup>9</sup> the only attempt at an overall appraisal of Jewish women's emancipation is the 2003 volume by Monica Miniati, probing the bourgeois discourse concerning gender roles found in the pages of the main Italian Jewish journals of the time, rather than on the lived experiences of contemporary Jewish women.<sup>10</sup>

Actually, although rabbinical homiletics and the official stances of the Jewish community in Italy as well as elsewhere in Europe present considerable similarities, defending a substantially chauvinistic and traditional vision of women's place in the world,<sup>11</sup> female social practices are much more diverse than they appear at first sight. Moreover, while it is certainly true that in the period with which we are concerned “the overwhelming majority of Jewish women were housewives or future housewives,”<sup>12</sup> Raffalovich represents a different group of women, whose influence and spheres of action have been overlooked by a nationally oriented historiography seeking to depict collective patterns of behavior, rather than minority or marginal clusters.

The intellectual biography of Elena Raffalovich is also interesting in light of the history of the Jewish family in nineteenth-century Europe. As suggested by Tullia Catalan, it would be valuable “to reach a comparative synthesis, which examines the economic and social strategies among port-Jews during the nineteenth century, focusing on the presence of a dense network of business and family ties, from Odessa and the main commercial and intellectual centers of Western Europe.”<sup>13</sup> The voluminous information available on the different scions of the Raffalovich dynasty<sup>14</sup> who attained positions of high social prestige

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<sup>9</sup> *Donne nella storia degli ebrei d'Italia: atti del IX Convegno internazionale “Italia Judaica,” Lucca, 6-9 giugno 2005*, eds. Michele Luzzati and Cristina Galasso (Florence: Giuntina 2007).

<sup>10</sup> Monica Miniati, *Les Émancipées. Les femmes juives italiennes aux XIX<sup>e</sup> et XX<sup>e</sup> siècles (1848-1924)* (Paris : Champion 2003) (in Italian *Le Emancipate. Le donne ebreiche in Italia nel XIX e XX secolo*, (Rome: Viella 2008)). For the early modern feminine condition see also chapter 3 of Marina Caffiero, *Storia degli ebrei nell'Italia moderna. Dal Rinascimento alla Restaurazione* (Rome: Carocci 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Maddalena Del Bianco Cotrozzi, “Ebraismo italiano dell'Ottocento: ‘la educazione della donna’ di David Graziadio Viterbi,” in *Donne nella storia degli ebrei d'Italia*, eds. Michele Luzzati and Cristina Galasso (Florence: Giuntina 2007) 329-345.

<sup>12</sup> Marion Kaplan, “Priestess and Hausfrau: Women and Tradition in German-Jewish Family” *The Jewish Family: Myths and Reality*, eds. Steven Cohen and Paula Hyman (New York - London: Holmes & Meier 1986) 63.

<sup>13</sup> Tullia Catalan, “The Ambivalence of a Port-City. The Jews of Trieste from the 19th to the 20th Century,” in *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC*, n. 2 (2011) [url: www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=232](http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=232).

<sup>14</sup> The only general study about the Raffalovich family known to me is S. K. Lebedev, “The

and left significant traces of their accomplishments in the European cultural scene, allows us to view Elena in a diachronic and transnational perspective throughout ‘the long nineteenth century.’ Too, we will attempt to understand how a Jewish family such as the Raffalovichs reshaped its identities in the course of its wanderings between the Czarist Empire and the West.<sup>15</sup>

### Elena Raffalovich’s Life

Elena was the third daughter of Leon (Lev Anisimovic) and Rosette Lowensohn, born in Odessa on May 22, 1842 after Marie (1833-1921) and Nadine (1836-1911). Other than the strong attachment of the young Elena to her father, who appears as a mentor and indefatigable supporter of Elena,<sup>16</sup> little is known about her earlier years in Russia. In 1861, Elena’s parents left Odessa with their entire family and settled in Western Europe, dividing their time between France and Italy.<sup>17</sup> It is not clear whether this move was made in order to avoid anti-Semitic pressures to convert, or as a consequence of the economic decline of this port city. With the beginning of the railroad boom of the 1860s and 1870s, the export line linking the major grain-producing regions of Russia with the western and southwestern borders of the Empire undermined the city’s importance in international trade.

The Raffalovichs may have chosen Italy as a destination because of familial ties to the Morpurgos of Trieste. Too, Odessa was in many ways a culturally Italian city, as much as it was under the spell of French models and fashions.<sup>18</sup> While the Raffalovichs never severed their commercial ties with Odessa, and travelled widely throughout Europe, Elena linked her destiny to her country of adoption,

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Raffalovich Family: Money, Literature, and Politics” in *Power, Society and Reform in Russia in XIX - Early XX Century: Research and Historiography*, ed. Alexiei N. Tsamutali (St. Petersburg: Nestor History 2009) 215-225 (in Russian). It includes only the brief biographical sketches of Herman, Marie and their three sons. Elena is mentioned only in a note drawing information from an article in the Italian Wikipedia.

<sup>15</sup> In the absence of scholarship dealing with the diaspora of Jewish Odessites, it can be useful to refer to the conceptual frame elaborated by Rebecca Kobrin, *Jewish Bialystock and Its Diaspora* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2010) in order to understand the dense intellectual, commercial and matrimonial networks established by the Raffalovichs across Europe as an example of the transnational character of the migrational patterns of Odessa Jews.

<sup>16</sup> According to a quite-widespread pattern in Jewish families of the haute bourgeoisie of the time, as demonstrated by Catalan, “Il rapporto padre e figlia.”

<sup>17</sup> Her sister Marie along with her husband Hermann moved to Paris shortly after, in 1863. See Sophie O’Brien, *Silhouettes d’autrefois* (Paris: Alkan 1926) 2.

<sup>18</sup> Anna Makolkin, *A History of Odessa. The Last Italian Black Sea Colony*, (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Press 2004).

leaving the traces of her deeds in the annals of Italian history.

Nowadays, Elena Raffalovich is remembered more for her illustrious descendants than for her own merits. Her name appears in short footnotes in the introductions of the many biographies of Lorenzo Milani (1923-1967), an outstanding figure of radical-left Tuscan Catholicism,<sup>19</sup> priest, educator and founder of the Barbiana School for the poor and underprivileged<sup>20</sup> [Fig. 2].



Fig. 2, Don Lorenzo Milani (1923-1967)

Retrieved from [https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lorenzo\\_Milani#/media/File:Don\\_lorenzo\\_milani\\_3.jpg](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lorenzo_Milani#/media/File:Don_lorenzo_milani_3.jpg)

In order to highlight the spiritual dimension of Don Lorenzo Milani's intellectual journey, those of his biographers with an apologetic bent linger on his double conversion: the first, his estrangement from his well-off bourgeois

<sup>19</sup> *Left Catholicism 1943-1955: Catholics and Society in Western Europe*, eds. Gerd-Reiner Horn, Emmanuel Gerard, (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001).

<sup>20</sup> Among the many biographical sketches of Lorenzo Milani that make incidental mention of Raffalovich, see Neera Fallaci, *Dalla parte dell'ultimo. Vita del prete Lorenzo Milani*, (Milan: Rizzoli, 1994); G. Guzzo, *Don Lorenzo Milani. Un rivoluzionario, un santo, un profeta o un uomo?* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 1998); Maurizio Di Giacomo, *Tra solitudine e Vangelo: 1923-1967* (Rome: Borla, 2001); Antonino Bencivinni, *Don Milani: esperienza educativa, lingua, cultura e politica*, (Rome: Armando editore, 2004); E. Martinelli, *Don Lorenzo Milani: dal motivo occasionale al motivo profondo*, (Florence: Società editrice fiorentina, 2007); Antonio Santoni Rugiu, *Don Milani. Lezioni di utopia*, (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2007); Sergio Tanzarella, *Gli anni difficili. Lorenzo Milani, Tommaso Fiore e le esperienze pastorali*, (Trapani: Il pozzo di Giacobbe, 2007); Piero Lazzarin, *Don Lorenzo Milani*, (Padua: EMP, 2007); Mario Lancisi, *Don Milani. La Vita*, (Casale Monferrato: Edizioni Piemme, 2013).



family and association with the Communist party, and the second with his discovery of the Gospel, which drove him turn his back on his secular Jewish background. His mother, Alice Weiss (Trieste 1895- Florence 1978) belonged to a prominent Jewish family of Trieste: her cousin was Edoardo Weiss (1889-1948), one of the first pupils of Sigmund Freud and founder of the Italian Association of Psychoanalysis.<sup>21</sup> Milani also had Jewish forebears on his paternal side: his great-grandmother was none other than Elena Raffalovich.

The second figure in connection with whom the name of Elena Raffalovich is usually mentioned is her husband, Domenico Comparetti (1835—1927), one of the nineteenth century's chief classical scholars of Italy. Comparetti's *Vergil* in the Middle Ages is still considered a masterpiece of erudition and positivistic scholarship.<sup>22</sup> [Fig. 3]

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<sup>21</sup> Anna Maria Accerboni, *Trieste nella Psicoanalisi. Prigionieri in riva al mare* (Trieste: Lint, 2002); Paul Roazen, *Edoardo Weiss: the House that Freud Built*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2005); Rita Corsa, *Edoardo Weiss a Trieste con Freud. Alle origini della psicoanalisi italiana. Le vicende di Nathan, Bartol e Veneziani*, (Rome: Alpes, 2013).

<sup>22</sup> Translated into English by Edward Felix Mendelssohn Benecke and published by Swan Sonnenschein & Co, London, 1895 from the Italian original, Domenico Comparetti, *Virgilio nel Medioevo*, 2 vol., (Livorno: Francesco Vigo 1872). On Domenico Comparetti's biography see E. Frontali Milani, "Gli anni giovanili di Domenico Comparetti (1848-1859). Dai suoi taccuini e da altri inediti," in *Belfagor*, 24 (1969): 174-180; Giovanni Pugliese Carratelli, "Domenico Comparetti," in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* Vol. 27 (Rome: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1982).





*Fig. 3 Domenico Comparetti (1835-1927)*  
Retrieved from  
[https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Domenico\\_Comparetti#/media/File:Comparetti.jpg](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Domenico_Comparetti#/media/File:Comparetti.jpg)

In the winter of 1862, Elena and Domenico met at the Pisan home of Baron Theodor (Anastasios) Tossizza (1795-1870).<sup>23</sup> They married in Genoa on the 13<sup>th</sup> of August 1863. One child resulted from this marriage, Laura (1864-1913), who in 1884 married a former student of her father's, the archeologist Luigi Adriano Milani (1854-1914).<sup>24</sup> Elena and Domenico separated ten years later. Her independent lifestyle and continuous traveling were apparently incompatible with raising her daughter, who was left in the custody of her father and later put in a college. This is how Domenico describes the reasons for the separation:

Affetta da malinconie isteriche [...] chiese ed ottenne dal marito la facoltà di vivere da se libera ed a modo suo, senza dimora fissa. Ciò avveniva nell'aprile del 1872.

[suffering from hysterical melancholy, she asked and received from her husband the right to live by herself, free and independent, with no fixed abode. This occurred in

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<sup>23</sup> Tossizza was a family of Greek descent from Leghorn that had commercial ties with Odessa. See Teresa Cirillo Sirri, *Carteggio Domenico Comparetti-Gherardo Nerucci* (Rome: Gonnelli 2007) 186.

<sup>24</sup> Fabrizio Vistoli, "Luigi Adriano Milani" in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 74 (Rome: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 2010), 442-445.

April 1872].<sup>25</sup>

It seems that the separation was decided upon after an attempted suicide by Elena, who could barely tolerate living under the shadow of her loving but patronizing husband.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, they did not divorce. The Italian civil code did not offer this possibility at the time,<sup>27</sup> and the only option was to resort to an ecclesiastical forum, a move that would have proved expensive and difficult. Although Domenico's repeated attempts to convince her to return home were unsuccessful, this did not prevent him from closely following and supporting his wife's projects,<sup>28</sup> maintaining with her father, whose intelligence and liberal views on marriage he admired, a stout friendship till the end of his life.<sup>29</sup> Comparetti's copious correspondence is an invaluable source for reconstructing Raffalovich's personality<sup>30</sup> and his admiration for his wife's

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<sup>25</sup> Domenico Comparetti, *In memoria di Elena Comparetti-Raffalovich e di Leone Raffalovich suo padre* (Florence: Ariani 1922) 8.

<sup>26</sup> At least this is the conclusion of Mario Alighiero Manacorda, "La breve illusione pedagogica di Elena Comparetti" in *Riforma della scuola*, 26/7-8 (1980): 36-42, based on his reading of the laconic Comparetti entry in his diaries "asfissia. Mia moglie rischia di morire [asphyxia. My wife is at risk of death]."

<sup>27</sup> Lucia Ricci, *Il divorzio in Italia. I giuristi, la società e il dibattito politico nel XIX secolo*, Tesi di Laurea in Giurisprudenza, Università degli studi di Macerata, 1998-1999.

<sup>28</sup> This is what emerges from the correspondence between Elena and Adolfo Pick, now at the Udine municipal library and partially published by Duilio Gasparini, *Adolfo Pick: Il pensiero e l'opera*, 2 Voll., (Florence: Biblioteca Nazionale Pedagogica 1968-1970) concerning the project to found a kindergarten in Venice.

<sup>29</sup> This is how he portrays Leon Raffalovich some 50 years after his death "Leone uomo d'alto ingegno, liberale in sommo grado e con tali principi egli diede a cadauna di esse marito, non imposto, ma di libera e sanamente motivata loro scelta. Abbiamo veduto come di gran cuore egli accordasse la mano della figlia minore Elena ad un giovane filologo professor universitario da lei stessa scelta a suo sposo. A questo fu sempre come un secondo padre e non cesso' mai fino agli ultimi giorni suoi di dargli prove della sua paterna sollecitudine [Leon, a man of high intellect, was extremely liberal, and according to these principles he gave a husband to each one of his daughters, not imposing him [the husband] but giving them [the daughters] a free and healthy choice. We can testify how happily he agreed to the marriage of his younger daughter Elena to a young university professor whom she chose. He behaved toward him as a second father, and he did not cease till his last days to provide him with proof of his fatherly care]," Comparetti, *In memoria di Elena Comparetti-Raffalovich*, 21-22. In the private collection belonging to Elisa Frontali Milani there are many letters of Leon addressed to Domenico, who studied Russian and frequently travelled to Russia for his researches on the Kalevala.

<sup>30</sup> Now at the *Biblioteca Umanistica* of Florence University, where Comparetti's literary estate is preserved. Unfortunately, only one letter in his huge correspondence survives that is seemingly addressed to Elena. See *Catalogo generale del fondo Domenico Comparetti, carteggio e manoscritti*, eds. Maria Grazia Macconi and Antonella Squilloni (Messina: Dipartimento di filologia e linguistica, Università degli studi, 2002).

achievements is attested by the memorial he wrote shortly after her death.<sup>31</sup>

The sole context in which Raffalovich appears on her own merits is in the history of education in post-Risorgimento Italy. Upon separating from her husband in January 1872, Elena left Pisa for Florence, where she became acquainted with Baroness Bertha von Marenholtz-Bülow (1810-1893),<sup>32</sup> an adept of Friedrich Froebel who was committed to the dissemination of his teachings across Europe. “Froebelism” highlighted the spiritual autonomy of the child and stressed the importance of creative games. The approach had an epochal impact on nineteenth- and twentieth-century teachers, making the kindergarten, a word coined by Froebel, an almost-universal educational institution.<sup>33</sup>

In Florence, Raffalovich collaborated with Marta Berduschek, a Jewess from Berlin and a friend of the baroness, to found a kindergarten that succeeded only in registering some children belonging to the foreign colony of the city. Despite the open support of Emilia Peruzzi, one of the most influential philanthropists in Tuscany,<sup>34</sup> Elena’s initiative was quashed by the opposition of more conservative local elites. Her earlier efforts in March 1872 to persuade the council that oversaw kindergartens in Pisa to adopt Froebelian methods encountered the same opposition in a Catholic milieu, and did not produce any results.<sup>35</sup> These rough beginnings did not prevent Elena, while in Venice in 1872, from contacting Adolfo Pick (1829-1894), another important figure in Italian Froebelism.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Comparetti, *In memoria di Elena Comparetti-Raffalovich*.

<sup>32</sup> Martha von Marenholtz-Bülow was one of the most ardent and energetic promoters of Froebel’s ideas in Europe. Her niece Bertha von Bülow-Wendhausen authored a ponderous biography under the title, *The Life of the Baroness von Marenholtz-Bülow*, 2 vols (New York: W. B. Harrison 1901). Loïc Chalmel, *La petite école dans l’école. L’origine piétiste-morave de l’école maternelle française* (Bern: Peter Lang 1996) 246 defines Martha’s role as the “la première porte-parole féminine des théories sur l’éducation de la petite enfance.”

<sup>33</sup> The bibliography on Friedrich Froebel (1782–1852) is huge. Among the most recent studies see Helmut Heiland, *Friedrich Wilhelm August Fröbel (1782-1852)* (Hohengehren: Schneider-Verlag 2002); Sigurd Hebenstreit, *Friedrich Fröbel. Menschenbild, Kindergartenpädagogik, Spielförderung*, (Jena: IKS Garamond 2003).

<sup>34</sup> Manacorda, “La breve illusione,” 38; James C. Albisetti, “Education for Poor Neapolitan Children: Julie Schwabe’s Nineteenth-century Secular Mission” in *History of Education*, 35/6 (2006): 166.

<sup>35</sup> Albisetti, “Education for the poor,” 167. In a letter to Pick of January 27, 1872, Elena writes that in Pisa “c’è molta apatia e ostilità a tutto ciò che è nuovo [there is indifference and much hostility towards everything new],” in Gasparini, *Adolfo Pick*, 63.

<sup>36</sup> Pick was born in Miskowitz, Bohemia, and at the age of 13 moved to Hungary and participated in the 1848 revolutions. After having fought in Italy in the Austrian army, he established himself in Venice as a teacher at the Collegio Ravà. He founded the journal

Her goal was to evaluate different options of supporting schools inspired by Froebel's pedagogical method. Two years later, after visiting different kindergartens in Munich, Stuttgart, Gotha, Dresden and Leipzig<sup>37</sup> and obtaining the official support of the municipal council on March 15<sup>th</sup> 1873,<sup>38</sup> Raffalovich launched in Venice her own Froebelian kindergarten, with Marie Ringler as its head teacher.<sup>39</sup>

While Froebel's intention had never been to spearhead a women's liberation movement and to campaign for Jewish emancipation, it is notable that most of his first followers in Europe were women or Jews, if not both.<sup>40</sup>

Italy in this respect was no exception.<sup>41</sup> The main proponents of Froebelian educational goals in the second half of the nineteenth century were Jewish, such

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*Educazione moderna* and *L'educazione dei bambini* in 1868 and 1888, respectively. He held different functions in the Italian ministry of education, and continued to spread Froebel's methods in Italy and abroad. Among his most important writings were *Il lavoro e l'educazione moderna*, (Venezia, 1873) and *Il giardino-scuola* (Venezia, 1874). About Pick, besides the aforementioned monograph by Duilio Gasparini, see also Tina Tommasi, *L'educazione infantile tra Chiesa e Stato* (Florence: Vallecchi 1978).

<sup>37</sup> In the spring of 1872 Elena writes several letters, now included in Gasparini, *Adolfo Pick*, 62-80, from Germany in French to Adolfo Pick, suggesting that he send to Germany an Italian teacher in order to learn there the Froebelian method.

<sup>38</sup> Archivio Municipale Venezia, 1870-76, VII, 9-12. The archive preserves as well a number of letters between the mayor of the city and Elena.

<sup>39</sup> The inauguration of the school took place on the 24th of October, and on this occasion were published *Discorsi pronunciati nella solennità di inaugurazione del giardino d'infanzia Elena Raffalovich Comparetti* (Venice: Tip. Antonelli 1874). Elena was not present at the ceremony and all the official discourses were delivered exclusively by males, among which Adolfo Pick whose lecture has been reprinted in Gasparini, *Adolfo Pick*, (1970), 256-273. *La scuola fa la storia: gli archivi scolastici per la ricerca e la didattica*, ed. Maria Teresa Segà (Venice: Edizioni Nuovadimensione 2002) 158.

<sup>40</sup> Froebel was not against greater gender parity and he was animated by a strong faith in the universal nature of human rights, but his action was intended to promote his pedagogical method and he was not actively involved in politics. His second wife and former pupil Luise Levin, whom he married in 1851, was Jewish. On his relationship with Jews and Judaism see Michael Gebel, *Friedrich Fröbel und die Juden*, (Olms: Hildesheim 1999).

<sup>41</sup> Alessia Moreu, *Il contributo degli ebrei alla diffusione dei giardini froebeliani in Italia nella seconda metà dell'Ottocento*, PhD Thesis, Trieste, 2003-2004; Maria Teresa Segà rightly speaks of the double emancipation of Jewish women and stresses the importance and the impact of their actions in the second half of the nineteenth century in "Percorsi di emancipazione tra Otto e Novecento" in *Donne sulla scena pubblica: società e politica in Veneto tra Sette e Ottocento*, ed. Nadia Maria Filippini (Milan: Franco Angeli 2006) 185-217. On some Jewish advocates of the women's emancipation movement in Italy see Claudia Gori, *Crisalidi. Emancipazioniste liberali in età giolittiana* (Milan: Franco Angeli 2003).

as the aforementioned Adolfo Pick and Adele Levi, the physicians Cesare Musatti,<sup>42</sup> Moisé Raffaello Levi,

Giacinto Namias and Rabbi Vittorio Castiglioni.<sup>43</sup>

Jewish women not only laid the foundation for the first Froebelian schools in the peninsula,<sup>44</sup> they also constituted a substantial segment of the children's writers<sup>45</sup> and educational activists in Italy.<sup>46</sup>

Interestingly, most of these Jewish women were in fact foreigners who had come to Italy for different reasons. Besides Raffalovich, the Anglo-German, Julia Salis Schwabe (Bremen 1819 – Naples 1896) deserves special mention. Salis Schwabe

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<sup>42</sup> Founder in 1878 of the journal *L'igiene infantile*.

<sup>43</sup> Yoseph Colombo, "Il pensiero pedagogico di Vittorio Castiglioni," *Scritti in memoria di Enzo Sereni. Saggi sull'ebraismo romano* (Jerusalem - Milan: 1970), 197-215.

<sup>44</sup> In Tuscany, besides Giulia and Matilde D'Ancona whose interest in Froebel was not oriented by professional aims, the Froebelian method had been introduced in Leghorn by Adele Franchetti Mondolfi since the seventies of the nineteenth century in her private institute for girls from the Jewish community or the foreign colony. See Funaro, "Compagna e partecipe," 329 and Raicich, "Liceo," 151.

<sup>45</sup> Many of the most important writers for children were Jewish. These include Ada Cagli Della Pergola, Gina and Paola Lombroso, Ida Finzi, Marta Ottolenghi Minerbi, Lina Schwarz, Lina Cohen Enriquez, Laura Cantoni Orvieto, Amalia Pincherle Rosselli, Laura Lattes, Anna and Rosa Errera, etc.. The extant bibliography about the work and the life of these female writers is still scant. See Marina Calloni, "(Auto)biografie di intellettuali ebraiche italiane: Amelia Rosselli, Laura Orvieto e Gina Lombroso," *Visioni insostenibili. Genere e intercultura*, eds. Clotilde Barbarulli and Liana Borghi (Cagliari: Cuec 2003) 139-158. Laura Orvieto (1876-1953) has been the object of valuable studies by Caterina Del Vivo. For the Lombroso sisters see Delfina Dolza, *Essere figlie di Lombroso* (Milan: Franco Angeli 1990). On Amalia Rosselli see Giuseppe Fiori, *Casa Rosselli. Vita di Nello, Carlo, Amalia, Marion e Maria* (Turin: Einaudi 1999). An overview of the Jewish contribution to the Italian children's literature in Sabrina Fava, *Percorsi critici di letteratura per l'infanzia tra le due guerre* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2004), in particular chapter IV. Otherwise some important, albeit incidental, remarks about this cultural phenomenon can be found in Alberto Cavaglioni, *Giornale di Emanuele 1822* (Rome: La Fenice 1996) 3-8 (republished in *Ebrei senza saperlo* (Naples: L'ancora del Mediterraneo 2002) pp. 95-102) and ID., "L'autobiografia ebraica in Italia fra Otto e Novecento. Memoria di sé e memoria della famiglia: osservazioni preliminari" in *Zakhor. Rivista di Storia degli Ebrei d'Italia*, 3 (1999):171-177.

<sup>46</sup> Among the most prominent educators in the nineteenth century were Virginia Tedeschi Treves (1855-1916), married to the editor Giuseppe Treves, youth writer and advocate of innovative ideas concerning the female labour force revealed in her pamphlet *Le donne che lavorano*, (Milan: Treves 1916), and Erminia Fuà (1834-1876), married to the poet Arnaldo Fusinato in 1856, who taught Italian at the Scuola Normale in Rome and later directed the Scuola Superiore Femminile in Rome. She was also one of the first of the many Jewish female authors for children in Italy during the Savoy monarchy. Also in the projected foundation of a female college in Florence, Jewish women, such as Giulia Raccah and Ester Coen Pardo, occupy prominent roles together with women belonging to the foreign, mainly Anglo-Saxon, colony established in the Tuscan capital. See G. P. Pons, "Erminia Fuà Fusinato ed Emilia Gould" in *Rivista Cristiana*, (1877): 60-62 and Raicich, *Liceo*, 160.

founded the Froebelian institute “Vittorio Emanuele II” in Naples<sup>47</sup> and Elena was acquainted with her.<sup>48</sup> In later decades, the American-born Baroness Alice Hallgarten Franchetti (New York 1874- Leysin 1911)<sup>49</sup> was involved in the field of education, as were Sarina Levi Nathan and her daughter-in-law Virginia Mieli Nathan (Siena 1846 – Roma 1924),<sup>50</sup> both of whom were related to England.

Elena was by no means the first of Froebel’s disciples in Italy.<sup>51</sup> By 1868, Laura Veruda Goretti (1822-1902) had already introduced some Froebelian-inspired changes into the curriculum of the San Marziale preschool in Venice, and the Raffalovich kindergarten was preceded by similar institutions established in 1869 in Venice by Adele Levi Della Vida<sup>52</sup> and the aforementioned Adolfo Pick,<sup>53</sup> and

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<sup>47</sup> Albisetti, “Education for Poor,” 637-652.

<sup>48</sup> The women had met in 1874. It is reputed that Elena did not overly appreciate Salis Schwabe. In a letter addressed to Domenico Comparetti of February 9, 1874 from Naples Elena writes, “elle est devenue impraticable, elle est trop indiscrete et manque de tact a un point incroyable.” Quoted by Clotilde Barbarulli, “Dalla tradizione all’innovazione. La ‘ricerca straordinaria’ di Elena Raffalovich Comparetti” in *L’educazione delle donne. Scuole e modelli di vita femminile nell’Italia dell’Ottocento* ed. Simonetta Soldani (Milan: Franco Angeli 1991) 440.

<sup>49</sup> *Leopoldo e Alice Franchetti e il loro tempo*, eds. Paolo Pezzino and Alavaro Tacchini (Città di Castello: Petrucci editore 2002); Maria Luciana Buseghin, *Cara Marietta... Lettere di Alice Hallgarten Franchetti (1901-1911)* (Città di Castello: Tela Umbra 2002); Mirella Scardozzi, “Una storia di famiglia: i Franchetti dalle coste del Mediterraneo all’Italia liberale” in *Quaderni storici*, 3 (2003): 697-740.

<sup>50</sup> Rosselli Amelia, *Virginia Mieli Nathan* (Rome: Centenari, 1926).

<sup>51</sup> For a overview of the history of Froebeldom in Italy see Valeria Benetti Brunelli, “L’Asilo italiano e l’introduzione del frobelismo” in *Rivista pedagogica*, 23 (1930): 530–556; *La scoperta dell’infanzia. Cura, educazione e rappresentazione, Venezia 1750-1930*, eds. Nadia Maria Filippini and Tiziana Plebani (Venice: Marsilio 1999); Nadia Filippini, “Figure, fatti e percorsi di emancipazione femminile (1797-1880)” in *Storia di Venezia. L’Ottocento*, ed. Stuart Woolf (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana 2002) 453-488; James C. Albisetti, “Froebel Crosses the Alps: Introducing the Kindergarten in Italy,” in *History of Education Quarterly*, 49/2 (2009):159–169.

<sup>52</sup> Adele Levi Della Vida, daughter of Samuele Della Vida and of Regina Pincherle, was born in Turin where she directed, together with Clotilde Jarach, the Istituto femminile israelitico of Turin. In 1869 she founded the first Froebelian kindergarten in Venice, in the Sant’Apostoli quarter, and later in Padua and Verona. She was the grandmother of the eminent orientalist Giorgio Levi Della Vida. See Gina Lombroso Ferrero, *Adele Della Vida Levi. Una benefattrice dell’infanzia* (Turin: Opes 1911); Valerie Brunetti Bonelli, “Il primo giardino d’infanzia in Italia: Adele Della Vida Levi” in *Rivista Pedagogica*, 1 (1931): 36-66; 2 (1931): 198-226; 3 (1931): 327-365; Jole Ceccon, “Adele Levi Della Vida e la sua opera in alcuni inediti” in *Rassegna di pedagogia*, 13/ 2 (1955): 120–32; Miniati, *Le Emancipate*, 69, 129-130.

<sup>53</sup> Initially supporting Adele Levi Della Vida’s initiative, he later decided to create his own institution for children near the Rialto, the ‘Vittorino da Feltre’s school’, see Gasparini, *Adolfo Pick*. Noteworthy was the introduction by Felice Momigliano to Adolfo Pick, *Scritti pedagogici*, (Udine: G. B. Doretti 1911).

in Milan by Vincenzo de Castro (1808 Pirano d'Istria-1886 Milan) in 1871.<sup>54</sup> Nonetheless, hers was by far the most successful, growing from an initial 63 children to 167 in 1894.<sup>55</sup> The kindergarten benefited from a perpetual endowment of 4000 lire per year, a considerable amount for the time, and is still extant, though not in its original setting.<sup>56</sup> Annexed to the kindergarten was a special training school for teachers, which until 1881 was under the direction of Pick. Her kindergarten, 'il più splendido istituto infantile della penisola [the most impressive children's institute in the Peninsula]' in the words of the Venetian lawyer Giambattista Ruffini,<sup>57</sup> thus became a model for other preschools that spread throughout Italy in the forthcoming years.

Much has been written on the obstacles Raffalovich encountered in imposing her views in the provincial and chauvinist context of Italian institutions.<sup>58</sup> Her vision of a fully secular school was thwarted in Venice, as in Pisa and Florence, by a clerical provincial council that excluded her from any form of supervision over the school that she had founded.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, even after a failed attempt of the authorities to change the name of the institution and efface any reference to her contribution, Elena continued to follow and support the activities of the children.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Vincenzo de Castro, "Apertura di tre giardini froebeliani a Milano" in *La provincia, giornale degli interessi civili, economici, amministrativi dell'Istria*, 5/18 (1871): 825.

<sup>55</sup> Figures of registrations per year in Nadia Maria Filippini, "'Come tenere pianticelle': L'educazione della prima infanzia: asili di carità, giardinetti, asili per lattanti," in *La scoperta dell'infanzia. Cura, educazione, rappresentazione 1750-1930*, eds. Nadia Maria Filippini and Patrizia Plebani (Venice: Marsilio 1999) 101.

<sup>56</sup> This piece of information is reported by Oscar Greco, *Bibliobiografia femminile italiana del XIX secolo* (Venice: Presso i principali librai italiani 1875) 275. Nowadays the kindergarten is located in the Ghetto Vecchio of Venice. Elena admits in a letter from Paris to Pick dated January 1873 that she has no experience in dealing with money and that her father was in charge of all the financial aspects of the school, see Gasparini, *Adolfo Pick*, 77.

<sup>57</sup> Quoted in Gasparini, *Adolfo Pick*, 256.

<sup>58</sup> Manacorda, "La breve illusione pedagogica di Elena Comparetti," 39; Barbarulli, "Dalla tradizione all'innovazione." Moreover, it was only since 1890 that the law allowed women onto the board of directors, see Miniati, *Le emancipate*, 142.

<sup>59</sup> Mario Alighiero Manacorda, *Storia illustrata dell'educazione* (Florence: Giunti 1992) 192. Raffalovich was aware that the Catholic opposition to Froebelian schools derived from their perception of them as "foreign" implants. "Mi domando se a Venezia la religione delle direttrici tedesche non li rende impopolari [I wonder whether in Venice the religion of the German principals do not make them unpopular]," letter dated January 27, 1872, in Gasparini, *Adolfo Pick*, 64.

<sup>60</sup> In 1899, the principal of the school in 1899 attested that she "used to visit it and to assist in the classes, the games and the supper of the children. She never stopped helping the poorest, donating jackets and clothes she had made by herself." *Relazione scolastica generale. Giardino infantile Elena Raffalovich Comparetti*, 1 agosto 1899 (Archivio Municipale Venezia, Ufficio Istruzione, C,

Raffalovich's approach to Froebelism was far from orthodox. In 1872, she wrote that "il n'est pas dans ma nature de me passionner pour un système, fut-il le meilleur [it is not in my nature to become enamoured of any system, even the best]."<sup>61</sup> In comparison to other schools inspired by the Froebelian method, Raffalovich's differed insofar it was free of charge and open to children of every faith and social stratum. Jewish and Catholic, female and male children shared the same spaces and participated in common activities.<sup>62</sup> Elena did not approve of the greater care male children received in the mixed schools she had the opportunity to see in France in 1872,<sup>63</sup> where she regularly went to visit with her sister Marie.<sup>64</sup> Countering the widely diffused bourgeois conception of public schools as institutions for the poor, to be supported by wealthy donors whose children studied elsewhere, Raffalovich believed, as she writes in one of her letters, that "les classes aisées ont encore plus besoin que le peuple d'une réforme dans l'éducation [the commoners are less in need of educational reform than the upper classes]."<sup>65</sup> Elena acknowledged that her eclectic approach to educational problems was inspired by her own democratic and liberal agenda, and was dictated by direct experiences more than by a strict ideological stance.

Besides education, Raffalovich was also involved in social projects for the improvement of the working class condition. After the catastrophic floods of 1882, together with Stefania Omboni she ran a popular soup kitchen in Padua, later to become a non-profit corporation.<sup>66</sup> Also in Padua, according to the

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5), quoted in Antonella Cagnolati, "La educación de la primera infancia desde guarderías de caridad a los jardines froebelianos (Venecia, siglo XIX)," in *Temas y perspectivas sobre educación. La infancia ayer y hoy*, eds. J. L. Hernández Huerta, L. Sánchez Blanco, I. Pérez Miranda (Salamanca: Globalia Ediciones Anthemus y AJITHE 2009) 128.

<sup>61</sup> Letter quoted in Barbarulli, "Dalla tradizione all'innovazione," 428.

<sup>62</sup> Filippini, "Come tenere pianticelle: L'educazione della prima infanzia," 91-111.

<sup>63</sup> Interestingly, the revival of Froebelism in France can be traced to the Protestant Clarisse Coignet and her *société* Froebel (1872), following the events of the Comune. See Jean-Noël Luc, "Salle d'asile contre jardin d'enfants: les vicissitudes de la méthode Froebel en France (1855-1887)" in *Pedagogica Historica* 29/2 (1993): 433-450.

<sup>64</sup> Maria was married to Hermann Raffalovich (1828-1893) and she hosted in Paris a salon that was attended by the most important liberal intellectuals of the time such as Renan, Arago, Maspero and Claude Bernard. With the latter she had a very strong sentimental, albeit platonic, relationship in the last years of his life. See André Soubiran, "Une amitié amoureuse. Claude Bernard, Madame Raffalovich," in *Historie de la médecine*, 16 (1966).

<sup>65</sup> Letter quoted in Barbarulli, "Dalla tradizione all'innovazione," 426.

<sup>66</sup> Valentina Trentin, "Beneficenza e filantropia: verso l'emancipazione femminile," *Tracciati del femminile a Padova. Immagini e storie di donne*, eds. Caterina Limentani e Mirella Cisotto Nalon (Padova: Il poligrafo, 1995) 138.



testimony of Florence Nightingale (1820-1910), who corresponded with Elena in 1887 and whom she met in London on June 30, 1883, she had in mind to establish a coeducational nursing school in Padua and planned to translate into Italian relevant English textbooks.<sup>67</sup>

Raffalovich's pedagogical ideals and philanthropic activity were tightly interwoven. In fact, she was more highly valued by her contemporaries for the economic means at her disposal than for her specific program of pedagogic renewal.<sup>68</sup> It would be nevertheless reductive to consider her philanthropic activity as a simple instrument in order to ensure "the reverential reception of the existent social order,"<sup>69</sup> according to the usual interpretation of philanthropy of the time, both Jewish and Christian.<sup>70</sup> For Elena, engagement in charity was first and foremost a way to escape from the oppressive context of parental sociability and to locate her own independence.

Her freedom was purchased at the price of great loneliness. The bitterness and isolation that characterized her last years, suffering from degenerative paralysis, are attested by her niece Elisa, the last of the four children of Laura, Albano, Giorgio and Piero, who described her as "fredda e silenziosa [cold and silent]," assisted only by a chaperone.<sup>71</sup> Her husband recalled that at her death on November 29, 1918, none of the numerous prizes she had been awarded for her efforts on behalf of youth and the poor were found in her possession. It seems as though she had decided to jettison her past.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *Florence Nightingale: Extending Nursing*, ed. Lynn McDonald (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press 2009) 482-483 quotes two letters to A. L. Pringle June, 30, 1888 and July, 2. Elena's correspondence to Nightingale is not extant, except some undated draft letters at the *British Library*, Nightingale Collection, Add Mss 52427 ff 125-26 and 129.

<sup>68</sup> It is curious that the recent and growing scholarship on Jewish philanthropy since Brian Horowitz's *Jewish philanthropy and enlightenment in late Tsarist Russia* (Seattle: University of Washington Press 2008) has till now completely disregarded the considerable role of different Raffalovich family members in Italy, France and England in social relief activities.

<sup>69</sup> Stuart Woolf, *The Poor in Western Europe in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century* (London/New York: Methuen 1986) 40.

<sup>70</sup> David Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture, 1840-1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1994) 329-352.

<sup>71</sup> Elisa Frontali Milani, *Storia di Elena attraverso le lettere 1863 -1884*, (Turin: La Rosa 1980). Book enthusiastically reviewed by Cesare Cases, *Il testimone secondario: Saggi e interventi sulla cultura del Novecento* (Turin: Einaudi 1985) 454-56.

<sup>72</sup> Comparetti, *In memoria di Elena Comparetti-Raffalovich*, 10. A similar attitude also characterized her sister Maria, according to the testimony of her daughter Sophie "elle voulait disparaître, ne faire parler d'elle. Elle était la réserve même [she wanted to disappear, not to be mentioned. She was reserved in nature]" in Claude Bernard, *Lettres beaujolaises* (Villefranche-en-Beaujolais : Editions du Cuvier 1950) XXI.

We have seen Elena Raffalovich as mother, spouse, pedagogue and philanthropist. It may now be possible to say something about her ideological commitments and her relationship to Judaism. Of her political credo everything points to a strong inclination toward a radical form of liberalism, not differing in this from her siblings Marie and Nadine, both associated with the republican and democratic milieu in France, sympathizers of the national causes of Europe.<sup>73</sup> Elena, in her youthful letters to Domenico Comparetti, manifests her support of Polish independence vindications, lamenting the scarce interest of her fiancé in similar questions of international politics. She is reputed to have translated from Russian the memories of the Decembrist Nikolai Basargin (1799-1861), although I was not able to find any exemplar of this translation.<sup>74</sup> Her affinity to the ideals of revolutionary nationalism can be found also among other members of her close family, such as Sophie (Odessa 1860 - Paris 1960), Marie and Hermann Raffalovich's daughter, who married in 1890 the Irish nationalist politician, William O'Brien (1852-1928),<sup>75</sup> and George, a sympathizer of the Ukrainian independence movement.<sup>76</sup>

Surprisingly, there is only scant information about Raffalovich's links with other members of the Russian diaspora in Italy. Nevertheless, there is evidence that she was acquainted with Alexander Herzen (1812-1870) in Italy at the end of the

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<sup>73</sup> Maria's daughter Sophie writes that "ma mère était forte ardente républicaine sous l'empire. Elle ne manquait pas, dans ses voyages, de visiter les exiles, Barbes à la Haye, les Quinet en Suisse" in Bernard, *Lettres beaujolaises*, XXV and in her memoirs, *Silhouettes d'autrefois* (Paris : Alkan 1926) 118 she recalls her mother's enthusiasm for the crumbling of the Tzarist regime in 1917, although she resented the Bolshevik revolution as an attack on freedom.

<sup>74</sup> Barbarulli, "Dalla tradizione all'innovazione," 425. Also lost is a novel supposedly written by Raffalovich. Basargin, a humanist and liberal writer, seems to be very important for any attempt to understand Raffalovich and her views. He and other Decembrists developed new progressive educational methods in Siberia for peasants and their children. They wrote school books and among many new ideas, they stressed notion of moral education.

<sup>75</sup> Sophie converted to Catholicism and devoted her wealth to financing her husband's political activities. She produced a number of books and articles during her lifetime, and she recalls her associations with Elena in her memoirs, Sophie O'Brien's *Silhouettes d'autrefois* (Paris: F. Alkan, 1926).

<sup>76</sup> Son of Nadine Chaptal (1859-1929), daughter of Nadine, sister of Elena Raffalovich, and Theodor (also Gregor or Gregoire) Raffalovich (1849- Paris 1881), George Raffalovich (Cannes 1880-New Orleans 1958) was a writer and translator of Emile Faguet from French into English. Part of George's correspondence is to be found in the archive of the anarchist Jean Grave (1854-1939). About his pro-Ukrainian activities and taking into account some mistakes about his genealogy, see David Saunders, "Britain and the Ukrainian Question (1912-1920)," in *The English Historical Review*, 103/406 (1988): 40-68.

forties, whose family she assisted after his death.<sup>77</sup> Elena had an epistolary relationship with Countess Elizabeth Dehler-Sheremetyeva,<sup>78</sup> wife of the famous European composer and pianist Theodore Dehler (1814-1856), whom she probably met during one of her many visits to Florence. This city was the home of a vibrant Russian community, hosting personalities such as Bakunin (1814-1876) who arrived in Italy in 1864 and Lev Mechnikov (1828-1888), one of the eleven Jews and of the many Russians who took part in the Mille expedition and a famous geographer and sociologist, but an acquaintance with such figures would be only conjecture.<sup>79</sup>

Elena was a life-long promoter of women's emancipation, believing that this process would be triggered not by the upper classes, to which she belonged, but precisely by those whose conditions of life she tried to improve. She wrote:

Je crois que l'émancipation des femmes viendra la d'où on l'attend le moins, c'est à dire des femmes du peuple... Moins inermes et plus énergiques que les femmes de la bourgeoisie elles iront plus droit au but sans se soucier des préjugés. En un mot je crois que la cause de femmes est intimement liée à celle de la démocratie et qu'elles triompheront ensemble. Laissons les classes riches pourrir dans leur corruption et attendons le progrès d'où il peut venir

[I believe that the emancipation of the woman will come from where we are not expecting it, that is to say from the women of lower classes. Less defenceless and more energetic than bourgeois women, they will go straight to the goal without consideration for prejudices. In short, I believe that the women's cause is intimately related to the one of democracy, and that they will overcome together. Let the rich rot in their corruption and let us wait for progress from where it may come].<sup>80</sup>

This anti-bourgeois stance and almost revolutionarily progressive interpretation of the fight for civil rights in contemporary liberal democracies is deeply rooted in Elena's materialist and utilitarian approach to social phenomena. She admits as much in a letter to Pick from Gotha, dated July 4, 1872:

Vous allez me trouver bien positiviste, peut être même entachée d'utilitarisme ou de matérialisme, mais que voulez-vous ? Je suis ainsi

<sup>77</sup> Barbarulli, "Dalla tradizione all'innovazione," 425.

<sup>78</sup> Dehler archive, fund number 752, at the *Russian State Archive of Literature and Art* (RGALI). See the book of recollections published in 1893 by Sergei D. Sheremetev on Elizabeth Dehler-Sheremetev.

<sup>79</sup> Lev Mecnikov, *Memorie di un garibaldino russo ed altri scritti* (Turin: CIRVI 2011).

<sup>80</sup> Letter from Geneva, October 23, 1872 to Adolfo Pick, in Gasparini, *Adolfo Pick*, 73.

[you will certainly consider me excessively positivistic, perhaps also stained by utilitarianism or materialism, but what do you want? I am like that].

The reference to positivism is interesting, as its roots may lie in a meeting at her sister's house in Paris with the French physiologist Claude Bernard, a herald of the experimental method. Elena apparently shared the agnosticism of this intellectual milieu, in which historian Pasquale Villari (1826-1917), another of Elena's acquaintances, was a key figure and advocate.

Thus, while Raffalovich's "Jewishness" is taken for granted by those who have dealt with her story, Elena's relationship to this aspect of her identity is far from straightforward. Religious practice was not particularly strong in her family of origin. Her acquaintances in the Jewish milieu were occasional and purely casual (such as the one with the mathematician David Besso at her father's home during a reception, or the choice to establish her Froebelian kindergarten on a property owned by the Jewish Vivante family in Cannaregio<sup>81</sup>). She spent the bulk of her time in non-Jewish surroundings, making the acquaintance of a wide circle of Gentiles. Her marriage to a Catholic man was accepted by her father with no opposition whatsoever, and even with apparent satisfaction. On the contrary, according to the testimony of Domenico, it was the Comparetti family who disliked his marriage with a Jewess, while Leon would continue to financially sustain his son-in-law even after his separation from Elena. Marriage to Domenico meant conversion to Catholicism, even if not out of religious conviction, since in Italy civil marriage was enforced by law only in 1865 through the "codice Pisanelli." At her death, she asked to be cremated,<sup>82</sup> and she had her ashes buried in the English cemetery in Florence, a burial place chosen not only by Protestants of different denominations but also by many non-Catholic minorities belonging to the large group of those who in those years in the Hapsburg area defined themselves as *konfessionslos*.<sup>83</sup> Thus, Elena seemed to

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<sup>81</sup> On this family present in Venice and Trieste see Anna Millo, *Storia di una borghesia. La famiglia Vivante a Trieste dall'emporio alla guerra mondiale*, (Gorizia: Libreria editrice goriziana 1998) and Cesare Vivante, *La memoria dei padri: cronaca, storia e preistoria di una famiglia ebraica tra Corfù e Venezia*, (Florence: La Giuntina 2009).

<sup>82</sup> Cremation was spreading among more traditional Jews as well. Vittorio Castiglioni, chief rabbi of Rome, asked to be cremated, in the midst of polemics but also acquiring support for his choice. See David Malkiel, "Technology and Culture Regarding Cremation: A Historical and Phenomenological Analysis," in *Italia*, 10 (1993): 37-70 (in Hebrew); Arthur Kiron, "'Dust and Ashes'. The Funeral and Forgetting of Sabato Morais," in *American Jewish History*, 84/3 (1996): 155-188.

<sup>83</sup> Joseph Geiger writes in "Some Jewish Scholars in Rome," (*Italia*, 17 (2006): 67) that "Jews

harbor no positive religious sentiments, and the correspondence from Leon to Domenico leaves no doubt about her anti-clerical if not anti-religious ideals.<sup>84</sup>

Against the tide of the proliferating school texts that tried to combine civic education with religious values,<sup>85</sup> so typical of the Italian Christian and Jewish reality of the second half of the nineteenth century, Elena declared her aversion to any form of catechism.<sup>86</sup> For Elena, religious education should be restricted to the private sphere of the family. Concerned about pressures to provide some kind of religious teaching in her establishment, she accepted only the possibility of sending “une ou deux fois par semaine chez un prêtre ceux qui le désirent, selon leur convictions personnelles [once or twice a week to a priest those who desire to do so, according to their personal conviction].”<sup>87</sup> Her personal faith was akin to a universalistic form of deism captured in her exclamation “non capisco come possono affollare chiese e sinagoghe, quando si puo avere come tempio l’universo interno [I cannot understand how it is possible to seek overcrowded synagogues and churches, when we can have the entire universe as a temple].”<sup>88</sup>

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chose to be buried elsewhere than a Jewish cemetery for a variety of reasons, the chief among these being, one may conjecture, the wish to be buried next to non-Jewish spouses or other family members, though in some cases antagonism to religious rituals, combined with a refusal to convert, will have designated the Protestant cemetery as the closest thing to neutral ground.” This second reason seems to explain the choice of Elena, since Domenico Comparetti was inhumated in a Catholic cemetery. On the burial of non-Christians, among which number many Jews or former Jews such as the German historian Robert Davidsohn and Adolfo Mussafia, in the cemetery of the English in Florence, see the proceedings of the international conference “Eloquenza silenziosa. Voci del ricordo incise nel cimitero degli inglesi,” 3-4 June 2004, Sala Ferri, Gabinetto G.P. Vieusseux, Palazzo Strozzi, that can be consulted in the site <http://www.florin.ms/gimel1.html>. In another cemetery for Protestants and other non-Catholic Christians in Florence, called ‘cimitero degli allori,’ Ljuba Samojlovna Raffalovic (Odessa 1825-Florence 1883), Theodor’s wife (1818- Vienna 1883) and Elena’s uncle who had converted to Russian Orthodoxy are buried.

<sup>84</sup> Letter of the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May 1873, in which she exhorts Comparetti to respect Elena’s “opinions religieuses, ou plutôt antireligieuses. Les dames de votre famille ont été élevées dans des convictions opposées [religious beliefs, or rather anti-religious. Women in your family have been raised with opposite convictions],” quoted in *L’educazione delle donne*, 439.

<sup>85</sup> On this aspect of the pedagogical activity of Italian rabbis see Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, “I catechismi ebraici fra Sette e Ottocento,” in *Le religioni e il mondo moderno. Ebraismo*, ed. David Bidussa (Turin: Einaudi 2008), 437-456. On catechisms it is still useful to refer to Jakob Petuchowski, “Manuals and Catechisms of the Jewish Religion in the Early Modern Period of Emancipation,” in *Studies in Nineteenth Century Jewish Intellectual History*, ed. Alexander Altman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1964), 47-64.

<sup>86</sup> Letter at the *Biblioteca Comunale di Udine* from Paris, dated February 4, 1873.

<sup>87</sup> Letter from Paris dated December 29th, 1872, in Gasparini, *Adolfo Pick*, 74.

<sup>88</sup> Mentioned by Milani, *Storia di Elena*, 47.

In this respect, there is a substantial convergence between the ideals defended by Elena and those of Protestant women of similar social extraction, active in Italy in education and social aid in the second half of nineteenth century. Besides Giulia Salis, born Jewish but converted to the Unitarian English Church, the Swiss Matilde Calandrini should be mentioned, with her kindergartens in Tuscany, and the American Emily Gould (1822-1875) who in 1871 founded in Rome the Italo-American schools for poor children and orphans.<sup>89</sup> Also in other Catholic countries, Protestant and Jewish women were the vanguard in introducing Froebelian methods and secular curricula. Examples include Emilie Mallet and Octavie Masson in France and Fanny Guillaume Wohlwill in Belgium.<sup>90</sup> Until the end of the nineteenth century, that 25% of secondary schools principals in France were Protestant was due to the opposition of the Catholic Church regarding female higher education.<sup>91</sup>

At this point, we may hazard the opinion that although our heroine's pedagogical sensibilities and philanthropic drive were shared by many women of her social stratum, autonomy of action and radical reasoning mark her as distinct from her Italian contemporaries. Nevertheless, in order to understand her life course we must contextualize her biographical trajectory against the backdrop of her family's history.

### Elena Raffalovich's Family

Through the archives of different prominent members of the Raffalovich dynasty, it is possible to follow its vicissitudes over at least five generations.<sup>92</sup> [FIG. 8] The

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<sup>89</sup> For the similarities between Jews and Protestant women in Italy in the second half of the nineteenth century see *Le donne delle minoranze. Le ebreo e le protestanti d'Italia*, eds. Claire Honess and Verina Jones (Turin: Claudiana 1999); Alberto Cavaglion, "La linea cenobitica e le aporie dell'ebraismo laico," in *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa*, 48/3 (2012): 625-635.

<sup>90</sup> Albisetti, "Education for Poor," 163-164.

<sup>91</sup> Raicich, "Liceo," 157. For the access of women to secondary education in a comparative perspective see also *Girls' Secondary Education in the Western World. From the 18th to the 20th Century*, eds. Joyce Goodman, James C. Albisetti, Rebecca Rogers (New York - London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

<sup>92</sup> The papers of Marie Raffalovich are deposited at the bibliothèque de l'Institut de France, mss 3641-3706. The correspondence of Marie's daughter, Sophie Raffalovich, married to the Irish nationalist politician, William O'Brien (1852-1928) can be found at the Cork City and County Archives, Republic of Ireland, while the letters of Marc-André Raffalovich, another son of Marie, are dispersed in different collections. The most important is at the John Rylands University Library of Manchester, GB 133 MAR. Other letters are at The National Library of Scotland, Manuscript Collections, which include correspondence between John Gray and André Raffalovich and at The Victoria and Albert Museum. The National Art Gallery holds a collection of letters by Raffalovich. The University of Texas at Austin: Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center Library, in the United States, also holds a collection of letters

family originated in Dubno in Podolia. That Raffalovich ancestors were Iberian conversos escaping the Inquisition who found refuge in Sweden and then came to Russia in the path of Charles XII,<sup>93</sup> is a tale caught in legend relying only on the presence of a swallow flying over the seas in the family arms [FIG. 9].

According to a tradition bequeathed by the Hassidic branch of the family, the first to bear this surname was Moshe Parnes, son of Rafael, ship builder for the Russian army, when in 1783 during a visit of Catherine the Great, the empress would have bestowed upon him his patronymic Raffalovich, replacing the surname Parnes that was used till then.<sup>94</sup> Of Moshe's sons, Kalman and Solomon (1790-1846) expanded to Nikolayev and Mogilev, whereas after the foundation of the port city of Odessa in 1794 Abraham (1783-1857) settled there as a banker and grain trader. Although most of these first-generation Raffalovichs had some degree of familiarity with the Russian language and culture, something quite unusual among the Jews of the Pale of Settlement at the turn of the century, only the branch established in Odessa became rapidly estranged from traditional ways of life. Those living in smaller localities of the interior, such as Bogopol, remained attached to the Lubavitch Hassidic movement till the beginning of the twentieth century.

In 1837 Abraham Raffalovich founded with his sons the Trading House "Fedor Raffalovich and Co" and was awarded by Tzar Alexander II hereditary honorary citizenship for his services to the Crown by Supreme Decree on 24 May, 1857. He was considered to be Odessa's wealthiest Jewish member of the Russian merchant guild.<sup>95</sup> In 1811 he married his first-degree cousin Olga Lowensohn (1792-1872), daughter of Leon and Lea Segal, who begot him thirteen children. Three of these children died in their infancy and one, Mark (1820-1842), perished

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from André Raffalovich in the Aubrey Beardsley Collection (1893-1959). Finally the Blackfriars Library, Oxford University, holds letters from the theologian George Tyrrell (1861-1909) to Raffalovich.

<sup>93</sup> As claimed for instance by Comparetti, *In memoria di Elena Raffalovich*, 15-16.

<sup>94</sup> Isaiah Raffalovich, *Tziunim Ve-Tamrurim: otobiographiah* (Tel Aviv, 1952) 4. Isaiah Raffalovich (1870-1956) was Kalman's grandson, a rabbi and author who promoted the development of Brazil's Jewish community. In 1882 he moved with his parents to Palestine, where he became a pioneer of photography in the country. He later studied in the rabbinical seminary of Berlin and served at congregations in Manchester and Wales and the Hope Place Synagogue in Liverpool. He was the brother of Shemuel Refaeli (1867-1927), a numismatist and director of the numismatic department of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine. He left his coin collection to the Bezalel Museum.

<sup>95</sup> Steve Zipperstein, *The Jews of Odessa. A cultural History 1794-1881* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1985), 67.

in his early twenties while swimming in the Dniestr. Olga was related to the famous *maskil* Isaac Baer Levinsohn (1788-1860) and belonged to an illustrious line of rabbis.<sup>96</sup> Her sister Bella Lowensohn was the wife of Charles Joachim Ephrussi (1792 Odessa-1864 Vienna).<sup>97</sup>

It is noteworthy that five of their six surviving sons married women related to the mother's family, the Lowensohns, members of the narrow circle of the big merchants of Odessa. This is in line with the well-known endogamic practice among the Jewish mercantile elite, in Russia and elsewhere, intended to preserve intact the family endowment.<sup>98</sup> Leon, Elena's father, married Rosette Lowensohn (1807-1895 Parigi), Theodor (also Fedor) married Ljuba Lowensohn, Anissim (Onesime) (1822-1883 Odessa) in 1844 married Nadine Lowensohn (1827-1891 Frankfurt),<sup>99</sup> David (1824-1877 Vienna) after his first marriage to Emilia Morpurgo from Trieste, who died in Odessa in 1848 shortly after the wedding,<sup>100</sup> in 1855 married Therese Lowensohn (1840-1912 Odessa). In one case this endogamy even violates the civil law's prohibition in most European countries forbidding the marriage of an uncle and his niece, but permitted and in some instances even encouraged in the Jewish tradition.<sup>101</sup> Hermann Raffalovich

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<sup>96</sup> Curiously, Isaac Baer Levinsohn (1788-1860) in his Hebrew works wrote of a pedagogical reform of Jewish schools that bears some resemblance to the ideals of Pick and Raffalovich, such as the role of manual labor in early childhood education and the establishment of mixed-sex elementary schools. While it is not impossible that Pick, who had a traditional Jewish education in Galicia, would have been exposed to Levinsohn's theories, which were widely disseminated among Eastern Europe Jews, Elena was not able to read Hebrew, the language in which Levinsohn wrote. On Levinsohn see Louis Stanley Greenberg, *A Critical Investigation of the Works of Rabbi Isaac Baer Levinsohn (RIBaL)* (New York: Bloch Publishing Company 1930).

<sup>97</sup> Forefather of the banking dynasty of the same name, established in Paris in the nineteenth century. See Edmund De Waal, *The Hare with Amber Eyes* (London: Chatto & Windus 2010).

<sup>98</sup> A general survey of the diffusion of endogamic practices in wealthy Jewish circles in the nineteenth century can be found in David S. Landes, *Banchieri e pascià. Finanza internazionale e imperialismo*, (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri 1990). A comparative study of parental alliances among British, French and Italian financial Jewish elites in Luisa Levi D'Ancona, "Famiglie ebraiche borghesi dell'Ottocento europeo: tre casi di studio," *Passato e Presente*, 57 (2002): 73-84. The perceived need to preserve patrimonial integrity is discernable as well in the matrimonial choices of different generations of Morpurgo's and Parente's in Trieste. See Tullia Catalan, "I Morpurgo di Trieste. Una famiglia ebraica fra emancipazione e integrazione (1848-1915)," in *Percorsi e modelli familiari in Italia fra 700 e 900*, ed. Filippo Mazzonis, (Rome: Bulzoni 1997) 165-186.

<sup>99</sup> Their son Leone was honorary consul of Persia in Odessa in the eighties. He married Elena Polyakov, daughter of the state counsellor Yaakov Solomonovich Polyakov (1832-1909), brother of the famous banker and merchant Lazzaro Samuele.

<sup>100</sup> Catalan, "I Morpurgo di Trieste."

<sup>101</sup> Talmud, tractate *Yevamot*, 62b and Maimonides, *Hilkhot Issurei Beiah*, 2:14. On endogamic practices in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe see Leonore Davidoff, *Thicker than Water: Siblings and their*



married Marie, who was his brother Leon's daughter and the sister of Elena Raffalovich in a set apparently dominated by a strong matriarchy.<sup>102</sup> [Fig. 6]



Fig. 6 Marie Raffalovich

Retrieved from <http://www.claude-bernard.co.uk/>

This is how their daughter Sophie describes their match:

Elle [Marie] s'était mariée très jeune. Elle avait été fiancée quand elle était dans les bras de sa mère, qui l'amena toute petite à la mère de mon père. Celle-ci était une redoutable matrone, petite mais d'une volonté de fer, et quand elle vit le délicieux bébé elle s'écria : voilà la femme de Grisha, son plus jeune fils qui avait quatre ans

[Marie got married very young. She got engaged to my father when she was still in the hands of her mother, who brought her still very small to my father's mother. The latter was an impressive matron, tiny but with an iron will. When she saw the sweet baby she exclaimed: here is the wife of Grisha, her youngest son, who was four].

With the exception of the aforementioned Maria, Abraham's daughters

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*Relations, 1780-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012) and in particular chapter 9.

<sup>102</sup> Bernard, *Lettres Beaujolaises*, XXII. On Hermann (Grisha) see Comparetti, *In memoria di Elena Raffalovich*, 20 and Lebedev, "The Rafalovichs Family," (in Russian).

benefited from greater freedom in their choice of partner, on condition, however, that the men were of the same economic status. While in Imperial Germany, according to Marion Kaplan, Jewish women “experienced the effects of secularization from their primary position in the home... clinging to religion longer, because they did not acquire either the advanced scientific education or the substitute secular power of men whose worldviews gradually rejected all or parts of spiritual thinking,”<sup>103</sup> women in the Raffalovich family and apparently in the Jewish financial aristocracy of the time in general anticipated the assimilatory trends, such as intermarriage, of their male counterparts of the same social class.<sup>104</sup> This does not mean that men were not exposed to a strong acculturation to the surrounding gentile culture, but only that on them rested the responsibility of keeping intact the assets of the family enterprises. Consequently, their freedom to find a partner outside the inner circle of close relatives was more limited.

Of Abraham’s three daughters, Maria (1819-1858) married in 1841 in Mohilev Dr. Moritz Askenasy (1811-1887), member of the Imperial Council of Odessa and later moved to Dresden, while her sister Anne (Chalina) (1830-1851) married in 1848 Heinrich Toeplitz (1822 Warsaw-1891 Wroclaw), director of the railroad of Southern Russia and founder of the Polish Handlowy Bank<sup>105</sup>. Although both men were wealthy Jews, they did not belong to the circle of close relatives.

We perceive another consistent signs of the disintegration of familial solidarity in the wedding of another of Abraham’s daughters, Elena (1835 –Vevey after 1921) who married a Christian German aristocrat, Baron August Von Wolf (1828-1888) thus embracing Catholicism. To find the earliest examples of total estrangement from Judaism among male representatives of the family, we have to look to those who did not seek a commercial career. Arthur (Odessa 1816- St. Petersburg 1851), perhaps the most famous among the sons of Abraham Raffalovich, is taken by Steven Zipperstein as the model of assimilatory desire that begins to gain a foothold among prosperous Jews of his generation:

In a conspicuous, though probably quite small, segment of the city’s Jewish youth who

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<sup>103</sup> Kaplan, “Priestess and Hausfrau,” 67; 70.

<sup>104</sup> According to what has been already noticed by Catalan, “I Morpurgo di Trieste.”

<sup>105</sup> Heinrich was the brother of Bonaventura Toeplitz (1831-1905), father of Giuseppe Toeplitz (1866, Warsaw – 1938, S. Ambrogio Olona), founder of the homonymous bank in Italy at the end of the nineteenth century. See Ludovico Toeplitz, *Il banchiere*, (Milan: Edizioni Milano Nuova, 1963).

came to view European culture as their primary affiliation, eschewing the Jewish scene (an even, according to local *maskilim*, Jewish institution designed along modern lines) in favor of the non-Jewish cultural arena.<sup>106</sup>

After attending the Richelieu Lyceum, the most prestigious school in Odessa, Arthur studied medicine in Prague, Berlin and Tartu, graduating in obstetrics and surgery and becoming a leading physician in Odessa on tuberculosis and plagues. Between 1846 and 1849 he traveled extensively in North Africa, Egypt and the Middle East. In 1838 Arthur converted to Russian orthodoxy and changed his name to Artemi Alexievich,<sup>107</sup> the first of the many conversions in the following years, when as for many Jews in Western Europe, social and geographical mobility had eroded the fundamentals of traditional Jewish practice.<sup>108</sup> By 1848 also Theodor, Abraham's first-born, with his wife Ljuba had converted to Russian Orthodoxy. In this faith will be raised their seven sons, who will continue to steer the destinies of the Raffalovich bank consortium till its bankruptcy in 1891. Of Theodor's daughters, Maria will convert to Catholicism in order to marry the Italian count Frangipane of Udine.<sup>109</sup>

These first conversions and the geographical dispersion of the Raffalovich family, whose traces can be found in the main European capitals from the second half of the nineteenth century on, did not appreciably affect the Raffalovich and Lowensohn the coherence of their familial structure. This is true in spite of the perceptible degrading of Jewish practice already found among Elena's aunts and uncles.

It is only in Elena's generation, the second after Abraham's migration to Odessa at the beginning of the nineteenth century, that the familial solidarity is completely dismantled. With it disappears every residual attachment to Judaism. Not only their cultural interests appear to be directed mainly to extra-community activities, but many members of Elena's generation and almost all of the following one intermarry, generally adopting the faith of the partner.

The matrimonial strategies of the second generation after Abraham Raffalovich seem to have been dictated by social ascent and intellectual ambition in a non-

<sup>106</sup> Zipperstein, *The Jews of Odessa*, 66.

<sup>107</sup> Contrary to what has been written by Zipperstein, *The Jews of Odessa*, 67.

<sup>108</sup> On this issue see *Assimilation and community. The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, eds. Jonathan Frankel and Stephen Zipperstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992).

<sup>109</sup> On the Frangipane family see *Famiglie Nobili delle Venezie*, eds. Giorgio Aldrighetti, Marino Zorzi, Leopoldo Mazzarolli, Italo Quadrio (Udine: Gaspari Editore 2001).

Jewish milieu. Of the three daughters of Leon Raffalovich and Rosette Lowensohn besides Elena, who married the Catholic scholar Domenico Comparetti, Nadine (1836-1911) married in 1857 the count Victor Chaptal Chanteloup (1821-1901), accepted baptism and was buried in Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris.<sup>110</sup> Only Marie will remain Jewish, but only out of respect for her mother and husband.<sup>111</sup> Her daughter Sophie wrote:

Elle resta juive. Elle ne voulut pas se séparer de son mari comme sa mère ne voulut pas cesser d'être juive pour ne pas faire de chagrin à la mère qu'elle avait tant aimée et qu'elle sentait tout près d'elle après que la mort les eut séparées

[She remained Jewish. She did not want to separate from her husband as her mother did not want to cease being Jewish in order not to grieve the mother she loved so much and she felt so close to even after death had separated them].<sup>112</sup>

Marie published vehement articles in the French journal *Le Temps* criticizing the rise of the anti-Semitic movement within Russian society during the late 1870s, but they were an expression of her liberal political views rather than of confessional solidarity.<sup>113</sup> Hence, according to her daughter, Marie was not opposed to the conversion of her children, quite the contrary:

Elle avait approuvé quand je m'étais faite catholique et, plus tard, quand mon frère André devint catholique, elle s'intéressa vivement à sa vie nouvelle, et prit sa part de joie lorsque son grand ami et frère d'adoption John Gray devint prêtre. Elle aimait entendre mon mari parler de sa foi.

[She approved when I became Catholic and, later, when my brother André also embraced Catholicism, she was extremely interested in his new life and was happy when his great friend and adoptive brother John Gray became a priest. She loved to hear my husband speak about his faith].<sup>114</sup>

In the following generation, adopting Christianity was no longer a mere

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<sup>110</sup> Victor was the nephew of Jean-Antoine Claude, Comte Chaptal de Chanteloup (1756 – 1832), French chemist and statesman under Napoleon. Victor had been the secretary of the Duc d'Aumale and sous-prefet in Algeria.

<sup>111</sup> In her memoirs, his daughter Sophie O'Brien, *Silhouettes d'autrefois*, 108-109, recalls that "mon père s'intéressait tout particulièrement aux juifs russes persécutés et qui venaient échouer à Paris," among whom numbered the ebionist Abraham Rouchine, father of the painter Maria Rouchine-Dupré (1883-1918).

<sup>112</sup> Bernard, *Lettres beaujolaises*, XXV.

<sup>113</sup> Bernard, *Lettres beaujolaises*, 15.

<sup>114</sup> Bernard, *Lettres beaujolaises*, XXV.

formality (what Heine called the “entrance ticket to the world”) but had become the natural option to relieve the spiritual restlessness of the most intellectually ambitious members of the family. Of the three sons of Marie, Elena’s sister, Marc-André<sup>115</sup> and Sophie, in the nineties convert to Catholicism out of deep conviction.<sup>116</sup> Nadine’s first-born, Emmanuel-Anatole Chaptal de Chanteloup (1861-1943),<sup>117</sup> after a successful diplomatic career, took holy orders, was elected as auxiliary bishop of Paris and was active in the service of working class foreigners in France, following a vocation in many aspects not dissimilar to that chosen by his second-degree cousin don Lorenzo Milani. Another of Nadine’s daughters, Leonie (1873-), also deeply involved in a Catholic version of social apostolate, became one of the most important nurses in France in the first half of the twentieth century, founding a clinic for nurses and fighting tuberculosis.<sup>118</sup>

Among the fourth-generation descendants of Abraham Raffalovich at the end of the First World War only Arthur Raffalovich (1853 - Paris 1921) married to Ida Wertheimer from Frankfurt,<sup>119</sup> remained faithful to his Jewish origins, becoming one of the main experts in Russian economics and counselor to the Czarist embassies in Paris and London.<sup>120</sup> He was the only member of the family who held a strongly conservative view of world politics, and objected to the revolutionary movements that began to threaten the stability of the Russian Empire. Furthermore, Arthur represents the last case of endogamic practice that

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<sup>115</sup> Fredrick Roden, “Marc-Andre’ Raffalovic: A Russian-French-Jewish-Catholic Homosexual in Oscar Wilde’s Lonon,” in *Jewish/Christian/Queer*, ed. Frederick S. Roden (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009) 127-138.

<sup>116</sup> The conversion from Russian Orthodoxy to Catholicism of Artemi Raffalovich, Theodor’s son, seems to have been driven by sentimental reasons, in order to be able to marry in a second wedding the German Henrietta Freygang in 1895 in Odessa.

<sup>117</sup> On this figure of a diplomat and liberal Catholic churchman see P. Boisard, *De la diplomatie à l’épiscopat : Monseigneur Chaptal, évêque d’Isionda, 1861-1943*, Paris, Flammarion, 1945 and Jean-Louis Clément, “Mgr Chaptal et la Mission diocésaine des étrangers. Entre pastorale, intégration et assimilation 1922-1930,” *Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, 76 (2008): 53-63.

<sup>118</sup> Evelyne Diebolt, “Esquisses biographiques : Anne Hamilton et Leone Chaptal,” *Cahiers de l’Amieci*, 10 (1988): 85-121 and Renee Magnon, *Leonie Chaptal. La cause des infirmières*, (Paris: Lamarre, 1991).

<sup>119</sup> On the Wertheimers, originally from Hanover and then installed in Frankfurt, see Werner Eugen Mosse, *The German-Jewish Economic Elite, 1820-1935: a Socio-Cultural Profile* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1989).

<sup>120</sup> On Arthur Raffalovich see Lebedev, “The Raffalovichs Family,” 222-225 (in Russian). His necrology was apparently written by J. M. Keynes (see, Richard J. Kent, “Keynes as Biographer and Obituarist,” in *History of Economics Review*, 52 (2010)) and published in *The Economic Journal*, 32/125 (1922): 129-131. His works have been frequently reviewed by Vilfredo Pareto in the Italian *Giornale degli economisti*.

had characterized the earlier generations of the Raffalovichs. His two daughters, Alexandra (Ada) (1885-1963) and Maria, will marry two Raffalovich brothers, Nicolai<sup>121</sup> and Sergei (1873-1944),<sup>122</sup> sons of Leon and nephews of Anissim Raffalovich. Nevertheless, with him ends the epoch of the great splendor of the Raffalovichs. His son Vladimir<sup>123</sup> died in 1921 of typhus fever in the Bolshevic prisons of Petersburg at age thirty-five. In his memoirs of his wife's family, Comparetti writes of the dramatic end and the exhaustion of their dynasty "Rimangono colà [in Unione Sovietica] trattenute la moglie e l'unica figlia Irene [his wife and only child, Irene, remain there, in the Soviet Union]."<sup>124</sup>

It can be said, then, that over four generations a progressive process of assimilation took place in the Raffalovich family. Abraham was faithful to his ancestral religion; while the next generation was not, it remained at least nominally Jewish; the next two generations witnessed a complete integration into the surrounding gentile society both through intermarriage and conversion. The intellectual and not only financial excellence of most of the representatives of the family over the arch of almost a century attests its acceptance into the gentile dominant elites and local aristocracies.

Elena Raffalovich's story seems to have been shaped by the fantasy of a novelist rather than by history itself. Indeed, it bears bearing striking resemblance to the literary characters Vera Pavlovna in Nikolai Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be*

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<sup>121</sup> In 1917, Nicholas Raffalovich served on the board of directors of Banque Russo-Asiatique of Paris, and in this capacity he met Giuseppe Volpi. In the thirties he played, together with Bank Toeplitz, an important role in the discussions for the electrification of Sicily. See Pinella Di Gregorio, "Crisi e ristrutturazione dell'industria elettrica in Sicilia (1930-1935): L'intervento del capitale americano," in *Studi Storici*, 28/4 (1987): 997 and Giovanni Bruno, "Capitale straniero e industria elettrica nell'Italia meridionale (1895-1935)," in *Studi Storici*, 28/4 (1987): 943-984.

<sup>122</sup> Serguei was graduated from St. Petersburg University with degrees in history and philology. In a form close to the poetics of symbolism and decadentism, he wrote in Russian and French many novels, dramas, poems. In 1905 success came with Raffalovich symbolic drama "The River is coming." He was among the first to review the literary works by the future Nobel Prize winner François Mauriac in 1934 in the *Revue de Paris*.

<sup>123</sup> Not to be confused with his homonym, his cousin born in 1876 as the first of the six children of Michael Raffalovich and the Belgian Catholic Eugenie D'Henin. This figure in 1909 married in St. Paul Cathedral Charlotte Mansfield, the writer who in 1909 made an adventurous trip from Cape Town to Cairo. Vladimir was an engineer in South Africa. See Mick Conefrey, *How to Climb Mont Blanc in a Skirt: A Handbook for the Lady Adventurer* (England: Oneworld Publication 2011).

<sup>124</sup> Comparetti, *In memoria di Elena Raffalovich*, 25. Apparently, they were able to escape to Bulgaria in 1925, see <http://baza.vgdru.com/1/26571/>.

*Done?*,<sup>125</sup> and Nora Helmer in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*.<sup>126</sup> It also anticipates similar and more famous episodes in the life of Sibilla Aleramo<sup>127</sup> and the separation of Amalia Rosselli and Margherita Grassini Sarfatti from their husbands.<sup>128</sup>

Thus, one might ask if it is best to simply clarify the singularity of Elena's story, or rather to see in her position an example of deeper structures of gender and class identities. Choosing the second, one might refer to Hannah Arendt's term "exception Jews," those whose wealth allowed them to be "exceptions from the common destiny of the Jewish people," as well as "Jews of education," who felt themselves exempted from "Jewishness" by virtue of having become "exceptional human beings" in their education.<sup>129</sup> The latter perspective is certainly more interesting, but more importantly, the case of Elena Raffalovich is emblematic of a larger phenomenon that enfolds within it a whole generation of Jewish women, mostly from Odessa, radically oriented in politics and often married to non-Jewish protagonists of the cultural and political scene in Italy.

Raffalovich's life story sharply overlaps with that of other Russian Jewish women such as the revolutionaries and political activists Anna Kuliscioff (born Anna Moiseyeva Rosenstein 1857-1925,<sup>130</sup> Julia Schucht (1894-1980) (Antonio Gramsci's wife) and her sister Tatiana,<sup>131</sup> Angelica Balabanoff (1878-1965),<sup>132</sup> the painter

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<sup>125</sup> Nikolai Chernyshevsky published his novel in 1863. The first English translation appeared in 1886 under the title *A Vital Question or What is to be done* (New York: Crowell, 1886) translated by Nathan Haskell Dole. The chief character is a woman, Vera Pavlovna, who escapes the control of her family and an arranged marriage to seek economic independence.

<sup>126</sup> Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House*, first staged in 1879 in Copenhagen, relates the feminist awakening of a good, middle-class wife and mother who decides at the end of the play to leave her family. It was brought to the stage in Italy only in 1891 in a version with a different ending from the original – this time "happy!"

<sup>127</sup> Annarita Buttafuoco, *Marina Zancan, Svelamento. Sibilla Aleramo: una biografia intellettuale* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1988).

<sup>128</sup> On the question of divorce and the Jews in Italy in the 19th century see the eighth chapter of Ester Capuzzo, *Gli ebrei nella società italiana. Comunità e istituzioni tra Ottocento e Novecento* (Rome: Carocci, 1999).

<sup>129</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1951).

<sup>130</sup> Paolo Pillitteri, *Anna Kuliscioff, una biografia politica* (Venice: Marsilio, 1986); Maria Casalini, *La signora del socialismo italiano. Vita di Anna Kuliscioff* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1987). She was among the very first women in Italy to graduate in medicine in Naples in 1885, even if, despite the support of MP Tullo Massarani and Filippo Turati, she was prevented from practicing this profession.

<sup>131</sup> Although of non-academic character see the recent work by Lucia Tancredi, *La vita privata di Giulia Schucht* (Treia (MC): EV, 2012).

<sup>132</sup> Francesco Biscione, "A. B.," in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Vol. 34, 1988. Author of

Antonietta Raphaël (1895-1975),<sup>133</sup> Ernestina Paper, born Puritz Manasse in Odessa, the first woman to be awarded a university degree in Italy in 1877, graduating in medicine in Florence,<sup>134</sup> Maria Fischmann, the first woman to obtain a degree in surgery in Italy in 1893<sup>135</sup> and many others such as the earlier-mentioned Ginzburgs and the Pekelis. Although these are women who arrived in Italy after Elena Raffalovich, driven to emigration in a period of fresh outbreak of anti-Semitic persecutions in the Czarist Empire and who came either to complete their studies or as refugees – Elena came for neither reason – it is noteworthy that their biographies reveal a common ambition of intellectual promotion, through culture and art, a desire to totally disassociate themselves from their Jewish heritage and a propensity to engage in a form of political and social activism characterized by radicalism and progressivism.

Although Elena did not follow a formal educational path, her vast cultural interests and her striving to be at the forefront of social and political debates characterize a whole generation of women fighting to gain access to university education. In Italy this right was granted in 1875. However, since female students until 1883 were prevented in Italy from receiving a high school education, most Italian women were until the late eighties unable to benefit from the right to higher education.<sup>136</sup>

Women with foreign high school degrees were thus at a greater advantage than local ones, and this partly explains why, between 1877 and 1900, among the 224 women college graduates in Italy, many were not natives of Italy. Still, it is

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an autobiography which does not make any mention of his Jewish origins Angelica Balabanoff, *Erinnerungen und Erlebnisse* (Berlin: E. Laub 1927) (in English, *My Life as a Rebel*, New York, 1938).

<sup>133</sup> Enzo Siciliano, *Il risveglio della bionda sirena. Raphaël e Mafai. Storia di un amore coniugale* (Milan: Mondadori, 2005); Serena De Dominicis, *Antonietta Raphaël Mafai. Un'artista non conforme* (Milan: Selene Edizioni, 2006).

<sup>134</sup> She began her medical studies at the University of Zurich, since higher education was unavailable at that time to women in Russia. In 1872, only ten years after Raffalovich's arrival, she moved to Pisa, where she studied for three years while finishing her specialization in Florence. In 1878 she opened a medical practice for pediatric and gynecologic illnesses. Raicich, "Liceo" 147.

<sup>135</sup> O. Peretti, "Da Odessa a Pisa: una donna medico tra interessi pedagogici, diritti della donna e impegno sociale," in *Fuori dall'ombra. Studi di storia della donna nella provincia di Pisa*, Elena Fasano Guarini, Annamaria Galoppini, Alessandra Peretti (Pisa: Pisa University Press, 2006) 85-129.

<sup>136</sup> In fact till World War I, most of the girls engaged in higher education studied in female institutions, and it was rare to see women studying together with men in colleges. This provided the context of the novel by Giani Stuparich, *Un anno di scuola* (Turin: Einaudi, 1961).



striking that the foreigners were predominantly Jewish and among the Jewish women 80% were Russian-born students, mainly from Odessa.<sup>137</sup> This situation is not unique to Italy, but can be traced in other national contexts as well. Although fewer than 14% of Russian Jews lived in the new Russian territories in the seventies, its four southern provinces furnished 45% of the Jewish students in Russian medical schools.<sup>138</sup> In 1906 more than 62% of the 1,920 Russian students studying in Switzerland (the majority of whom were Jewish) were women.<sup>139</sup> At the University of Paris in 1900-1910, Russian and Romanian women, most of them Jewish, accounted for more the one-third of all female students and about two-thirds of those who were foreign-born.<sup>140</sup>

This was due to a several concomitant factors, first and foremost the fact that women were not allowed into Russian universities, where a *numerus clausus* policy against Jews and many other non Russian ethnic groups was enforced. This occurred in a context wherein it was not unusual for Jewish women of bourgeois background to obtain a high-school degree.<sup>141</sup> Moreover, there were many courses of academic level given by university professors for female students.<sup>142</sup> This was particularly true in the international trade port-city of Odessa, undoubtedly the home to the most secular Jewish community in the Russian Empire, a sort of “anti-shtetl” in Eastern Europe.<sup>143</sup> Female higher

<sup>137</sup> Raichich, “Liceo,” 151. Full data in Simonetta Ulivieri, “Donne e scuola. Per una storia dell’istruzione femminile in Italia,” in *Educazione al femminile: dalla parità alla differenza*, eds. Emy Beseghi and Vittorio Telmon (Scandicci: La Nuova Italia, 1992), 31-54.

<sup>138</sup> Carole B. Balin, “The Call to Serve: Jewish Women Medical Students in Russia, 1872-1887” in *Jewish Women in Eastern Europe*, eds. Chaeran Freeze, Paula Hyman, Antony Polonsky (Oxford: Littmann, 2005) 133-152.

<sup>139</sup> Jack Wertheimer, “The ‘Ausländerfrage’ at Institutions of Higher Learning: A Controversy Over Russian-Jewish Students in Imperial Germany” in *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, 27/1 (1982): 188; Avi Ohry, “When Grandfather Studied Medicine in Geneva... Foreign Students and Teachers from 1876 Onwards” in *Vesalius*, 12/2 (2006): 64-8.

<sup>140</sup> Nancy Green, “L’émigration comme émancipation: les femmes juives d’Europe de l’Est à Paris 1881-1914” in *Pluriel*, 27 (1981): 47.

<sup>141</sup> Shaul Stampfer, “Gender Differentiation and Education of Jewish Women in Nineteenth Century Eastern Europe,” in *Polin*, 7 (1992): 459–483.

<sup>142</sup> L. Bobrow, “High Courses of Professor Gerie for Women in Moscow (1872-1888),” *Proceedings of the Moscow Historical Archives Institute*, vol. 16, Moscow 1961 (in Russian); A. J. Savelyev, A. I. Momot, V. F. Hoteenkov, *Higher Education in Russia: A Short History to 1917*, Research Institute of Higher Education, Moscow, 1995 (in Russian).

<sup>143</sup> John D. Klier, “A Port, not a Shtetl: Reflections on the Distinctiveness of Odessa,” in *Port Jews. Jewish Communities in Cosmopolitan Maritime Trading Centres, 1550-1950*, ed. David Cesarani, (London: Frank Cass Publishers 2002), 173-178; Alexis Hofmeister, “Judische und ‘Gesellschaftliche’ Mission-Partizipation von Juden in der staedtischen Offentlichkeit Odessas,” *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts / Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook*, 10 (2011): 125-143; Jarrod Tanny, *City of Rogues and Schnorrers. Russia’s Jews and the Myth of Old Odessa*,

educations was favored by a good part of Russian intelligentsia of the time, nihilists in primis,<sup>144</sup> but since legislation barred Jewish women access to local universities, they sought better opportunities of self-fulfillment in Europe's most prestigious Athenea.

The methodological interest in the biographies of Russian Jewish women in Italy in the second half of the nineteenth century lies precisely in their tripartite marginality: as women, as Jews and as foreigners.<sup>145</sup> Paradoxically, if to leave the autocratic and anti-Semitic Russian empire and emigrate to Italy, where since 1848 full civil rights had been accorded to Jews, amounted to an improvement of political status, conversely as women, life in Italy exposed them to the prejudices of a bourgeois society much less open to what was considered to be deviant behavior. What Iris Parush has called the "benefits of marginality,"<sup>146</sup> that is, the greater degree of freedom enjoyed by discriminated groups in certain historical circumstances – as for instance a greater access to general education among high-status Jewish women in nineteenth-century Russia – were in Italy significantly reduced. While in Russia the rapid industrialization in the nineteenth century was not matched with political and social modernization, in Italy the opposite occurred.

One example will epitomize the disappointment of the many women who believed that their emigration to Western Europe would increase their social autonomy: Elena's anger in the face of the affectionate nicknames penned by Domenico to her. "Gattina [kitten]," for instance, connoted in Elena's eyes the petit bourgeois and patronization, and she rebukes her husband for not being able to express his love "properly." So too does Anna Kuliscioff chide her lover, the socialist leader Andrea Costa. Both Costa and Comparetti, despite their principled anticlericalism, obliged their companions to undergo Church weddings, thus forcing them to convert in order to spare the Catholic sentiments

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(Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2011).

<sup>144</sup> Shmuel Feiner, "Ha-Ishah Ha-Yehudit Ha-Modernit," in *Zion*, 58 (1993): 469-499 (in Hebrew); Mauro Rosa, "L'educazione della donna in Russia nel Settecento e nella prima metà dell'Ottocento," in *Studi di storia dell'educazione*, (1984): 65-71.

<sup>145</sup> *Profiles in Diversity. Jews in a Changing Europe 1750-1870*, eds. Frances Malino and David Sorkin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press 1998), 1-7 stress the importance of such an approach not in order to engage in apologetics regarding Jewish integration, but rather to show the multifaceted spectrum of Jewish reactions towards modernity.

<sup>146</sup> Iris Parush, *Reading Jewish Women. Marginality and Modernization in Nineteenth Century Eastern European Jewish Society*, (Waltham: Brandeis University Press 2004).

of their respective families.<sup>147</sup>

The condition of Russian Jewish women in Italy must be read against the backdrop of what is known about women in other parts of Europe. The story of Elena Raffalovich, the first of a long series of Russian Jewish immigrants in Italy in the second half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, introduces us to a statistically small but culturally large reality of women belonging to the haute bourgeoisie. Unlike middle-class women, whose behavioural patterns are well known from the seminal work of Marion Kaplan, these women are characterized by strong economic and intellectual independence. Indeed, Elena lived alone after her separation from Comparetti, and even left the care of their then-infant daughter to her husband. In her own estimation, she preferred to live “comme l’oiseau sur la branche [as a bird on the branch]” rather than be confined at home, even with the people she loved.<sup>148</sup>

A second important distinction is the Eastern Europe-Central Europe divide. As rightly noted by Paula Hyman:

As opposed to women originating from Eastern Europe, in Central Europe the experience of civil emancipation, economic integration and a high degree of acculturation enabled Jews to situate themselves securely in the bourgeoisie. Jewish women increasingly participated in philanthropic activities and organizations, which not only gave them a voice in the public sphere without challenging gender norms, but also helped them develop close friendships and ties with non-Jewish women who supported similar causes.<sup>149</sup>

Raffalovich’s case, however, further complicates these disparities. A Russian who operated in Western Europe, Elena modeled an alternative version of feminist activism, one that was at variance with the traditional gender-role cleavage then current in Western bourgeois.<sup>150</sup> This appears also in the matrimonial strategies of the Raffalovich family. While for middle class Jews in Central and Western Europe, Marion Kaplan is certainly right when she affirms that “before the 20<sup>th</sup> century Jewish and non-Jewish marriages had, with few exceptions, been

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<sup>147</sup> Anna Kuliscioff, *Lettere d’amore a Andrea Costa, 1880-1909* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976).

<sup>148</sup> Comparetti, *In memoria di Elena Raffalovich*, 10.

<sup>149</sup> Paula Hyman, “Two Models of Modernization: Jewish Women in the German and the Russian Empire,” in *Studies in Contemporary Jewry: Jews and Gender. The Challenge to Hierarchy* ed. Johnatan Frankel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 43.

<sup>150</sup> Natalia L. Pushkareva, “At the Beginning of Russian Feminism: Similarities and Differences between Russia and the West,” in *Russian Women and Western Culture*, ed. Grigorii A. Tishkin (St. Petersburg, 2002).

arranged,”<sup>151</sup> Elena’s marriage furnishes proof against these notions. She was one of the first, but by far not the only woman to intermarry. In fact, virtually all of the marriages of the women in the Raffalovich family, in and after Elena’s generation, and of other Jewish women from Odessa mentioned in this study, were love marriages often established despite and against their family’s will. While it is true that in Italy this occurred on a relatively less frequent basis, the aforementioned Erminia Fuà Fusinato, also a social activist and married in 1856 to the poet Arnaldo Fusinato, might be kept in mind.

It is clear then that Paula Hyman’s conclusions for Germany cannot be transposed unconditionally to Russian women living in Italy or elsewhere in Europe:

There is some suggestion that among those Jews who attained wealth and became part of a small upper bourgeois stratum, women were much more reluctant than men to jettison Jewish practice and identity.<sup>152</sup>

The Raffalovich story reveals a different attitude of Italian Jewish women, generally more conservative, than those of Eastern Europe who in increasing numbers were coming to the peninsula.<sup>153</sup> Raffalovich was not the only woman of her class who was obliged to rethink herself, her role, the relationship between women and society and the place of women in the new national states, without recourse to a strong female model, at least symbolically, of the “citizen mother,”<sup>154</sup> to whom were attached most of the women of petit bourgeois extraction, both Christian and Jewish.

From this vantage point, Elena’s incessant travel may be viewed as a kind of female quest for new spaces of emancipation and liberty. Against this backdrop

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<sup>151</sup> In her “For Money or Love” (Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook, 1982) and more recently Luisa Levi d’Ancona, “Mediation and Marriage Strategies in the 19th century Jewish European Upper Middle Class,” in *La mediazione matrimoniale. Il terzo (in)comodo in Europa tra Otto e Novecento*, ed. Bruno P. F. Wanrooij (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2004). Barbara Armani, in her recent book on Jewish elites in Florence in the nineteenth century goes even further when she states that intermarriage was a masculine rather than a feminine Jewish phenomenon. Barbara Armani, *Il confine invisibile: l’élite ebraica di Firenze 1840-1914* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2006) 241.

<sup>152</sup> Paula Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995).

<sup>153</sup> A difference noted already by Miniati, *Le emancipate*, 188, but only concerning Jewish female associationalism outside Italy.

<sup>154</sup> Liviana Gazzetta, “Madre e cittadina. Una concezione dell’emancipazione alle origini del primo movimento politico delle donne in Italia” in *Venetica. Annuario di storia delle Venezie in età contemporanea*, 11 (1994), 133-162.

her restlessness can be compared to that of Flora Randegger, a Triestine woman with a Jewish deeply religious background, who traveled twice from Triest to Jerusalem, where she hoped to teach Italian and to establish a school for Jewish girls, thereby securing independence of profession and income.<sup>155</sup> But while Randegger sought a stronger Jewish life than the one constituted within the four walls of her family, Raffalovich leveraged her freedom of movement to rid herself of this very same Judaism. It seems that Jewish women could choose complete emancipation, typically resulting in total estrangement from Judaism, like Raffalovich, or subordination within traditional family structures that permitted autonomy of action only in philanthropic enterprises, like Randegger.

And so we come to the last point that is usually made in relation with the process of women's emancipation in the nineteenth century, namely, that the public sphere of action for women before the twentieth century can be ascribed only to what Marion Kaplan calls "social feminism," that is, a means for liberating women from an exclusive preoccupation with the home. Social work became the path of least resistance for Jewish women intent upon access to the public sphere. Social feminism is an admixture of social work and feminism, moderate and motherly. Raffalovich was precisely at odds with the fact that in Italy at the turn of the century, education had not yet been dissociated from philanthropic preoccupations. She was furious, for instance, that the Venetian authorities referred to her school as an "asilo" (shelter) and not a "giardino d'infanzia" a proper Italian translation of the Froebelian term "kindergarten."<sup>156</sup> In fact, Raffalovich's charitable activity bears no confessional character whatsoever.

Elena never sought out solidarity networks, either on a confessional or on a gender-oriented basis. She acted alone, benefitting from her considerable family resources, and collaborated indiscriminately with men and women who shared her ideals. Raffalovich was spared the caution and self-denial of Jewish women seeking to become bourgeois, a quest of many contemporary German Jewish women, according to Kaplan. What Michael Stanislawski has termed the "twin process of Russification and ennoblement"<sup>157</sup> had taken place for many prominent Jewish families in Odessa much earlier than in Western Europe,

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<sup>155</sup> Marina Arbib, "Intercultural Exchange and Maintaining Fidelity to Judaism: The Influence of Italian Literature on Flora Randegger" in *Around the Point: Studies in Jewish Literature and Culture in Multiple Languages*, eds. Hillel Weiss, Roman Katsman, Ber Kotlerman (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 271-282.

<sup>156</sup> Colombo, "Il pensiero pedagogico di Vittorio Castiglioni," 205.

<sup>157</sup> Michael Stanislawski, "Russian Jewry" in *Paths of Emancipation*, ed. Pierre Birnbaum (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

confronted there with a “modernity without emancipation.”<sup>158</sup> Elena could allow herself to be more critical of her own bourgeois upbringing than other Jewish women, who were fighting for social recognition.

While for many of her contemporaries the progressive but winding path towards women’s emancipation did not necessarily entail the relinquishing of Judaism *in toto*, in Elena’s family, as in many others of Russian *émigrés* to Europe, the assimilation process was much quicker and more linear. Thus, Elena’s intellectual and familial biography uncovers an Italian way to women’s emancipation composed at least of two streams, one of indigenous Jewish women and the other of foreign immigrants. The reciprocity of the two remains to be studied in their multifarious contexts. What is certain is that Elena Raffalovich, a cosmopolitan at home in every European capital but anchored to a permanent condition of exile and errance, personifies the “foreigner in her own home”<sup>159</sup> described by Annarita Buttafuoco in her seminal paper on women’s emancipation in Italy from the late eighteenth century to the Fascist period. It is because of women like Raffalovich, who belonged to what Virginia Woolf would have later called a “society of outsiders,”<sup>160</sup> bearers of modernity albeit an accented one, that in Italy it was possible at the turn of the century to spotlight political and juridical aspects of women’s emancipation, rather than confining the focus to arenas of cultural and social welfare, anticipating the “feminism without borders”<sup>161</sup> that will be characteristic of the twentieth century fights for women’s rights.

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<sup>158</sup> Ely Lederhendler, “Modernity without Emancipation. The Case of Russian Jewry” in *Assimilation and Community. The Jews in Nineteenth-century Europe*, eds Jonathan Frankel and Steven J. Zipperstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>159</sup> Annarita Buttafuoco, “Straniere in patria. Temi e momenti dell’emancipazione femminile italiana dalle repubbliche giacobine al fascismo” in *Esperienza storica femminile nell’età moderna e contemporanea*, ed. A. Crispino (Rome: Udi, 1988), 91-124.

<sup>160</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (London: Hogarth Press 1938).

<sup>161</sup> Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders. Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

*écrivains juifs en Italie au XVIIIè* (2007) and *L'epistolario di Marco Mortara: un rabbino italiano tra riforma e ortodossia* (2012).

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**Bernardo Dessau**

by *Marco Bencich*



*Bernardo Dessau (1863-1949)*

**Abstract**

*This paper examines Bernardo Dessau's activities within the Zionist movement in the years between the end of the Nineteenth century and the first two decades of the Twentieth century. Dessau's important contribution is still little-known and under-explored even by the most recent historiographical studies on Zionism in Italy.*

*More specifically, this essay will investigate Dessau's intellectual and propagandistic commitment towards the realization of the Zionist ideal, his views on the main concepts and issues put forward by the Jewish movement of national rebirth and his responses and reactions to the major historical events which affected, both directly and indirectly, the Jewish community in Italy and*



abroad in the period before the outbreak of the First World War.

In this research two different types of source have been scrutinized and evaluated: on the one hand, printed publications such as articles and pamphlets, and on the other, the private correspondence between Bernardo Dessau and Felice Ravenna, President of the Italian Zionist Federation, all of which is kept in the Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem.

- Premise
- German by Birth, Italian by Adoption, a Zionist deep down
- The Concept of “Zionism” in Dessau
- The Zionist Activity in the First Decade of the Nineteenth Century
- The Uganda Scheme
- The Controversy between Territorialists and Palestinocentrists
- Dessau’s Collaboration with *L’Idea Sionista*
- War Conflicts, the Ottoman Empire and the Prospects of Zionism
- Conclusion

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## Premise

Bernardo Dessau is little-known within the Italian Zionist panorama, and his work is still little studied. With the exception of a couple of references in a few Italian articles, very little has been written about him.<sup>1</sup> Currently, the most relevant study is Franca Focacci’s essay on his scientific production as a physicist and on the collection donated by his heirs to the Department of Physics of the University of Perugia in the summer of 1950.<sup>2</sup>

The history of Zionism in Italy presents some odd traits, which in turn mirror

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<sup>1</sup> The entry in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* on Dessau is wrong: “An active Zionist, he founded *Il Vessillo Israelitico*, the first Italian Zionist periodical” (see *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Vol. 5, 604). In reality *Il Vessillo*, which was initially against Theodoro Herzl’s political program, was founded in Casale Monferrato by Flaminio Servi as a continuation of *L’Educatore Israelitico* (1853-1874). Some records regarding Dessau’s Zionist work can be found in: Alberto Cavaglioni, “Tendenze nazionali e albori sionistici,” in *Storia d’Italia. Annali 11, Gli ebrei in Italia. Vol. 2, Dall’emancipazione a oggi*, Corrado Vivanti ed., (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), 1300; Nazario Sauro Onofri, *Ebrei e fascismo a Bologna*, (Bologna: Editrice Grafica Lavino, 1989), 55; Ariel Toaff, *Gli ebrei a Perugia*, (Perugia: Deputazione di storia patria per l’Umbria, 1975), 186; Laura Brazzo, *Angelo Sullam e il sionismo in Italia tra la crisi di fine secolo e la guerra di Libia*, (Roma: Società Editrice Dante Alighieri, 2007), 35, 71-2, 101.

<sup>2</sup> Franca Focacci, *Bernardo Dessau. Professore di Fisica a Perugia*, (Perugia: Deputazione di storia patria per l’Umbria, 2012).

the peculiarities of Italian Jewry, since the number of Jews in Italy was rather low, they were disseminated throughout the country and they were one of the most integrated communities in Europe. The advent of Zionism helped to radicalize the nexus between the two different souls – the “public”/Italian and the “private”/Jewish one – of Jewish identity in Italy in the aftermath of emancipation. While the vast majority of Italian Jews opted for the construction of a more private form of religious identity, in a constant attempt to reconcile and find a balance between their Jewishness and their national (Italian) identity, Zionism tried to strengthen the ties with the Diaspora by emphasizing the concept of a Jewish ethnic group and by encouraging the diffusion of Jewish culture.<sup>3</sup>

Italian Zionism is to be understood in the first place as a cultural movement which tried to find a solution to the Jewish question by helping the oppressed Jews of Eastern Europe, but which *also* participated in the effort to renew the moral, intellectual and physical conditions of Jewish people.<sup>4</sup> Within this movement, Bernardo Dessau acted as a link between the then prevalent philanthropic version of Zionism, which supported a more simplified form of Jewish national rebirth, and a less widespread variety, which backed a more political and pragmatic nationalist vision of Zionism. As an intermediary, Dessau’s importance equals that of Felice Ravenna.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> On the impact of Zionism on the Jewish identity in Italy, see Mario Toscano, “Integrazione nazionale e identità ebraica. Francia, Germania, Italia,” in *Ebraismo*, David Bidussa ed., (Torino: Einaudi, 2008), 166; Mario Toscano, “L’uguaglianza senza diversità: stato, società e questione ebraica nell’Italia liberale,” in *Storia Contemporanea*, 25/5 (1994), 704; Barbara Armani, *Il confine invisibile. L’identità ebraica di Firenze 1840-1914*, (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2006), 46; Carlotta Ferrara degli Uberti, “Fare gli ebrei italiani: modelli di genere e integrazione nazionale,” in *Famiglia e nazione nel lungo Ottocento italiano*, ed. Ilaria Porciani, (Roma: Viella, 2006), 222-3; Alberto Cavaglion, “Tendenze nazionali,” 1304; Simonetta Della Seta, “Identità religiosa e identità nazionale nell’ebraismo italiano del Novecento,” in *Italia Judaica. Gli ebrei nell’Italia unita (1870-1945). Atti del IV Convegno internazionale (Siena, 12-16 giugno 1989)*, (Roma: Ministero per i Beni culturali e ambientali, Ufficio centrale per i Beni archivistici, 1993), 263-72.

<sup>4</sup> On the origins of Zionism in Italy, see David Bidussa, “Tra avanguardia e rivolta. Il sionismo in Italia nel primo quarto del Novecento,” in *Oltre il Ghetto. Momenti della cultura ebraica in Italia tra l’Unità e il fascismo*, eds. David Bidussa, Amos Luzzatto and Gadi Luzzatto Voghera (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1992), 155-279; Mario Toscano, *Ebraismo e antisemitismo in Italia. Dal 1848 alla guerra dei sei giorni*, (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2003), 48-68; Tullia Catalan, “Società e sionismo a Trieste fra XIX e XX secolo,” in *Il mondo ebraico: gli ebrei tra Italia nord-orientale e Impero asburgico dal Medioevo all’Età contemporanea*, eds. Giacomo Todeschini and Pier Cesare Ioly Zorattini (Pordenone: Studio Tesi, 1991), 459-479; Alberto Cavaglion, “Tendenze nazionali,” 1293-1320; Laura Brazzo, *Angelo Sullam*.

<sup>5</sup> On Felice Ravenna, see Gabriella Falco Ravenna, “Leone Ravenna e Felice di Leone Ravenna,” in *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel*, 36/11 (1970): 407-15; Simonetta Della Seta, “Dalla tradizione a un

## German by Birth, Italian by Adoption, a Zionist deep down

Dessau was born on the 13<sup>th</sup> of August 1863 in the German town of Offenbach am Main. His was a deeply devout family, his father Samuel was an Orthodox rabbi and a teacher in Jewish schools. The fifth of seven children, Bernardo initially attended a technical school but then got his leaving certificate from a grammar school where the teaching of classics was a major part of the syllabus. He studied at the Universities of Berlin and Strasburg and he graduated in physics in 1886. Three years later he moved to Italy to work as Professor Augusto Righi's<sup>6</sup> assistant at the Department of Physics of the Universities of Padua and Bologna. In the years 1900-1903 he was also in charge of the Meteorological and Astronomic Observatory in Bologna.

In the history of Jewish migration in the Nineteenth century and in the first half of the Twentieth century, the role of Italy as a place both for transient Jews and for Jews who decided to settle there has still not been adequately considered, even if the stories of several high-status figures who came to settle in Italy are well-known. Dessau seems to be one of the many German Jews, studied by Klaus Voigt, who decided to emigrate to Italy not because they were attracted to Italian culture but because they wanted to avoid the constraints which, in Germany, prevented them from accessing jobs in the public administration and in universities.<sup>7</sup>

On 20<sup>th</sup> August 1901 the thirty-eight-year-old Bernardo married Emma Goitein<sup>8</sup>

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mondo più moderno: un ebreo autentico in un'epoca di passaggio. Note per un profilo di Felice di Leone Ravenna," in *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel*, 53/3 (1987): LXXI-LXXVII. A strong friendship developed through the years between Dessau and Ravenna, a kind of *elective affinity*; see Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 2 August 1907, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

<sup>6</sup> Augusto Righi (1850-1920) was one of the greatest experimental physicists of his time. More specifically, he studied electromagnetism and contributed to the invention of wireless telegraphy.

<sup>7</sup> See Klaus Voigt, "Considerazioni sugli ebrei immigrati in Italia," in *Stato nazionale ed emancipazione ebraica*, eds. Francesca Sofia and Mario Toscano (Roma: Bonacci, 1992), 223-9.

<sup>8</sup> Emma Dessau Goitein was the daughter of Rabbi Gabor Goitein – the last heir of a long dynasty of Hungarian rabbis – and was born in Karlsruhe on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1877. Her mother, who became a widow at a very young age, belonged to a deeply religious family who, nevertheless, was very open-minded and willing to accept the ideas of nineteenth-century German culture. So, in order to secure for her daughters a professionally and economically independent life, she decided that Emma and her sisters should become very well-educated young women. Emma was thus able to devote herself to her artistic vocation as a painter from very early on and became the first woman to attend the Nude Painting and Drawing Classes of the Perugia Art Academy. For more information on Emma Goitein and her artistic output as painter and xylographer, see Fanny Steindler Dessau, "Ricordo di Emma Dessau," in *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel*, 35/3 (1969):

in Karlsruhe. Their eldest daughter Fanny Steindler Dessau (1904-1984) thus remembers her parents' marriage:

The meeting with the tall and gentlemanly young professor of physics, with brown burning eyes and a thick brown beard, and the love that they felt for each other, different as they were yet so similar in the nobility and dignity of their feelings, convinced her, after a long inner debate, to accept his proposal and to follow him as a young bride to Bologna in the early years of the Twentieth century.<sup>9</sup>

Dessau first began to take an interest in Zionism during his stay in Bologna, where the intense propaganda of the members of the Italian Zionist Federation (FSI) had been highly successful, especially in the spring of 1903. Endowed with a profound Jewish religious culture which had made him aware of the fact that, notwithstanding his religious beliefs, his bond with the history and the traditions of the Jewish people was permanent, Dessau saw in Zionism the opportunity to help Western Jews to redeem themselves from their condition of moral servitude, through what Ravenna had defined as “the dignified assertion of the true Israelite spirit.”<sup>10</sup> Besides, since Zionism advocated the right for a Jewish nation to come into existence, he found in it a salvific answer “for those who are not able or do not want to assimilate into their host countries and desire to reconstruct for themselves a national life in a territory of their own.”<sup>11</sup>

Dessau's life changed radically in November 1904 when he became Professor of Experimental Physics at the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery of the University of Perugia, where he moved with his family at the beginning of 1905. Fanny Dessau's description of the city is useful to understand what this move meant for the entire family: “Perugia was back then really and truly the “City of Silence,” lying among hills in the middle of high mountains and limitless horizons [...]. Rich with works of arts and ancient traditions, Perugia was a world apart, far

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151-6; Rahel Wolff, “Pagine d'Arte. Emma Dessau Goitein,” in *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel*, 5/12 (1931): 623-6.

<sup>9</sup> Steindler Dessau, “Ricordo di Emma Dessau,” 152.

<sup>10</sup> See Felice Ravenna, “Il Sionismo in Italia,” in *L'Idea Sionista*, 2/6-7 (1902): 50. Donato Camerini, the Rabbi of Parma, was also of the idea that emancipation and equal individual rights had caused the decline of the Jewish religion (“freedom to believe – Camerini had written – has become licence to mis-believe, and freedom to practice one's rites has turned into aversion for them”); see Donato Camerini, “L'ora presente,” in *L'Idea Sionista*, 1/10-11 (1901): 80-2.

<sup>11</sup> See Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 16 May 1906, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 25 (Polemica Gabba), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

away from communication routes as well as from progress.”<sup>12</sup>

In 1912, Dessau was informed by Chaim Weizmann of the plan of the Action Committee to create a Hebrew University in Jerusalem and this is evidence of the high esteem Dessau was held in internationally. He was chosen as the contact person in Italy for preliminary explorations but was nonetheless unconvinced that that was the right moment for such a project, given the difficult political situation of the Ottoman Empire after the two Balkan Wars.<sup>13</sup>

This specific situation must have been very difficult for Dessau to look at, since, as Franca Focacci claims, he was hoping to find another teaching position away from Perugia, where “he was not happy at having to teach physics only for medical purposes.”<sup>14</sup> Already back in 1910, two years before the foundation of the Technion in Haifa, Dessau had hoped for a move to Palestine. In May 1910 he had written to Ravenna: “I was told by a reliable source that I have a very good chance to make it, but at the moment nothing has been decided about the professors’ salaries nor about the time when the Institute will open.”<sup>15</sup>

Although he was an Italian citizen, during the First World War period he had to face serious difficulties because of his German origins: following the complaints of some of his students, he was suspended from his academic teaching and research.<sup>16</sup> After the war years which he spent in dire straits in Florence, in 1920 he went back to Perugia with his family and recovered his position as Professor of physics.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Steindler Dessau, “Ricordo di Emma Dessau,” 152.

<sup>13</sup> See Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 2 April 1913 and 27 May 1913, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem. On the Balkan wars, see Egidio Ivetic, *Le guerre balcaniche*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006); Richard C. Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913. Prelude to the First World War*, (London: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> See Franca Focacci, *Bernardo Dessau*, 25.

<sup>15</sup> Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 4 May 1910, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

<sup>16</sup> On Dessau’s suspension from teaching, see Franca Focacci, *Bernardo Dessau*, 21-4. On Italian Jews and World War I, see Mario Mario Toscano, *Ebraismo e antisemitismo in Italia*, 110-22; Carlotta Ferrara degli Uberti, *Fare gli ebrei italiani. Autorappresentazioni di una minoranza (1861-1918)*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011), 223-44.

<sup>17</sup> On the years of Dessau’s life during the deeply traumatic period of the fascist racial laws until his death, which happened on 17<sup>th</sup> November 1949, see Focacci, *Bernardo Dessau*, 24-37; Steindler Dessau, “Ricordo di Emma Dessau,” 154-6.

## The Concept of “Zionism” in Dessau

The study and analysis of some of his writings and letters to Felice Ravenna allow us to comprehend what Zionism represented and what being a Zionist meant for Dessau. He defined Western Zionism as a “reflex movement” whose origins were to be found in a feeling of connectedness and empathy with the oppressed fellow Jews of Eastern Europe: therefore, in his opinion, a thorough comprehension of the soul of the Jewish people was an indispensable necessity. He asserted:

For us Western Jews, brought up with the children of the nations in which we live, imbued with modern ideas, it is hard to understand how common traditions, which are not religious, can still exist for people who lost their own country and independence a thousand years ago, [...]. Yet, among those people, the permanence of our national traditions was never discontinued. The wandering Jew [...] brought with him a wealth of traditions which allowed him to keep his own identity even among foreign people and in spite of external infiltrations. And this wandering Jew, so often depicted as degraded and ruined by deprivation, enjoys nowadays if not a full political life at least a full intellectual life; he also possesses his own language, which is the language spoken by his ancestors. Far from being a mere language of religious practice and religious literature, Hebrew is in fact studied and cultivated by those who see it in the first place as the primary expression of a national unity.<sup>18</sup>

In previous years, Dante Lattes, had already commented on the exceptional uniqueness of the Jewish people; the founding pillar of such uniqueness was “a community of interest, of traditions and of feelings.”<sup>19</sup> Indeed, in Dessau’s vision, the *sine qua non* condition for being a Zionist resided in the awareness of the existence of such a community, in the perception of the strength deriving from a glorious past and in the possibility of experiencing one’s Judaism with pride and not as a burden. The duty of a Zionist was, as Lattes himself had put it,<sup>20</sup> to cultivate this “Jewish emotional fellowship” and to create it where it did not exist

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<sup>18</sup> Federazione Sionistica Italiana, “Comunicazioni Ufficiali – I. Atti del IV Convegno Sionistico Italiano (II federale) tenuto in Milano il 20-21 marzo 1904,” *L’Idea Sionista*, 4/3-4-5 (1904), 44.

<sup>19</sup> See Dante Lattes, “La nazione ebraica,” in *Il Corriere Israelitico*, 39/7 (1900), 145-7.

<sup>20</sup> Lattes believed that Jews, who had to compensate for the lack of a common nation (the only place where a real community life would have been feasible), had the duty to raise and intensify as much as possible the national religious feeling through a guarded preservation of traditions. On this topic see Dante Lattes, “Lotte contemporanee,” in *Il Corriere Israelitico*, 41/12 (1903): 265-6; Dante Lattes, “Lotte contemporanee,” in *Il Corriere Israelitico*, 42/2 (1903): 25-6.

anymore: “Our hopes lie with the future generations, with the young and even with the very young [...]. Yet our propaganda should be directed both to the young and to the adult, and at the moment it seems to me that the only form of propaganda which can reach our adults is conferences.”<sup>21</sup>

As for the inspiring principles of the Zionist organization, Dessau was of the opinion that when dealing with the harsh living conditions of the oppressed Jews of Eastern Europe any reference to feelings of compassion and any form of self-referential aid or charity were to be banned. Indeed, Dessau criticised the work of the most important Jewish charitable institutions, convinced as he was that their impromptu aid was a waste of precious energies: their aim was to relieve the living conditions of those who survived but not to provide them with a new accommodation in a safer and more hospitable location. Dessau wrote:

Only Zionism offers a truly fruitful and enduring way forward and aims at finding a permanent solution to the Jewish question. But for this high and noble goal to be attained, we need to keep focussing and working on it day in day out. We must not follow in the footsteps of those other institutions and must avoid adopting their methods.<sup>22</sup>

He openly insisted on the necessity that all Zionists agree on the deep significance of the movement itself:

In my opinion, those who think they are or see themselves as Zionists simply because they are moved by philanthropic motivations are only deluding themselves. [...] Those who do not feel like Jews anymore, or those for whom this feeling does not reach beyond the narrow confines of their family, should step back and should not try to model our movement on their ideas.<sup>23</sup>

Dessau gave voice to this anti-philanthropic interpretation of Zionism on the occasion of Theodor Herzl's visit to Italy (20-26 January 1904).<sup>24</sup> In Ferrara, Herzl was interviewed by the special correspondent of *L'Idée Sionista*<sup>25</sup> and was

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<sup>21</sup> Federazione Sionistica Italiana, “Comunicazioni Ufficiali – I. Atti del IV Convegno,” 44-5.

<sup>22</sup> “Il Sionismo nel momento attuale – I. Una lettera del Prof. Dessau,” *L'Idée Sionista*, 4/1 (1904), 6.

<sup>23</sup> Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 3 October 1905, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

<sup>24</sup> On Herzl's trip to Italy, see Toscano, *Ebraismo e antisemitismo in Italia*, 59-61; Fausto Coen, *Theodor Herzl. L'ultimo profeta di Israele e la nascita del sionismo*, (Genova: Marietti, 1997), 116-7.

<sup>25</sup> *L'Idée Sionista* was founded in Modena in January 1901 and was the first Zionist journal to be

asked to express an opinion on the direction that the Zionist propaganda had taken in Italy which did not want to subscribe to any ideal claims, but rather than follow any colonizing plan which adequately found a solution to save the Eastern European oppressed Jews. Herzl

strongly approved of our choice [...] and stated very clearly that Zionism must pursue the primary goal of defending the oppressed Jewish proletariat, even though he did not completely agree with our opinions concerning the difficulties in achieving our aspirations and ambitions in Palestine.<sup>26</sup>

Dessau deeply disapproved of the assertions made by the leader of international Zionism and he did not hesitate from openly expressing his views even though he knew that the majority of Italian Zionists would disagree with him. He wrote:

it seems to me that Herzl has supported a purely philanthropic interpretation of Zionism, while I exclusively see its future in the national ideal. I do not mean by this that all the partisans of Zionism should be stirred by that national drive, but I do believe that every one of them should acknowledge its existence and its enormous and prime importance for the souls of those Russian Jews whom we want to redeem. And once this national feeling is acknowledged, even those who do not fully agree with it should, in my opinion, follow it as a guiding principle and act accordingly.<sup>27</sup>

Dessau spoke out very clearly in favour of a political-nationalist concept of Zionism, in full agreement with Lattes' own interpretation of the movement: Zionism was the expression of the rebirth of a national Jewish consciousness and not simply a humanitarian organization. Lattes thus voiced what was for him unmistakable evidence: "Whether the Jews are a *people* or a *nation*, the consequences are the same: *they are entitled to a national and political existence of their own in their own historic land.* This is the only element which can

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printed in Italy. The decision to publish the journal was taken also with the specific goal to support Zionist propaganda in Italy, since *L'Idea Sionista* was expected to function as a preparatory organ for the creation of FSI and for the summoning of its first National Convention. The promoters intended from the very beginning to appoint Carlo Conigliani as editor of the journal, a role which he kept till his death, on 6<sup>th</sup> of December 1901. His successor was Benvenuto Donati, who edited the journal for two years. The third and last editor was Carlo Levi.

<sup>26</sup> "Il Sionismo nel momento attuale – II. La nostra intervista col Dott. Herzl," in *L'Idea Sionista*, 4/1 (1904), 7.

<sup>27</sup> Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 18 February 1904, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.



distinguish Zionism from other Jewish philanthropic or colonizing organizations.”<sup>28</sup> In Dessau’s view, the “national bond” between the Italian Jews and other diaspora groups did not demand in any way that Italian Jews should choose between their Italian and their Jewish nationality, nor that they should leave their own country to go and colonize Palestine. Zionists were often accused of not taking into account their patriotic duties as Italian Jews in their attempt to establish a Jewish national consciousness, but Gino Arias, among others, reiterated that there existed no antagonism between the Jewish national idea and Italian patriotism. Nevertheless, should a conflict between the two arise, Arias was of the opinion that the first would have to yield to the second.<sup>29</sup>

In Dessau’s view, the fact that some Jews might feel they were Italian should not lead them to deny those fellow Jews, who were deprived of the possibility of enjoying life in a welcoming country, the right to the political ambition to create their own state and homeland. Dessau asserted: “I want to say this: I am Italian, but I am also a Jew, and there are Jews who aspire to have a homeland of their own [...] This individual desire has nothing to do with the desire for a national home for the Jews.”<sup>30</sup>

Alfonso Pacifici gave voice to a much more intransigent position. With his “integral Judaism” formula he intended to express a concept which saw Jewish nationalism as a preliminary step towards the final goal of a “return to Judaism in all its original, untranslatable wholeness.”<sup>31</sup> Since the condition of enduring temporariness of the people of Israel would end, according to tradition, on the day of their return to their ancient homeland, Pacifici claimed that Jewish life should be fashioned in anticipation of this future circumstance and in the cultivation and rebirth of a Jewish soul in compliance with the most imperative motivations of its historical existence: “Only when ‘the whole of Israel’, in other words, all those who are capable of such an ideal, want the termination of exile, will exile come to an end.”<sup>32</sup>

Dessau did not delude himself into thinking that Italian Jews could believe their bond with the rest of the Jewish people consisted of something more than a mere feeling of pity and compassion. He explained that the vast majority of Italian Jews denied the political and nationalist essence of the Zionist movement

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<sup>28</sup> Dante Lattes, “Che cos’è il Sionismo per il Sionismo,” in *Il Corriere Israelitico*, 44/6 (1905), 169.

<sup>29</sup> See Gino Arias, “Una dichiarazione,” in *L’Idea Sionista*, 5/8-9 (1905), 127.

<sup>30</sup> Federazione Sionistica Italiana, “Atti del VI Convegno Sionistico Italiano (quarto federale) tenuto in Venezia il 22-23 febbraio 1908 – I. Verbale delle adunanze,” in *L’Idea Sionista*, 8/3-4-5 (1908), 45.

<sup>31</sup> See Alfonso Pacifici, “La nostra patria,” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, January 16, 1914.

<sup>32</sup> Alfonso Pacifici, “La nostra patria,” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, January 23, 1914.

because they were not in touch with the most vital and most important centres of Jewry and consequently they had not practiced any form of truly Jewish existence for a very long time. In a letter to Ravenna, he wrote:

I know only too well that there are Jews, here in Italy as elsewhere, for whom these bonds do not really exist anymore [...]. But even if the present generation bears no responsibility for this situation, a responsibility exists anyway, and it falls on those who had known our traditions and did not feel for them – for the past of their ancestors – enough fondness to take care of those very traditions and to pass on that affection in their children. This is why, in my opinion, it is now up to their children to try and compensate for their predecessors' mistakes and to remember their past instead of forgetting it for good.<sup>33</sup>

### **The Zionist activity in the first decade of the Nineteenth Century**

Dessau's debut as a Zionist took place in Bologna, where, on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April 1903, he became a member of the Promoting Committee, along with other four important personalities.<sup>34</sup> Two weeks later, on the 19<sup>th</sup> of April, Ernesto Coen called a meeting of the Committee, as Dessau and Coen himself intended suggesting a quick, uncomplicated and decisive method to make the establishment of a Zionist group in Bologna an official event. Their plan was to try and convince the Bologna Jews who were already members of other local Zionist associations to join their newly founded group.<sup>35</sup> During the meeting, Coen decided to appoint Dessau head of the Promoting Committee, motivating his choice with the following words: "Many were the reasons which made me adopt this solution; among them, my frequent trips away from Bologna and especially my belief that an invitation to join our association would be more easily accepted [...] if it did not come directly from me."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 3 October 1905, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

<sup>34</sup> See "Note Sparse – Movimento sionista in Italia. Gruppo sionista a Bologna," in *L'Idea Sionista*, 3/4-5 (1903), 49.

<sup>35</sup> In order to avoid offending the Presidents of the other Associations with this manoeuvre, Coen asked for Felice Ravenna's opinion before taking any step in this direction; see Ernesto Coen to Felice Ravenna, 17 April 1903, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 12 (Gruppo Bologna), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

<sup>36</sup> Ernesto Coen to Felice Ravenna, 21 April 1903, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 12 (Gruppo Bologna), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

The inaugural meeting of the *Circolo Sionista Bolognese* took place on 29<sup>th</sup> June 1903. Felice Ravenna was in the audience and, as President of FSI, he expressed his satisfaction at the results obtained by the Zionist propaganda in Bologna; part of his speech emphasised the importance of the constitution of associations which sought to re-energise Jewish consciousness. Ravenna also observed how the goal of Zionism was twofold, both moral and material:

“To be materially a Zionist, it is enough to contribute with one franc to the remarkable organization which has its heart in Vienna. Is it really possible to redeem an entire people with one franc? You are not taking part in a humanitarian mission by contributing with that almost insignificant coin to a world organization, but by giving your name, your strength and your intelligence to a redeeming enterprise, and also by strengthening that Jewish consciousness, which will make the miracle of our triumph possible.”<sup>37</sup>

It is interesting to observe that this part of Ravenna’s speech was inspired by a request made by Dessau himself, who, in his invitation to Ravenna, wrote:

no-one could explain better than you the objective of these associations and the nature of the relationships between the Central Committee and the local bodies. [...] Please forgive me if I take the liberty of offering advice and making some suggestions, which are nothing but the fruit of my active contribution to propaganda work. There are some of us who do approve of the idea of doing enlightened charity to help our oppressed brothers, but who also think that the formation of an organization or of a local association is unnecessary. [...] There are others who, though they embrace Zionism at least to a certain degree, consider it mainly charity-oriented; but charity is really humiliating for those who receive it, since they may sense that the only interest they inspire in us is compassion and nothing else. We should try and explain to these partisans of Zionism that our fellow Jews in Russia or Rumania are not only able to receive material help from us, but also that, in return, they will make it possible for us to enjoy the treasures of a culture which they thoroughly possess and which is instead almost completely unknown to us.<sup>38</sup>

Once the final outline of the Statute of the newly-born Bologna Association was approved, Dessau became one of the advisors to the Executive Board.<sup>39</sup> As a

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<sup>37</sup> Handwritten notes, Undated, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 12 (Gruppo Bologna), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

<sup>38</sup> Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 8 June 1903, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

<sup>39</sup> On the inauguration of the Bologna Association, see “Note Sparse – Il Sionismo in Italia. Bologna,” *L’Idea Sionista*, 3/6-7 (1903), 72-3.

representative of the Bologna Zionists, he took part in the fourth (Milan, 20-21 March 1904) and in the fifth (Rome, 7-8 August 1906) Italian Zionist Conference, and in the sixth (Basel, 23-28 August 1903) and seventh (Basel, 27 July – 2 August 1905) World Congresses. His presence at the Italian Conferences was especially valuable because he was officially asked to present his papers to the audience.

After the elections of the fourth Milan Conference, Dessau was appointed to two offices; first, he became a member of the Federal Council and he showed from the very beginning that he was taking his mission very seriously.<sup>40</sup> Secondly, he became a member of a Committee – whose formation had been strongly recommended by, among others, Angelo Sullam and Benvenuto Donati – which would be in charge of the analysis and, if necessary, of the revision of the Zionist program, specifying its gaps and omissions.<sup>41</sup> The results would be presented at the ensuing Italian Conference, which was to be summoned within a year. The need for such a revision was felt mainly because there was a belief that this would help the Italian delegates to express their vote with one voice at the upcoming International Congress. In spite of the fact that the task of the *Commissione sul programma sionista* had been made superfluous by various events – in July 1904 Herzl had died and the Italian Conference had been postponed for so long that in the end it took place six months after that International Congress – an extremely brief final report was read by Dessau at the fifth Italian Zionist Conference: “we came to the conclusion that there was nothing to modify in the Basel program, and that therefore no change was necessary.”<sup>42</sup>

Following the task assignments within the Zionist propaganda in Italy, Dessau was also put in charge of the FSI *Information Office*, a new body which aimed at keeping the public as up-to-date as possible with events concerning the Jewish world.<sup>43</sup> The articles, which were published regularly in *L’Idea Sionista*, are mainly about events concerning the Jews of Eastern Europe and can help us understand Dessau’s own opinions about the violence perpetuated against his

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<sup>40</sup> See Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 27 March 1904, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem; “Movimento Sionistico – Quarto convegno sionistico italiano,” in *Il Corriere Israelitico*, 42/11 (1904), 302.

<sup>41</sup> The two expressions in the official document which caused more disagreement among the participants were “*Heimstätte*” and “*secured under public law*,” see on this topic Federazione Sionistica Italiana, “Comunicazioni Ufficiali – I. Atti del IV Convegno,” 42 and 47; “Movimento Sionistico – Quarto convegno,” 299-300.

<sup>42</sup> Federazione Sionistica Italiana, “Atti del V Convegno Sionistico Italiano (terzo federale) tenuto in Roma il 7-8 gennaio 1906 – I. Verbale delle adunanze,” *L’Idea Sionista*, 6/1 (1906), 9.

<sup>43</sup> See Federazione Sionistica Italiana, “Comunicazioni Ufficiali – II. Cariche Federali,” in *L’Idea Sionista*, 4/3-4-5 (1904), 76.

fellow Jews in Russia and Romania. He thought that even the birth of more liberal regimes would not lead to a solution of the Jewish question. In his view, the hatred which fuelled pogroms could not be wiped out overnight, and even if the most violent phase of anti-Semitism came to an end, economic anti-Semitism would continue with the boycotting of Jewish goods and commercial activities.<sup>44</sup> The 1905 move to Perugia impacted on his Zionist endeavours: if on the one hand the Bologna Association began slowly but surely to decline,<sup>45</sup> on the other, another Association was founded. Dessau did not hesitate to strongly support the Zionist cause in Perugia too. In November 1905, he wrote to Ravenna:

I have been around quite a bit in the last few days and I have met many fellow Jews in Perugia; actually I think I have met them all. I am attaching [...] the rather sad fruit of my efforts, along with the list of benefactors and of their offerings [...]. By and large I was well-received (at least as far as their good intentions go, if not for the amount of their contributions) and I think I will take advantage of this situation to try and work in favour of the Zionist cause.<sup>46</sup>

Dessau took the decisive steps towards the institution of a Zionist Group in Perugia at the end of 1905. He kept the President of the FSI constantly informed:

The operation has not ripened yet, but the people with whom I talked welcomed my proposal very warmly. Given the small number of Jews who live here, the Group will not be a very important one, but it is nevertheless a good idea to gather all our forces.<sup>47</sup>

The first and constitutive meeting of the new association took place on 9<sup>th</sup> January 1906, as Dessau explained to Ravenna in a private letter:

I am happy to inform you that [...] the Gruppo Sionistico Perugino was founded at Mr Moisè Servadio's house, after I explained the aims and the means of Zionism, and after a short exchange of ideas; its Provisional Council is composed of Mr Vittorio Ascoli and Mr Policarpo Bemporad. There are about twenty members so far, but more will join

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<sup>44</sup> See Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 21 June 1906, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

<sup>45</sup> On Dessau's important moral contribution to the life of the Bologna Zionist Association, see "Movimento Sionista – Circolo Sionistico Bolognese," in *L'Idea Sionista*, 5/3-4 (1905), 54; Nazario Sauro Onofri, *Ebrei e fascismo a Bologna*, 53-6.

<sup>46</sup> Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 23 November 1905, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

<sup>47</sup> Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 6 December 1905, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

very soon.<sup>48</sup>

As a delegate of the Perugia Group, Dessau took part in the sixth Italian Zionist Conference (Venice 22-23 February 1908), during which he captured the members' attention with his talks on various institutions – financial and of other types – which operated in favour of Zionist colonization in Palestine, and on the possible involvement of new members through the support of those institutions. He made then a rather bizarre proposal; taking inspiration from the religious “Opera dei Rifiuti” institution, he talked about wrapping tinfoil for chocolate sweets: “all families should get their children to collect chocolate tinfoil, which, taken together, can represent a financial contribution albeit a very small one; but this gesture will in the first place get their children into the healthy habit of worrying about others and of helping those who suffer.”<sup>49</sup>

At the end of the Conference, Dessau also took part in the debate about Jewish culture and the proposal that the FSI should directly manage the *Pro Cultura* Committees.<sup>50</sup> He commented on the parallel with the German situation and explained his opposition to this proposal. He explained that independent Jewish associations, noted for their commitment to Hebrew history and literature, had existed for many years, and had been founded so as to find a common ground for attack after the resurfacing of anti-Semitism in Germany. Dessau defined these societies, where Zionism had taken root late, as the link between Zionists and the vast majority of indifferent Jews. Making the *Pro Cultura* into a mere filiation of FSI would risk alienating the anti-Zionist members of the new movement:

Since there are some Zionists among their members, allowing the ‘Pro Cultura’ Committees to stay independent, true Zionism will spread and in the end we will succeed and will see all these cultural associations kept together by Zionism.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 12 January 1906, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem. The news of the creation of the *Gruppo Sionistico Perugino* was also given by *Die Welt*, the official organ of the Zionist movement; see “Aus der Bewegung – Perugia,” in *Die Welt*, February 9, 1906, 17.

<sup>49</sup> Federazione Sionistica Italiana, “Atti del VI Convegno,” 49. Dessau also expressed a very positive opinion of the social and financial help granted by *Bezalel*, while he did not hesitate to criticize another important institution, openly blaming the International Zionist Organization for a serious mistake which had been made in the charter of the *Jewish Colonial Trust*.

<sup>50</sup> The *Pro Cultura* movement, which had the merit of leading Italian Jewry on really innovative paths, was born in mid-1907 in Florence and was connected to the activities of the disciples of the local Rabbinical School. Aldo Sorani, the leading figure, thought that making Italian Jews aware of how little they knew about Jewish culture was the key objective to pursue. On *Pro Cultura* see Toscano, *Ebraismo e antisemitismo in Italia*, 71-89.

<sup>51</sup> Federazione Sionistica Italiana, “Atti del VI Convegno,” 52.

In spite of his commitment to the cause, along with his friend Felice Ravenna, as a representative of Italian Zionism abroad, Dessau began to show signs of dissatisfaction with his presence within the movement as early as the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. This was mainly due to the fact that he was under considerable psychological and physical strain and was suffering from depression, as he would time and again in the years to come; this limited his pro-Zionism activity considerably, so much so that on a specific occasion he was forced to cancel his participation to the International Congress even though he had been elected delegate.<sup>52</sup>

In his attempts to recover from the stress and fatigue of his teaching, Dessau spent many summers in various locations in Engadina; in September 1909, he wrote disheartened to Ravenna: “not even the mountain air can improve the condition of my nervous system. We must resign ourselves to this.”<sup>53</sup> According to Dessau himself, paradoxically writing from the Kurhaus Waldpark of Meran-Obermais (Tirol), there was a marked improvement in his health in late 1912:

I can't complain about the state of my health, and in truth I do feel much better than I have felt in years. [...] being on leave until the end of the month, I thought it was a good idea to satisfy my family's requests and follow my doctor's advice, and they all think I should take advantage of this opportunity to try and get better or heal at least some of the illnesses from which I have been suffering for years.<sup>54</sup>

His determination to continue his work for the Zionist cause impelled him to carry on with this activity for some years more; he took part in the ninth (Hamburg, 26-30 December 1909) and tenth (Basel, 9-15 August 1911) International Congresses. But in 1913 he came to the conclusion that it was better to leave space for the younger generation of Zionists, downplaying, and even over-downplaying, his own Zionist involvement:

I totally agree with you that somebody younger and more capable should take my place.

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<sup>52</sup> In another letter we read that Felice Ravenna was prone to suffering from the same type of illness; see Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 21 June 1906, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

<sup>53</sup> Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 12 September 1909, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 12 (Gruppo Bologna), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem. For further reference to his psychophysical illness, see in Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem, the letters sent by Dessau to Ravenna on 4<sup>th</sup> May 1910, 15<sup>th</sup> July 1910, 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1912, 19<sup>th</sup> October 1912 and 18<sup>th</sup> September 1914.

<sup>54</sup> Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 10 December 1912, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

To tell you the truth, I have never been very useful our cause, except for my unyielding faith in the necessity and in the feasibility of the goals of Zionism. But the reasons for my inactivity are to be found, at least in part, in my isolation and in my lack of physical strength. I do not intend to abandon our movement, not at all; on the contrary [...] I will always remain faithful to it, not as one of its leaders but as a simple soldier. And I really and deeply wish, if fate allows me to spend a part of my life in a Jewish centre, that I might gain energy and stamina from the enlivening contact with my younger Zionists who share my faith.<sup>55</sup>

Although his intentions were very clear, Dessau was appointed Federal Advisor for the fourth consecutive time by the seventh Italian Zionist Conference (Milan, 4<sup>th</sup> May 1913). He did not turn down the assignment, but he did describe himself, with disproportionately impolite words, as “an almost useless, if not harmful, element.”<sup>56</sup>

### The Uganda Scheme

The offer made by the British Colonial Secretary of a portion of British East Africa for the constitution, under the British Protectorate, of a self-administered Jewish colony was the most important issue debated during the sixth Zionist Congress at Basel.<sup>57</sup> In an attempt to re-establish some order in the Congress, it was decided to create the *Committee for the study of the East Africa expedition* to assist with a purely consultative vote the Greater Actions Committee in its examination of the British proposal. Dessau had the honour of being asked to collaborate with the commission, with eight other members (among them Otto Warburg, Chaim Weizmann e Alexander Marmorek).<sup>58</sup> From his privileged position as a participant at the Congress, Dessau described the presentation of

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<sup>55</sup> Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 24 March 1913, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

<sup>56</sup> See Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 27 May 1913, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

<sup>57</sup> The opposition was stiff: on the one hand there were the so called *Territorialists* – Herzl, Nordau and Syrkin among others – and on the other the *Palestinocentrists*, who included Ahad Ha'am and many other Jewish intellectuals from Eastern Europe. For both *Territorialist* Zionism and *Political-Palestinocentric* Zionism, the objective was the creation of a Jewish new homeland, but while *Territorialists* aimed at establishing a Jewish state anywhere, even in a territory which was not necessarily the Land of Israel, *Palestinocentrists* considered Palestine an inalienable choice.

<sup>58</sup> See “Il VI.° Congresso Sionista – I lavori del Congresso,” in *L'Ida Sionista*, 3/9-10 (1903), 112.



the British plan with these words:

There was nobody, among the 600 delegates, who did not feel moved by, and aware of, the historical importance of this moment: but while some of them saw in the English proposal an official recognition of Zionism by a superpower, a moment of light shining in the darkness which had so far engulfed the Jewish people, as well as an important step on the path towards a much longed-for freedom, for others this very same proposal represented a serious violation of the Basel program and an attempt to sacrifice to temporary needs the whole edifice of our imperishable ideals.

[...] Almost nobody paid any attention to the commission, nor did they wonder if the colonization of that specific African area was to be pursued or not.

For all the orators, the issue at stake was this: if a Zionist Congress had any right or obligation to follow a route which was not directly connected with our one and only goal of setting foot in Palestine or at least in its bordering territories, even if only to prepare a better future for our unhappy Russian brothers.<sup>59</sup>

The opinions expressed by the Italian Zionist press on the Uganda vote were mostly denoted by appreciations of the firm position of the Russian delegation. In the 1903 September issue of *Il Corriere Israelitico*,<sup>60</sup> Dessau emphasized how the Russian delegates, in spite of having to address the desperate needs of their Russian fellow Jews, had declared that the return to *Eretz Israel* was the only way to redemption for the Jewish people.<sup>61</sup> For Dessau, the behaviour of this minority, ready to sacrifice itself so as not to compromise a distant ideal, became especially relevant because it was opposed to the idea of Zionism which was spreading among public opinion and which considered it as nothing more than a

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<sup>59</sup> “Il Sionismo nel momento attuale – I. Una lettera,” 6.

<sup>60</sup> *Il Corriere Israelitico* published its first edition in 1862 in Trieste; the editor was Abram Vita Morpurgo. The Trieste journal kept a mainly cultural perspective until the end of the Nineteenth century, when it changed its overall approach; in 1896 it converted to Zionism and brought to its readers' attention the initial developments of the new Jewish movement of national rebirth. *Il Corriere Israelitico* had the merit of being the first Zionist publication in the Italian language. On the history of *Il Corriere Israelitico* in the period before the outbreak of the First World War, see Attilio Milano, “Un secolo di stampa periodica ebraica in Italia,” *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel. Scritti in onore di Dante Lattes*, 12/7-8-9 (1938): 109-13; Massimo Oreste, “Abram Vita Morpurgo da Gorizia e l'esordio dell'esperienza giornalistica del 'Corriere Israelitico' di Trieste,” *Cultura ebraica nel goriziano*, ed. Marco Grusovin, (Udine: Forum, 2007), 184-99; Bruno Di Porto, “‘Il Corriere Israelitico’: uno sguardo d'insieme,” *Materia giudaica. Rivista dell'Associazione Italiana per lo Studio del Giudaismo*, IX/1-2 (2004): 249-62; Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, “La formazione culturale di Dante Lattes,” *Oltre il Ghetto. Momenti della cultura ebraica in Italia tra l'Unità e il fascismo*, eds. David Bidussa, Amos Luzzatto and Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1992), 17-69; Tullia Catalan, “Società e sionismo a Trieste,” 470-1.

<sup>61</sup> See Bernardo Dessau, “Dopo il voto sull'Africa,” in *Il Corriere Israelitico*, 42/5 (1903): 113-4.

socio-economic movement and a mere consequence of the dismal living conditions of Eastern European Jews.<sup>62</sup> Depriving Zionism of its true nature and reducing it to a simple economic battle was risky indeed, because, as he wrote in a letter to Ravenna,

any advance in the living conditions of our Russian brothers, or even a slight improvement in the Russian political situation, could lead us towards dangerous illusions and could weaken the stamina of our movement, which must not abdicate if and when equal rights are granted to Russian Jews.<sup>63</sup>

The minority's behaviour would help to overcome the prejudice, which portrayed Jews as the typical representatives of utilitarian materialism, a feature which, according to Dessau, did not belong to the collective Jewish consciousness. This is part of the speech he gave at the fourth Italian Zionist Conference:

I do not mean to underestimate the importance of the economic factor, but I do firmly believe that such a great enterprise can only derive its strength from ideals. And to those who object by saying that such idealism no longer belongs to our time, I say that, if this is the case, then that very idealism must be reawaken, because without it our movement would be doomed. But luckily this is not our case. Indeed, this idealism was never extinguished among Jews even amid the most terrible of persecutions, and this is why I believe in the future of Zionism, since Zionism has always been capable of absorbing our oppressed brothers' latent energies.<sup>64</sup>

As for the Uganda plan, Dessau did not think that the British Government's proposal would weaken the Zionist ideal, since he thought that the Jews emigrating to Africa would be the masses who were trying to reach the big cities of North America in search of better living conditions and not the Jews who considered Zion their ideal goal:

In those big cities, where the battle for life and survival takes place in a nation endowed with enormous assimilating potential, those emigrants will no doubt be lost to the Zionist cause; [...] we do hope that those Russian and Rumanian Jews who will decide to emigrate to that area of British East Africa, [...] where they will be able to live according to their customs and to speak their own language, [...] will not forget the Zionist ideal for which many of their less fortunate brothers will have to continue

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<sup>62</sup> See Federazione Sionistica Italiana, "Comunicazioni Ufficiali – I. Atti del IV Convegno," 43.

<sup>63</sup> See Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 3 October 1905, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

<sup>64</sup> Federazione Sionistica Italiana, "Comunicazioni Ufficiali – I. Atti del IV Convegno," 43-4.

fighting.<sup>65</sup>

As for the possible diplomatic repercussions deriving from the British proposal, he saw positive consequences even in case of new negotiations with the Ottoman Empire for the concession of territory in Palestine. He asserted: “it would not be surprising if the Sultan, who refused a population disregarded by all nations from entering his own land, now allowed it in after seeing England welcoming it with open arms!”<sup>66</sup>

A variety of opinions and positions developed in Italy on the planned Jewish colonization of East Africa. *L’Idea Sionista* stressed the great historical importance of the British offer, trusting that the sixth Congress would mark the beginning of a new phase for Zionism. It saw Herzl’s policy as a fundamental step forward for the Zionist cause, because, in the constant struggle between the real and the ideal, a practical measure seemed finally to prevail:

We do indeed believe,” stated *L’Idea*, “that one day the Zionist program formulated by the first Basel Congress will be realized and to this aim we will no doubt invest our modest time and energy. But since there is now an opportunity for a faster and safer solution to the Jewish question, we embrace it without hesitation, having only the good of the Jewish proletariat at heart.”<sup>67</sup>

As *L’Idea Sionista* was a highly respected journal, the President of the FSI felt obliged to respond. Ravenna could not accept the idea that the speech given at the Congress might be interpreted as a relinquishing of the classic Zionist ideal and a modification of the Basel program: “Today, as ever, Jerusalem is, for those of us who have a nation, the symbol of our social and moral renewal; but for all of the Eastern Jews, from the fiercest anti-africanist to the strongest new-colony enthusiast, Jerusalem is the real hoped-for destination, the dream which cannot die, which will never die!”<sup>68</sup> *L’Idea Sionista* agreed with Ravenna that none of the delegates who had voted in favour of the British proposal intended to explicitly distance themselves from the Basel program; but it also specified how the Zionist movement was at last pursuing “that *realpolitik* which up to then had existed only on paper. The colonization of the Holy Land no longer represents an objective which prevents the realization of our program; now the objective is once again that which has always been at the core of our program:

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<sup>65</sup> Bernardo Dessau, “Dopo il voto,” 114.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>67</sup> D., “Il VI.° Congresso Sionista – Le nostre impressioni,” *L’Idea Sionista*, 3/9-10 (1903), 114.

<sup>68</sup> Felice Ravenna, “Attorno al congresso di Basilea – Impressioni e critiche,” *L’Idea Sionista*, 3/11 (1903), 126.

that is to save the Jewish proletariat.”<sup>69</sup>

These words, published by the journal that gave voice to the feelings of the majority of Italian Zionists, show very clearly how in Italy it was the philanthropic element of Western Zionism which had prevailed. The commitment to the pure ideal of Zion was sacrificed in an attempt to find immediate help for the persecuted Jews of Eastern Europe.

During a conference on “Zionism after the sixth Basel Congress,” held at the Bologna Zionist Association on 27<sup>th</sup> December 1903, Dessau stated that the emergence of differing opinions about the implementation of the Zionist program was the natural consequence of the increased number of members. Far from seeing these divergences as the symptom of a crisis or even of a near dissolution of the movement, he viewed them as a sign of vitality: “each one of us works with his own strength and with his own intelligence towards the fulfilment of a shared common ideal. [...] the fire of the love we feel for our oppressed people burns in all of us, and we are all firmly determined to secure a better future for them.”<sup>70</sup>

The resolutions adopted by the seventh International Congress led to the rejection of the Uganda plan and stated that the organization, by limiting the foundation of a *Heimstätte* to Palestine and to its adjacent lands, stood firmly by the fundamental principle of the Basel program.<sup>71</sup> In this regard, Dessau wrote in the August issue of *Il Corriere Israelitico*:

today, when the conquest of our land is still a long way off, when we cannot even behold it from afar, as Moses did when he was about to die, it is only natural, or rather it was an imperative, that the majority of Zionists endeavoured to protect our program and to keep safe those precious ideals which have guided us so far.

I have no doubt that these were the principles which inspired many of those (myself included) who, after voting with the majority in the Sixth Congress, now chose to vote otherwise.<sup>72</sup>

He also rejected the charge against the Congress majority of having betrayed the

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<sup>69</sup> See the reply to Felice Ravenna’s article: “Attorno al congresso di Basilea – Impressioni e critiche,” *L’Idea Sionista*, 3/11 (1903): 126.

<sup>70</sup> “Il Sionismo nel momento attuale – I. Una lettera,” 4.

<sup>71</sup> This is the moment when what Shemuel N. Eisenstadt called “the sanctification of political activity as an end to itself” weakened, to be later substituted by a pragmatic type of Zionism, which opted for more practical solutions such as the gradual acquisition of land and a faster form of colonization; see Shemuel N. Eisenstadt, *Civiltà ebraica. L’esperienza storica degli Ebrei in una prospettiva comparativa*, (Roma: Donzelli, 1996), 178.

<sup>72</sup> Bernardo Dessau, “Il Congresso di Basilea. Impressioni e considerazioni,” in *Il Corriere Israelitico*, 44/4 (1905), 98-9.

interests of the Jewish people, but he was unsure as to the consequences of such resolutions. A few months later he wondered: "It remains now to be seen [...] if the abandonment of any action outside Palestine and its adjacent lands will turn out to be too high a price for the commitment to our original program and for the unity of the party."<sup>73</sup>

### The Controversy between Territorialists and Palestinocentrists

After the resolution of the Seventh International Congress, Italian Zionism went through a period of crisis, fuelled also by the on-going quarrel between *L'Idea Sionista* and *Il Corriere Israelitico*. Dessau blamed this controversy, which dominated the FSI's activity, for the slowing down of Zionist propaganda in Italy. He expected that the accommodating speeches which closed the fifth Conference in Rome would open a new phase for Italian Zionism, but this did not happen, as the movement progressively moved towards what Dessau saw as a sort of peaceful inertia. In June 1906 he wrote to Ravenna: "You say, it is true, that some things are not possible here, but if make an exception every time a more active form of commitment becomes necessary, then Italian Zionism will develop into a special case, and not a positive one, when compared to the situation in other countries."<sup>74</sup>

The dissatisfaction with the resolution of the International Congress led many members to resign from the movement. Dessau spoke very clearly about this: "it is a duty of every Italian Zionist, and of every Zionist at large, to support and obey the decisions taken by the seventh Congress. Let us hope that those ill-judged, post 30<sup>th</sup> July resignations will be withdrawn."<sup>75</sup> But the aspirations of that part of Italian Zionism which saw the movement as inspired by a sentiment of "human fraternity" and not by political nationalism were disappointed by the resolutions of the Federal Council: the choice was not to openly oppose the World Zionist Organization. "As befitting disciplined soldiers" (Ravenna's words),<sup>76</sup> the FSI remained faithful to the tradition of following the interpretation of the Basel program given by the Congress, the most important official body of Zionism.

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<sup>73</sup> Bernardo Dessau, "Lo svolgimento dell'attività sionistica in Italia durante l'ultimo biennio," *L'Idea Sionista*, 6/3 (1906), 41.

<sup>74</sup> Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 18 June 1906, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

<sup>75</sup> Bernardo Dessau, "Lo svolgimento dell'attività sionistica in Italia," 42.

<sup>76</sup> See Circular of the FSI – protocol number 35/1905, 20 November 1905, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 51, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

Partly taking on board the exhortations of some important representatives of the movement – among them Carlo Levi and Amedeo Donati – who saw in the Basel resolution a possible obstacle to the development of Italian Zionism, the President of FSI gave an interview to *Il Giornale d'Italia*, in an attempt to clarify the situation. Dessau partly disagreed with its contents, as he explained to Ravenna during his summer holiday in Oberstaufen im Allgäu:

In truth I believe that in order to object to the charge against Zionists of being anti-patriotic, you depict Italian Zionism as a reflex movement, energized only by solidarity and without the concurrence of a Jewish national feeling. This clearly emerges from the distinction you make between those countries where 'Zionism takes the form of political nationalism' and those in which Zionism is only 'the expression of a due solidarity for our Eastern brothers'... Now, even if this belief is, unfortunately, held by the majority of Italian Zionists, it is not a true Zionism, nor does it correspond with what we recently voted in Basel.<sup>77</sup>

Dessau adopted a very clear position in the Italian Zionist debate between Territorialist and Palestinocentrist positions and their possible coexistence. He was convinced that each Zionist had the right to sympathise with Israel Zangwill's cause, but preemptorily ruled out the possibility of taking active part in the *Jewish Territorial Organization*. At the fifth Italian Zionist Conference he said: "we must not forget that each single good Zionist's energy and actions must belong in the first place to our movement, which seeks primarily to find a stable and long-term solution for the Jewish problem."<sup>78</sup> He had initially supported Zangwill's association because he agreed with its aim to found an administratively autonomous settlement. When it became clear that this autonomy was not contemplated in the Galveston Plan for the colonization of Texas, Dessau gave voice to his disapproval in a letter which he wrote to Ravenna in January 1907: "In my opinion, Zangwill is sacrificing our highest long-term goals for present-day needs."<sup>79</sup>

In a propaganda lecture given in Venice (14<sup>th</sup> April 1907) and released for promotional purposes,<sup>80</sup> [Fig. 3] Dessau was even more explicit about his belief that it was impossible to solve the Jewish question through emigration to

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<sup>77</sup> Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 13 August 1905, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

<sup>78</sup> Bernardo Dessau, "Lo svolgimento dell'attività sionistica in Italia," 42.

<sup>79</sup> Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 24 January 1907, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

<sup>80</sup> See Circular of the FSI – protocol number 48/1907, 28 November 1907, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 53, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

America: “It is imperative [...] that Jews can call a part of the land on this planet their own, a place where they can take refuge without fear of being exploited or mistreated; it is also imperative that they can enjoy if not complete independence at least very significant local autonomy.”<sup>81</sup> There is a passage in this pamphlet, which angered some important representatives of Italian Zionism who did not interpret the guiding principles of Zionism as Dessau did and possibly overestimated the import of his words. The incriminating passage reads: “In spite of appearances, it is not uncommon for backward civilizations and erroneous economic criteria to allow anti-Semitic groups to form in places where large groups of Jews gather among European populations.”<sup>82</sup> In a letter to Ravenna, the then *L’Idea Sionista* editor Carlo Levi expressed his disagreement in strong terms:

even allowing for mitigating factors [...] the unacceptable statement that a co-existence of large Jewish groups among European populations is fatally impossible without anti-Semitic persecution, Dessau leads inevitably to the conclusion that Jews must emigrate to a land of their own and cannot live among other people. This is not only contrary to what I believe – which would not in itself count for much more than a personal objection – but it is also contrary to our newspaper’s policy and to current socio-scientific trends.<sup>83</sup>

Benvenuto Donati, who openly sympathized with the Territorialist cause, reacted in a similar way:

The author legitimizes the movement, using, as a point of departure, the assumption that anti-Semitism is a universal phenomenon and the belief in a Jewish national unity which aspires to an autonomous existence in a homeland of its own. He also legitimizes the pro-Palestine position referring to specific international political conditions which would make the implementation of a Jewish settlement possible. I do believe this is not admissible, nor is it well-founded.<sup>84</sup>

These passages help us to understand the wide variation in the perception of European political anti-Semitism in Italy between the end of the Nineteenth and the beginning of the Twentieth century. If on the one hand the Italian

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<sup>81</sup> Bernardo Dessau, *Il primo decennio del movimento sionista*, (Modena: Tip. G. Ferraguti e C., 1907), 15.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>83</sup> Carlo Levi to Felice Ravenna, 14 August 1907, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 38 (Prof. Carlo Levi, Modena), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

<sup>84</sup> Benvenuto Donati to Felice Ravenna, 7 August 1907, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 31 (Prof. Benvenuto Donati, Modena), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

population was affected only by sporadic episodes of anti-Semitism, which encouraged the belief that they living in a very particular historical moment, on the other there were those who understood from the very beginning how dangerous this new wave of intolerance would be if it reached Italy.<sup>85</sup>

### Dessau's Collaboration with *L'Idea Sionista*

In the first decade of the twentieth century, Dessau collaborated with *L'Idea Sionista*. In 1905 his wife Emma drew a colour front cover for it. Following a widespread disappointment with the position taken by the paper – edited at that time by Carlo Levi – in the debate between Territorialists and Palestinocentrists, he tried, along with Felice Ravenna and Angelo Sullam, to change its stance by forming a united and cohesive editorial staff that would function as board of directors.<sup>86</sup>

If the monthly paper did not change, it would run a great risk of being disavowed by the most convinced section of Zionists, and this in turn would result in a loss of authority. Dessau thought that the small number of Committee members and the fact that they all shared the same idea on what Zionism meant were two essential conditions for the success of the project:

I can easily conceive of editing the journal with Sullam because, although we have very different ideas on many issues, and some of them quite important, we could easily agree on the line to follow; besides whoever of us edited the journal would unquestionably feel not only the duty but also the need to consult the other, if and when an uncertainty on what to do next emerged. But I do not even know some of the names that have been put forward. Nor do I really know why Prof. Levi wants to continue to be editor. I can only conclude that he wants to continue to advocate those very opinions that we feel no longer have anything to do with Zionism.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> On the specific situation of Italian Jewry at the beginning of the twentieth century, on its relative disinterest – if compared to other nations – for political anti-Semitism and on its understanding of European anti-Semitic phenomena, see Tullia Catalan, “Le reazioni dell’ebraismo italiano all’antisemitismo europeo (1880-1914),” *Les racines chrétiennes de l’antisémitisme politique (fin XIX<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, eds. Catherine Brice and Giovanni Miccoli, (Roma: École Française de Rome, 2003), 137-62.

<sup>86</sup> See Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 3 October 1905, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

<sup>87</sup> Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 10 December 1905, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.



Dessau blamed Amedeo Donati and Carlo Levi for the situation in which *L'Idea Sionista* found itself.<sup>88</sup> With the passing of time, and especially after it became clear that Sullam would not be able to cooperate with and financially support the journal, Dessau became convinced that the plan to reposition *L'Idea Sionista* had failed and that he could do little more other than effectively support the current editors.<sup>89</sup>

After the attempts to renew the editorial line had come to nothing, the journal continued on its well-beaten track and opted to support a philanthropic version of Zionism, under the guidance of its most influential editors, Carlo Levi and the Donati brothers. This clearly emerges from some opinions expressed by Dessau on the territorialist sympathies of the journal. In September 1907 he wrote to Ravenna:

I do appreciate your kindness to the Donati brothers, but I do not think we should limit ourselves to mitigate the territorialist or humanitarian tendencies of the editors, nor to fight the bad influence that the journal is no doubt exercising in its present form.<sup>90</sup>

Dessau even considered proposing at the next Italian Zionist Conference<sup>91</sup> that *L'Idea Sionista* should not receive the official FSI press releases and that it should no longer be given any form of financial sponsorship. What he could not accept was its uncertain and wavering positions, which kept changing from issue to issue: “We need an official publication capable of forming and guiding public opinion.”<sup>92</sup> In spite of his efforts, Dessau could do little but watch helplessly as *L'Idea Sionista* gradually collapsed.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> See Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 8 July 1906, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

<sup>89</sup> See Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 8 November 1906, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

<sup>90</sup> Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 8 September 1907, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

<sup>91</sup> During the sixth Italian Zionist Conference (Venice, 22-23 February 1908) the line followed by the journal was the subject of a very heated debate, which had been somehow pre-announced before the Conference by the verbal brawl which took place between Edgardo Morpurgo and the editorial board.

<sup>92</sup> Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 21 October 1907, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

<sup>93</sup> See Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 4 May 1910, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

## War Conflicts, the Ottoman Empire and the Prospects of Zionism

The situation of the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the 1910s led Dessau to consider the opportunities that the political earthquake that had hit the territories of European Turkey might offer to Zionism. In his view, the period of serious internal crisis would make it necessary for the Turkish State to reach an “agreement among its different nationalities.”<sup>94</sup> He believed that the loss of the European territories – where the majority of the population was Christian and therefore not easy to integrate into the Ottoman Empire – did not represent a serious loss for Turkey and so he could postulate the rebirth of the Turkish State as resulting from a large Jewish immigration. In December 1912 he wrote to Ravenna:

The real resources of the Turkish State lie in Asia and they would be more than enough to give those countries a wonderful future, provided one finds somebody capable of awakening those energies and putting them to work. But who should be in charge of this mission? Certainly not the Young Turks, who are responsible for their country’s dire situation and who have proved themselves incapable of real progress. Nor would it be possible to contemplate an intervention by European Christians, whom Muslims no doubt deeply hate, and will continue to hate for a long time. Who could then inculcate in the old empire those elements of Western culture without which any type of productive existence is impossible? Is it not logical and natural to think of the Jews, against whom Turks surely do not feel any racial antagonism and who already own European culture, and if they do not, they certainly are extremely suitable to absorb it? [...] We Jews should become for the Turks a vehicle towards progress and towards modern civilization, while that affinity existing between us and the oriental people would eliminate that antagonism which makes our existence unsustainable among the nations of Europe.<sup>95</sup>

Dessau had no illusions about how hard it would be to convince the Turkish State’s future ruling class about the benefits of collaborating with the Jews; and this, in the first place was because he believed that the World Zionist Organization lacked diplomats sufficiently skilled to attain such a goal. Given the situation, in his view it was of paramount importance that the Jews who were long settled in the Ottoman Empire kept to a “firmly Jewish-nationalist” stance. He wrote to Ravenna: “this is the most unclear issue for me, given that a part of

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<sup>94</sup> See Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 21 April 1913, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

<sup>95</sup> Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 10 December 1912, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

our fellow Jews in Turkey are also of that conviction (which, alas, is widespread in Italy too); they like to come across as patriots by denying any historical right for our race.”<sup>96</sup>

At the outbreak of the First World War, during the Italian neutrality of 1914-1915, Dessau’s pro-German declarations were indeed ardent, especially if one keeps in mind how cautious the initial reactions of Italian Zionism to international events had been. Aware of the atrocities of the conflict and reflecting on their possible implications for the Jewish question, in September 1914 Dessau was displeased to see that Italy was bracing itself for war – in an attempt to defend a neutrality which was under no threat at all – and to realize that in Italy the prevailing idea was to go to war against Austria. What especially troubled him was the fact that such a choice would indirectly help Russia. He believed that a possible Russian victory would worsen the conditions of those populations under Russian control; among them, of course, were the Jews, who had been searching for their own emancipation for such a long time. He wrote to Ravenna:

My heart sinks when I think about this terrible possibility. We should therefore get our act together and talk to friends and acquaintances, Jews and non-Jews, to show that Italy would be guilty of a crime against humanity and civilization if it renounced its neutrality and went to war against Austria and Germany. And, above all, we should become active in the newspapers. [...] I am sure that many of those who are now ready to go to war against Austria would change their mind once they realized the consequences of a Russian victory.<sup>97</sup>

Dessau hoped Ravenna would agree with him on this issue in such a tragic historical moment, as he had always done in the past when the fate of the people of Israel was at stake. But this was not to be, as this time the President of FSI was not at all happy to read Dessau’s words. Their disagreement was for Ravenna a painful episode, since for more than a decade he had appreciated and admired the well-balanced opinions of his good friend. His non-Italian origins had allowed Dessau to assess with great precision the differences between Italy’s relationship with Jews and that of other countries: “I have wondered, and I am still wondering, who is wrong and who is right today” wrote Ravenna. Unlike Dessau, Ravenna was convinced that a Russian victory would not bring about the exacerbation which Dessau feared for two main reasons: first, it would not be easy to celebrate a victorious end to the conflict with more violence; and

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<sup>96</sup> Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 21 April 1913, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

<sup>97</sup> Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 9 September 1914, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

secondly, the presence of England – a country which had always honoured democracy and its highest principles – was not to be underestimated.<sup>98</sup>

Dessau appreciated Ravenna's honesty, which he viewed as a sign of a friendship, but was sorry to see that their assessments of the causes of World War I and of the unhappy situation in which the Jewish population now found itself were very different. Where Dessau and Ravenna disagreed most was in the evaluation of possible British initiatives in favour of the Jews. Dessau was not very hopeful in this regard:

Britain declared war against Germany not because it was moved by a moral obligation to defend the violated neutrality of Belgium, but because it was jealous of Germany's growing economic power.

He nevertheless specified that his letter expressed no desire whatsoever to see Italy enter into war in alliance with its old allies and insisted that he wanted to draw Ravenna's attention to a very relevant issue which should push Italy to remain neutral.<sup>99</sup> It must be said that both Ravenna and Dessau, although with different and even contrary visions, were both convinced that Italy should remain neutral.

## Conclusion

Although he was completely aware of the fact that the majority of Italian Jews had lost the perception of the existence of a Jewish nationality, Dessau fully recognized the political essence of the Zionist movement and was a convinced supporter of the fact that Zionism's final goal was national reconstitution. Of course he did not expect each single Zionist to make an explicit declaration of univocal belonging to the Jewish nation, he nevertheless hoped that the Jewish national ideal and Italian patriotism could enjoy the same type of dignity and degree of participation.

He was convinced that the abandonment of non-religious traditions was an illogic mistake and this also explains why his efforts and his commitment to intensify the bonds between Italian Jews and other diaspora groups through the reconfirmation of the idea of a Jewish ethnic group and the drive to take possession once again of Jewish traditions never weakened.

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<sup>98</sup> See Felice Ravenna to Bernardo Dessau, 13 September 1914, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

<sup>99</sup> See Bernardo Dessau to Felice Ravenna, 18 September 1914, Felice Ravenna Papers (A353), file 29 (Prof. Bernardo Dessau), Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

Dessau was always ready to refute wrong assumptions and prepared to discuss the main Zionist theories thanks to his deep and direct knowledge of German sources and to his contacts with celebrated Zionists such as Otto Warburg and Chaim Weizmann.

His disappointment with the positions adopted by *L'Idea Sionista*, a journal which, through the years, expressed clear philanthropic and territorialist tendencies, is evidence to the fact that he was an independent personality, removed from the ambiguities and uncertainties which were instead typical of the vast majority of Italian Zionists whenever they had to clearly define the meaning and substance of "Zionism."

Dessau advocated Zionism as a national movement of moral and cultural rebirth and his strong commitment to this cause makes him into one of the most important representatives in Italy of a renewed Jewish dynamism, along with Felice Ravenna, Gino Arias, Dante Lattes and Alfonso Pacifici.

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**Practices of Cultural Nationalism.  
Alfonso Pacifici and the Jewish Renaissance in Italy (1910-1916)**

*by Sara Airoidi*



*Alfonso Pacifici (1889-1983)*

**Abstract**

*This essay focuses on Alfonso Pacifici, leader at the forefront of the Jewish cultural revival movement in Italy in the first decades of the XX century. His figure and his philosophy represent a privileged focus through which it is*

*possible to identify and follow the evolution of various intertwined aspects of the Jewish experience in post-emancipated Italy, such as: the elaboration of the Kulturdebatte within Italian Zionism; the development of a form of Jewish nationalism, as well as the dilemmas and the complicated dynamics that shaped the national identity of Italian Jews, torn between their allegiance as Jews and as Italians.*

- Introduction
- Jewish Florence and the Spirit of Renaissance
- Defining the Essence of Judaism
- The Season of the Conventions and the Development of a Cultural Strategy
- Which Homeland for the Jews?
- The Challenge of WWI. Between Civism and Jewish Nationalism
- Conclusion

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## Introduction

In the broad panorama of ways in which Italian Jews shaped their identity after emancipation, Alfonso Pacifici played an exceptional role.<sup>1</sup> He was among those

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<sup>1</sup> Historiography on the subject is extensive. For decades, it converged in affirming that the process of Jewish integration into Italian society was anything but linear and immediate. An overview on the issue is found in the collection of essays *Stato nazionale ed emancipazione ebraica* eds. Francesca Sofia and Mario Toscano (Rome: Bonacci, 1992). See also Mario Toscano, “L’uguaglianza senza diversità. Stato, società e questione ebraica nell’Italia liberale,” in *Storia contemporanea* 5 (1994): 685-712; ID., *Integrazione e identità. L’esperienza ebraica in Germania e in Italia dall’Illuminismo al fascismo* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2003); Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, “Italian Jews,” in *The Emancipation of Catholics, Jews and Protestants. Minorities and the Nation State in Nineteenth-century Europe* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), 169-187; Anna Foa, “Il mito dell’assimilazione. La storiografia sull’emancipazione ebraica negli ultimi vent’anni,” in *Ebrei e nazione. Comportamenti e rappresentazioni nell’età dell’emancipazione*, special issue of *Storia e problemi contemporanei* 20/45 (2007): 17-30. More recent works are those of Elizabeth Schächter, *The Jews of Italy. 1848-1915. Between Tradition and Transformation* (London and Portland: Valentine Mitchell, 2011) and of Cristina M. Bettin, *Italian Jews from Emancipation to the Racial Laws* (New York: Palgrave Mac Millan, 2010). The experience of Italian Jewry should be examined in a broad context and perspective, taking into account, at the background, the intricate, dialectical process of reshaping the Jewish identity in modernity and placing it in the wider frame of Western European Jewry. Recent works on such topics are those of David N. Myers, Massimo Ciavolella, Peter H. Riell and Geoffrey Symcox, *Acculturation and its Discontents. The Italian Jewish Experience between Exclusion and*

third-generation-Jews who responded to the encounter with modernity by undertaking Zionism as the path to rediscover and regain a Jewish allegiance<sup>2</sup>; only a minority embraced that option in Italy. In the period before WWI, two main Zionist strands stood out in the peninsula: *philanthropical*, embodied by the “Federazione Sionistica Italiana” (FSI), for whom the national project regarded the persecuted Jews of Eastern Europe and *political*, represented mainly by Zionist groups from Trieste and Florence, who believed in Zionism as a modern form of nationalism, pursuing simultaneously both cultural and territorial objectives.<sup>3</sup>

Pacifici’s view resided mainly in the latter trend; however, what made him peculiar within Italian Jewry was the endorsement of a hybrid form of identity that, despite several differences, owed significant influence to the world of Eastern European orthodoxy. That such a borderline soul, an *Ostjuden*, turned up at the heart of Western Jewry has hitherto received little attention.<sup>4</sup> This essay will focus on the dawn and on the very beginning of his experience, tackling it in

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*Inclusion* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008); David N. Myers, “‘The blessing of assimilation’ Reconsidered. An Inquiry into Jewish Cultural Studies,” in *From Ghetto to Emancipation. Historical and Contemporary Reconsiderations of the Jewish Community* (Scranton: Scranton University Press, 1997), 17-36; Michael A. Meyer, *Judaism within Modernity. Essays on Jewish History and Religion* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> The generational differentiation in relation with Italian Jewry is discussed in David Bidussa, *Il sionismo politico* (Milan: Unicopli, 1999), 19.

<sup>3</sup> On Italian Zionism before WWI I mention only Alberto Cavaglioni, “Tendenze nazionali e albori sionistici,” in *Storia d’Italia. Gli ebrei in Italia*, vol. 2 (Turin: Einaudi 1997), 1291-1320; Simonetta Della Seta, “Il movimento sionistico,” in *ibid.*, 1323-32; Francesco Del Canuto, *Il movimento sionistico in Italia dalle origini al 1924* (Milan: FSI, 1972); Schächter, *The Jews of Italy*, 152-224; Mario Toscano, “Ebrasimo, sionismo, società. Il caso italiano,” in *Stato nazionale ed emancipazione ebraica*, 397-420; Carlotta Ferrara degli Uberti, *Fare gli ebrei italiani. Autorappresentazioni di una minoranza* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011), 204-23.

<sup>4</sup> See Cecil Roth and Alfredo M. Rabello, “Pacifici Alfonso,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 15 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference Usa, 2007), 563-64; Angelo M. Piattelli, “Pacifici Alfonso,” “Repertorio biografico dei rabbini d’Italia dal 1861 al 2011,” in *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 76/1-2 (2010): 184-256, 225-226. More elaborated essays, that focused mainly on Pacifici’s thought are those of David Bidussa, “Tra avanguardia e rivolta. Il sionismo in Italia nel primo quarto del Novecento,” in *Oltre il ghetto. Momenti e figure della cultura ebraica italiana tra l’Unità e il fascismo* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1992), 155-279, 195-213; Maurizio Molinari, *Ebrei in Italia: un problema di identità. 1848-1938* (Florence: Giuntina, 1991), 46-9; Yoseph Colombo, “Alfonso Pacifici ha ottant’anni,” in *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 35/6 (1969): 233-234; Alessandro Roifer, “Diversità ideologiche nel sionismo italiano: Cassuto, Pacifici, Artom, Sciacky,” in *HaZman VeHaRaion* 1-2 (2012): 4; Angelo Piattelli, “Alfonso Pacifici e il giornale ‘Israel’ edizione di Gerusalemme (1935-1941),” in *Segulat Israel* 9 (2012): 73-92.



its ideological and historical interplays as it developed between 1910 and 1916.

This focus, moreover, will particularly address broader questions concerning the Jewish experience in Italy in the first decades of the twentieth century, in particular the discourse and the practice of the Jewish cultural revival; the dynamics of Jewish communal life; the development of Zionism, and the process of shaping the Jewish identity.

All those aspects coalesced in Pacifici's experience under the heading of "culture", that he dichotomously intended as a category of discourse and of practice.<sup>5</sup> For him, "Culture" represented the essential bearer of Jewish identity, and consequently he made it a central element in his campaign. On the other hand, "culture" was also a matter of concrete action to which he devoted his entire apostolate; in his view, therefore, Jews should be concentrating all their efforts in a renewal of their heritage.

### **Jewish Florence and the Spirit of Renaissance**

In the geography of Jewish Italy at the beginning of the XX century, Florence emerged by all manner of means as the cradle of the Jewish cultural renaissance.<sup>6</sup> The figurehead of that movement was the chief rabbi of the city, the Polish Galician Shmuel Zvi Margulies who, in 1899, moved the rabbinical college from Rome to Florence, transforming it in the crucible of a new generation of young Jews engaged in the spirit of the Jewish renewal.<sup>7</sup>

Together with another Galician rabbi, Zvi Peres Chajes,<sup>8</sup> Margulies spread a bit of the Jewish fervor hailing from his motherland into the Florentine milieu. His

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<sup>5</sup> I take this categorization and this definition from Brubaker's approach in the study of nationalism, especially from Roger Brubaker, "Rethinking nationhood. Nation as institutional form, practical category, contingent event," in *Contention* 1 (1994): 3-14.

<sup>6</sup> Del Canuto, *Il movimento sionistico*, 56-57; Mario Toscano, *Ebraismo e antisemitismo in Italia. Dal 1848 alla guerra dei sei giorni* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2003), 73; Massimo Longo Adorno, *Gli ebrei fiorentini dall'emancipazione alla Shoah* (Florence: Giuntina, 2003), 9-16.

<sup>7</sup> "Nel I anniversario della morte di rav S. Z. Margulies," *Israel*, March 1, 1923, 3-4; Schächter, *The Jews of Italy*, 173-76, 206-08.

<sup>8</sup> A new interesting overview of Hirsch's philosophy is given by Ephraim Chamiel, *The middle way. The emergence of modern religious trends in Nineteenth century Judaism. Responses to modernity in the philosophy of Z. H. Cahjes, S. R. Hirsch and S. D. Luzzatto*, 2. voll. (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2014)

actions concentrated principally on two groups: politically oriented Zionists, (he supported the birth of the local Zionist group that emerged for its marked nationalistic stance<sup>9</sup>) and cultural Jews, crowned in 1904 with the establishment of the journal *La Rivista Israelitica* [The Jewish Review] that, until 1915, divulged scientific studies in the field of Jewish studies, paying particular attention to the Italian repertoire.<sup>10</sup>

In 1907, that lively climate gave birth to the “Pro Cultura”, a movement that sought to shape the Jewish cultural revival through a systematic and institutionalized work of cultural promotion whose meaning, however, went far beyond re-acculturation.<sup>11</sup> As the programmatic discourse delivered by Aldo Sorani clarified, the development of Zionism had proved that Jews were searching for a “homeland” and the only “written homeland of the Jewish people [...] is the Bible.”<sup>12</sup> The national aspect was thus entangled and ingrained in the cultural sphere: the Text, and extensively culture and customs, constituted the source of Jewish national identity, from which, it followed, that only the full possession of those elements could secure a future as a nation among other nations for the Jews.

The accomplishment of that task was attributed to the youth who, fighting “with all the enthusiasm of their young heart against the pseudo-culture and religious fiction” of the older assimilated generation, could lead the Jews simultaneously back to tradition and forward to their national future.<sup>13</sup>

In that way, Italy entered the movement of European Zionism, rooted in the *Kulturdebatte* as its cornerstone, according to which “culture” was to serve the double function of (re)edifying Jewishness in modernity and of (re)building the Jewish national identity. Education and nationalization were therefore indissolubly entwined. However, if in Western and Eastern European Zionism that led frequently to the fracture between *Kulturisten* and Orthodox (which perceived the effort of founding a modern national culture as an improper threat of secularization) in the peninsula the situation was more nuanced and

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<sup>9</sup> Schächter, *The Jews of Italy*, 178-80.

<sup>10</sup> Attilio Milano, “Un secolo di stampa periodica ebraica in Italia,” in *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 12/7-9 (1938): 96-136, 116-18

<sup>11</sup> Attilio Milano, “Gli enti culturali ebraici in Italia nell’ultimo trentennio. 1907-1937,” in *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 12/6 (1938): 253-69, 254-55.

<sup>12</sup> “Il valore della cultura,” in *Il Corriere Israelitico*, July 31, 1907, 67.

<sup>13</sup> “Il valore della cultura,” in *Il Corriere Israelitico*, June 30, 1907, 38-9.

problematic, and not simply due to the absence of Orthodoxy.<sup>14</sup> Italian Jewry, in fact, had passed through emancipation without reform, avoiding in that way the split between the “religious” and the “national” aspect of Judaism. Therefore, the restoration of tradition and the acceptance of Zionism as a national movement easily cohabitated, as “culture” contained a possible ground of encounter and synthesis.<sup>15</sup>

## Defining the Essence of Judaism

Alfonso Pacifici’s figure and commitment emerged in that fervent climate. He was born in 1889, in a Florentine Jewish family modestly inserted in the circuit of the local community, meaning that since childhood, he had been familiar with rav Margulies.<sup>16</sup> He described the approach to Jewish nationalism in terms of a “revelation” that manifested itself to him at the age of eighteen, in June of 1907, during a philosophy lesson on the subject of “nation [...] and the necessary elements for its existence, among which the territory.” As he explained, he intervened in the discussion emphasizing that:

the definition of a nation given by the teacher couldn’t be completely exact, inasmuch there was at least an exception to the rule he posed: that of the Jewish people, which is of course a nation, which demonstrated the capacity to survive also without a territory.<sup>17</sup>

Beyond that symbolic moment, at the end of the first decade of the XX century Pacifici acceded formally to Margulies’s circuit and became his favorite disciple.<sup>18</sup> He soon emerged as the most active participant of the cultural debate that filled

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Berkowitz, *Zionist culture and West European Jewry before the First world war* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 77-98; Ehud Luz, *Parallels meet: religion and nationalism in the early Zionist movement 1882-1904* (Philadelphia: Jewish publication society, 1988).

<sup>15</sup> Alberto Cavaglion, “Qualche riflessione sulla ‘mancata Riforma,’” in *Integrazione e identità. L’esperienza ebraica in Germania e in Italia dall’Illuminismo al fascismo* (Milano: Franco Angeli 1998), 152-66; Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, “Cenni storici per una ricostruzione del dibattito sulla riforma religiosa nell’Italia ebraica,” in *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 1-2 (1993): 167-85.

<sup>16</sup> Alfonso Pacifici, “Ha-rav Margulies,” in *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 28 (1962): 251-61.

<sup>17</sup> Alfonso Pacifici, *La nostra sintesi-programma. Volume I di Israel Segullà* (Gerusalemme: Taoz, 1955), 76.

<sup>18</sup> We understand the kind of relationship from the epistolary exchanges in Alfonso Pacifici Papers, file 172/132, The Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People of Jerusalem [hereafter CAHJP].

the pages of the weekly *La Settimana Israelitica* [The Jewish Weekly] launched on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1910 by Margulies to serve as an arena for the Jewish Italian *Kulturdebatte*.<sup>19</sup>

Under such influences, his ideological background forged two main pillars in religious proto-Zionist thought, and in the world of the neo-orthodoxy of Frankfurt am-Main. In particular, Pacifici recognized a fundamental reference in rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalisher and in his 1863-seminal book *Derishat Zion* [The Quest for Zion].<sup>20</sup> Like Pacifici, Kalisher, a borderline figure between emancipated Western European Jewry and un-emancipated Eastern European Jewry, was convinced that nationalism could serve the Jewish purpose inasmuch as it transformed into a movement of restoration conformed to Torah's teachings. Only in that way would it manage to revive the positive elements of Jewish tradition and to galvanize Jews to such an extent that they might make *'aliyà*. Conscious of the fact the dynamic action was not easily accomplishable, Kalisher argued that the "quest for Zion" should begin in the Diaspora in the form of an evolutionary process of re-acculturation that, by funneling Jewish energies, would hasten the fulfillment of the ultimate aim.<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, Pacifici identified with the *Trennungsothodoxie* of Frankfurt am-Main, that is with those secessionist Orthodox groups engaged in the battle against the Reform movement. Various reactions to modernity coexisted in that sphere, from the radical *Austrittsgemeinde*, who refused any sort of cooperation with reformed Jewry, to the more conciliatory *Gemeindeorthodoxie*. Pacifici wavered between those polar positions without opting for either. Choosing the world of Orthodoxy, in any case, was anything but alienating from the world; on the contrary, to him it meant undertaking a position that was militant in its conservatism, in its spiritualism, in its prophetic view and in its controversial, although not closed *a priori*, attitude toward Zionism.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Milano, "Un secolo di stampa," 119-20.

<sup>20</sup> Pacifici outlined his ideological background also in the article "Derishat Zion," in *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 16/6-8 (1950): 41-53.

<sup>21</sup> Sam N. Lehman-Wilzig, "Proto-Zionism and its proto-Herzl: the philosophy and efforts of rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalisher," in *Tradition* 16 (1976): 56-76; Jody E. Myers, "Zevi Hirsch Kalisher and the origins of religious Zionism," in *From East and West. Jews in a changing Europe 1750-1870* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 267-94.

<sup>22</sup> Yaakov Zur, "German Jewish Orthodoxy's Attitude toward Zionism," in *Zionism and religion* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1998), 107-15.

Pacifici stepped into the debate in 1910 with the essay *La nostra sintesi-programma* [Our synthesis-program] that, despite his young age, enshrined the organic profile of his ideology. His aim, he explained, was to find a “vision of the world with a synthesis that must translate immediately into action, into the enlightenment of the consciences and into the transformation of life.”<sup>23</sup> In other words, he was looking for a dynamic *Weltanschauung*, a conceptual system that could supply keys to decipher and explain the nature of Judaism in modernity as well as operational tools to intervene concretely in Jewish life.

He thought he had achieved his synthetic intent with the notion of *segullà*. In light of biblical exegesis, Pacifici remarked, the concept referred to the “chosenness” of the Jewish people in a double sense: that of being a treasured possession for God, as well as that of being the repository of a treasured possession, of a distinctive heritage that therefore needed to be redeemed from oblivion.<sup>24</sup>

For that uniqueness, he continued, Judaism transcended every definition: it was “neither nation nor religion,” nor a synthesis of the two.<sup>25</sup> It couldn’t be considered “nation” because the Jewish people had existed uncoupled from a territory, far from its land, owing its survival exclusively to the perpetuation of traditions by individuals.

As a corollary of that conviction, a skeptical attitude was born towards political Zionism, contested by Pacifici for the centrality attributed to the resettlement in Eretz Israel that, in his view, minimized Judaism to a mere territorial issue. His position, however, was more problematic than a simple denial of territorialism: if, on the one hand, he asserted that the “complete fulfillment of the system” was achievable only with “a Jewish organism living of, and through, its own life,” on the other he affirmed that “the core in Palestine is of fundamental importance.”<sup>26</sup> Therefore, he neither retracted Kalisher completely, nor disowned the position of the newborn Mizrachì party, that represented a controversial reference to him. If the continuity stood in considering the essence of Judaism as ethnical, national, traditional and based on Torah, the discontinuity resided in the “emergency” of

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<sup>23</sup> Pacifici, *La nostra sintesi*, 26.

<sup>24</sup> “My covenant than you shall be My own possession among the peoples” (Exodus 19:5); “to be His people, a treasured possession as He promised” (Deuteronomy 26:18).

<sup>25</sup> Pacifici, *La nostra sintesi*, 39.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 348.

the territorial issue. Whereas the Mizrachì individuated in the homelessness of the Jews, the *Zerat haYehudim*, the fundamental source of the modern Jewish problem, as a problem to solve by which the only possibility was to find a secure homeland somewhere in the world, Pacifici, supported the thesis of Ahad Ha-Am, who maintained that the problem was the *Zerat haYahadut*, the oblivion of Judaism, whose solution was a work of acculturation to be pursued in the different homelands of the Jews.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, in that phase his nationalism was a form of “nationalisme diasporique,” for which the national awakening of the Jews should coincide with the rejuvenation of Jewish customs and institutions in the frame of the national states in which Jews lived. The return was first and foremost spiritual to be transformed into a practicable option only through a prophetic perspective.<sup>28</sup>

Pacifici also denied the identification of Judaism with religion as the modern phenomenology of religion, that wavered from ritualism perpetuated with unawareness of its meaning, to ascetical quest for spirituality deprived from normative aspects.

To express the uniqueness of Judaism, Pacifici resorted to the biblical concept of “Nafscenu,” literally “our soul:”

in that tiny word, in that pluralizing of the personality, in that “we” substituted by “me,” I learned to recognize in myself a type of personality that differentiated from the typical individual. [...] it made me feel an intrinsic difference between me and the others, between Israel and humanity [...] I saw Israel proposing to itself, as a conscious program of life for centuries, the accomplishment of a differentiated human being, the accomplishment of the historical type of Israel. Israel that voluntarily creates itself along the centuries.<sup>29</sup>

Theology, history and national reflection overlapped in his mind: Jewish history was the biblical epopee of a people without a territory that transformed traditions and norms in the space of existence. Collective and at the same time individual, the Jewish nation survived through that bond of responsibility for

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<sup>27</sup> Herschel Edelheit, *History of Zionism. A handbook and dictionary* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), 62-3.

<sup>28</sup> For a definition of Diasporism see Israel Bartal, “Autonomie, autonomisme, diasporisme,” in *Les Juifs et le XX siècle. Dictionnaire critique* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2000), 36-46. Pacifici, *La nostra sintesi*, 100. He would have returned to the topic of the “pride of Galut” with the two articles “Il Galut col G maiuscolo,” published on the front page of *Il Corriere Israelitico* on January and March 1912.

<sup>29</sup> Pacifici, *La nostra sintesi*, 158-159.

which “everyone in Israel is the entire Israel.”<sup>30</sup> The encounter with modernity, according to Pacifici, had weakened that sense of mutuality, lessening the role of Judaism in everyday life; therefore a project of restoration appeared imperative to perpetuate the existence of the Jews as a nation.

The responsibility of revival was attributed to an avant-garde group of young activists devoted to the study and to the intensive practice of Judaism. Their exemplary behavior was meant to enlighten the path for “the Jewish multitude to produce the practical return to a full Jewish life.”<sup>31</sup> The reference was evidently to his environment, to the group of graduates of the rabbinical college among which were those who would become the “symbols of Italian Jewry,” like Umberto Cassuto, David Prato, Angelo Sacerdoti, and Angelo Disegni.<sup>32</sup>

The radicalism reflected evidently the vibrant Florentine atmosphere as well as that generational dynamics mentioned by Aldo Sorani in 1907, for which the “sons” desired to blot out the secularized legacy left by the “fathers” that the whole youth movement remained formally independent from the FSI.<sup>33</sup>

With his essay, Pacifici took his place at the forefront of that avant-garde; his attitude and the contents of his reflection impressed the spokesman for political Zionism, Dante Lattes, who saw in that emerging figure “one of the strong comrades of our acrid battle [...] for our program of Risorgimento” and expected “a lot [from you] for the awake of our national consciousness.”<sup>34</sup>

## The Season of the Conventions and the Development of a Cultural Strategy

In July 1911, *La Settimana Israelitica* launched the project of a youth congress to be held in Florence to gather the young Jews involved in the movement of cultural renaissance across the peninsula. The meeting, that took place the

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, *La nostra sintesi*, 100.

<sup>32</sup> Lionella Viterbo, “La nomina del Rabbino Margulies: un excursus nella Firenze ebraica di fine Ottocento,” in *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 59/3 (1993): 67-89.

<sup>33</sup> The attitude of the Florentine group was synthesized as the “children’s spirit of revolt against the fathers” by Carlo Alberto Viterbo, “Un maestro ancora presente,” in *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 38/4 (1972): 195-208, 197-98.

<sup>34</sup> Dante Lattes to Alfonso Pacifici, not dated, P172/124, CAHJP.

following October, was actually the first of a longer season that constituted the “place” of the Zionist Italian *Kulturdebatte*.<sup>35</sup>

Scholarship has elaborated an ambivalent judgment of those conventions. On the one hand, it has esteemed their representative and political function for the whole Italian Jewry, especially considering that in the same moment Italian Zionism was substantially silent as a consequence of the nationalistic polemics raised during the Libyan campaign.<sup>36</sup> On the other side it has underlined the modest success of the proposals discussed in that siege, that remained “more on paper than in reality.”<sup>37</sup> Not for Pacifici, who, on the contrary, meeting after meeting, strengthened his mentoring role and was finally consecrated as the leader of the Jewish Italian “renaissance.”

Shortly before the congress he intervened in the debate with two articles that prepared the field for the forthcoming lecture. The first, “To be Jewish is to be modern,” was an attempt to actualize the Jewish renaissance, presenting it as an outcome of the *Zeitgeist*. Pacifici, in fact, asserted that its intellectual roots were those of Italian idealism and historicism, for which everyone “tends to tie up bonds with the past [...], and new duties towards posterity appear.” Then, he continued his anti-reactionary defense maintaining that the nature of that revival as well was modern, insofar it consisted in a “practical reaffirmation of the Jewish nationalism,” that he considered an “antibourgeois force.”<sup>38</sup> No other claims, effectively, could have shown better the influence of the context, since the nationalist call and the antibourgeois criticisms were features that in the same period characterized also the political and the ideological discourse of some Italian cultural and political avant-gardes, that were settled mostly in Florence.<sup>39</sup> That self-portrait, moreover, discloses the dynamics that presided over the formation of the cultural identity of Italian Jews, even of a Jewish radical soul as Pacifici. A mechanism of osmosis, of border-crossing between the Jewish and the

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<sup>35</sup> “Appello ai giovani,” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, July 14, 1911, 1.

<sup>36</sup> Toscano, *Ebraismo e antisemitismo*, 74. On the spreading of antisemitism during the Libyan campaign see Stefano Caviglia, *L'identità salvata. Gli ebrei di Roma tra fede e nazione 1870-1938* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1996), 139-51; Tullia Catalan, “L'antisemitismo nazionalista italiano visto da un ebreo triestino. Carlo Morpurgo e il ‘caso Coppola’” *Qualestoria* 1-2 (1994): 95-118; Ferrara degli Uberti, *Fare gli ebrei italiani*, 219-20.

<sup>37</sup> Mario Toscano, “Prime note sui fermenti culturali e le esperienze organizzative dei giovani ebrei italiani tra il 1911 e il 1925,” in *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 7-12 (1981): 136-42, 139.

<sup>38</sup> “Essere ebrei è essere moderni,” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, September 15, 1911, 2.

<sup>39</sup> Elisabetta Mondello, “Le riviste del primo Novecento,” in *Storia generale della letteratura italiana*, vol. XII (Milan: Motta Editore, 2004), 286-310.



homeland's national narratives, of interaction of complementary intellectual repertoires that were essential to nurture the development of the "subculture" in its dual nature.<sup>40</sup>

With the same aim to prove the modernity of the Jewish revival, a few days before the congress, Pacifici wrote the article "For a Jewish classicism," in which he explained that the *ethos* of the movement was not that of "classicism for classicism," that is of erudition for erudition's sake, but a form of militancy *tout court* made of everyday work in order to restore Judaism in the daily life of Jews. By seeing Jews practicing their "specific integral life," he concluded, the hosting society would have ceased to perceive them as "*pariah*" and to finally look at them as a people.<sup>41</sup>

On that basis, he presented the lecture on "Religious practices" at the first youth congress between October 29<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> 1911. In this speech Pacifici insisted on the fact that religious practices were the only markers of the Jewish national identity because they were prescribed by the sole source of Jewish nationality, Torah, and because they had constituted the sole track of nationhood in the centuries of dispersion. In that way he created a hierarchy between faith and politics, as well as a differentiation between Judaism and other creeds. In fact, although acknowledging Zionism's credit in awakening the Jewish consciences, Pacifici maintained that only an integral return to religious practices could lead to the restoration of Judaism in its national dimension. On the other side, for the close relation between norms and national identity, Judaism could neither be defined as "religion," nor be compared to other faiths, where rituals and customs had for him only a mere theological value.<sup>42</sup>

The lecture was welcomed by Margulies, who had launched the same message of the importance of religious practices in his speech on the duty of the sabbatical rest,<sup>43</sup> whereas from the columns of *Il Corriere Israelitico*, short after the congress, several voices of dissent raised to criticize Pacifici for his controversial reading of Zionism and for his aversion towards the definition of "religion" applied to

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<sup>40</sup> For a definition of "subculture" and an analysis for the German Jewry's case see David Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry 1780-1840*, (New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 5-6.

<sup>41</sup> "Per un classicismo ebraico," in *La Settimana Israelitica*, October 27, 1911, 3.

<sup>42</sup> "Le pratiche religiose," in *La Settimana Israelitica*, November 9, 1911, 2-3.

<sup>43</sup> Del Canuto, *Il movimento sionistico*, 68.

Judaism.<sup>44</sup>

He defended himself from the critics of a pale Zionist conviction by addressing the political value of Zionism, both as an ideology and as a form of belonging. He professed himself Zionist because “Zionism is in the air” and inasmuch he perceived the movement as a revival of the “sentiment of Jewish nationality.”<sup>45</sup> By presenting it as a product of osmosis, Pacifici denied his affiliation to any political premise and from the other side, insisting on the “sentiment,” he characterized Zionism primarily as an interior and spiritual itinerary. That a-political stance, however, didn’t prevent him from concern about the process of national self-identification of Italian Jews on the verge of the Libyan campaign, so to pacify in advance any possible remark or criticism of dual loyalty, he clarified that his position was that of someone who “although having regained the sense of his belonging to the people of Israel still feels perfectly Italian.”<sup>46</sup>

He motivated his contentious stance towards Zionism also “from within”, from the point of view of a cultural-religious Zionist, criticizing its laicism for which the Jews had maybe realized to be “a people” but still not to be “the people.” Only “a movement of culture, of high culture” could fulfill the purpose of making them aware of their uniqueness.<sup>47</sup>

On the other side, Pacifici had to face the polemics for his well-known opposition of defining Judaism as “religion,” a conviction that was raised mainly by Samuele Colombo, the chief-rabbi of Leghorn. The two engaged into a journalistic crossfire entitled “Religion or not religion” that took place on *La Settimana Israelitica* for several weeks starting from January 1912.<sup>48</sup> Colombo denied the definition of Judaism as a nationality because it implied the concept of “nation” that was “something contingent, that could exist or not.” On the contrary, “religion” intended as “eternal truth,” was the notion that best, and solely, fit the essence of Judaism that was for him the “law of Israel, of the world, of infinity,” and to sustain his convincement he quoted also Elia Benamozegh’s teachings on Jewish universalism.<sup>49</sup> Pacifici answered punctually with a series of articles that he then collected in what became his second monograph, *Israele*

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<sup>44</sup> The zenith of the polemics was surely represented by the article “Sionisti, A-sionisti, Anti-sionisti,” in *Il Corriere Israelitico*, January 31, 1912, 169. The article was anonym, signed by “A Young Jew.”

<sup>45</sup> “Il sionismo è nell’aria,” in *Il Corriere Israelitico*, November 21, 1911, 2.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> “Il Galut col G maiuscolo,” in *Il Corriere Israelitico*, January 15, 1912, 1.

<sup>48</sup> All the articles are now in Alfonso Pacifici’s paper, P172/312, CAHJP.

<sup>49</sup> Samuele Colombo, “Religione, religione!” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, December 29, 1911, 3.

*l'unico. Ricerca di una definizione integrale dell'ebraismo*, that was published in October 1912.<sup>50</sup>

In the essay, he reaffirmed the *leitmotif* of *segullà* by presenting Judaism as a monistic system that embraced faith, history, daily lives, culture and language. That latter aspect, that was one among the most functional for the Jewish nationalist discourse and that had already been tackled at the congress by the Florentine rabbinical college's graduate Elia Artom,<sup>51</sup> emerged as a new trope in Pacifici's conceptual system.

As such, the “emergence of Hebrew,” that represented a central pillar of the European Zionist *Kulturdebatte*, finally involved Jewish Italy as well, where, for the historical specificity of the context – one above all: the absence of the Yiddish question – it would have assumed different nuances and understanding.<sup>52</sup>

The Hebrew language was for Pacifici a fundamental requisite of Jewish identity and not simply because it epitomized its distinctive national spirit, but also because its instrumental function provided tools to access the innermost truth of Judaism enshrined in Torah. For the loss of the competence in Hebrew, he continued, Jews had turned to “translations” into other languages, that is into other conceptual systems, in order to understand Judaism, with the only result of distorting its essence. “De-translating” the Jewish culture, that is regaining expertise in Hebrew to explore it in its original form, was for the Florentine intellectual the key to return to Judaism and to acquire a complete and distinctive Jewish national identity, because “a people who speaks its language can never doubt of its existence as a people.”<sup>53</sup>

The theorization, however, wasn't disjointed from practice. In September 1912, he launched the project of the “Palestinian Scholarship,” a travel grant for students who wished to go to Palestine to improve their skills in spoken Hebrew. For that purpose, together with Guido Castelfranco, Carlo Alberto Viterbo and other Florentine comrades, he established an apposite Committee appointed to raise funds, to select candidates and to organize the mission; in addition to that, he personally contributed to the enterprise devolving all the incoming profits of

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<sup>50</sup> Alfonso Pacifici, *Israele l'unico. Ricerca di una definizione integrale dell'ebraismo* (Florence: Giuntina, 1912).

<sup>51</sup> Schächter, *The Jews of Italy*, 215.

<sup>52</sup> Berkowitz, *Zionist culture*, 40-76; Shlomo Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism* (New York: Basic, 1982), 112-24

<sup>53</sup> Pacifici, *Israele l'unico*, 140-42.

his new book to the Scholarship.<sup>54</sup>

The initiative was welcomed by Dante Lattes as well as by the FSI;<sup>55</sup> however, what counted the most, was the support it received from outside. The theologian and leader of the French reformed movement Aimé Pallière, immediately offered his help.<sup>56</sup> Above all, Pacifici found an illustrious supervision in the master of contemporary Hebrew language, Eliezer Ben Yehuda, whom he had contacted to learn from his pioneering experience.<sup>57</sup> Through his son Jonathan, Ben Yehuda welcomed the development of a Hebraist sensitivity in Jewish Italy and guaranteed help to the Italian students who would arrive in Palestine in the frame of the Scholarship.<sup>58</sup>

Galvanized by such an eminent godfather, Pacifici attempted to hasten the project by presenting it publicly at the second youth congress, which took place in Turin between December the 22<sup>nd</sup> and the 25<sup>th</sup> 1912.<sup>59</sup> His lecture “The Hebrew language”, chosen as the opening speech, emphasized the duty Jews have to learn and to practice Hebrew so intensively as to become bilingual. The repercussions to that call were ambivalent. On the one hand, it was a sincere wish that Italian Jews regain proficiency in Hebrew, eventually reaching the competence showed by David Krinkin, Russian Jew living in Rome, president of the local section of the “Pro Cultura,” active participant to the *Kulturdebatte*, whom Pacifici had always admired for his expertise.<sup>60</sup> On the other side, however, he was also conscious that an excessively strong focus on Hebrew may have appeared prejudiced, stirring the endless polemics on the Jewish double affiliation, so he clarified that he wasn’t calling for the substitution of Italian language.<sup>61</sup> Bilingualism as a regime of coexistence of two idioms that is of two

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<sup>54</sup> The Committee was composed by Guido Castelfranco (President), Alfonso Pacifici (secretary), Carlo Alberto Viterbo (treasurer), Umberto Cassuto (counsellor), Moisè Foa (counsellor), David Krinkin (counsellor), Adolfo Ottolenghi (counsellor). For the resume of the annual activity see “Committee for the Palestinian Scholarship,” March 12, 1913, P172/82, CAHJP. Informations about the Committee’s activity also in “Israele l’unico,” *La Settimana Israelitica*, September 11, 1912, 3; “Per la riconquista della nostra lingua,” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, September 20, 1912, 1.

<sup>55</sup> Lattes praised the initiative in a conclusive comment to Pacifici’s article “Per la rinascita della nostra lingua,” in *Il Corriere Israelitico*, September 15, 1912, 2.

<sup>56</sup> “Sottoscrizione per la Borsa di studio palestinese,” in *Il Corriere Israelitico*, November 15, 1912, 3; a reference to Aimé Pallière in Collette Sirat “Pallière Aimé,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol.15, 602.

<sup>57</sup> Alfonso Pacifici to Eliezer Ben Yehuda, 2 December 1912, P172/82, CAHJP.

<sup>58</sup> Jonathan Ben Yehuda to Alfonso Pacifici, 15 December 1912, P172/61, CAHJP.

<sup>59</sup> “Alla vigilia del secondo congresso giovanile,” in *Il Corriere Israelitico*, December 20, 1912, 1-2.

<sup>60</sup> Schächter, *The Jews of Italy*, 216.

<sup>61</sup> “La lingua ebraica,” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, January 3, 1913, 3.

systems of identity markers was in fact the linguistic *figura* of the dynamics of self-identification of the “returned” Jews of Diaspora. With that claim, thus, he sought to reconfirm that the revival of Jewish culture, even in its most radical aspects as that of the “Hebraist emergence,” wasn’t to the detriment of Italian patriotic affiliation, that the two spheres of belonging could cohabitate, although differently, as “homeland”, exactly like languages coexist as mother tongues in the bilingual status.

The commitment to the linguistic enterprise, affirmed Pacifici in Turin, could constitute the Italian contribution to the Zionist *Kulturfrage* and for that reason he challenged unwaveringly the Jewish communities not to be “prudent”, to “cut the dead branches” of the local charity, and to cooperate on the initiative.<sup>62</sup> The polycentrism of Jewish Italy and the persistent lack of an institution that centralized sources and strengths was a structural obstacle for the development of projects on wide scales.<sup>63</sup> In particular, Pacifici was addressing the *Comitato delle Università Israelitiche Italiane* (Committee of the Jewish Italian Communities), whose establishment was being discussed in that same period and in which he was evidently placing expectation for support to the Scholarship.<sup>64</sup>

Nonetheless, in Turin his wishes seemed partially satisfied: the “Hebraist campaign” was inserted in the agenda of the convention and, on the side of the youth cooperation, the *Federazione Italiana della Gioventù Ebraica* (Jewish Italian Youth Federation) was established.<sup>65</sup> In the frame of that new institution, and with Pacifici’s decisive support, in October 1913 a new Jewish nationalist group, called “Giovane Israele” [Young Israel] was also founded. Its main activity coincided mostly with the publication of a homonymous journal.<sup>66</sup>

In Milan and Florence the Committee for the Palestinian Scholarship worked intensively to implement his activities related to the teaching of Hebrew language,<sup>67</sup> but the other local branches the Federation remained substantially

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*; Pacifici had already solicited the Jewish communities to help locally the youth’s movement (“Il movimento giovanile e le Università israelitiche,” in *Il Corriere Israelitico*, December 13, 1912, 1-2).

<sup>63</sup> Ester Capuzzo, *Gli ebrei italiani dal Risorgimento alla scelta sionista* (Florence: Le Monnier, 2004), 79-107.

<sup>64</sup> Tullia Catalan, “L’organizzazione delle comunità ebraiche dall’Unità alla prima guerra mondiale,” in *Storia d’Italia. Gli ebrei in Italia*, vol. 2, 1243-1290. Pacifici sent the same message at the VII Zionist congress that took place in Milan in May 1913, see “Il VII convegno federale sionistico italiano,” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, May 9, 1913, 2-4.

<sup>65</sup> Del Canuto, *Il movimento sionista*, 77-8.

<sup>66</sup> Toscano, *Ebraismo e antisemitismo*, 89-90; Attilio Milano, “Un secolo di stampa,” 129.

<sup>67</sup> The committee managed to publish a Hebrew grammar book (a copy of the volume is now in

lethargic. It was as though all the youth fervor that had imbued the debates during the previous years had dissolved exactly when it should have turned into practice. Or at least, it seemed that further incentive was needed. And it was precisely what happened with the third youth congress that took place in Rome in February 1914,<sup>68</sup> where it was up to Pacifici to rekindle the Federation with the speech “The organization of the Jewish youth.”

He individuated in the persistent localism and in the lack of top-bottom relations the main reasons of the weakness of the institution. As remedies he suggested centralization, a strong leadership and a clear program of action to be replicated in every community without possibilities of deviations. He attempted to solve personally and immediately the first two necessities by entering, together with Elia Artom and Giuseppe Levi, the Directive Committee designated to write the Federation’s statute.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, he responded to the third necessity by illustrating a program in four main points, each one corresponding to a field of action in which young Jews should operate: language (study of Hebrew); culture (cultivation of Jewish studies); tradition (extension of *Halakah* in daily lives, especially the Shabbat rest) and Palestine (interest in the development of the *Yishuv*).<sup>70</sup> And again, he gave an example of what cultural militancy should look like in “his” Florence by establishing the youth group of “Bachurei Israel” that used to gather on Saturday around “one of the benches in the Temple” and to use Hebrew for any sort of communication.<sup>71</sup> However, that venture “was terribly, and too early, interrupted in its birth by the War.”<sup>72</sup>

### Which Homeland for the Jews?

At the onset of WWI, the debate on the Jewish national affiliation mounted massively in Italy. Jews considered the conflict as the supreme occasion to

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Alfonso Pacifici’s papers, P172/82, CAHJP); to hire an instructor coming from Palestine (“Firenze,” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, November 21, 1913, 3), to introduce spoken Hebrew in the program of studies at the local Jewish school and to establish a fellowship for an external student who wished to study Hebrew in Florence (“Comitato per la borsa di studio palestinese,” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, October 31, 1913, 3)

<sup>68</sup> “Il compito del III convegno,” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, February 13, 1914, 1.

<sup>69</sup> “Statuto provvisorio della Federazione,” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, August 28, 1914, 3.

<sup>70</sup> “Dell’organizzazione della gioventù ebraica,” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, February 27, 1914, 3-5. Pacifici then explained his proposal in the pamphlet *La Federazione giovanile ebraica* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1914).

<sup>71</sup> Memorandum Sezione Bachurei Israel, not dated, P172/7, CAHJP.

<sup>72</sup> Alfonso Pacifici’s memory, not dated, P172/82, CAHJP.

demonstrate the complete dedication to their homeland, however the mobilization disclosed more urgently the crisis that was affecting Italian Jewry: the clash between Zionist and anti-Zionist intensified; the anxiety to prove the loyalty grew tremendously and the idea that Palestine could become an asylum for persecuted Jews of Eastern Europe became more concrete.<sup>73</sup>

Alfonso Pacifici was brought into the debate by Ferruccio Servi, director of the journal *Il Vessillo Israelitico* [The Jewish Flag], who perceived in his system of integral Judaism an obliteration of Italianness and a disavowal of patriotism and consequently solicited him to dissipate any doubt on merit by clarifying his conception of “homeland.”<sup>74</sup> Pacifici answered enshrining his belief into two complementary manifests: “My homeland” and “Our homeland.”

In the first, differently from what the title might suggest, he didn’t choose between Zion and Italy, rather he explained “his” conception of homeland, that was anything but linear and uniform. He distinguished two possible ways to understand the concept: one civic-territorial; the other ethno-anthropological. If “homeland” was to be conceived as the land of residence, of civic duties and of education, so Italy could be intended as such. But if “homeland” meant “also that land, or better, that civilization, that ethnic group with whom one feels so fused and assimilated” to sense “the unrestrained nostalgia for the land once abandoned that keeps calling it “my Land”, so “Zion” was homeland.<sup>75</sup> The two conceptions weren’t alternative, rather coexisting; so patriotism was saved.

The second article, “Our homeland”, appealed to those assimilated Italian Jews who recognized exclusively Italy as their homeland, disregarding Zionism as a nationalist movement. To validate Zionism, to legitimize it as a possible cultural and national element of identification, Pacifici recalled the historical experience during which Italian Jews completely recognized themselves at the same time as Italian citizens and as emancipated Jews, that is Risorgimento.<sup>76</sup> Zionism was for him an “enterprise of Risorgimento” because Jews were imbuing it with the same Universalist values of national pride and freedom they had learnt by

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<sup>73</sup> Ester Capuzzo, *Gli ebrei nella società italiana: comunità e istituzioni tra Ottocento e Novecento* (Roma: Carocci, 1999), 119-44; Toscano, *Ebraismo e antisemitismo*, 110-54.

<sup>74</sup> Pacifici was contested for his too audacious use of the term “nationalism” for the Jewish renaissance (“L’imprudenza della prudenza,” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, June 27, 1913, 1).

<sup>75</sup> “La mia patria,” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, August 15, 1913, 2.

<sup>76</sup> The bibliography is extensive; an interesting reflection on the relationship between the Jewish understanding of nation and the National discourse elaborated in Italy during Risorgimento is that of Francesca Sofia, “La nazione degli ebrei risorgimentali,” in *Un’identità in bilico: l’ebraismo italiano tra liberalismo, fascismo e democrazia (1861-2011)*, *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 86/1-2 (2010), 95-112.

participating actively to Italian unification.<sup>77</sup> Rather than historical antipodes, thus, Risorgimento and Zionism were twin-paradigms of national identification. On a conceptual stage, that coexistence was possible because Pacifici differentiated between two forms of national affiliation and their respective legacies: Risorgimento was a political one, that had consecrated Jews as Italians, while Zionism was a spiritual one, that would provide them with a rejuvenated cultural identity.

The commitment with the latter would not endanger the affinity to the former. Only “sentimental conflict” could possibly descend from that double-belonging, but in no way Jews would disappoint “the major or minor participation to Italian life.”<sup>78</sup> Italy was firmly “homeland.” However, when WWI broke out that “conflict” evoked by Pacifici came into being, with fundamental influences on the evolution of the Zionist discourse.

### **The Challenge of WWI. Between Civism and Jewish Nationalism**

In the war period, the Jewish sentiment of national affiliation faced a sort of inner split: On the one side, Jews answered to the call of their respective homelands enrolling in the army; on the other hand they became more sensitive to the call of the Jewish nation, for the evolution of international Zionism that brought the perspective of a solution to the Jewish quest closer.

The two complementary cores of Pacifici’s thought and identity – the Italian and the Jewish – submitted to the same force of the “trial of the nation”, and strengthened simultaneously: the haste of the civic duty grew inasmuch Italy’s entrance into the conflict approached, as well as his Zionism moved to more proper political postures.

He spoke about war in terms of a “tragedy” that, by compelling Jews to fight one against the other in their respective national armies, interrupted the project of *segullà*.<sup>79</sup> By exploiting the category of “nation”, war shattered the *Kelal Israel*, therefore Jews should take a position against it and proclaimed themselves “pacifist.”<sup>80</sup> Pacifism, he maintained, didn’t coincide with “cosmopolitanism,” that is with the dismissal of the concept of “nation” for the sake of universalism, otherwise such a stand would have sacrificed his theory of the uniqueness of

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<sup>77</sup> “La nostra patria,” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, January 16, 1914. The text was born as a lecture, that was delivered at the Jewish cultural circle of Verona on January 6<sup>th</sup> 1914.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> “Nell’ora della nostra tragedia,” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, August 7, 1914, 1.

<sup>80</sup> Alfonso Pacifici to Eldad, 16 May 1915, P172/11, CAHJP.



Judaism and of the Jewish people.<sup>81</sup> The Florentine intellectual intended pacifism as an inner attitude that would permit the Jews to take part in the war and simultaneously to save their identity; to answer to the homeland's call without forgetting to be Jewish.

He expressed that stance with the formula of "sentimental neutralism," that was also an echo of Italy's position in the first phase of the war.<sup>82</sup> "Neutralism" didn't mean either abstention from civic duty nor forgetfulness of the allegiance, rather participation to the "two mobilizations."<sup>83</sup> Italian Jews couldn't decline the enlistment both because it was their duty as citizens and because it was the supreme demonstration of their loyalty to the homeland that had emancipated them, but at the same time they couldn't ignore the Jewish nationhood, all the more in the moment when the recognition of the national aspiration of the Jewish people seemed "really tomorrow."<sup>84</sup>

Pacifici then conceded to his traditional a-Zionism; for the first time, he entered the flow of political discourse and assumed a radical position supporting "Palestine" as the sole possible solution to the Jewish question. That turn wasn't a sudden conversion to territorialism, rather the adoption of one of the core-terms of the secularized vocabulary of Zionism re-semanticized in its meaning.<sup>85</sup> The influence of both the philanthropism of Italian Zionism and the messianism of proto-Zionism to which he aspired was evident. Palestine was to be the nation first and foremost for East European Jews, for whom "homeland" had turned to a place of persecution. Not for Western European Jews, least of all for Italian Jews, who could live their Jewishness openly.

Although contingency was making the "return" a matter of concrete survival and the recognition of the Jewish national aspiration on territorial basis a political issue, Pacifici didn't abandon the eschatological view. He fathomed the eventual development of international Zionism as a:

solemn and practical recognition of our millenarian historical national aspirations that express themselves in the reacquisition of an organized core of Jewish life, also partially autonomous in our land.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> "Israele e la pace," in *La Settimana Israelitica*, August 14, 1914, 1-2.

<sup>82</sup> "Quel che dobbiamo volere," in *La Settimana Israelitica*, March 11, 1915, 1.

<sup>83</sup> "Le due mobilitazioni," in *La Settimana Israelitica*, June 3, 1915, 1.

<sup>84</sup> "L'anno della vigilia," in *La Settimana Israelitica*, March 25-April 1, 1915, 1.

<sup>85</sup> The same dynamics occurred in German Jewry, as discussed in Y. Zur, "German Jewish orthodoxy," III.

<sup>86</sup> "Quel che dobbiamo volere," in *La Settimana Israelitica*, March 11, 1915, 1.

The return was not presented as *‘aliya* but as the retake of the national continuity that had seen his solution with the beginning of the exile. In that messianic reading, the development of the “core of Jewish life” as an institutional organism was set in a sort of a-temporal dimension: it was a perspective that could “also” materialize sometime in a prophetic future, to individuate which hermeneutics, and not politics, was necessary.

However, although involved directly in the return, Western Jews, as well as Western society as whole, should feel committed to the destiny of Eastern European Jewry. For that reason, in January 1915 Alfonso Pacifici and three members of the Florentine group of “Bachurei Israel” established the “Pro Causa Ebraica” Committee to spread consciousness about the condition of Russian Jewry, particularly among the gentile society, and to gain support for the recognition of the Jewish national right on a territorial basis.<sup>87</sup> For the purpose, the Committee elaborated an apposite pamphlet, enlarged the net of cooperation with two analogue groups in Milan and Turin and, above all, contacted illustrious elements of Italian politics and society, among which the historian Pasquale Villari and the former (Jewish) prime minister Luigi Luzzatti, to have them sign the petition.<sup>88</sup>

In that perspective, the territorial option evolved further, insofar it transcended the Jewish discourse and the context of Jewish nationalism itself to become an ethnic issue, that, as such, deserved to be brought to the limelight beyond any religious distinction.<sup>89</sup>

Pacifici’s personal commitment to the cause, however, was limited in time since in 1916, after obtaining the title of *maskil*, he enrolled as a military rabbi.<sup>90</sup> The new role and the new enterprise didn’t mean a deviation or a release from the nationalist apostolate;<sup>91</sup> for him, on the contrary, they were a sort of crowning. He considered military rabbis, in fact, the harbingers of the Jewish sense of nationhood – in its double Italian-Jewish articulation – on the lines. Their task was to “motivate Jews to military duty” but also, and mainly, to assure spiritual aid and above all to solve “the divisions that could rise” among Jews soldiers “for national matters.”<sup>92</sup> In other words, military rabbis would reinforce “Israel’s

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<sup>87</sup> Alfonso Pacifici’s memory, 15 January 1915, P172/7, CAHJP.

<sup>88</sup> Comitato Pro Causa Ebraica, 14 May 1916, P172/7, CAHJP.

<sup>89</sup> Alfonso Pacifici, *La questione nazionale ebraica e la guerra europea* (Firenze: Comitato fiorentino Pro ebrei oppressi, 1917).

<sup>90</sup> Piattelli, “Repertorio,” 225; Pacifici announced his departure in “Verso il nostro domani,” *Israel*, May 11, 1916, 3.

<sup>91</sup> “I rabbini militari,” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, July 15, 1915, 1.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* On the military rabbinate see Mario Toscano, “Religione, patriottismo, sionismo: il

lines on the lines,” reminding Jews of the homeland they were fighting for and to which ultimate *Heimat* they belonged.

## Conclusion

Pacifici didn't leave a void behind him when he departed for the trenches. In January 1916, together with Dante Lattes, he had established the weekly *Israel*, that became the most important Jewish Italian cultural enterprise in the Twenties and the Thirties.<sup>93</sup> The journal was the perfect synthesis of his conception of Jewish nationalism based on a pragmatic conception of “culture” as a herald of Jewish nationhood and as a tool of Jewish nationalization. As an intransigent pioneer of the *Kulturfrage* and at the same time as an Italian, he understood how that nationalization, necessarily had to run parallel in order to succeed. Strongly Jewish in its contents and in its goals, at the same time it was complementary, in the cultural address and in the historical paradigms of reference, to the Italian nationalization that, by then, was fully and deeply accomplished.<sup>94</sup>

*Israel's* first front page was emblematic in that sense: with its title in Hebrew fonts, it proposed to be mirror of Jewishness, the voice of, and for, the Jewish national redemption. Redemption that, again, was presented and expressed as “Risorgimento.”<sup>95</sup>

Pacifici approached the theme of Jewish nation and engaged in Jewish nationalism when both concepts became diriment for the Italian culture and politics in a way and with an exclusive meaning that were problematic for the accomplishment of the integral project he was supporting.<sup>96</sup>

Such a “political eye” as Weizmann's, however, years later, acknowledged and praised that apostolate, judging it as a “great moral force” that not simply animated Italian Jewry in the Twenties and forth on, but also stirred the vocation of the tiny élite of people who, in the Thirties, “were turning their eyes to Palestine.”<sup>97</sup> Vocation that Pacifici himself assumed in 1934, as a sign that culture

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rabbinate militare nell'Italia della Grande Guerra (1915-1918),” in *Zakhor* 9 (2005): 77-133.

<sup>93</sup> Milano, “Un secolo di stampa,” 121-22.

<sup>94</sup> I take the well-known expression from Arnaldo Momigliano, *Pagine ebraiche* (Turin: Einaudi, 1987), 237-39.

<sup>95</sup> “Il nostro programma,” in *Israel*, January 13, 1916, 1.

<sup>96</sup> Carlotta Ferrara degli Uberti, Daniele Menozzi, “Ebrei e nazione. Comportamenti e rappresentazioni nell'età dell'emancipazione,” in *Storia e problemi contemporanei* 20/45 (2007).

<sup>97</sup> Chaim Weizmann, *Trial and error* (New York: Harper&Brothers Publishers, 1949), 287. The

could definitely succeed in transforming nation, religion and Eretz Israel into a way of life.

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relation between Pacifici’s apostolate and the Jewish Italian emigration to Palestine is underlined also in Ferrara Degli Uberti, *Fare gli ebrei italiani*, 208. For a history of the Jewish Italian emigration to Palestine until 1940 see Arturo Marzano, *Una terra per rinascere. Gli ebrei italiani e l’emigrazione in Palestina prima della guerra. 1920-1940* (Genova: Marietti, 2003).

**The Italian-Jewish Writer Laura Orvieto (1876-1955)  
between Intellectual Independence and Social Exclusion**

by *Ruth Nattermann*



*Laura Orvieto (1876-1955)*

### **Abstract**

*The present article focuses on Laura Orvieto's intellectual development, asking about the chances, but also the barriers in the life of the sophisticated Italian-Jewish writer. Based on documents from the Orvieto archives in Florence, the Rosselli archives in Turin, as well as selected writings by Laura Orvieto, the contribution examines the protagonist's access to scholarship and learning in liberal, post-emancipated Italy, where Orvieto gained considerable success and public acclaim both as journalist and writer. At the same time, the article questions the free intellectual's "success story" by looking at the marginalization and eventual exclusion of the seemingly well-integrated Jewish woman from Italian society during Fascism.*

#### **- Introduction**

#### **- Between Italian-Jewish Patriotism, Female Self-Assertion and Laicistic Education**

#### **- Intellectual Relationships and Women Networks. Laura's Beginnings as an Independent Writer and Activist in Belle Époque Florence**

#### **- Mediating Knowledge by Telling Stories**

#### **- Jewish Identity and the End of Independence during Fascism**

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### **Introduction**

"Work for its own sake" reads the title of an article on female labor, which Laura Orvieto published in 1911 in the Florentine periodical "Il Marzocco." The Italian-Jewish journalist and writer stated therein:

Working in order to do good to others. Why shouldn't from home, where the man already provides a sufficient contribution to the life of the family, the woman initiate a stream of diligence that furthers the female spirit and pride, and opens up a wider horizon to human personality?<sup>1</sup>

Laura Orvieto's statement did not only reflect her female self-understanding, but also her identity as a free intellectual personality. She belonged to a social stratum that did not need to work for survival. Nevertheless, she did not accept to be

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<sup>1</sup> Mrs El (Laura Orvieto), "Il lavoro e la donna," in *Il Marzocco*, 24 September 1911.

reduced to the contemporary role of an obeying wife and mother. Orvieto defined her identity to a considerable extent in terms of study and a commitment to writing, which was not primarily aiming at material reward. She became an independent writer and journalist with considerable success, until Fascism excluded her as well as her work from Italian society.

Outside her home country she has been hardly known, in liberal Italy however Laura Orvieto was a popular writer and a reputable personality in cultural life. Claudia Gori calls her an “intellectual of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century,”<sup>2</sup> Monica Miniati describes Orvieto in her book on Jewish women in unified Italy as a “woman of great culture.”<sup>3</sup> Some of her literary works, especially “Storie della storia del mondo” (“Stories of World History”),<sup>4</sup> which re-narrate Greek mythology for children and young persons, have been read in Italian schools to this day.

Although there has been no comprehensive biography on Laura Orvieto, we dispose of a considerable amount of articles on particular aspects of her life and work.<sup>5</sup> In the last years, authors have also begun to deal with her pedagogical concepts and the significance of Jewish identity in her opus, which had been largely neglected or even denied for years.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Claudia Gori, “Laura Orvieto: un’intellettuale del Novecento,” in *Genesis* III/2 (2004): 183-203.

<sup>3</sup> Monica Miniati, *Le “emancipate.” Le donne ebraiche in Italia nel XIX e XX secolo*, (Rome: Viella, 2003), 180.

<sup>4</sup> Laura Orvieto, *Storie della storia del mondo. Greche e barbare*, (Florence: Bemporad, 1911).

<sup>5</sup> On Orvieto’s life and her *oeuvre* see in particular Carla Poesio, *Laura Orvieto* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1971); Caterina Del Vivo, “Laura Orvieto,” in *Profili di donne. Dai fondi dell’Archivio Contemporaneo del Gabinetto G.P. Vieusseux*, ed. Laura Melosi (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2001), 107-114; ID., “Costruirsi una storia: miti e realtà nell’autobiografia di Laura Orvieto,” in *Espacio. Tiempo y Educación* 1/1 (2014): 55-75; ID., “Educare narrando “Storie.” Miti classici, tradizione ebraica, echi del Novecento nella letteratura per ragazzi di Laura Orvieto,” in *Madri sociali. Percorsi di genere tra educazione, politica e filantropia*, ed. Antonella Cagnolati (Rome: Anicia, 2011), 153-182; ID., “Laura Orvieto,” in *Scrittrici italiane dell’Otto e Novecento. Le interviste impossibili*, eds. Hervé A. Cavallera and Walter Scancarollo, (Pisa: Bibliografia e informazione, 2013), 306 – 329; Marina Calloni, “(Auto)biografie di intellettuali ebraiche italiane: Amelia Rosselli, Laura Orvieto e Gina Lombroso,” in *Visioni in/sostenibili. Genere e intercultura*, eds. Clotilde Barbarulli and Liana Borghi (Cagliari: CUEC, 2003), 139-158. Recently, the “Antologia Vieusseux” dedicated a whole issue to the writer: “Laura Orvieto. La voglia di raccontare le ‘Storie del Mondo,’” in *Antologia Vieusseux* 18/53-54 (2012).

<sup>6</sup> On her pedagogical concepts see Gori, “Laura Orvieto;” ID., *Crisalidi. Emancipazioniste liberali in età giolittiana* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2003), 117-140. On the question of Jewish identity in Orvieto’s work see Caterina Del Vivo, “Altre ‘Storie del mondo’: Gli inediti di ispirazione ebraica nell’archivio di Laura Orvieto,” in *Una mente colorata. Studi in onore di Attilio Mauro Caproni per i suoi 65 anni, promossi, raccolti, ordinati da Piero Innocenti*, ed. Cristina Cavallaro (Rome: Vecchiarelli, 2007), 555-574. On Orvieto’s and contemporary Italian Jewesses’ commitment to the

The present article focuses deliberately on Orvieto's intellectual development, asking about the chances, but also the barriers in the life of this woman and Jewess. I will examine her access to scholarship and learning in liberal, post-emancipated Italy, where she gained considerable success and public acclaim as a journalist and writer.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, my article questions the free intellectual's "success story" by looking at the marginalization and eventual exclusion of the seemingly well-integrated Jewish woman from Italian society during Fascism.<sup>8</sup>

The article is based on documents from the Orvieto archives in Florence, the Rosselli archives in Turin, as well as selected writings by Laura. I will first look at Orvieto's patriotic family background and early education in Milan, secondly at her close involvement in the Florentine networks of learned Italian-Jewish men and women who furthered her interest in literature, pedagogics and the women's cause. I will then explain the forms she chose for mediating knowledge and the innovative potential of her opus, before I will focus in the last part on the restriction of Laura's intellectual independence during Fascism and her eventual exclusion from Italian society in 1938.

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Italian women's movement see Ruth Nattermann, "Weibliche Emanzipation und jüdische Identität im vereinten Italien. Jüdinnen in der frühen italienischen Frauenbewegung," in *150 Jahre Risorgimento – geeintes Italien?*, ed. Gabriele B. Clemens (Trier: Kliomedica, 2014): 127-145; 127-128.

<sup>7</sup> In spite of her fine education, especially with regard to literature, history, and languages, Laura Orvieto never went to an Italian university. She stayed for her whole life an independent writer and journalist, mainly out of her own choice, but also because of the barriers contemporary universities maintained towards women. On the carriers as well as barriers for women at Italian universities in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, see Simonetta Polenghi, "'Missione naturale,' istruzione 'artificiale' ed emancipazione femminile. Le donne e l'università tra Otto e Novecento," in *L'altra metà della scuola. Educazione e lavoro delle donne tra Otto e Novecento*, eds. Simonetta Polenghi and Carla Ghizzoni (Turin: Edizione SEI, 2008), 283-318; Marino Raicich, "Liceo, università, professioni: un percorso difficile," in *L'educazione delle donne: scuole e modelli di vita femminile nell'Italia dell'Ottocento* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1989), ed. Simonetta Soldani, 147-181. On the phenomenon of independent scholarship among women, especially women historians, see Gianna Pomata, "Amateurs by Choice: Women and the Pursuit of Independent Scholarship in 20th Century Historical Writing," in *Centaurus* 55 (2013): 196-219.

<sup>8</sup> On the alleged "success story" of Italian Jewry see also Martin Baumeister, "Ebrei fortunati? Juden in Italien zwischen Risorgimento und Faschismus," in *Italien, Blicke. Neue Perspektiven der italienischen Geschichte des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Petra Terhoeven, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 43-60.



### Between Italian-Jewish patriotism, female self-assertion and laicistic education

Laura Orvieto was born in 1876 in Milan, seventeen years after political emancipation was granted to the Jews in Lombardy. For the Jewish minority in the young Italian nation state, founded in 1861, it was a period characterized by several ongoing processes, concerning the implementation of the new rights into political reality, socio-cultural change and integration: They had to become “ebrei italiani.”<sup>9</sup> It is a well-known fact that Jews had played an important role in the political and social construction of the Italian nation. Nineteenth century patriotic sentiment and a strong sense of Italian consciousness were to remain outstanding characteristics of Italian Jewry until well into the Twentieth Century. Participation in religious life, on the other hand, was altering and began to diminish by the growing activity in Italian political and social life. The process of secularization resulted in individual life styles or even the rejection of religion and the abandonment of the community.<sup>10</sup> Among many people who chose one of these options, however, Jewish identities continued to exist. They were bound by ties of affinity and friendship, but most of all by closely intertwined family relationships. As Guri Schwarz and Barbara Armani have pointed out, even non-religious Jews maintained a distinct “identità familiare” [family identity] which stayed alive in their families, based on a common cultural memory and heritage.<sup>11</sup> The Cantoni and Orvieto families, who formed Laura’s cultural and social background, are important examples for the entanglement of Italian-Jewish families in post-emancipated Italy, where the profound sense of national belonging fused with a distinct, rather secular Jewish family identity. Laura’s parents, Maria and Achille Cantoni, were remote relatives. Her father, a Jewish banker and land owner, was originally from Mantua; he had moved as a young

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<sup>9</sup> Among the recent studies on Italian Jewry, especially in the period of emancipation, see Carlotta Ferrara degli Uberti, *Fare gli ebrei italiani. Autorappresentazione di una minoranza (1861-1918)*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011); Elizabeth Schächter, *The Jews of Italy, 1848-1915. Between Tradition and Transformation* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2010); *Acculturation and its discontents: the Italian Jewish experience between exclusion and inclusion*, ed. David N. Myers (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008); *Ebrei e nazione. Comportamenti e rappresentazioni nell’età dell’emancipazione*, special issue of *Storia e problemi contemporanei* n. 45, ed. Carlotta Ferrara degli Uberti (Bologna: CLUEB, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> On this argument see also Tullia Catalan, “Juden und Judentum in Italien von 1848 bis 1918,” in *Judentum und Antisemitismus im modernen Italien*, eds. Gudrun Jäger and Liana Novelli-Glaab, (Berlin: Trafo Verlag, 2007), 71-86; 72-73.

<sup>11</sup> See Barbara Armani and Guri Schwarz, “Premessa,” in *Ebrei borghesi. Identità familiare, solidarietà e affari nell’età dell’emancipazione*, *Quaderni storici* 14 (2003): 621-651; 627-632.

man to Milan. Achille was the cousin of the writer Alberto Cantoni (1841-1904), a reputable intellectual of his time, whose style also Luigi Pirandello appreciated.<sup>12</sup> A central feature of the numerous Cantoni family and their direct relatives, especially the Errera from Venice, was an active patriotism that reflected the loyalty of Italian Jewry to the project of the Risorgimento and its inherent promise of emancipation. As Laura emphasizes in her autobiography, Angiolo's grandmother Anna Errera came from a Venetian family of "ardent patriots."<sup>13</sup> Anna's father Abramo Errera had taken part in Daniele Manin's provisional government of the "Repubblica di San Marco," committed to free Venice from the Austrian rule and to achieve political and social equality for Jews. As to the Cantoni, Laura's father Achille as well as one of Angiolo Orvieto's uncles, the engineer Luigi Cantoni, had fought as young volunteers on Giuseppe Garibaldi's side in the Italian wars of independence.<sup>14</sup> The familial context represents a key to understand Laura's profound patriotism and Italian consciousness; in one of her curriculum vitae she defined herself as "italianissima."<sup>15</sup>

Achille Cantoni, who was thought of as an eccentric by his family, represented the first significant intellectual influence in Laura's life: In spite of his profession as a banker, that he took up only at the behest of his father-in-law, his real passion was directed towards the ancient world and the collection of antiquities. He became one of the major contemporary Italian experts on Islamic art and was in touch with eminent scholars such as the German art historian and curator Wilhelm Bode (1845-1929).<sup>16</sup>

Del Vivo assumes that besides a distinct interest in art and history, Achille transmitted to his daughter also a certain restlessness that became one of the

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<sup>12</sup> In her autobiographical text "Storia di Angiolo e Laura," Laura dedicated a chapter to her remote relative Alberto Cantoni; see Laura Orvieto, *Storia di Angiolo e Laura*, ed. Caterina Del Vivo, (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2001), 9-12. On Cantoni's ideological positions and his eventual interest in the Zionist movement, see Alberto Jori, *Identità ebraica e sionismo nello scrittore Alberto Cantoni (1841-1904)*, Firenze: Giuntina, 2004. Alberto Cantoni was an uncle of the Florentine poet Angiolo Orvieto's who became Laura's husband, himself a distant cousin of hers.

<sup>13</sup> Orvieto, *Storia di Angiolo e Laura*, 7.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 12. - On Luigi Cantoni see Caterina Del Vivo, "Illusioni e delusioni nelle lettere inedite di Luigi Cantoni," in *Nuova Antologia* 2172 (ottobre-dicembre 1989): 362-414.

<sup>15</sup> Gabinetto G.P. Vieusseux, Firenze, Archivio Contemporaneo "Alessandro Bonsanti" (in the following: ACGV), Fondo Orvieto, Or. 5.1.2. Carte personali e biografiche: Curriculum vitae.

<sup>16</sup> On Achille Cantoni and his commitment to art collecting see Daniela Cecutti, "Achille Cantoni e il commercio di arte islamica nella Milano tardo ottocentesca," in *Antologia Vieusseux* 55 (gennaio-aprile 2013): 49-64; on Wilhelm von Bode's see in this context: Barbara Paul, "'Collecting is the noblest of all passions!': Wilhelm von Bode and the relationship between museums, art dealing, and private collecting," in *International Journal of Political Economy* 25/2 (1995): 9-32.

mainsprings for her accomplishments and smoldered for her whole life underneath the apparent middle-class calmness of her existence.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Laura described herself in the autobiographical piece *Storia di Angiolo e Laura* [Story of Angiolo and Laura] as a young “rebel” on search for her place in the world. She immersed herself into books by writers such as Charles Dickens and dreamed about alleviating the misery in London’s slums as a “rescuing angel.”<sup>18</sup> In the school for “young ladies” that she frequented in Milan, Laura did not find answers to her questions: she perceived the traditional middle-class education for girls as superficial, as she remarked later on in a curriculum vitae.<sup>19</sup>

However, it was the educated and progressive Scottish Puritan Lily Marshall (1867-1931), whom Laura’s parents employed as a private teacher for their talented adolescent daughter, that had a decisive influence on the future writer’s intellectual development.<sup>20</sup> Marshall inspired not only Laura’s passion for English literature but also her interest in the social conditions and necessities of women, for whose rights the feminist movement in the United Kingdom had already been standing up for some time.<sup>21</sup> In this context, Laura began to reflect upon her own role as woman and to question the contemporary codes of female conduct, as becomes evident in a letter the twenty-one-year old wrote in English to Marshall. Feeling unable to conform, the young woman expressed her ongoing inner struggle and the preoccupation not to please her parents:

“I have so much to tell you. I have been often bad, in this time. But I’ll try to the better. You know that my nature is very wicked sometimes? But very, you know. I should like to be [...] chided badly sometimes but with love. I like this more than coldness or indifference. Tell me, dear, where I am wrong. I am not proud of thinking that I am better than these girls, though they will make their parents more glad than I make mine? I can’t think I am like them ...”<sup>22</sup>

As a consequence, Laura refused wherever possible to comply to certain etiquettes and apparently avoided social events for young middle-class women

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<sup>17</sup> Del Vivo, “Laura Orvieto,” 107.

<sup>18</sup> Orvieto, *Storia di Angiolo e Laura*, 61.

<sup>19</sup> ACGV, Fondo Orvieto, Or. 5.1.2: Carte personali e biografiche: Curriculum vitae.

<sup>20</sup> Laura dedicated to her beloved Scottish teacher a chapter in her autobiography, see Orvieto, “Storia di Angiolo e Laura,” 66-67. On Marshall see also the commemorations “Lily E. Marshall, teacher and friend,” an address delivered by Rosita Levi Pisetzky, 26 November 1931, Milan, “Our Club” (1931); Angiolo Orvieto, *Lily E. Marshall nella vita e negli scritti*, (Milan: Our Club, 1931).

<sup>21</sup> On the early women’s emancipation movement in the United Kingdom see e.g. Elizabeth Crawford, *The women’s suffrage movement: A reference guide 1866-1928* (London: Routledge 2001).

<sup>22</sup> ACGV, Fondo Orvieto, Or. 5.2.1: Minute, lettere o copie di lettere di Laura Orvieto a amici e familiari; Laura Orvieto to Lily Marshall, August 19, 1897.

that she regarded as shallow. Amelia Rosselli, one of Orvieto's dearest friends, amused herself a few years later about the fact that her vivacious friend Laura had never gone to a ball: "What a funny little woman you are! You have never been to a ball? *Colossale!* I don't know how much time I have thought about this extraordinary thing. I instead could describe well the excitement of the first balls, as Signorina..."<sup>23</sup>

Besides the unconventional Lily Marshall, who surely furthered Laura's individuality and inspired her lifelong commitment to the women's cause, an important mentor of Laura's was the Italian-Jewish educationalist Rosa Errera (1864-1946), one of Angiolo Orvieto's Venetian cousins who lived in Milan. She taught the young woman Italian literature and supported at the same time her impulse for social commitment. Rosa as well as her sisters Emilia and Anna, all writers, shared a strong interest in pedagogics.<sup>24</sup> Partly in collaboration with another friend of Laura's, Lina Schwartz, as well as with her sister Rosa, Anna Errera wrote also texts for schools. Emilia, a teacher, literary critic and translator, confided to Angiolo that already as a girl she had dreamt to become a school teacher.<sup>25</sup> Laura, obviously inspired by the pedagogical commitment of the Errera sisters, began to teach as a volunteer under Rosa's direction in the newly-founded Milanese institution "Scuola e famiglia," which was frequented by children of blue-collar workers after their regular day of school. "In these days I have only worked and walked. I work for "Scuola e Famiglia" and I walk with my father," Laura stated in a letter to Lily Marshall.<sup>26</sup>

In the concrete dedication of many learned Italian-Jewish women to education, especially in terms of institutions for socially disadvantaged children and adolescents, one can clearly identify a certain continuity tracing back to Sara Levi Nathan's (1819-1882) activities in Rome: The companion of Giuseppe Mazzini, one of the major pioneers and icons of the Italian women's movement, had

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<sup>23</sup> ACGV, Fondo Orvieto, Or. 2.18.1-71, Carte aggiunte – "Lascito Asso," Amelia Rosselli to Laura Orvieto, July 18, s.d. (1905?). In another letter, Amelia described a young woman she had met during her holidays and reminded her of Laura: "... she has your cheerful joy ... it is ridiculous how much she resembles you. Even in the way she throws herself on the lawn, and when she bursts out laughing;" ACGV, Fondo Orvieto, Or.1.2059, Amelia Rosselli to Laura Orvieto, August 18, 1913.

<sup>24</sup> On the educated sisters Rosa, Emilia and Anna Errera see Achille Norsa, "Tre donne che hanno onorato l'Ebraismo italiano: le sorelle Errera," *Rassegna Mensile di Israel* XLI (1975): 42-55.

<sup>25</sup> ACGV, Fondo Orvieto, Or. 2.8, 12, No. 2, Emilia Errera to Angiolo Orvieto, s.d.

<sup>26</sup> See ACGV, Fondo Orvieto, Or. 5.1.2: Minute, lettere o copie di lettere di Laura Orvieto a amici e familiari; Laura Orvieto to Lily Marshall, August 19, 1897. On her work for Scuola e Famiglia see also ACGV, Fondo Orvieto, Or. 5.1.2., Carte personali e biografiche: Curriculum Vitae.

founded in 1873 a school for daughters of impoverished parents in the Roman borough of Trastevere.<sup>27</sup> The *Scuola Mazzini* resulted directly from Nathan's concept of a profound and laicist education, emphasizing Mazzini's *Doveri dell'uomo* (The Duties of Men) which she regarded as indispensable for social development and justice. Her school project took up the idea of the *Libera Scuola per i lavoratori* ("Free School for Blue-collar Workers") Giuseppe Mazzini had founded in 1841 in London. Sara Levi Nathan shared Mazzini's conviction that education and instruction represented the most important base for the intellectual as well as moral development of both individual and society. They formed in their view the precondition for building a nation on the principles of equality.<sup>28</sup> Sara Levi Nathan had also a decisive share in establishing the educational, secular impetus within the Italian women's emancipation discourse. In her *Scuola Mazzini* girls were taught instead of the Catechism moral principles based on the "Duties of Man." Her school became a visible sign for the new laicism that since the conquest of Rome in 1870 and the separation of state and church had been a firm component of the young Italian nation's self-understanding.<sup>29</sup> The importance of a decidedly laicistic education becomes similarly evident in Adele Della Vida Levi's (1822-1915) Fröbel-Kindergarden, the first of its kind in Italy, founded as early as 1869 in Venice.<sup>30</sup> Twenty-seven years later, her nieces Gina and Paola Lombroso created in turn the *Scuola e Famiglia* for needy primary school children in Turin, which became the concrete model for Rosa Errera's enterprise in Milan. Thus, also Laura Orvieto's closeness to *Scuola e Famiglia* must be viewed in this overall context and as another piece of evidence for the strong interest of a large group of Italian-Jewish activists in

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<sup>27</sup> On Sara Levi Nathan see Anna Maria Isastia, *Storia di una famiglia del Risorgimento. Sarina, Giuseppe, Ernesto Nathan*, (Turin: Università Popolare di Torino Editore, 2010); Chiara Valentini, "La banchiera della rivoluzione. Sara Levi Nathan," in *Donne del Risorgimento*, eds. Elena Doni et. al., (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011), 137-156.

<sup>28</sup> On this argument see Isastia, *Storia di una famiglia del Risorgimento*, 7; Valentini, "La banchiera," 139; Nattermann, "Jüdinnen," 132.

<sup>29</sup> On the meaning and visibility of laicism in unified Italy see Oliver Janz, "Konflikt, Koexistenz und Symbiose. Nationale und religiöse Symbolik in Italien vom Risorgimento bis zum Faschismus," in *Nation und Religion in Europa. Mehrkonfessionelle Gesellschaften im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, eds. Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Dieter Langewiesche (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus, 2004), 231-252, here 232f.

<sup>30</sup> See Nadia Maria Filippini, "'Come tenere pianticelle'. L'educazione della prima infanzia: asili di carità, giardinetti, asili per lattanti," in *La scoperta dell'infanzia. Cura, educazione e rappresentazione Venezia 1750-1930*, eds. Nadia Maria Filippini and Tiziana Plebani (Venice: Marsilio Editori), 91-111, here 96-97; Maria Teresa Segà, "Percorsi di emancipazione tra Otto e Novecento," in *Donne sulla scena pubblica. Società e politica in Veneto tra Sette e Ottocento*, ed. Nadia Maria Filippini (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2006), 185-217; 204.

pedagogical issues and a secular form of education, especially for the socially disadvantaged, within the concrete framework of institutions that can be traced back to Sara Levi Nathan and ultimately Mazzini.<sup>31</sup>

### **Intellectual Relationships and Women Networks. Laura's Beginnings as an Independent Writer and Activist in Belle Époque Florence**

It was without doubt the Italian-Jewish poet and philosopher Angiolo Orvieto (1869-1967) that smoothed definitely the way for Laura's development towards writer and journalist. In 1899, twenty-three-year-old Laura married her cousin Angiolo, who like herself descended from a family of bankers, and moved to his home town, Florence. Angiolo had studied philosophy there, and by the time of his marriage had already published several literary works.<sup>32</sup> Together with his brother Adolfo and a group of friends, he had founded in 1896 the periodical "Il Marzocco" as an autonomous forum for *litterati*, writers, and artists. Among its collaborators were well-known personalities such as Giovanni Pascoli, Gabriele D'Annunzio, and Luigi Pirandello.<sup>33</sup> Laura expressed the importance of the relationship to Angiolo for her journalistic and literary achievements later in one of her curriculum vitae as follows:

Laura Cantoni married the Florentine poet Angiolo Orvieto and began under his loving and intelligent guidance to write for the popular and influential periodical "Il Marzocco." At first [she did so] in the section of marginalia, which consisted of summaries from other journals, later [she wrote] her own articles.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> On the laicistic orientation of many contemporary Italian-Jewish activists and their educational projects see Nattermann, "Jüdinnen," 141ff.

<sup>32</sup> On Angiolo and his work see Arrigo Levast, "Angiolo Orvieto. Un ebreo fiorentino," in *Amicizia ebraico-cristiana*, XXVI/1-2 (1991): 60-70; Caterina Del Vivo, "L'approdo alle scritture: ispirazione e tradizione ebraica nella poesia di Angiolo Orvieto," in *La Rassegna della letteratura italiana* IX/2 (2002): 482-498; ID., "Nostalgie delle palme e dell'Arno': dicotomie inattese e proiezioni letterarie nelle opere di Angiolo e Laura Orvieto," in *Ebrei migranti: le voci della diaspora / Jewish migration: voices of the Diaspora*, eds. Raniero Speelman, Monica Jansen and Silvia Gaiga, (Utrecht, April 2012) <http://www.italianisticaultraiectina.org/publish/articles/000163/article.pdf>.

<sup>33</sup> See *Il Marzocco. Carteggi e cronache fra Ottocento e avanguardie (1887-1913)*, Atti del seminario di studi, 12-14 dicembre 1983, ed. Caterina Del Vivo (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1985).

<sup>34</sup> ACGV, Fondo Orvieto, Or. 5.1.2: Carte personali e biografiche: Curriculum vitae.

The emotional and intellectual support Laura found in her husband, as well as the couple's for contemporary standards rather unusually egalitarian and particularly close relationship was perceived also by their contemporaries. Amelia wrote to Laura shortly after their first meeting:

I have the feeling that we will become girlfriends, or rather friends: because you seem to me so entirely fused with your husband, in your soul are so many things of his [soul] vibrating, that actually I do not believe it is possible to be friends with you if he does not take part in this friendship as well.<sup>35</sup>

With the marriage to Angiolo, the transfer to Florence and the access to writing, Laura experienced a central moment in her identity formation as a woman as well as an independent writer. In *belle époque* Florence, she found a rich forum of cultural and social projects, ideas, and networks.<sup>36</sup> After the short period as Italy's capital city, the Florentine people were eager not to fall back into any form of provincialism. They continued to honour in particular the intellectual achievements: At university, historical as well as literary studies were flourishing thanks to illustrious lecturers such as Pasquale Villari, Guido Mazzoni and Ernesto Parodi. The publishing houses Le Monnier, Marbera, Paggi and Sansoni were specializing successfully in the reading behavior of the educated, affluent middleclass, especially classical culture, but also the contemporary novel and poetry. Moreover, Florence became a centre of literary periodicals: Besides the "Marzocco," Giovanni Papini's "Leonardo" and Prezzolini's "La Voce" were founded at the beginning of the twentieth century, in 1913 "Lacerba" was created as the organ of the popular group of literates associated with the Florentine coffee-house "Le Giubbe Rosse."<sup>37</sup>

A particular Florentine institution of that time supported the exchange between disciplined science and independent scholarship: The society "Leonardo da Vinci" saw herself as a forum for academics as well as culturally interested, educated people with no university background. Moreover, it was Florence where at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the public lecture in Italy was established as a

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<sup>35</sup> ACGV, Fondo Orvieto, Or. 2.18.1-71, Carte Aggiunte – "Lascito Asso," Amelia Rosselli to Laura Orvieto, September 10, 1904.

<sup>36</sup> On this argument see also Gori, "Laura Orvieto," 184.

<sup>37</sup> On the contemporary cultural role of Florence as well as the Florentine identity of its inhabitants see Laura Cerasi, "Florentinität. Wege einer Identitätsideologie an der Wende vom 19. zum 20. Jahrhundert," in *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 83 (2003): 363-394; 385-391. On the Florentine Avant-garde, its protagonists and discourses see Walter L. Adamson, *Avant-garde Florence. From modernism to fascism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

socio-cultural event. The encounter between literates and scientists with a wide audience, outside the university seminars, enjoyed great popularity and introduced also non-academics to the most recent scientific and literary works. In this way, Florence became a fertile ground not least for independent scholars, among them popular figures such as Aby Warburg (1866-1929) and Robert Davidsohn (1853-1937).<sup>38</sup>

Besides the cultural stimulation Laura Orvieto found inspiration in the lively exchange of political ideas. In spite or maybe precisely because of her own middle class upbringing, she became highly interested in the controversial social question and, in the context of the beginnings of the Italian women's emancipation movement, above all in the issue of women's rights. She used her articles in the "Marzocco" to bring uncomfortable topics such as female labour, gender relationships as well as the rights of women to education to public attention.<sup>39</sup>

However, not even Laura herself succeeded in overcoming completely the limitations of traditional gender roles: She published her progressive articles not under her own name but hid herself behind the pseudonym "Mrs EL," especially in order not to be identified as the author of these texts by her demanding and

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<sup>38</sup> An intellectual portrait of Florence at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with a particular focus on Aby Warburg, offers Bernd Roeck, *Florenz 1900. Die Suche nach Arkadien* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2001); on the German-Jewish historian Robert Davidsohn, who lived in Florence from 1889 onwards and wrote a "History of Florence" (published between 1896 and 1927), see *Robert Davidsohn (1853–1937). Uno spirito libero tra cronaca e storia. I. Atti della giornata di studio, II. Gli scritti inediti, III. Catalogo della biblioteca*, eds. Wiebke Fastenrath Vinattieri and Martina Ingendaay, (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2003).

<sup>39</sup> See e.g. her articles on female labor "Il lavoro e la donna," in *Il Marzocco*, 24 September 1911 on gender relationships based on equality and not on sentimentality "Libri per ragazzi," in *Il Marzocco*, 23 July, 1905; on the women's emancipation movement "La brutalità delle femministe," in *Il Marzocco*, 23 December, 1906, as well as "Le donne al Congresso di Roma," in *Il Marzocco*, 3 May 1908. On the beginnings and the early development of the women's emancipation movement in Italy see Franca Pieroni Bortolotti, *Alle origini del movimento femminile in Italia 1848-1892*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1963); Elisabeth Dickmann, *Die italienische Frauenbewegung im 19. Jahrhundert*, (Frankfurt: Domus Editoria Europea, 2002). In particular on the press of the Italian women's movement see Annarita Buttafuoco, *Cronache femminili. Temi e momenti della stampa emancipazionista in Italia dall'unità al fascismo*, (Siena: Università degli Studi di Siena, 1988); *Giornali di donne in Toscana. Un catalogo, molte storie (1770-1945)*, Bd I. (1770-1897), Bd. II (1900-1945), eds. Silvia Franchini, Monica Pacini, Simonetta Soldani (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2007); Tullia Catalan, "Percorsi di emancipazione delle donne italiane in età liberale," in *Gli italiani in guerra. Conflitti, identità, memorie dal Risorgimento ai nostri giorni. Vol. II: Le Tre Italie dalla presa di Roma alla Settimana Rossa (1870-1914)*, eds. Mario Isnenghi and Simon Levis Sullam, (Turin: Utet, 2009), 170-181. On gender historical aspects of Italian journalism see *Donne e giornalismo. Percorsi e presenze di una storia di genere*, eds. Silvia Franchini and Simonetta Soldani, (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2004).



rather conservative brother-in-law Adolfo. In one of her curriculum vitae, Laura stated that he was “not easily pleased” when it came to articles for the “Marzocco.”<sup>40</sup>

In spite of this one reservation, however, her journalistic activities opened up to Laura once and for all the possibility to break through the private sphere of her previous studies and to articulate her ideas in public. Angiolo Orvieto offered his wife not only access to the intellectual circle of the “Marzocco,” but also to representatives of “disciplined science,” the Florentine professoriate, among others his former teacher and professor for Hebrew at the “Istituto di Studi Superiori” in Florence, David Castelli (1836-1901). Laura included him later on under a different name in her unpublished novel “Leone Da Rimini.”<sup>41</sup> At the same time, Angiolo continued at Laura’s own wish her education in private, introducing her to philosophy, reading and discussing with her Italian as well as foreign literature. In October 1899, shortly after Laura had married Angiolo, the educationalist Lina Schwarz (1876-1947),<sup>42</sup> a dear friend of Laura’s, inquired eagerly: “When you are writing to me again, you will tell me many things about you two. Have you already begun studying together? What are you reading?”<sup>43</sup> And Laura replied immediately: “We have read three *canti* by Dante the other evening ... and yesterday a thought by Amiel.”<sup>44</sup>

Readings represented an important theme in Laura’s correspondence with her friends. Especially in the exchange with Amelia Rosselli and Lina Schwarz one can find frequent allusions to Italian, English, German and French writers and poets from various epochs. They offer an insight into the multi-lingual and

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<sup>40</sup> ACGV, Fondo Orvieto, Or. 5.1.2: Carte personali e biografiche: Curriculum vitae.

<sup>41</sup> Professor Pacifici in Laura’s unpublished novel “Leone Da Rimini” is obviously based on David Castelli; see Del Vivo, “Altre storie del mondo,” 572. On Castelli see Cristiana Facchini, *David Castelli. Ebraismo e scienze delle religioni tra Otto e Novecento*, (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2005).

<sup>42</sup> On Schwarz, who wrote children’s literature and introduced Rudolf Steiner’s theories in Italy, see *Donne del giornalismo italiano. Da Eleonora Fonseca Pimentel a Ilaria Alpi. Dizionario storico bio-bibliografico. Secoli XVIII-XX*, ed. Laura Pisano, (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2004), 339-340.

<sup>43</sup> ACGV, Fondo Orvieto, Or. 5.2.1.: Minute, lettere o copie di lettere di Laura Orvieto a amici e familiari: Lina Schwarz, Schwarz to Orvieto, October 23, 1899.

<sup>44</sup> ACGV, Fondo Orvieto, Or.5.2.1., Laura Orvieto to Lina Schwarz, November 2, 1899. On Laura’s readings and her choice of books see also Caterina Del Vivo, “Libri dietro i libri. Laura Orvieto, ‘Il Marzocco,’ la biblioteca di Leo e Lia, e le ‘Storie del mondo,’” in *Antologia Vieusseux* 57 (2013): 93-123.

diversified reading behavior of these women, their shared passion above all for English literature - Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Shelley, George Eliot - and even an interest in Indian philosophy and meditation, as becomes evident in Schwarz's recommendation of "Raja Yoga" to Laura.<sup>45</sup>

Orvieto's correspondence with her friends, however, does not only reveal cultural interests. They reflect most of all the closely intertwined networks of Jewish women she was involved in, and the social and cultural milieu she identified herself with. Lina Schwarz was very close to her, but especially significant was her profound friendship with the Venice-born writer Amelia Rosselli (1870-1954), who had moved to Florence together with her sons Aldo, Carlo and Nello in 1903.<sup>46</sup> Amelia, née Pincherle, had known Angiolo Orvieto since her childhood. As a young boy, Angiolo had frequently gone with his mother to her birthplace Venice in order to visit the Errera relatives, who were also close friends with the Pincherle.<sup>47</sup> In fact, Angiolo's cousins Emilia, Rosa, and Anna belonged also to Amelia's networks, which frequently overlapped with Laura's.<sup>48</sup> In Florence, Amelia and Laura - almost coeval women and mothers with a middle-class, educated and patriotic Jewish background - became soon dear friends. The playwright Rosselli, who had already published several works when she met Laura for the first time, certainly inspired the latter for beginning her own career as writer and journalist.<sup>49</sup> Besides Schwarz and the Errera, with

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<sup>45</sup> See Schwarz's letters to Laura Orvieto in ACGV, Fondo Orvieto, Or. 5.2.1: Minute, lettere o copie di lettere di Laura Orvieto a amici e familiari: Lina Schwarz, especially October 23, 1899; May 15, 1900; December 30, 1900; June 29, 1901. - About Raja Yoga, Schwarz wrote to Orvieto: "Read well Raja Yoga, consider him yourself; I think he should help you so well with the children. This idea of the absolute "I" ... is extraordinary;" ACGV, Fondo Orvieto, Or. 5.2.1: Schwarz to Orvieto, Pasqua (annotation: between April 10 and 16, 1911). - Also Amelia Rosselli wrote often about her readings to Laura, among others Dante, Tolstoi, and Colette; see especially her letters on May 22, 1905; July 18 (s. d., 1905?) in ACGV, Fondo Orvieto, Or. 2.18.1-71, Carte aggiunte - "Lascito Asso." The beginning of the First World War inspired her to read Berta von Suttner's "Lay Down your Arms" in Italian; see her letter to Laura on September 13, 1914, ACGV, Fondo Orvieto, Or. 1.2059, Nr. 105.

<sup>46</sup> On Amelia Rosselli see Dolara Vieri, Amelia Rosselli Pincherle, *Quaderni del Circolo Rosselli* 3 (2006); Giovanna Amato, "Una donna nella storia. Vita e letteratura di Amelia Pincherle Rosselli," in *Quaderni del Circolo Rosselli* 1 (2012); Amelia Rosselli, *Memorie*, ed. Marina Calloni, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001).

<sup>47</sup> See his "Commemorazione di Amelia Rosselli," ACGV, Or.1.2059: Rosselli Amelia. Commemorazioni e stampa relativa.

<sup>48</sup> See the detailed register of the "Lettere di famigliari e conoscenti" (1881-1930), Archivio Rosselli Torino.

<sup>49</sup> In 1901 Amelia had published "Anima," her most famous theater play, as well as "Felicità

whom she shared the vivid interest in education, as well as Rosselli, who stimulated her literary and journalistic ambitions, Laura was in touch with many other contemporary Jewish women, among them the activists Bice Cammeo, Mary Nathan Puritz, and Ernestina Paper, who like herself and Rosselli committed themselves to the women's cause.<sup>50</sup> They did so mostly within secular institutions such as the Florentine section of the *Consiglio Nazionale delle Donne Italiane* (CNDI), [National Council of Italian Women] which was created in 1903 in association with the American Women's Council as well as the Lyceum, founded in 1908 in Florence, hereby showing their national solidarity and secular outlook.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, Laura and her friends maintained their close ties even within these organizations, where they continued to form a kind of Jewish "subgroup."<sup>52</sup> Besides their common origin and cultural heritage they shared a distinct interest in educational issues, which had a decisive influence on

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perduta" (1901) and "Gente oscura" (1903). Due to their closeness to the "Marzocco" circle, Laura as well as Amelia were also both well acquainted with the popular actress Eleonora Duse (1858-1924), Gabriele D'Annunzio's lover. The relationship between the two younger women and Duse, however, proved to be difficult; see in this context Laura's diary entries in ACGV, Fondo Orvieto, Or. 5.3.4.: *Appunti di diario e fascicolo di carte sciolte: "Incontri con Eleonora Duse."*

<sup>50</sup> The Florentine Bice Cammeo (1875-1961), an outstanding activist of the contemporary Italian women's movement, was highly active in various sectors of the social welfare as well as educational programs for women. On Cammeo see *Dizionario biografico delle donne lombarde*, ed. Rachele Farina, (Milan: Baldini&Castoldi, 1995) 250-251; Patrizia Guarnieri, "Tra Milano e Firenze: Bice Cammeo a Ersilia Majno per l'Unione Femminile," in *De Amicitia. Scritti dedicati a Arturo Colombo*, eds. Giovanna Angelini and Marina Tesoro, (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2006), 504-515. Ernestina Paper, who had Russian origin, studied medicine at the universities in Pisa and Florence, and was the first woman to graduate in Liberal Italy in 1877; later on she opened a surgery especially for women and children in Florence. On Paper see Marino Raicich, "Liceo, università, professioni: un percorso difficile," ed. Simonetta Soldani, *L'educazione delle donne: scuole e modelli di vita femminile nell'Italia dell'Ottocento* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1989), 147-181; 150ff.; Perry Willson, *Women in Twentieth Century Italy* (Basingstoke/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). Mary Puritz, née Nathan, was the daughter of Sara Levi Nathan's son Ernesto, Rome's mayor from 1907 until 1913, and his wife Virginia Mieli. She was an active member of the Florentine section of the Consiglio Nazionale delle Donne Italiane.

<sup>51</sup> On the participation of Jewish women in the CNDI see Nattermann, "Jüdinnen," 143; Luisa Levi D'Ancona, *Italy. Modern. Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, 1 March 2009. Jewish Women's Archive. URL: <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/italy-modern>. On the foundation of the Lyceum in Florence see Simona Maionchi, *Lyceum Club Internazionale di Firenze – Circolo culturale femminile*, unpublished manuscript, Archivio del Lyceum.

<sup>52</sup> The Italian situation shows here parallels to the activities of German Jewesses in the women's emancipation movement and its organizations; see Marion Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class*, 125f.

Laura's writings.

### Mediating Knowledge by Telling Stories

Throughout her life, Laura Orvieto moved about freely between journalism, literature and scholarship, in accordance with her general need for independence and diversity. Her articles in the "Marzocco," but also in the press of the early Italian women's emancipation movement aimed at drawing public attention to feminist issues and to articulate her ideas regarding women's rights.<sup>53</sup> Her literary works on the other hand, which apart from few exceptions belong to children's and young people's literature, express a distinct interest in questions regarding pedagogy, which had already been supported by her early mentor Rosa Errera and increased further with Laura's own motherhood. In 1900 her son Leonfrancesco was born, three years later her daughter Annalia. In 1906, Laura wrote to Amelia Rosselli: "I think that a woman needs work even more than love. I myself feel this need at the highest level. Until now, I have not been able to do anything. The children have taken me away these four years, and I gave them to them consciously, with joy..."<sup>54</sup> Now Laura was determined to start working again. Educating the children as well as observing their development inspired her to write her first book *Leo and Lia* [Leo and Lia], published in 1909 by Bemporad in Florence.<sup>55</sup> Only two years later, Laura finished her most successful work, *The Stories of World History* [English title]. It was the period in which she concentrated deliberately on issues such as education and pedagogy. On the basis of appealing, easily understandable stories, Orvieto imparted to children and her parents pedagogical-didactical concepts, which were oriented towards the contemporary discourse, especially Maria Montessori's progressive theories.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> See e.g. her article on female education, the transformation of gender roles as well as power relationships between husbands and wives, parents and children: "Come educerò le mie figlie," *Almanacco della donna italiana* I (1920): 116-125. On Laura's educational ethos as a journalist see Monica Pacini, "Il giornalismo di Laura Orvieto: educarsi/ educare," in *Antologia Vieusseux*, 53-54 (2012): 109-132.

<sup>54</sup> ACGV, Or. 5.2.1: Minute, lettere o copie di lettere di Laura Orvieto a amici e familiari; Laura Orvieto to an unidentified friend, 1906.

<sup>55</sup> Mrs El, *Leo e Lia: storia di due bimbi italiani con una governante inglese* (Florence: Bemporad, 1909).

<sup>56</sup> Among the numerous works on Montessori's life and work see Gerald Lee Gutek, *The Montessori Method: The Origins of an Educational Innovation*, (New York: Roman & Littlefield, 2004); Marjan Schwegmann, *Maria Montessori* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1999); Grazia Honegger Fresco, *Maria Montessori, una storia attuale* (Rome - Naples: L'Ancora del

Laura's intense study of pedagogy reflected the distinct interest in instruction and education that can be observed in many Italian-Jewish women of her time. An explanation for this phenomenon lies certainly in the central role education and instruction assume within Judaism; in fact even after the erosion of the normative religious system, their significance stayed alive in a transformed, rather secular way.<sup>57</sup> Rosa Errera, Adele Della Vida Levi and Paola Lombroso became pioneers of the reformatory pedagogics in Italy whose theoretical concepts (especially the Montessori as well as the Froebel methods) they did not only develop in their writings:<sup>58</sup> Frequently they also implemented them in a practical way by founding respective schools and institutions, as we have seen above. In this way, the contemporary pedagogical discourse in Italy was inspired and developed to a considerable extent by learned women who were not affiliated to universities but often connected with each other on a personal level, such as Orvieto, Schwarz, Errera and the Lombroso sisters. In addition to that, an interaction emerged with academics like Maria Montessori, who in 1904 obtained the "libera docenza" at the University "La Sapienza" in Rome.<sup>59</sup>

Laura Orvieto was closely involved in these developments, although she did not write contributions to pedagogy in a scientific sense. She rather took up certain topics and ideas of contemporary educational theory and used them in an individual way for her literary works. It is surely no coincidence that the notion of freedom, central both to Montessori and to Froebel, gained a particular meaning in her writings. The narration *Leo e Lia* for example is based on the dialogue between mother and children and was inspired by the everyday life of the Orvieto family itself. Behind its seemingly naïve narrative structure, the story actually imparts innovative pedagogical findings: In accordance with

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Mediterraneo, 2007).

<sup>57</sup> On this argument see also Karen Hassan, "Colte, chiare, patriote, persino femministe. Amalia Guglielminetti, Laura Orvieto, Clelia Fano, Adele Levi," in *Donne ebreo*, eds. Hora Aboaf, Pupa Garibba, Maria I. Maciotti (Rome: Com Nuovi Tempi, 2001), 78-82; 81.

<sup>58</sup> On the psychology of children see e.g. Paolo Lombroso's writings "L'evoluzione delle idee nei bambini," in *Rivista di scienze biologiche* 1 (1899); "La psicologia dei bambini poveri," in *Nuova Antologia* 170 (1900); "Il senso della gioia nei bambini," in *Nuova Antologia* 192 (1903).

<sup>59</sup> Montessori participated also in several conferences of the international women's movement, among others the "Internationaler Kongress für Frauenwerke und Frauenbestrebungen" in Berlin in September 1896, where also questions regarding pedagogy and female education were extensively discussed; see *Der Internationale Kongress für Frauenwerke und Frauenbestrebungen. Eine Sammlung der auf dem Kongress gehaltenen Vorträge und Ansprachen*, ed. Rosalie Schoenflies, Lina Morgenstern e.a. (Berlin: Hermann Walther Verlag, 1897). On Montessori's "libera docenza" in Rome see Polenghi, "Missione naturale," 315.

Montessori's emphasis on supporting the child's independent thinking and action, Orvieto brought out the right of children to free learning, spontaneity, as well as the internalization of moral principles.<sup>60</sup> One of the talks between the mother, Laura, and the children, Leo and Lia, focuses on the relationships with other human beings. The respective dialogue shows a distinct sense for individual responsibility and morality:

... because all of us are servants, but more than others we have to follow ourselves. When something is good we must do it, even if it is uncomfortable; when something is bad, we must not do it, even if it seems pleasant to us. Don't you think so?<sup>61</sup>

It was Orvieto's merit to translate contemporary findings of pedagogy into children's everyday life, and to impart knowledge to young as well as older readers in an entertaining way. The innovative potential of her accomplishments as a writer lies therefore not least in the fact that she succeeded in leading the new pedagogical theories of her time out of the academic ivory tower, rendering them accessible and comprehensible to a wider public.

The didactical influence remained a constant factor in Laura Orvieto's literary work. It contributed decisively to her public presence, particularly when it comes to her most successful work, the already mentioned *Stories of World History*. Their first volume appeared in 1911 under the title "Storie della storia del mondo : greche e barbare" (Stories of Greece and the Barbarians) in Florence and were later translated in numerous languages.<sup>62</sup> In these stories, Orvieto's pedagogical interest joined her fascination for ancient history and Greek mythology, which gained great popularity at that time. Based on her intense studies of Homer, the authoress retold central episodes of the Iliad and the Odyssey for children. Orvieto's intention was to introduce her young readers to the Homeric tradition and to impart with the help of archetypal figures such as Paris and Helena, Achilles and Patroclus, Atreus and Thyestes a sense for human relationships and social behavior.<sup>63</sup>

The educational aim is clearly reflected in the commentary of the omniscient

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<sup>60</sup> On the pedagogical value of Orvieto's work see also Gori, "Laura Orvieto," 186.

<sup>61</sup> Laura Orvieto, "Leo e Lia," 106.

<sup>62</sup> Only the Italian first editions are cited in this article. There are numerous editions and reprinting of "Storie della storia del mondo" right up to the present day, as well as translations into French, English, German, Spanish, Slavic, Scandinavian languages etc.

<sup>63</sup> On the contemporary revival of classical culture, which influenced Orvieto's "Stories of Greece and the Barbarians" see Franco Cambi, "La classicità spiegata ai bambini in Storie della storia del mondo," in *Antologia Vieusseux* 53-54 (2012): 35-43.

story-teller and her children regarding certain parts of the plot. When Hera for example approaches Paris and tries to convince him that it matters most of all to “rule many people, to own many countries, and to be immensely rich,” the young boy Leo comments: “It seems to me that Hera does not tell the truth.” His attitude is supported both by his mother and his sister.<sup>64</sup> The lucidity, comprehensibility and originality with which the authoress in her “Stories of World History” reinterpreted difficult mythological and historical subject-matters for children, had a big public success. Literature as well as history teachers realized the potential of Orvieto’s work and began to use it for their lessons. To this day, “Stories of World History” have been read in Italian schools. Regarding Laura’s intellectual self-understanding, it was precisely the historically oriented as well as pedagogically inspired children’s and young people’s literature that complied with her need for independent, interdisciplinary work. The genre of children’s literature allowed her to position herself freely between pedagogy, history and literature, and to use as well as process her knowledge in an individual way. With the consolidation of the Fascist regime, however, the situation changed, which will be explained in the following.

### **Jewish Identity and the End of Independence during Fascism**

The role Jewish identity and inspiration played in Orvieto’s life and work has been neglected in relevant studies for a long time.<sup>65</sup> The frequent reference to her acculturated background, her secular education, as well as to the seemingly few connections to Jewish tradition in her writings are however based on a superficial examination. As we have seen, her curricula and her autobiographical work “Story of Angiolo and Laura” show a deep attachment to the Italian-Jewish milieu, both with regard to her marriage as well as to her involvement in Jewish women’s networks. A distinct characteristic in the self-understanding of Laura and her friends was the close connection between learning and social commitment that can be best explained with the influence of the religious Jewish principle of justice and the responsibility of every individual for the well-being of the community.<sup>66</sup> Laura Orvieto did not represent an exception in this case:

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<sup>64</sup> Orvieto, “Storia delle Storie del Mondo,” 27.

<sup>65</sup> See in this context Del Vivo, “Altre ‘Storie del Mondo,’” 556-557.

<sup>66</sup> On the significance of the religious principle of social justice (Hebrew: *Tzedakah*) for Jewish women’s socio-political commitment, see also Marion Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class. Women, Family, and Identity in Imperial Germany*, (Oxford - New York: Berghahn, 1991), 193-195; Miniati, “Le emancipate,” 251.

together with Amelia Rosselli and Bice Cammeo she belonged to the most prominent philanthropists in Florence. Interestingly, her social and cultural activities reflected also a certain closeness to the Jewish community of the Tuscan capital, especially when it came to the foundation of an institution for Jewish orphans, the “Pro Infanzia Israelitica,” in 1907.<sup>67</sup> In the early 1920s, probably as a reaction towards the political developments in Palestine, Orvieto took part with great interest in the meetings of the Zionists’ group in Florence. As she stated herself later on, her openness for the ideas of early Zionism differed considerably from her husband’s attitude whose interest in Judaism stayed mostly limited to the private sphere.<sup>68</sup> One can in any case record the fact that Laura’s examination of her own identity did not start only as a result of the racial laws in 1938.

Until far into the 1920s, Laura’s career appears as the success story of an independent writer, who in spite of her Jewish origin, without social limitations and barriers, was able to articulate freely her ideas. However, in her private statements Orvieto began to sound less optimistic. The political reality had outrun her ideal to serve a higher purpose. In November 1925, the year in which Mussolini assumed dictatorial powers, she wrote to Amelia Rosselli: “[Nowadays] I want to work only for my own pleasure. Not like [in the past] when I used to believe the things I wrote were important for the education of humanity!”<sup>69</sup>

Only a few years later, the authoress begun to face concrete problems regarding the publication of her work. At first, only a part of her writings was concerned. In fact, until the 1930s Orvieto’s “Stories of Greece and the Barbarians” continued to enjoy a considerable, not least commercial success, especially because of its extensive use in primary schools: Classical culture and myths had become increasingly popular due to the school reform the new minister of public instruction, Giovanni Gentile, initiated in 1923, and the subsequent revision of readings for primary schools by the respective ministerial commission.<sup>70</sup> The new edition of Orvieto’s “Leo and Lia,” on the other hand, encountered certain obstacles, which in 1909 had not appeared. On February 12, 1929, one day after the completion of the concordat between the Fascist state and the Catholic Church, the publishing house Bemporad asked the authoress in writing to carry

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<sup>67</sup> On her commitment to the “Pro infanzia” see in particular Lionella Viterbo, “Impegno sociale ed educativo nella comunità ebraica fiorentina,” in *Antologia Vieusseux* 53-54 (2012): 65-84.

<sup>68</sup> See Del Vivo, “Altre ‘Storie del Mondo,’” 565.

<sup>69</sup> Archivio Rosselli Torino, Laura Orvieto to Amelia Rosselli, 7 November 1925, M 2119.

<sup>70</sup> On this argument see Aldo Cecconi, “La fortuna editoriale delle Storie della storia del mondo. Greche e barbare,” in *Antologia Vieusseux* 53-54 (maggio-dicembre 2012): 75-84, here 81-83.



out a significant change in the book's second edition. In the letter, which has been handed down to us, one can read that Laura was supposed to delete a whole chapter of her work.<sup>71</sup> It carried the title: "Is the king a Jew?" The part in question represents a dialogue between the mother and her son Leo, who wants to know whether the Italian king is Jewish, just as his parents. With great self-confidence Laura Orvieto refused her publisher's request. As a result of this, she received a private letter by Enrico Bemporad, in which he insisted:

"...if you hold on to this chapter, no library of the primary schools in the whole [Italian] kingdom will want to acquire your book [...] This chapter shows to everybody that the protagonists are Israelites, which might please the protagonists themselves ... but is far from being commercial."<sup>72</sup>

When interpreting this statement one has to bear in mind that the relationship between Laura and her editor Enrico Bemporad (1868-1944), himself a Jew, was based on great esteem and confidence.<sup>73</sup> He surely did not object personally to the presence of Jewish protagonists in Orvieto's book, but rather acted here in his role as publisher who was preoccupied to lose readers, especially Italian teachers and pupils. Nevertheless, the chapter that had been the bone of contention remained in the book. Not without a certain irony Orvieto limited herself to change the title into "The King and Leo" ("Il Re e Leo"), and to write the noun "king" with a capital initial letter throughout the whole book (il "Re," instead of il "re").<sup>74</sup>

The episode is significant in so far as it reflects the overall political as well as cultural climate in Italy, which compared to 1909, the year of the book's first edition, had drastically changed. Non-catholic themes had become unpopular and unwanted. In December 1922, Giovanni Gentile had announced his intention of making the teaching of the Catholic religion "the principal foundation of the systems of public education and of the moral restoration of the Italian spirit in its entirety." As Michele Sarfatti points out, Jews were destined to suffer the consequences of the new policy in the religious and educational field to a greater degree than other non-Catholics, given their

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<sup>71</sup> Letter by "R. Bemporad & figlio editori" to Laura, Florence, 12 February 1929, ACGV, F.Or.5.1.9. The letter has been published by Caterina Del Vivo "Asterischi," in *Bollettino dell'Amicizia ebraico-cristiana* 3-4 (2003): 61-64; 62.

<sup>72</sup> Letter by Emilio Bemporad to Laura, Florence, 22 February 1929, ACGV, F.Or.5.1.9; see the edited version in Del Vivo, "Asterischi": 62-63.

<sup>73</sup> Cecconi, "La fortuna," 76.

<sup>74</sup> See Del Vivo, "Asterischi," 61.

considerable diversity and the fact that this ideological change constituted an incentive to the growth of prejudice and hostility against them. The concordat from February 1929, which had preceded Bemporad's request to Orvieto only by one day, confirmed Catholicism once again as the sole religion of the State and the "teaching of Christian doctrine in the form passed down by Catholic tradition" as the "foundation" of all public education.<sup>75</sup> The fact that Laura's work openly addressed the Jewish identity of its protagonists and included references to Jewish religion did not fit any longer into the ideological alignment of the Fascist state. The incident gives evidence for the imposed marginalization of Judaism from Italian culture, which was to intensify in the following years.

Laura Orvieto, however, did not distance herself after 1929 from Jewish themes. On the contrary, she even approached them more decidedly. Especially from the mid-1930s onwards, when the anti-Semitic course of the Fascist regime was harshening, she must have felt a particular need for a close examination of her identity and origins. This development manifests itself impressively in her autobiography "Story of Angiolo and Laura," which was to remain unpublished for decades.<sup>76</sup> In this work Laura dealt with her and Angiolo's Jewish ancestors and relatives, while at the same time emphasizing their Italian consciousness and national solidarity. It is surely no coincidence that the text was written between 1936 and 1939, when the rights of Jews in Italy had already been restricted to a considerable extent.<sup>77</sup> After Laura's opus had been taken out of circulation in 1938, the exclusion of the formerly successful and publicly present writer was completed. Even the Lyceum, according to its origins an apolitical and secular institution, dismissed in 1938 its Jewish members, and with them also Laura Orvieto.<sup>78</sup>

In the protagonist's retreat into the private sphere, which is also reflected in her turning towards her own history, one can see therefore both a consequence of the social and political marginalization, and the expression of a personal need for self-reflection. It was the beginning of a period when Orvieto focused on Jewish

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<sup>75</sup> See Michele Sarfatti, *The Jews in Mussolini's Italy. From Equality to Persecution*, (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press 2006), 44.

<sup>76</sup> On the history of Laura's autobiographical text see Caterina Del Vivo, "Introduzione," in: Orvieto, *Storia di Angiolo e Laura*, VII-XI; VII.

<sup>77</sup> On the discrimination, marginalization and persecution of Jews in Fascist Italy see Sarfatti, *The Jews in Mussolini's Italy*; Enzo Collotti, *Il Fascismo e gli ebrei. Le leggi razziali in Italia* (Rome - Bari: Laterza, 2003).

<sup>78</sup> The author thanks Mirka Sandiford, Lyceum Club Internazionale di Firenze, for valuable information on the Lyceum's policy in 1938.

stories and characters in her writings: An especially relevant example is her unfinished and unpublished novel “Leone Da Rimini,” the story of a young Jewish Florentine lawyer, which includes numerous allusions to real situations and people in the Orvieto family life.<sup>79</sup> The violent exclusion of Jewish culture and identity from Italian society as well as the censorship of her oeuvre in reality led the authoress only closer towards her own roots. This counter reaction revealed once again Laura’s urge to independence and freedom that had characterized her existence as an independent writer for all her life.

Orvieto wrote the biggest part of her autobiography from 1939 onwards in Cortina D’Ampezzo, far away from her Florentine place of residence. In view of the racial laws that had been passed only a few months before, bitterness and a sense of isolation are clearly perceptible in her writing. Especially interesting in this context are her memories of the Great War: In face of Fascist anti-Semitism, she remembered the period of the “Grande Guerra” in spite of all its tragedy as an era of a strong national community, in which Jews and Non-Jews had supported in harmony the Italian cause:

“... at that time we believed in an unconditional battle for Italy’s independence, so that the enemy could have been expelled from Italian territory, from the alps, so that he would not have any longer commanded a people that was finally free, free in his own will, his own strength, his own sacrifice. This is what we believed at that time, this is what we desired, all of us united, we Italians, without racial discrimination and difference, in a common love and a common belief.”<sup>80</sup>

In Orvieto’s memory, the First World War assumed thus the nimbus of an era long ago, in which anti-Semitism among Italians had not existed.<sup>81</sup>

By working, Laura continued to create herself individual spaces of comfort and freedom. Even in the years of the “assault on Jewish lives,”<sup>82</sup> between 1943 and 1945, when Laura and Angiolo hid themselves in the Padre Massimo home for the elderly in Mugello, close to Florence, she found the inspiration to writing.

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<sup>79</sup> The individual chapters of this unfinished novel are preserved in the Orvieto archives; on “Leone Da Rimini” see Del Vivo, “Altre ‘Storie del Mondo,’” 568-573.

<sup>80</sup> Orvieto, *Storia di Angiolo e Laura*, 119.

<sup>81</sup> On the respective political context as well as the personal attitude and recollections involved in Orvieto’s autobiography see Ruth Nattermann, “Zwischen Pazifismus, Irredentismus und nationaler Euphorie. Italienische Jüdinnen und der Erste Weltkrieg,” in (*Deutschsprachig*)-*jüdische Publizistik zum Ersten Weltkrieg - mit Schwerpunkt Habsburgermonarchie*, eds. Petra Ernst and Eleonore Lappin-Eppel (Innsbruck – Wien - Bozen: Studienverlag, 2014) (in press).

<sup>82</sup> Sarfatti, *The Jews in Mussolini’s Italy*, 178.

The right of free speech remained a dominant theme in her work until the end of her life.

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The examination of Laura Orvieto's intellectual formation and accomplishments shows the chances, but also the barriers in the life of this independent Italian-Jewish writer in the period from liberalism to fascism. Compared to the majority of her female contemporaries, Laura was certainly privileged in so far as her parents as well as her husband provided the necessary material and cultural preconditions for her rather unconventional education and development. "Work for its own sake" became Orvieto's guiding principle. Her independence created spaces for a distinct social and cultural commitment, which represented an essential part of Laura's identity. In accordance with her general need for independence and diversity, she was able to move about freely between journalism, literature and pedagogy for a long time.

The anti-Semitic course of Fascist Italy changed Orvieto's success story as a free intellectual. With the passing of the Racial laws Laura had to face her definite exclusion not only as a writer but as a human being from Italian society.

Unlike many of their family members and friends, Laura and Angiolo survived the war. They belonged to a tiny group of Italian-Jewish scholars who after 1945 succeeded in continuing to a certain extent their work as writers and journalists. The overall situation, however, had painfully changed. The past could not be made undone. In the children's journal, *La settimana dei ragazzi* ("The Children's Week"), which Laura Orvieto founded immediately after the ending of the war in Florence, she tried to recover her energy.<sup>83</sup> In its first issue she wrote:

[...] since you were born, there had always been the rule that one was never allowed to say what he wanted, but what he was ordered to say [...] In this journal we are allowed to say everything we like, and we will in fact speak about everything [...] We will also speak about Chinese and Russian children, and about American and English ones, who sent their dads and big brothers to free us from a slavery that threatened to suffocate us [...].<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Amelia Rosselli wrote to Laura after reading the first three issues of the journal, which had been sent to her new home in Larchmont: "In these pages I have found again, with joy, this healthy optimism in face of all disturbing and wretched things in life, which has always been one of your most beautiful characteristics ... Even in the things that are not written directly by you, one feels the influence of your thought, of your moral attitude. *Brava, Laura...*;" ACGV, Fondo Orvieto, Or.1.2059, Amelia Rosselli to Laura Orvieto, June 4, 1945.

<sup>84</sup> Laura Orvieto, "Cari ragazzi," in *La settimana dei ragazzi*, April 1, 1945.

Thus Laura Orvieto, in her old age, still tried to impart to children the value of freedom for which she as a journalist and writer, woman and Jewess, had stood up for all her life.

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**Dereck J. Penslar, *Jews and the Military. A History*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2013) p. 360**

*by Marco Mondini*

In his latest book Derek Penslar tackles boldly the history of the presence and participation of Jews in military institutions. He offers the first comprehensive, comparative outlook on a complex topic, covering a very wide time frame and taking into consideration a variety of national scenarios. Since the introduction of mandatory draft service and until the end of Second World War, military service was a matter of great interest for all Jews in the world. There is little doubt that being recognized the right to bear arms and the duty to defend the nation has been central to the history of Jewish communities and individuals in modern times, namely for the decisive role that military service had in the process of emancipation, integration and acculturation. The relevance of the topic in fact stems directly from the interconnection between military service, citizenship and the construction of the virile stereotype; considering the history of the Jews in the military is thus a way to scrutinize both their inclusion as citizens and the evolution of the image of the Jew as effeminate and weak.

To better understand the relevance of these connections between military service/citizenship/manhood it might be appropriate to take a step back, highlighting how – since the years of the Revolution in France, compulsory military service is conceived not only as a duty but also as a privilege. Annie Crepin has brilliantly illustrated in her *Histoire de la conscription*<sup>1</sup> that even the Jacobin armies gathered by Republican France in the 1790s were in reality very far from the theoretical model of the "nation in arms." The idea that all able bodied adult males would be ready and willing to pay the " blood tax " has no basis in the actual behavior of many social segments, neither before Napoleon nor during his long campaigns. This does not prevent the myth of the "nation in arms" - egalitarian and fervent with patriotic sentiment - to establish itself as an ideal model (and an ideology) that underlies and legitimizes the triumph of the revolutionary armies, first, and those of the Emperor Napoleon later on. The successes of the "nation in arms" lead to profound consequences in the European imagination. First and foremost we assist to a celebration of the connection between the national-political community and the citizen through sacrifice (or at

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<sup>1</sup> Annie Crepin, *Histoire de la Conscription*, (Paris: Gallimard, 2009).

least the idea of self-sacrifice). On the basis of the exemplary model of the Roman Republic, and largely thanks to the recovery of its heroes conceived as prototypes to imitate, in the Europe of the late eighteenth century the right/duty to bear arms and the right/duty to citizenship are equated. This is, of course, a doctrine firmly rooted in the political tradition of Western Europe; periodically reactivated from the age of modern commentators (like Machiavelli), enamored with classical models and convinced that only a return to the virtues of Solon and Brutus could save from decadence. Of the theoretical positions of the humanists and the *philosophes* the revolutionary state actually maintains the link between political identity and a willingness to sacrifice. A passage that morally legitimates mass armies that march across the continent since 1792: the exercise of legitimate violence regulated by the state becomes progressively a natural element of life for all adult males (at least ideally). The “militarization of masculinity”, to borrow a formula from George Mosse<sup>2</sup>, implies hereafter that the ability to bear arms and to get down on the battlefield is imposed as a founding element of gender identity. Although detested by the peoples subject to it, however socially discriminatory (for most of the nineteenth century military service can be avoided by the rich) and often ridiculed in both fictional and non-fictional publications, conscription quickly established itself as an inevitable and formative phase of male life. The distinction between those who serve and those who instead are rejected becomes a borderline that does not only distinguish the able bodied and those deemed to weak or sickly to serve, but that defines manhood itself.

Penslar’s work is to be situated within this framework. As he states in the first pages of the volume, the privilege of bearing arms, and then to enter with full rights in a community of citizens made equal by the same service in the name of the state, was among the principal pathways to emancipation: “advocates for Jewish rights presented the Jewish soldier as proof that Jews were worthy of emancipation and social acceptance” (p. 1). In a pattern not unlike that of the rest of the European population subjected to the draft, the attitude of many young Jews could be contradictory. On the one hand, the experience of military life could be a very difficult test. The strict discipline of the armies of the nineteenth century, led by officers with a very conservative mentality, and the total disregard of religious obligations within any military circles (albeit not all), could pose a difficult challenge for the young Jewish conscript. On the other, just that clear

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<sup>2</sup> George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: the Creation of Modern Masculinity*, (New York - Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

break with the previous life, perceived by many as a kind of forced entry into modernity, could be felt as a “liberation.” This ambiguous dimension is not surprising: it is a mindset not unlike that of other minorities or marginal social segments (like the peasants of southern Italy): hostile to the idea of losing a large part of their youth in the army but often nostalgic for the comfort (relative), the excitement and the new possibilities offered by military life. The literary figure of the young ‘Ntoni, in the novel *I Malavoglia*, by Giovanni Verga, is a good example of this uncertain relationship with the military. The militarization of the Jewish element can be seen as part of the successful process of nation-building, that same process that transformed ‘peasants into Frenchmen’<sup>3</sup> would, with some differences, also transforms Jews into citizens.

Conscription was, of course, not the only way in which the Jews of Europe experienced access to military status. There were those that volunteered, that chose the military life as a profession and in so doing testified to their faith in the national cause. In some national cases, the percentage of the offspring of Jewish families drawn to the military profession as a permanent (or at least long-term) condition, led to the creation of an authentic Jewish military tradition. In the Kingdom of Sardinia and then the Kingdom of Italy until 1938, in Austria-Hungary until 1918 and in France until at least the watershed of the Dreyfus case, the numbers of this phenomenon were extraordinary in relative terms (albeit forcibly small in absolute terms), arousing the interest and in some instances also the jealousy of fellow Christians. The importance of this phenomenon - so much in the history of European Jewry as in the history of national military institutions – is testified effectively by a copious scholarly production. From the studies of Erwin Schmidl<sup>4</sup> and Istvan Deák,<sup>5</sup> concerning the Habsburg armed forces, to those of Horst Fischer<sup>6</sup> and Christine Krüger,<sup>7</sup> on the military experience of German Jews, to that of Philippe Landau<sup>8</sup> on French Jews and the Great War (to name but a few) specific national cases (with some notable exceptions, on which I will return in the final paragraph) have been studied in depth. From this wealth

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<sup>3</sup> Eugene Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen. The Modernization of Rural France 1870-1914*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976)

<sup>4</sup> Erwin A. Schmidl, *Habsburgs Jüdische Soldaten. 1788–1918*, (Wien: Böhlau, 2014)

<sup>5</sup> Istvan Deák, *Beyond Nationalism. A Social and Political History of the Habsburg Officer Corps, 1848-1918*, (New York - Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> Horst Fischer, *Judentum, Staat und Heer in Preussen*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1968).

<sup>7</sup> Christine Krueger, *Sind wir denn nicht Brüeder? Deutsche Juden in nationalen Krieg 1870/1871*, (Paderborn: Schoeningh, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Philippe E. Landau, *Les Juifs de France et la Grande Guerre: un patriotisme républicain 1814-1941*, (Paris: CNRS Editions, 1999).



of research we can draw an overall view of the phenomenon: between the mid-nineteenth century and the First World War not only the German Jews, French, Russian and those from Austria-Hungary did much less than could be expected to avoid military service, but in many cases worked out a surprisingly homogeneous integration strategy that passed through precisely the experience of the barracks and even through the career in the officer corps, even though in this last case forms of discrimination (although mostly informal) were still significant in some contexts (notably not in Italy).

Penslar faces this complex framework, where the contexts vary wildly both concerning the number and characteristics of the Jewish presence and the dynamics of the military institutions, with two goals. On the one hand, starting with the examination of a vast bibliography, he offers an overall synthesis of these national histories in a chronological development, ranging from the eighteenth century until the 1960s and which claims to offer a transnational and not merely Eurocentric depiction of the problem: «the scope of this book – he writes - spans Europe, the Middle East and North America and a period of some three hundred years from the mid-seventeenth to the twentieth centuries» (p. 3). On the other, however, the volume proposes a more original purpose, connecting the manifold Jewish military experience in Europe to two central issues in the history and culture of the State of Israel: the Zionist aspiration to the creation a new community of warriors to reclaim the ancestral homeland and the founding role of the Armed Forces in the genesis and in the defense of the State of Israel. Penslar sees the Six Days War as the acme of cultural militarization in Israel (culmination of a choral celebration of war and combatants as protagonists of the rebirth and as indisputable centerpiece of the new Jewish history). At the same time it is the moment in which begins the rise of pacifist movements that to chip away at the undisputed consent to the Armed Forces, challenging the symbolic space of the fighters in national imagination. According to a parable that seems similar (only delayed for twenty years) to that of post-heroic Europe<sup>9</sup>, the figure of the Jew in arms seems to go from being central in the drafting of a collective identity proudly free from traditional stereotypes (the cowardly Jew, naturally weak and effeminate) to be progressively more marginal (p. 2).

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<sup>9</sup> James J. Sheehan, *Where Have All the Soldiers Gone? The Transformation of Modern Europe*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008).

To meet his ambitious goals, the author structures his analysis in seven chapters. The first explores, in extremely synthetic terms, the genesis and contradictions of the myth of the “cowardly Jew” in early modern Europe. The second chapter describes how, starting especially with the introduction of new laws concerning compulsory military service in Central and Western Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Jews were involved in the process of militarization of the adult male population. An inclusive process frequently accompanied by a reconfiguration of anti-Semitic stereotypes: to a certain degree the Jew ceased to incarnate the non-male, the effeminate inept that, unable or unwilling to bring weapons for the glory of the nation could not be considered a true man. Chapter three deals with the choice of a military career as a vehicle for social promotion for the Jews of continental Europe, especially in light of the increasing number of Jews serving in various national armies (in Austria-Hungary, France and Italy in particular). The fourth focuses on the transition from the military experience in peacetime to that in wartime, and especially on the conflict between Jewish identity and patriotic devotion. In the name of what values and ideal were Jews willing to fight and potentially kill each other in opposing armies? How were the tensions between transnational religious and/or ethnic identity and the obligations to the newly acquired homelands resolved? The possibility of a clash perceived as fratricidal destabilizes the image (widely idealized) of a solidarity capable of taking precedence over opposing national allegiances. That image will resurface, albeit weakened, at the end of the first World War, in the form of an altogether bland (and unclear in its aims) federative bond between the associations of Jewish veterans formed in diverse countries (the Reichsbund jüdischer Frontsoldaten in Germany, the Bund jüdischer Frontsoldaten in Austria, and similar social networks that formed in Hungary, Poland, Lithuania and the United States). The birth of these veteran leagues is undoubtedly one of the most indicative phenomena in the history of the relationship between the Jews and the celebration of their patriotism in arms. They were important not because of their size or their lobbying capacity (on the contrary, these were some of the least impressive associations of veterans that flourished after the war), but for their main purpose: claiming the honor of German (or Polish or Hungarian etc.) speaking Jews in the defense of their respective country. The experience of the Great War is the focus of Chapter 5. In some countries (Germany, Austria and the states of the dual monarchy for example) that moment represents the acme of Jewish military history, the culmination of decades of integration pursued through military service. As for other categories of Europeans (the younger generation, intellectuals), the war is perceived and represented as a test; for the Jewish population it is a test of a different kind: the final proof of the full

integration in and of the undying fealty to the nation-state. This spasmodic desire to be recognized as equals is then destined to give way to the bitter disappointment of the 1920s and 1930s, when the upsurge of anti-Semitism becomes a dominant feature of public life in the countries in which the sacrifice of Jews in uniform had been the highest. The unintended irony of the German-Jewish aviator Fritz Beckardt, ace fighter pilot in Imperial Germany, whose aircraft was decorated with the distinctive emblem of a large swastika, is a good way to remember how the trauma of defeat, the troubled transition from war to peace and the loss of the institutional framework that had guaranteed legal equality, has not only undermined the expectations projected on the idea of the glorious “ultimate test,” it also led to a season (by many perceived as paradoxical and inconceivable) of marginalization and then persecution. The last two chapters of the book, finally, are devoted to the period 1918-1948. They seem to constitute a sort of temporal and cultural appendix with respect to the history that Penslar has traced so far. We have an explosion of different experiences of military life: not just the classical national military service paradigm, but the celebration of sacrifice for a revolutionary ideal (i.e. the Spanish civil war) or the passion for the idea of a new Jewish collective, as seen through the struggles of the Jewish Brigade and later the early nuclei of the Israeli army. The ideal background of these experiences (or at least, that is the reading provided by the author) is that all these new experiences are in some way the expression of an underlying sense of disappointment. The anti-Semitism rampant in much of Central and Eastern Europe already in the Twenties and then the implementation of racial laws by the Allies or satellites of Nazi Germany were a kind of litmus test for the fragility of emancipation in Europe: all this represented a real betrayal especially for those veterans of the Great War that had been the culmination of decades of voluntary submission to the laws of sacrifice for the defense of the fatherland.

The broad portrait offered by Penslar is undoubtedly fascinating, and precisely for his attempt to connect those that until now were seen as fragments of a kaleidoscope of national histories into a single coherent view. The advantages of this effort are quite evident: first, the creation of a comparative social and cultural military history of the Jews of Europe, in which the common elements qualifying the Jewish experience tend to transcend national differences. On the other hand, the inclination to compare and juxtapose very different scenarios, moved by the predetermined belief that there is something that unifies Jewish military experiences across different countries, tends to induce the author to disregard the differences and to emphasize commonalities. The social history of

military institutions has long highlighted that, while establishing institutional and regulatory frameworks very similar in continental Europe between the mid-nineteenth century and 1915, the symbolic importance of national armies could nonetheless vary wildly. For example, the social status of the military in Germany in 1900 was incomparable to that of the military corps in Italy or even France. Yet, in all three cases, in Germany - where there were (informally) significant obstacles and impediments for those Jews wishing access to public office - in France or in Italy the military profession was unanimously and consistently perceived by young Jews as a way to obtain social promotion and, in the cases of the offspring of some of the most prominent families, as a way to gain great status and prestige and to attest to the moral qualities of their community.

To create this ambitious fresco Penslar had to rely heavily on secondary bibliography, and he has certainly to be credited for the wealth and variety of texts that he scrutinized. Mastering such a great volume of information and fully grasping all the subtleties of the various national contexts considered in this ambitious work was not an easy task. Unavoidably, not always this extraordinary wealth of sources and literature is the object of a convincing critique. One of the most obvious considerations accompanying the reading of *Jews and the Military* is the disproportion between the attention paid to the events in Central and Eastern Europe and the information available about the French and Italian cases. The long bibliography accompanying the volume is, from this point of view, truly telling: we see a wealth of works in German and English and a scarcity of sources in French. For the Italian case, in many ways exceptional, the only two works cited are a pioneering essay by Meir Michaelis<sup>10</sup> and a volume authored by the retired general Alberto Rovighi<sup>11</sup> on Italian soldiers of Jewish origin, of which the best that can be said is that no serious historian could quote him without great caution. The lack of attention to the Italian case appears bizarre in a research specifically dedicated to the issue of the relations between Jews and military power. The Kingdom of Sardinia from 1848 and the later Kingdom of Italy were, in fact, the scene of one of the most striking manifestations of that race to the career of arms that had characterized significant segments of the Jewish bourgeoisie in Europe. Until 1938, when the Fascist regime put an end to an almost secular vocation, the officers of Jewish origin in the Italian armed forces had been more or less a constant 1% of the total, compared with a

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<sup>10</sup> Meir Michaelis, "Gli ufficiali superiori ebrei nell'esercito italiano dal Risorgimento alla marcia su Roma," in *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel*, 4 (1972): 20-37.

<sup>11</sup> Alberto Rovighi, *I Militari di origine ebraica nel primo secolo di vita dello Stato italiano*, (Rome: USSME, 1999).

registered population of Jewish religion of 1 %. Although this data should be treated with great caution (the very definition of who qualifies as a "Jew" and what form the 'Jewishness' of those officers and soldiers took is the object of much discussion), the over-representation is indisputable, and testifies to a drive towards the military life as a permanent choice that does not have (proportionally) equal in any other segment of the Italian population. The numbers of high ranking Jewish officers, including several Generals and Ministers of War, also appears to be striking if compared to other national scenarios.

Penlar is more interested in other matters. His attention concentrates on those areas where Jewish presence was more conspicuous and his choices also reflect the availability of bibliography in English. This being said, the volume has undeniable merits: he offers a vivid and stimulating comparative picture of the military service of Jews covering three centuries and diverse national settings, from XVIIIth century Europe to the State of Israel. The writing style, the kind of information selected (with an impressive attention to colorful life stories), the propensity for oversimplification, may suggest that it has been written more for a public of students or for the general reader, than for a scholarly milieu. Nonetheless it offers in a concise way a lot of precious information and insightful institutions for the specialist reader as well.

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**Derek J. Penslar, *Jews and the Military. A History*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2013) p. 360**

*by Marcella Simoni*

In his *Jews and the Military. A History*, Derek Penslar painted a multi-layered picture of the historical relationship between the Jews and the State in the early modern and modern times through the prism of Jewish engagement in army life and participation in war. The relationship between the Jews and the military is analysed through a comparative framework that mainly refers to the European context but that also includes some extra-European situations; such an organization inevitably excludes an in-depth analysis of each national case. The volume is organized thematically, along a chronological timeline and it also includes stories and memories of individual Jewish soldiers; it brings to light their testimonies through private writings, that the Author has integrated with their service records; at times, this material is enriched by documentation from the Jewish press. Most of the historiography is in English, with some French, Hebrew and a few German texts. Primary sources come from a variety of European and Israeli archives.

Comparative analysis is only one of the strong points of this volume and it represents one of its aims. Others are to revert a narrative that speaks of the historical extraneousness of Jews to the military experience, to understand why the Jewish soldier was “blotted out” of collective memory (p. 2) and why his role has been taken up by the Israeli soldier/hero in current Jewish collective consciousness. In this respect, this volume not only succeeds in rescuing the “Jewish soldier (...) from oblivion”; it also helps deconstruct and rescale a number of assumptions about the relationship between Homeland and Diaspora as well as about the relationship between Jews and military force. If we consider militarism and military force – two of the main keys to read and interpret Israeli society today - does the State of Israel stand in continuity with the Jewish Diaspora, or does it represent a rupture? Mainstream narratives point to the latter direction of course, but this volume seems rather to prove the first point. In this respect, it convincingly deconstructs the idea that the history of the Jews and that of the military have crossed paths only through the coercion of former: the conscription of Jews into the Russian army is the most obvious example of such a narrative which has turned into “a metonym for the collective suffering of the Jewish people and its on-going struggle against assimilation” (p.

28). Secondly, the volume re-assesses the mistaken assumption that Jews have avoided and refused to embrace arms to fight in their countries' wars (thus addressing the question of national loyalty), or to defend themselves *as Jews* in the Diaspora, especially against Nazi-Fascism (thus raising the issue of their weakness and thus inevitable slaughter). In the third place, re-appraising Jews (also) as militaries in the Diaspora necessarily also leads to a rescaling of the role of the Israeli soldier (usually perceived and represented as a hero) among mainstream Western Jewry today, a theme that is discussed especially in the last chapter and in the epilogue of this volume.

From a geographical point of view, chapters two through five concentrate on the Western and Eastern European scenarios, while the last two chapters – as we shall see - open up to extra-European experiences; chapter six examines the role of Jews during the two world wars, while chapter seven looks at the War of 1948 in Palestine/Israel as seen from the US.

In the organization of the book, chapter one - “The Jewish soldier between memory and reality” - is different from the others: it discusses critically and it deconstructs the self-representation of Jews as a “people that shuns the waging of war” (p. 10). Here we also find a discussion of the character of the armed Jew in different historical moments: participating to the defence of towns under siege (in Poland since the 1300s, in the 1648 siege of Prague by the Swedish army), or fighting as mercenaries in the Dutch invasion of Brazil in 1630, and in other contexts. An interesting example is that of a group of Sephardi Jews who in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century owned corsairs and operated as privateers licensed by the French Government to attack British ships on high seas. These are just a few examples among the many possible, presented at pp. 24-27. One would have hoped for a more in-depth analysis of each of these (and other) often fascinating cases, but – taken together – they serve the purpose of strengthening the argument of the historical non-extraneousness of Jews to military enterprises/adventures; they also give a first blow to the “remarkably static and homogenous memory” that presents a vacuum between the “military prowess of the Jews in the ancient Land of Israel” and the valour of the Israeli Defence Forces (p. 17). This chapter also contains a swift analysis of the idea of war in Judaism from the Hebrew Bible to Talmudic commentaries up to medieval rabbinic speculation on this subject.

Chapter two – “Fighting for Rights: Conscription and Jewish Emancipation” – starts to cover the long 19<sup>th</sup> century, and in part sets the tone of the volume by presenting here a number of questions that recur through its pages, though addressed differently according to the time and place they refer to. What

elements were at play in the relationship between the State, the military and the Jews? Which laws (secular or religious) would Jews ultimately follow and to whom would they entrust their individual and collective loyalty? To what extent did Jews in Europe adhere to or resist the modernizing project that aimed at including them into the new ideal-type of the citizen soldier that was developing at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century? Could conscription offer a solution to the question of citizenship of Jews altogether? Can we speak of a coherent European experience?

In this chapter the A. investigates Jewish voluntary and/or compulsory inclusion in the army in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, from the moment when state-armies started to appear and thus fight state wars (and, in parallel, non-state armies – revolutionaries' and/or mercenaries' alike – gradually began to disappear), to the support extended by Western Jewry to aggressive colonial militarism at the end of the century (the Anglo-Boer wars - 1880-1881; 1899-1902 - and the Spanish American war – 1898 - not to mention Jewish support/participation to French, German and Italian colonialism in Africa). Chapter two thus starts with the history of “the first state to conscript its Jews” (p. 46) in Europe, the Habsburg Empire, to move on to others: the United Kingdom, France, Prussia and Italy-in-the-making. Inevitably, the A. focuses at greater length on the Habsburg and the French cases, the two main broad models for the Emancipation of the Jews in Europe<sup>1</sup>. As it is well known, from a historical point of view, serving in the army represented one of the ultimate tests of national belonging<sup>2</sup>: even more so between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, when newly established nation-states and empires determined the inclusion of (religious, national or social) minorities in their national body politic<sup>3</sup>. For the Jews, such inclusion led to that well-known (and well-studied) process of Emancipation which, in various ways, changed the civil and political status of various Jewish population groups throughout Europe<sup>4</sup>. This chapter adds another piece to the puzzle, examining the question

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<sup>1</sup> For a broader comparative history of the Emancipation of the Jews mainly in Europe, see *Paths of Emancipation: Jews, States, and Citizenship*, eds. Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katznelson, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> See the long-term comparative analysis by Margaret Levi, *Consent, Dissent and Patriotism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> *The Emancipation of Catholics, Jews, and Protestants: Minorities and the Nation State in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, eds. Rainer Liedtke and Stephan Wendehorst, (New York: Manchester University Press, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> For reasons of space and opportunity, I cannot present here an exhaustive bibliography of studies on the Emancipation of the Jews; for a general and comprehensive study see Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto. The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation 1770-1780*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1973).



of Jewish Emancipation through the prism of military service. Indeed, as we can read in the first few pages of the volume, from the 1700s “the position of Jews in European society” was reconceived “by presenting Jews as capable of martial valor and so deserving of civil rights” (p. 11), while “advocates for Jewish rights presented the Jewish soldier as proof that Jews were worthy of emancipation and social acceptance” (p. 1). In a cause-effect relationship this process helped (and was helped by) the emergence of a new ideal type, the citizen-soldier, the one who “fought out of love of king and country and in return became an active, equal member of the body politic” (p. 35). This dynamic can be exemplified through the words of Jean-Jacques Rousseau: “every citizen should be a soldier by duty; no citizen should be a soldier by trade” (p. 49).

Compulsory military service for Jews was established in France only in 1808, twenty years after the 1788 decree of Joseph II ordering Galician Jews to serve as wagoners in the service corps and artillery (p. 46). However, in both cases the fitness of Jews for military service had been at the centre of a debate that revealed a general public anxiety. Not by chance, if Rabbi Moses Schreiber of Bratislava (aka Moses Sofer or Hatam Sofer, commonly known as the father of Ultra-Orthodox Judaism) had classified military service as a form of taxation, thus implicitly urging the Jews to try to buy their way out of it (p. 45); and immediately after the 1788 decree mentioned above, Jews had “fled into remote areas of the province or into the remnants of independent Poland” (p. 46) to evade draft. The French case proved different, both since the very first stages of the Revolution – when Jews volunteered for the Civic and National Guard in Paris, in Bordeaux<sup>5</sup>, in Alsace and Lorraine and elsewhere<sup>6</sup>, and again after 1793, with the republican *levée en masse*, in part also as a reaction to such public anxiety. Moreover, the powerful myth of the people’s army – so well discussed in comparative perspective in the volume edited by Daniel Moran and Arthur Waldron<sup>7</sup> - continued to attract Jews all over Europe into the 19th century – for example in Prussia in 1812 (p. 51-56). Interestingly enough, this chapter does not neglect those Jews who (like many other non Jews) expressed their loyalties by fighting on the rebel side across continents and countries, especially Poland,

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<sup>5</sup> See also Zosa Szajkowski, “The Sephardic Jews of France during the Revolution of 1789,” in *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, 24, (1955): 137-164.

<sup>6</sup> See also R. Moulinas, “Les Juifs d’Avignon et du Comitat et la Révolution Française,” in *Annales historiques de la Révolution Française*, 4 (1976): 143-182, and *La Révolution Française et les Juifs. Problèmes et aspirations*, 48 /223, (1976): 121-160.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Moran and Arthur Waldron (eds), *The People in Arms: Military Myth and National Mobilization since the French Revolution*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Hungary and Italy (pp. 56-61), countries undergoing a process of national resurgence and/or striving for national unification. As chapter three shows, many of these fighters moved from one rebel army to the next (as in the case of Adolph Moses from Breslau, who joined the Red Shirts of Garibaldi in 1861 and later participated to the Polish insurrection against Russia in 1863; p. 87).

Chapter three – “The military as a Jewish occupation” – not only re-introduces Jews in the military sphere, but also discusses their role in state-bureaucracy and administration, with a special focus on France and Italy. The A. opens the chapter with two important references: Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and the study of Pierre Birnbaum on Jews in France during the Third Republic<sup>8</sup>. Their juxtaposition helps deconstruct Arendt’s general argument that - in the transition from the early modern to the modern era - Jews lost their special space in the relationship between state and war, as financiers of the wars that the various sovereigns had waged against one another (p. 83); such influence necessarily started to decline when state bureaucracy (and thus tax collection) took over as the main means to finance wars, state bureaucracy being closed to Jews. Against this thesis Penslar connects to the study of sociologist Pierre Birnbaum who coined the term *Juif d’État* to refer to the presence of Jews in all levels of state bureaucracy in France. As the A. points out, this is not just a descriptive term, but a rather normative one, “evoking French Jews’ intense loyalty to the ideals and institutions of the state” (p. 97); moreover, it is enough to read through chapter four to find a detailed section on the later involvement of Jews (as well as non Jews) in war finance (pp. 145-152), thus disproving Arendt’s idea that Jews had lost their space between state and war.

Focusing on officers and administration, the A. deepens his focus on the French and Italian cases, in comparison with other national contexts, mainly in Europe: the UK, Austria-Hungary and Germany, even though Jewish officers were virtually non-existent here until the First World War. Obviously, because of the timeframe of this chapter, and for the deeper focus on France and Italy, special attention is devoted to the *affaire Dreyfus* in France. Rather than framing the history of Alfred Dreyfus in terms of exceptionalism – the only Jew in the General Staff - the A. used the records of the French military, preserved at the *Service Historique de l’Armée Territoriale*, to reconstruct the lives and careers of many other French Jewish officers (p. 103-120) and of their families; as in the case

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<sup>8</sup> Pierre Birnbaum, *The Jews of the Republic: A History of State Jews from Gambetta to Vichy*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

of Dreyfus, their paths – both in terms of their profession and identity – showed an intimate connection with the French Republic.

The A. portrays a similar picture for Italy, venturing into the first decades 20<sup>th</sup> century: even under Fascism, he claims, “the Italian army remained an attractive and welcoming institution for Jewish officers”; after all, “between 1859 and 1938 Italy produced 58 Jewish generals and admirals, including Giuseppe Ottolenghi, (...) minister of war in 1902” (p. 94) and “Italian-Jewish military officers were a source of pride for Jews throughout Europe” (p. 95). However, one can easily disagree with the sentences that accompany these data, i.e. that “precisely because there were so many Jews in positions of high command, the racial laws of 1938 proved difficult to implement”. No footnote follows this statement that squarely recalls the myth of the good Italian, and the *adagio* that the discrimination and persecution of Italy’s Jews during World War II was not implemented as systematically as in other countries, an argument that has already been demolished by much Italian and foreign historiography in original and in translation<sup>9</sup>. There is no evidence that a high numerical representation in a given sector saved Jews from discrimination/persecution anywhere in Europe, and one would not see why this mechanism should have worked in Italy. Here, Jews were overrepresented numerically not only in the army but also in schools and universities, as well as in the medical professions, or in recreational clubs; this did not spare them from being expelled from all these institutions *and* from the army. As Michele Sarfatti has demonstrated, already in November 1937 Mussolini (as Minister of War, Navy and Airforce) had instructed that no Jew should be admitted to military academies<sup>10</sup>. And by the time racial laws came into force in 1938, Italian Jews had been censured, identified, screened and finally expelled, in the military as well as in other sectors<sup>11</sup>.

Chapters four – “When may we kill our brethren? Jews at war” – and five - “The Jewish soldier of World War I: from Participant to Victim” – complement one

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<sup>9</sup> Filippo Focardi, *Il cattivo tedesco e il bravo italiano. La rimozione delle colpe della seconda guerra mondiale*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2014); Michael A. Livingston, *Fascists and the Jews of Italy: Mussolini's Race Laws 1938-1943*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); *Jews in Italy under Fascist and Nazi Rule*, ed. Joshua D. Zimmerman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 71-199.

<sup>10</sup> See Michele Sarfatti, *Gli Ebrei nell'Italia Fascista. Vicende, identità, persecuzione* (Turin, Einaudi, 2000), 139, fn 101, available in English as *The Jews in Mussolini's Italy. From Equality to Persecution*, (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> See Marco Mondini, “L'identità negata: materiali di lavoro su ebrei ed esercito dall'età liberale al secondo dopoguerra” in *Gli ebrei in Italia tra persecuzione fascista e reintegrazione postbellica*, eds. Ilaria Pavan and Guri Schwarz (Florence: Giuntina, 2001), 141-170.

another. The first presents yet another aspect of Jewish involvement with the military in the long 19<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. Jewish individual and institutional dilemmas and reactions during the many national wars fought in Europe and on extra-European territory, from the 1848-49 revolutions to the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, up to the Anglo-Boer war. Crucial here is the theme of identity and of trans-national (inter-ethnic) solidarity versus patriotism through the various national contexts. Individual and institutional anxiety can be considered one of the keywords to read this chapter and understand individual, collective and institutional Jewish attitudes and behaviors. The sermons of the various rabbis across the Continent (in Belgium, Germany, France and Italy) and the articles published in the Jewish press (p. 129-145) echoed and transmitted such anxiety; the same can be said for the mythological narrations repeated in a slightly different version for each war/national case. Typical was the redemptive story of Jewish enemy soldiers fighting, one of which discovers the other to be also Jewish upon his imminent death, rushing him to medical care and thus saving him.

The long 19<sup>th</sup> century is analyzed here under one last prism, i.e. that of the involvement of Jews (as well as non-Jews) in war finance as bankers (pp. 145-152). Rather than considering this topic only as the modern version of a century-old stereotype that deepens its roots in medieval blood libels, these pages discuss the actual involvement of Jewish bankers into war finance in this period. There could be numerous examples, even more than those presented in these pages: from the marketing of government bonds in small denominations to be bought by citizens - a method used in France in the 1830s by the Rothschilds and by Joseph Seligman in the US during the Civil War - to the famous \$200 million loan to Japan organized by the New York banker Jacob Schiff just before the Russo-Japanese war, up to Max Warburg dumping his shares in companies trading on the Vienna exchange during the crisis of July and August 1914 (pp. 146-49). This section, which in part can be connected to one of Penslar's previous works<sup>12</sup>, is a welcome diversion from issues of anxiety, identity crisis, divided loyalties and from the painful decisions that many Jews across the Continent confronted, caught in the dilemma whether they were part of a collective nation in itself, or if they were nationals of modern states belonging to a different faith.

If chapter four is about "anxiety", the fifth "is about empowerment" (p. 166), focusing on the apparent resolution of the identity dilemmas of many Jews

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<sup>12</sup> Derek Penslar, *Shylock's Children. Economics and Jewish Identity in Modern Europe*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

across Europe. Placing the First World War at its center, it looks at the reasons behind the ultimate choice of most European Jewish males, to be proud fighters for the nations they resided in at the beginning of the twentieth century. Each group of national Jews saw a different reason for participating, that could be distinct from that of the non-Jewish population: in France, Jews fought to regain Alsace-Lorraine, exactly as the non Jews did; but for the former this area represented “the cradle of French-Jewish civilization” (p. 170). For German Jews, fighting allowed the “preservation of opportunities gained and the attainment of greater access and acceptance” (p. 171); it also meant having the opportunity to fight the Czarist Empire, thus conceiving their own fighting as a war of liberation of Jews oppressed elsewhere. The perspective and the organization of this chapter remain comparative, but the focus is mainly on German Jewry (p. 169), and on the German-Jewish encounter in the trenches, on the battlefields, and after the war, whether as veterans or mourning the dead.

Particularly interesting is the comparative section on post-war institutional and general attitudes towards veterans, and how the various national associations dealt with Jews within their ranks. By 1920 Germany had seven war survivors’ associations, the largest of which (the socialist-oriented Imperial League of War Wounded and Former Fighters) welcomed Jews (p. 180); less welcoming appeared the other six, Catholic or rightist in orientation. In Germany there was no Jewish veterans’ association like in the UK, France or Poland, and in each country these associations served various social, political and national purposes at the same time. They mirrored how Jews were perceived in the various national contexts, how widespread was popular or institutional anti-Semitism, what image of themselves Jews wanted to project in society at large so as to finally fit in the (wounded) body politic of the nation; finally, where and to what extent had Zionism (in its *Muskuljudentums* version) permeated groups of Jewish former fighters<sup>13</sup>. After all, according to a Zionist perspective (even as it had been presented in the progressive *Ha-Melitz* at the turn of the century) (p. 129), Jews fighting against one another were the living demonstration of the passive acceptance of the political implications of living in the Diaspora, a theme that introduces us to the next two chapters.

Chapter six – “The World Wars as Jewish Wars” - continues the chronological history of the relationship between Jews and the military force into the first

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<sup>13</sup> The bibliography on muscular Judaism as a tool for emancipation and national construction is very vast. See at least Michael Stanislawski, *Zionism and the fin de Siècle: Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism from Nordau to Jabotinsky*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

decades of the twentieth century until the end of the Second World War. New perspectives are introduced here, i.e. the first all-Jewish military units during the First World War, the internationalist call for mobilization during the Spanish civil war, and Jews fighting during the Second World War under the banners the Allied forces or in the Resistance. In this respect the geographical and conceptual horizon of this chapter is broader than that of the previous ones. After a brief description of the separate Jewish units of the 20<sup>th</sup> century - the Zion Mule Corps (1915), the Jewish Legion (1917) (which contained some of the would be founders of the *Haganah*) within the British Army and some separate Jewish units in the Red Army (1917) – the chapter moves on to the Spanish Civil War, contextualized as the “next battlefront in the Jewish world wars of the twentieth century” (p. 200) and as a Jewish war (p. 206). According to a variety of sources, between 5,000 to 7,000 Jews fought in the International Brigades in Spain, about one fifth of the total. According to these pages, it is difficult to indicate a precise reason for such a large Jewish mobilization, or at least a possible dominant motive: the internationalist drive, communism, the threat to their world represented by Fascism, deep-seated Jewish sensitivities. For this and other reasons, the Spanish Civil is considered a Jewish war on two levels: in the first place “as part of a global struggle against Nazism and anti-Semitism”; secondly “as a performance of a Jewish virility and heroism that historically had been tied to national patriotism but was now put in the service of international Marxism” (p. 206).

If this chapter’s subject is the participation of Jewish soldiers to the wars of the first half of the twentieth century, its last section focuses extensively on their contribution to the fight against Nazi-Fascism. The count of Jewish soldiers fighting on the various fronts reached one million and a half, one third of which in the Red Army, one third in the US army and the remaining third from Europe (Poland, British, France, in the Resistance). As we read at p. 208, “add to these various types of soldiers and rebels the thousand of Jewish partisans and ghetto rebels in eastern Europe, and the resulting total of Jewish fighters far exceeded the number of Jews killed at Auschwitz”. This essential statement would benefit from some references; however, it serves one of the main purposes of this volume, to deconstruct the narrative of feeble and weak Jews, slaughtered without fighting back. As in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, also during the Second World War, Jews enlisted in each country for different reasons beyond the minimum common denominator of joining against Nazi-Fascism (and Japan).

From here onwards the perspective on the events that follow (the end of World War two and the War of 1948 in the following chapter) comes from North America. In chapter six various themes emerge: the significance of enlisting

beyond just joining the war effort (seen by some recent historiography as a means of both Americanization and intensification of Jewish ethnic identity, p. 210), the role of apologetic literature of the period for adults and for youth, for example through Canadian and American comic books which strengthened the image of the armed and fighting Jew, and the construction in the US of the Yishuv's image as a fighting establishment, Palestine being the place where "almost from the first day of the war, the entire Yishuv mobilized as one man" (p. 216). In this way it was described in the 1941 yearbook of the Zionist United Palestine Appeal (UPA).

The situation in Palestine was actually different, but these pages are very interesting as they integrate the historiography on the so-called "Bergson group" (gathered around Hillel Kook, aka Peter Bergson) in raising consciousness, recruiting (political) sympathies and funds, and in lobbying on behalf of the future Jewish state. This was a Revisionist enterprise, helped by other groups of émigrés organized in the Revisionist New Zionist Organization of America (NZOA) led, among others, also by Ben-Zion Netanyahu. Thus, a number of Revisionist-inspired initiatives laid the foundations of the support of those American Jews "who had not been lured by the siren of socialism" for the would-be Jewish State. The Bergson group was particularly effective at winning endorsements from national political leaders (p. 221). Historically, the idea of a Jewish army had been a constant in the ideology and rhetoric of Revisionist Zionism; in the wake of World War Two however, it was advocated by Labour leaders of the Yishuv, as well as by the President of the Zionist Organization, Chaim Weizmann. Only in 1944, as it is well known, the British administration in Palestine allowed the creation of a 5000-men strong independent Jewish Brigade, sending them to the European fronts through Italy. In the meantime 30,000 Jews from Palestine had volunteered in the British Army.

The book ends with chapter seven – "1948 as a Jewish World War" (rather than an Israeli-Palestinian war) and is then closed by an Epilogue. The first looks at the War of 1948 through a Diaspora-Homeland framework in various fields, of military relations, of economic contributions and, finally, of the construction of a celebrating narrative which has grown increasingly detached from the original contemporary reporting. The other offers some conclusions as to the theme of rupture versus continuity of the Jewish participation in army life in the Diaspora and Israel.

Chapter seven starts by looking at the voluntary military contribution of many (mainly American) Diaspora Jews to the battles of the War of 1948. In this respect their testimonies, stories and a discussion of their tasks and actions helps re-appraise their standing within an Israeli nationalist narrative that has downplayed their role and successes to highlight those of the indigenous new conscripted citizen-soldier fighting for his/her homeland. Partisans were among the first waves of recruits (GAHAL) in the War of 1948, followed by at least 3,500 volunteers (MACHAL) from the US (1,100), Canada and South Africa (1 per cent of the Jewish population). Others came from Europe too; for France and Britain one in 500 Jews volunteered, many of whom had been fighting in other national armies just a few years before. Of great interest are the biographical profile of the well known Col. David “Mickey” Marcus (among other things, one of the men selected by Ben Gurion’s emissary to the US as a foreign expert that could help build an army out of initial “scruffy militias” - p. 232) for example; and of Major Benjamin Dunkelman, officer of the Canadian army who became Commander of the Seventh Brigade which took part to the conquest of the Galilee. Dunkelman was replaced as military Governor of the city of Nazareth after defying his superiors over the question of expelling the Palestinians population that he had pledged to protect after the city’s surrender (pp. 234-235). These two examples, among the others, reveal the cultural differences and the difficulties of the encounter between Homeland and Diaspora, the existence of an exchange between the two and, therefore, a substantial continuity. From an economic point of view, it was a fruitful encounter, especially if “the final and crucial quarter of the costs of Israel’s War of Independence came from diaspora Jewry” (p. 239), through fund raising but also through the acquisition of arms and other means, both during and after the 1948 war. These pages focus more extensively on US Jewry than on other diasporas; they paint an interesting picture of the deep involvement of many US affluent Jewish families with the Zionist project through the so-called “Sonneborn Institute”, the well known underground network of bourgeois and aristocratic Jews which - in tight cooperation with the *Haganah* - raised millions of dollars to procure weapons and ships for illegal immigration to Palestine, airplanes and equipment for arms manufacture. Similar rings existed in Europe, for example in Marseilles and, as it is well known, in Southern Italy; even though this aspect is not dealt with in the volume, here too less affluent Jews from the North offered their names for the purchase of ships for illegal immigration or their manpower and language skills in the mediation between the *Haganah* and the local authorities. The North American perspective of this chapter tends to sacrifice other examples that could have completed the comparative perspective. Finally, from the point of view of



how the narrative of the 1948 war was constructed in the US, the chapter closes by pointing out how contemporary reporting on the event of the War of 1948 was less concerned with embellishing Zionist victories or denying Zionist expulsions of Palestinians; more disturbing, and thus less present in the press at the time, was another factor, i.e. the participation of American Jews to the war as volunteers.

The Epilogue confirms the political nature of a book that focuses on the Diaspora but ends up speaking about the State of Israel, its culture, and its claim to a strong discontinuity with both a distant and recent past of apparent Jewish weakness and destruction. Such a claim is obviously political; it has found - and continues to find - an echo in mainstream and Zionist historiography and is full part of the national public discourse. Downplaying (if not denying) the historical Jewish involvement with the military and participation in war(s) served (and continues to serve) several historiographical and political purposes: it helps re-affirm the narrative on the regenerative potential that Zionism attributes to itself through nationalism; it presents military strength as the *one* factor that can make the difference between collective survival and destruction in a society daunted by security concerns; finally, it reaffirms the primacy of the army in Israeli society. In this we can maybe find a partial rupture between the State of Israel and the Jewish Diaspora. Indeed, if Jews in the various countries always took part to military campaigns and donned military uniforms, militarism was never their horizon; there were exceptions of course, some generals, military academy graduates and some Italian early bird supporters of the Fascist movement, whose militarism one can detect from their articles published in the Journal "La Nostra Bandiera" [Our Flag], just to mention a few examples; however, militarism per se never stood at the center of their lives, as individuals and as a collective. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about the State of the Jews.

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Jan Županič, *Židovská šlechta podunajské monarchie. Mezi Davidovou hvězdou a křížem* [The Jewish Nobility of the Danubian Monarchy. Between the Star of David and the Cross]  
(Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2012) pp. 811.

by Václav Horčíčka

Nobility, its development, structure and lifestyle have long been the focus of attention for many historians. In the same vein, the research on Jewish history, which has, until recently, targeted mostly the tragic period of the Second World War, is now providing a more complex portrayal, examining the issue from various angles and time periods. It is noteworthy that Jewish nobility has escaped the attention of a majority of historians who study the development and status of nobility in the modern times and history of Jews.

This situation has undergone a radical change over the past few years, with three publications examining the subject. They are the studies by Georg Gaugusch (*Wer einmal war. Das jüdische Grossbürgertum Wiens 1800-1938*, Teil I. (A-K), Wien 2011), Kai Drewes (*Jüdischer Adel. Nobilitierungen von Juden im Europa des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt am Main – New York 2013) and Jan Županič (*The Jewish Nobility of the Danubian Monarchy*).

Rather than being a scientific monograph, the study by Georg Gaugusch can be viewed as an invaluable genealogic handbook, which contains an interesting introductory study. Furthermore, it is, for the moment, partially useful as only the first volume (letters A-K) has been published. In contrast, the dissertation by Kai Drewes is very different, being the first of its kind to attempt a synthesis of all Jewish ennoblements in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Undoubtedly, Drewes' assets consist of a vast knowledge of history, sound expertise in methodology and clear logical text-structure, as well as the ability to ask the right questions. On the other hand, the study is not flawless. While its main focus is nobility (whether that be Jewish or not), the author fails to describe the different structures of noble communities in individual countries, and says only little about various policies of ennoblements and methods of acquisition of noble titles in the

countries studied. Moreover, although allegedly “European,” the main focus of the study is on Austria, Great Britain and Prussia, scarcely illustrating the situation in other important countries (France, Spain etc). In fact, it has been nearly impossible to compare the situation of Jewish nobility in different countries, since there are no thorough studies examining their situations. As a result, the principal benefit of the book is a list (although inaccurate) of the ennoblements of Jews and Jewish converts in Austria, Great Britain and Prussia, as well as reflections on Jewish ennoblements in the European society of the “long” 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The book by Jan Županič is of a different nature. Its principal aim was not only to provide a complex portrayal of Jewish nobility, but mostly to outline the specific features of this social group and its status in a changing world, as well as to draw a portrayal of its relations to the majority Christian society, but most of all to describe its social mobility, political engagement and variety of status symbols.

As the book aims for a better understanding of the elites in the Habsburg monarchy, its principal target is to set out the establishment and development of Jewish nobility in a wider context. Should the premise be that Jewish aristocrats were members of the Jewish elite and strove for greater self-accomplishment, it is highly likely that they would seek links to the majority (Christian) society and participate in the activities of many organisations of that time, i.e. cultural and work associations, charities, and foundations. The desire to stand out is also closely related to the relation of (not only Jewish) elites to ennoblement and their interest in the acquisition of noble titles.

It is for the above reason that the book contains two separate parts. The first studies the subject of Jewish nobility and is divided into several chapters. The longest chapter, titled *The Jewish Nobility of the Danubian Monarchy*, is about the development of this group and its specific features. The next chapter, *The Austrian Noble Rights*, outlines basic information on the possibilities of an acquisition of a noble title in Austria (Austria-Hungary) and mentions several other important aspects of the-then rights of the nobility. The chapter *The Coats of Arms of the Jewish Nobility* analyses the topic of coats of arms and presents readers with the question whether there is such a thing as specific Jewish heraldry. The final chapter, *The Perishing World of the Jewish Nobility* offers a brief characterization of the stories of Jewish nobles in 1918-1945 and in the Second World War, which radically transformed the ethnic, religious, and political map of

Central Europe. It was at that time that the Jewish community, for many centuries established in this universe, practically perished, including Jewish nobles who had in the better case scenarios, emigrated and shattered for good their links to the region; or in the worst case ended up in one of the Nazi's concentration camps.

The other, encyclopaedic part provides detailed information on two hundred Jewish families. The portrayals are not comprehensive. The author presumably focused on the origin of the individual families and on the reasons behind their ennoblement, whereas any other information (including the data on conversion) tends to be concise. Contrary to the aforementioned study by Gaugusch, the extent of the present publication is undoubtedly much wider. While G. Gaugusch targets Austria's haute bourgeoisie, Županič depicts many families of the lower middle class, who acquired their noble titles for their merit in the development of arts and science, or long army service.

The author claims that the two hundred families represent less than a half of all Austrian ennoblements of people of the Jewish religion and origin. Because the Austrian and Hungarian noble communities were closely interlinked, the author included in his book several Hungarian families, but only the branches of previously ennobled families in Cisleithania. In one case, an originally Bavarian noble family is mentioned (von Hirsch) and the personality of the alleged (though never ennobled) aristocrat of a Prussian origin, Bethel Henry Strousberg, has an important position in the book.

It should be noted how the author also mentions some families that descended from Italy (Italian provinces of Austria), moved from Italy (Italian states) to Austria, or on the contrary came from Austria to Italy. Some of them, which had Italian roots, lived in Vienna and in Bohemia as well. One example could be the family of Bassevi von Treyenberg. The family of Eisner von Eisenhof has been living in today's Italy, as well as the families of Goldschmied, Herzfeld (1867), Herzfeld (1871), Landau (all in Trieste) and Taussig de Bondonia (Firenze).

Županič, like many other authors, finds himself facing the pitfall of the notion of "Jewish nobility." In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the number of Jewish conversions grew a great deal. Some of the ennobled Jews later converted to Christianity or left the Jewish community, while in other families, only the children did so, and in others still, the Jewish faith was

preserved. Being aware of this issue, Županič opted for the “ethnic” approach, adding to “Jewish nobility” people of the Israeli religion, as well as ennobled individuals originally born in Jewish families who had converted earlier and who had a much lower awareness of their Jewish origin.

By virtue of this ethnic approach, the author has succeeded in providing clear evidence that conversion to Christianity had not been important for the acquisition of a noble title since the reign of Joseph II, although it had made it easier (especially since mid-19<sup>th</sup> century). Analysing the two hundred families, Županič proves that noble titles in Austria were not privileges of financial and industrial oligarchs, but were often granted to freelancers, artists, officials, journalists and military officers.

Consequently, the present book is a remarkable and exceptional contribution to the study of elites in the Habsburg Empire and, thanks to the comparison provided of the situation in Prussia and Hungary, it frequently goes beyond the frontiers of Austria. Importantly, the study is primarily based on documents that had, until recently, languished, largely ignored in Austrian, Czech, Hungarian and Prussian archives. As a result, the publication contains an extensive supplement with colour pictures of the coats of arms of the individual families, based on the materials deposited in Austrian and Hungarian archives of the nobility.

*The Jewish Nobility of the Danubian Monarchy* answers many questions while posing many, too. Hence, it opens up space for forthcoming research for which it provides solid background information. As a result, the book is an outstanding contribution to a better understanding of the development of Jewish society and noble elites in the 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

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*Pius XII and the Holocaust. Current State of Research*, eds. David Banker, Dan Michman and Yael Nidam-Orvieto (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem 2012) pp. 278.

by *Liliana Picciotto*

On March 8-9, 2009 Yad Vashem International Institute for Holocaust Research and the Salesian Theological Institute of Saints Peter and Paul in Jerusalem convened an international workshop on the topic of the controversial attitude of Pope Pius XII toward the Jewish sufferings during the Holocaust period. The main aim of the workshop was to review the current state of the research, in light of recent publications and, even more so, the archival material that has recently been discovered or opened to the public.

The Salesian Institute invited several scholars: Andrea Tornielli, Matteo Napolitano and Grazia Loporco from Italy, Jean-Dominique Durand from France and Thomas Brechenmacher from Germany, Yad Vashem invited experts who have conducted studies on the topic based on primary documentation: Paul O'Shea from Australia, Michael Phayer and Susan Zuccotti from the USA; Sergio Minerbi and Dina Porat from Israel; Yad Vashem itself was represented by David Bankier (sadly dead on 2010), Dan Michman, and Iael Orvieto.

The main questions posed by the organizers of the workshop were, first: can materials that recently became available shed a new light on the controversy surrounding the activity of Pius XII? And second: can historiography reach a better and more comprehensive understanding of the crucial questions related to this topic?

The workshop was organized according to specific historiographical questions. In each session, a presenter and a respondent were asked to relate to one question previously presented to them. An open discussion with all participants followed. The workshop was indeed a gathering of researchers who range from fierce critics to ardent defenders.

The publication issued in 2012 consists of the transcript of the presentations of each speaker in the workshop.

The range of topics presented begins with the pre-papacy period of Pacelli's life and continues until the aftermath of World War II.

The part that I found most interesting covers from session four to session five B: Pius XII's messages to European Bishops, Leaders and Governments; Pius XII and Hiding in Italy; Pius XII and German Diplomats.

These were some of the questions: could Pope Pius have communicated secretly with European bishops to tell them to confidentially encourage Catholics to

protect Jews or to publicly protest against Nazi atrocities. Did he do so? Do we have any knowledge about papal appeals to local authorities, on behalf of Jews, besides the known exceptions of Slovakia and Hungary? To what extent did Pius XII influence government policies toward the Jewish population in Catholic countries?

Matteo Napolitano affirms that the Holy See did not have a temporal power, capable of making people respect it. Considering that, what kind of diplomacy could the Holy See exercise? Classic diplomacy had to be abandoned. The Holy See's political power could only be successful if other entities listened to it. What alternative was there? A "catacomb diplomacy," i.e. a diplomacy that had to be conveyed underground. Many scholars answered that this was not a diplomatic issue but an ethical one. Actually, as an officially neutral state, the Vatican constantly balanced its statements between all warring parties and, Paul O'Shea said, satisfied none. Until we have the opening of the official archives, from the evidence available we can say that Pius XII had quite a clear picture of the Nazi killing process from at least the middle of 1941 and, except for the contorted logic of defending the mixed marriages and the rescue attempts directed primarily at baptized Jews, the Pope did not officially take a stand for the rescue of European Jews.

Jean Dominique Durand joined the discussion adding that one cannot speak about "silence" because the Pope had spoken out, in his own way, at least three times. He acted like other moral authorities, for example the Red Cross. The final choice of the Red Cross demonstrates that the question of an intervention, of a statement, was a problem for many other moral authorities in the world. David Bankier points out that the major question is: when did the Pope understand that his response was not proportioned to what was happening? This is the crucial question: at what point does an event become a precipitator that leads to a change of awareness of reality? The awareness of the killing process did push Pius XII to reflect: at that stage there were no longer two options but only one: to issue a public statement, even considering the risks involved.

The results of the discussion around the questions have not deviated much from the usual arguments: "the Pope did everything he could" versus "he could do more." Historians do not really have brought new arguments to discussion, they just repeated what we already know, emphasizing more strongly this or that aspect of the matter and postponing further discussion when the Vatican archives for the years in question will be opened.

The next questions were: did the Pope give instruction or help to hide Jews in Italy? What documentation do we have in this regard?

The best expert to answer these questions is Sister Grazia Loporco, member of the Coordination of Religious Historians, a group of religious scholars who, since 2002, have been conducting research on the religious houses of Rome who sheltered the Jews. Grazia Loporco analyzed the numbers we already know, published in 1961 by Renzo De Felice: of about 10-12,000 Jews living in Rome in 1943, at least 4,500 were saved by religious houses. Her research shows that on the approximately 750 religious homes that existed in Rome, some 220 hid Jews. It is an important fact that must be placed in the particular situation of Rome at that time. The city at the same time saw the largest, numerically speaking, Jewish community of Italy and the largest concentration of religious houses in the world. It seems only natural that in Rome the Jews went to monasteries for help, as structures able to offer a sheltered place to sleep, and, on the other hand, that the monasteries granted aid under the impulse of Christian charity. I do not think there was even a need for a specific order, especially since Rome was at that time housing a wave of refugees fleeing war zones and who poured into the city. The Jews were part of this world of civilians in need of finding solutions to sleep and eat.

I must add on that matter that the Center for Jewish Contemporary Documentation (CDEC) based in Milan, is conducting a research on the Jews in Italy who escaped arrests and deportation: how, where, and by whom they were aided. The situation elsewhere [than Rome] was very different: the majority of Jews in Italy saved themselves thanks to a series of circumstances, among which the help of the clergy is an important but not the dominant element. The first results of this research will be published shortly on Holocaust and Genocide Studies.

Going back to the fundamental question: was there a recommendation from the top, if not an order, to provide shelters to the Jews? Was the help activity due to a spontaneous initiative, or was there any kind of a message also given?

The testimonies Sister Loporco managed to gather show examples of both. In some cases there was a spontaneous action, while in others the religious houses were opened upon instructions orally transmitted by priests or people connected to the Holy See. But the argument applies only to Rome. As well pointed out by Dan Michman for the Belgian case it is evident that there was a large difference in behaviour between different monasteries and between different regions. Had a directive been issued from the top, the behaviour would always have been the same and all the religious houses would have opened or closed their doors. The same applies to the rest of the Italian cities apart from Rome. Anyway, the research of Sister Loporco is not only worthy of attention, but it deserves encouragement.



About this issue, I agree with Paul O'Shea that the argument that the Pope ordered the convents and monasteries of Rome to take in Jews is suspicious. It would be very surprising if such a written order ever existed. Likewise, it would be extremely silly that the Pope would have said not to rescue them.

The other issue that seems to me of great interest pertains to the relations between the Vatican and German diplomats in Rome. Thanks to Susan Zuccotti's painstaking research, published in her book *Under His Very Windows*, the issue has been properly placed.

Vatican intervention in the hours that followed the raid on Jews was too weak compared to the seriousness of the offense and never reached the pitch of a real protest, much less of a diplomatic note. It is very clear from Maglione's own description of his meeting with Weizsäcker that the Pope did not issue a formal diplomatic protest to the October roundup. Instead, he resorted to discrete diplomatic intervention, as was his custom.

A second question gets our attention: was perhaps the Pope's intervention that caused the suspension of the raid? Zuccotti answers negatively to this question. She says, and I agree with her, that the roundup ended at 2 pm not because Himmler stopped it, but because all the addresses of Jews on the German police list had already been visited.

A third issue has been brought to the attention of the participants of the workshop: the arrested were 1,259, 252 were released. Could the releases be attributed to a papal intervention? Zuccotti rightly points out that the 252 prisoners were released not because of Vatican pressure, but because the German SS was not deporting individuals belonging to these categories: non-Jews, half-Jews; Jews in mixed marriages, Hungarian citizens. They were exempt from deportation.

The seminar held in Jerusalem raised many other questions, which have been discussed calmly and conscientiously by all parties. However, the workshop was successful because it allowed the gathering of many historians on the *vexata quaestio*. In summary, however, it seems to me that everyone is left to their own opinion and the discussion around the figure and the role of Pius would see more to come.

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**Michael A. Livingston, *The Fascists and the Jews of Italy. Mussolini's Race Laws, 1938-1943* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2014) X-267.**

by *Michele Sarfatti*

Michael A. Livingston is professor of Law at the Rutgers School of Law, Camden. His areas of research are tax law, comparative law, and law and the Holocaust. *The Fascists and the Jews of Italy. Mussolini's Race Laws, 1938-1943* has been published in the book series of the American Society for Legal History. It explores the content and implementation of Italian anti-Jewish laws from 1938 to 1943 – which were the years in which the Fascist regime was not yet engaged in a murderous persecution – leaving out the years from 1943 to 1945, marked instead by arrests and deportation. The author takes a highly original approach, even if compared to studies published in Italy. His reconstruction and observations are therefore of considerable significance for the advancement of research and debate both in Italy and internationally.

Livingston examines the content and implementation of the anti-Jewish laws by placing them within the general framework of Italian juridical norms and administrative life, devoting but little attention to the history of Italian anti-Semitism as the laws' background. He also compares some of the results of his analysis with other scholars' views of anti-Semitic legislation in Nazi Germany and Vichy France. In this regard, he argues, in the wake of Richard H. Weisberg, that "the Holocaust must be considered in a sophisticated manner that takes into account each nation's legal and intellectual traditions rather than in a linear fashion that asks whether a country was 'more' or 'less' anti-Semitic on a single, unitary scale" (p. 12). This approach, although rarely adopted, is correct and it is only thanks to it that the author is able to explain that "there are vital differences between Italy and other countries, which provide significant insights into Italian history and the broader Holocaust era" (p. 21).

According to the author, the laws enacted by Mussolini were well suited both to what might be acceptable in a country which, up to that moment, had officially not been anti-Semitic, and to the existing Italian administrative and juridical system. Thus, what the Fascist regime did was to create "a new, uniquely Italian approach to the anti-Semitic problem" (p. 25).

After expounding the differences existing between Fascist and Nazi anti-Jewish legislations and concrete implementation, Livingston points out that, although

in some respects Fascist anti-Semitism was (until 1943) not as harsh as Nazi anti-Semitism, simplistic comparisons ought to be avoided. Proper consideration should instead be given to the different kind of totalitarian state existing in Italy and in Germany, to the importance that legal and extra-legal measures had in the two countries and to the preeminence assigned to anti-Semitic policies rather than to other political priorities.

Many chapters in the book deal in great detail with the laws, their implementation, the reaction of the people persecuted, the judicial proceedings of individual cases. As for the latter, the author again takes up a topic that has been much debated in Italy, namely that of the actions of some judges, notably in Turin. In his view, some of the important judgments by the courts should be seen as an indication that the judges wished to abide by the general legislative framework (which included pre-Fascist laws still in force) rather than as proof that they meant to sabotage anti-Jewish laws or at least to protect the persecuted person. He thus raises the question of the “ambiguities of resistance and collaboration” (p. 156), an issue that concerns not just anti-Semitism, but the entire twenty years of Fascism in Italy.

With regard to Jewish response to persecution, Livingston describes both the reactions of individuals and those of the organization that since 1931 represented all persons belonging to the Jewish faith: the *Unione delle Comunità Israelitiche Italiane* (Union of Italian Israelites Communities). The focus of his interest is on what the victims felt they might ask and obtain, rather than on any actions on their part aimed at preserving their identity and values. Examining a long letter sent by the Union in 1939 to the Minister of the Interior (i.e. Mussolini himself), he reaches the conclusion that it “focuses on issues that were still subject to change (local ordinances, the press campaign, the as yet incomplete real property and professional limitations), rather than challenging the underlying validity of the laws” (p. 213), an attitude “not much different” from that of any person or association trying as best it could to mitigate the effects of an unavoidable calamity.

On some points I find myself unable to concur with Livingston’s views, as when he maintains that the Italian definition of “belonging to the Jewish race” was not “purely (...) biological-racist,” but rather “hybrid,” being based on an “approach (...) partially religious or cultural” (pp. 37-38, 40). I am still persuaded that the former of these interpretations is the correct one. I base my view on the case (which never actually occurred, yet can be rationally assumed) of a person christened at birth, having sixteen “Jewish” great-great-grandparents, whose descendants had all been christened: in Fascist Italy that person would

inescapably be classed as of “Jewish race” (as in Nazi Germany). It follows that the approach chosen by Mussolini was uncompromisingly “biological-racist.” The overall critical assessment of the book is positive, both with regard to the research carried out and also because it opens up or reformulates important questions. One of these is the comparison between the various anti-Semitic systems in 20th century Europe. According to Livingston, when comparing them one should not focus only on the violence, however vicious it may have been. In his opinion, the study of the Italian system shows that: “...the legal procedurally correct nature of a racist system – while avoiding some short-term excesses of a full-blown criminal enterprise – may in the long run make the system stronger rather than weaker” (p. 119). It is a question that is open for collective consideration.

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Guy Ben-Porat, *Between State and Synagogue. The Secularization of Contemporary Israel*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, 2013.

by *Marcella Simoni*

This volume represents an important contribution to the literature on the relationship between Church and State, focusing on the State of Israel, hence the reference to Synagogue in the title. The volume is divided in six chapters; the first two provide a theoretical and a historical introduction, while the following four address one main theme each: the question of civil marriage (ch. 3) and of civil burial (ch. 4), that of raising, producing, selling and serving pork in Israel (ch. 5) and the question of shopping (and more in general of conducting business) on Israel's official day of rest, the *Shabbat* (ch. 6). The relevance of these subjects is only apparently different, civil marriage and burial seemingly carrying more weight than eating pork or shopping on *Shabbat*. However, this choice of subjects is convincing for at least three reasons: first, it helps to present a balanced argument within a coherent analysis of the process of secularization which has unfolded in Israel since the 1990s (p. 213). The A. looks at various factors: individuals' belief and behaviour, the private initiative of economic entrepreneurs responding to individual and socio-economic needs not otherwise covered by the State, the campaigns of some organizations and movements to have acknowledged the legitimacy of a secular perspective on certain individual rights, the role of the High Court of Justice in such a process. Second, each of the four themes mentioned above is investigated with equal thoroughness and rigour; finally, an analysis conducted on four such different subjects also shows how pervasive, and ultimately limiting, can religious monopoly be for who would rather have the possibility to choose between a religious or a secular perspective in the State of Israel, among them secular individuals and many migrants from the former Soviet Union (FSU). And while the book is very balanced between apparently heavier and lighter subjects, one cannot but wonder why the A. did not extend his analysis to include other topics as well: education seems an important crossroads where lay and religious authorities, institutions and legislation meet, clash and often compromise; so is medical care and research (in particular in the field of reproductive health, euthanasia, organ donation), as well as two other topics which are only marginally touched upon respectively in chapter 3 and 4; these are same sex families and step children adoption on the one hand, and military service (and who can be exempted) on the other.

Each of the four subjects investigated here is first framed from a theoretical point of view, placed in a brief comparative perspective with other national cases, religious traditions and national legislations, and is then scrutinized for the Israeli situation. Some historical background is given for each of them, but *Between State and Synagogue* can be viewed as an example of history of the present. This emerges from at least two points; in the first place, from the sources used by the A. These consists of media reports and

internet data, studies conducted by various organizations which have campaigned to introduce a more secular agenda in Israeli society and politics, an analysis of some of their initiatives, judicial decisions taken on one or the other issue discussed in the various chapters, surveys provided by the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, as well as about forty in depth interviews with some of the actors involved in the process of secularization that the country apparently has been undergoing since the 1990s. The A. terms them secular entrepreneurs – for instance managers of a shop/shopping centre, representatives of reformed or conservative temples and movements, managers of secular cemeteries or travel agents that organize civil weddings abroad, notably Cyprus - who share some (mainly) economic or (less so) ideological interest in the country's secularization. One can speak of history of the present also because of the main chronological turning point that recurs throughout the study, i.e. the 1990s, when about one million persons from the FSU immigrated to Israel. They were recognized as Jews collectively for immigration purposes according to the Law of Return, but not individually for reasons of uncertain individual descent, as many of them did not match the religious legal criteria (*halakhah*) followed by Orthodox religious institutions and hence, by the State. This left many of them in an impossible limbo where – in a context where personal status law continues to be monopolised by Orthodox religious authorities - their individual rights could not be guaranteed. This was for example the case Lev Pesachov discussed in chapter 4 (p. 109). One should not forget that the same decade saw the incorporation of Israel into a process of economic globalization. The combination of these factors opened up new demands for more secular spaces and helped readdress and re-discuss the relationship between the State, society, religious parties and institutions and individuals in various ways.

There are several questions that this book addresses: in the first place, what is the institutional setting for the relationship between Church and State that was laid in 1948 (*status quo*), an agreement that indeed left in the hands of Orthodox religious institutions issues of personal status law (marriage and divorce), of life, death and burial, that imposed the *Sabbath* (in its religious definition) as Israel's day of rest and that prohibited the breeding, sale and consumption of pork. Secondly, what have been the social and political consequences of this state of affairs since the early 1950s, and how did this setting stand the trial of the 1990s. Who have been the political or individual secular entrepreneurs that operated – and often struggled - to change such a setting; which interests and rationales guided them, if they responded to an ideological commitment, to an economic interest or if they acted to respond to the emergence of a social question. Some of these questions are outlined in the preface (p. xvii) but, in a broader perspective, one of the main questions that the book tries to answer is whether, and to what extent, can we call Israel (as a State and as a society) secular or religious, or if any of the nuances available between these two terms – from ultra-orthodox to traditional – describe the situation more accurately. Put it differently - and to go back to a long past controversy – this book contributes to the discussion whether Israel is a Jewish state, i.e.

a state where religion is institutionalized, and where it regulates the intimate desires and practices of its citizens, what they can or cannot eat, and when they can spend their earnings, and how such a situation reflects on the concepts of democracy as a system of value and as a practice. Or if, on the contrary, Israel is a state of Jews (*Der Judenstaat?*), where varying degrees of religious identity are expressed and accordingly regulated according to individual sensitivity and wishes (p. 6).

After analysing in depth the four themes mentioned above and the changes they underwent from the 1990s onwards, the answer seems pretty straightforward: the State is ultimately considered “lagging behind in secularization” (p. 224), while the picture that emerges from society is more complex, being it almost impossible to measure religious identity “on a single-dimensional axis of religious belief” (p. 48). In his conclusions, Ben-Porat resumes Sammy Smooha’s (1997) definition of Israel as an “ethnic democracy”, i.e. “a nonliberal democracy with a stratified citizenship structure that excludes and marginalizes groups according to ethnicity and gender” (p. 224).

Central to the argument of this volume is the distinction between secularization – defined here as a process and as the decline of religious authority - and secularism – seen as an ideology, a “comprehensive worldview associated with liberal ideology of equality and freedom” (p. xii). This study is primarily concerned with the former and with the interesting and manifold processes connected to such a decline in the political, social and economic spheres; indeed the A. refers to a deconstruction, or as he terms it, “disaggregation” of the concept of secularization as one that “opens up the possibility of a more nuanced and empirical study of both the declining role of religion in society vis-à-vis other systems (political and economic) and the role of religion in individual lives” (p. 6). After reading the book, one would hope that such a disaggregation would eventually also open up the possibility of a more nuanced lifestyle where citizens are guaranteed in their rights and intimate wishes before an equal law.

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**Francesca Bregoli, *Mediterranean Enlightenment. Livornese Jews, Tuscan Culture, and Eighteenth-Century Reform* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press 2014) pp. 338.**

by *Ulrich Wyrwa*

After the conquest of Pisa and Livorno, until then a small and unimportant fishing harbour, in the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century the Medici planned to establish Livorno, or Leghorn, as it is named in English, as a central Tuscan port by expanding its commerce and trade activities. The first invitation to Jews and other oppressed or underprivileged people to settle in Leghorn took place during the reign of Cosimo I. However, it remained rather ineffective. Yet when Ferdinand I renewed the edict in the last decade of the 16<sup>th</sup> century – again inviting Jews and others to live there without any legal restrictions and offering them tax privileges to carry on commerce – the city underwent a rapid growth. This edict, the so-called Livornina, offered Jews not only the right to establish their own community but also ensured them wide-ranging autonomy. Furthermore, it gave Marranos the possibility to turn back to Judaism freely and with impunity. Leghorn, therefore, became the second largest Jewish community in the Italian peninsula. Even after the passage from Medici to Habsburg rule in 1737, Leghorn retained its privileged status. Furthermore, and in sharp contrast to all the other Italian cities, Livornese Jews were not forced to live in a ghetto. Whereas Jews in the Italian peninsula around the year 1800 accounted for only 0.2 % of the population, Leghorn had a Jewish population of 10 %. Its social profile was characterized by predominantly wealthy Jews who were active not only in commerce but also in textile, soap and coral manufacture. In this atmosphere of tolerance and prosperity, a unique and vivid Jewish life developed, and Leghorn enjoyed a European wide reputation as a paradise or oasis of the Jews.

The exceptional character of Leghorn's Jewish community and its environment has attracted a huge amount of historical research. Thus, the history of Leghorn's Jewry, together with the rich heritage of local histories, is well documented. On the basis of these documents and together with the additional sources available in the local archives, both of the Jewish community as well as of the Tuscan state, Francesca Bregoli presents the relationship of Livornese Jews with the Tuscan enlightenment. Strangely enough she does not use the English term for this port city, Leghorn, as for example the editors of the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* did.

After an introductory chapter concerning the peculiarity of the Jewish community of Leghorn and its relation to the Tuscan state, subtitled aptly a "A Fruitful Symbiosis," she directly turns to one of the most prominent figures of



the enlightened Livornese Jewry, Joseph Attias (1672-1745), who left commerce to address himself extensively to scientific studies and erudite conversations. He corresponded with some of the most important proponents of the Italian Enlightenment and established a huge library. His house became a vivid place of intellectual exchange between Jewish and Christian intellectuals. Strangely, however, Attias never published anything. Bregoli has analysed extensively his intellectual activities and the composition of his library as well as his conflicts with the Inquisition.

Bregoli considers the publications of Livornese Jews written under the influence of the Enlightenment, demonstrating the presence of the Galilean tradition among the Tuscan enlightenment, where she again highlights the central role of Attias. The next chapter examines the extensive medical studies of Livornese Jews presenting above all the Angelo de Soria, Joseph Vita Castelli and Graziadio Bondi. They all laud the Habsburg Grand Dukes of their times as patrons of sciences and medicine, as Bregoli underlines in her conclusion of this chapter. But she did not reduce her study to science alone, she also examines religious and devotional literature in the age of Enlightenment.

An interesting chapter is related to the emergence of the coffeehouse culture in Leghorn, and the participation of Jews therein. This chapter covers not only the foundation of the first coffeehouses in Leghorn but also the role of gambling and entertainment, including the debates within the Jewish community regarding these new forms of leisure activities.

Returning to the erudite culture, Bregoli then examines the business of Hebrew book printing in Leghorn, analysing its genres and distribution. In the last chapter she considers the peculiarities of Leghorn vis-à-vis the contemporary discussions of economic utility and political reforms. She notes that the European debate, opened by the publication of the Prussian enlightened reform politician Christian Wilhelm Dohm about the civil improvement of the Jews, found no reception in Leghorn. Instead the enlightened Jews of Leghorn extensively discussed the play of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *The Jews*, which had there found a French response, published and performed in that city. Bregoli concludes this chapter with a paragraph on the municipal reforms, drafted by Francesco Maria Gianni, the enlightened adviser of Grand Duke Peter Leopold.

Francesca Bregoli's study stands up not only because of her sensitive presentation of the interaction between Jews and non-Jews in Leghorn, but also due to her comparative observations and to her perception of some of the current historical debates, like those on the role and importance of port cities in Jewish history – and notably the debate on the term Port Jews. In this context she draws stimulating comparisons between Leghorn and Trieste, referring however

exclusively to Anglo-American publications like those of Lois Dubin, ignoring the rich Italian studies on Triestine Port Jews by Tullia Catalan.

Bregoli has given an impressive presentation of this “Livornese model of engagement with eighteenth-century culture” (p. 239), but it might be worth asking if this picture is perhaps too smooth, if the ambivalences and conflicts within the age of enlightenment are slightly glossed over. Four questions could be discussed:

The first relates to her impressive picture of Josef Attias and other Livornese Jewish ‘illuminati,’ underlining their extensive intellectual exchange with Christian scholars. Bregoli disregards the hindrances and obstacles Livornese Jews were confronted with in other circles of the Christian middle classes and in local academies. Whereas some of the Christian intellectuals in Leghorn presented themselves as open for debate with Jewish intellectuals, others held strong resentments against Jews and were not willing to accept them as members in their associations. Moreover, Bregoli has not followed the change of the intellectual mood in Leghorn, and underestimates the fact that the lively circle around Josef Attias in fact disappeared after his death, along with his library.

Second, Bregoli has ignored the ambivalences and two-faced character of the Age of Enlightenment, or in other words the contemporaneousness of the non-contemporaneous. Leghorn Jewry, in this view, lived not only in an enlightened surrounding world, they also took part in an elaborate and remarkable *representative* public sphere where they faced a highly self-regarding court culture, expressed for instance in the excessive festivities rendering homage for the new Grand Dukes. Here too, Leghorn is most impressive.

Third, next to the persistence of court culture, which is left out of the account, Bregoli has only casually mentioned, and therefore underestimated, the hostility against the Jews on the part of the Livornese lower classes, which broke out in riots in 1790. These were also strongly connected with the enlightened absolutist reform politics, because the Livornese lower classes initially staged protests against the ecclesiastical reforms of Peter Leopold. These protests soon turned against the Jews.

Finally, Bregoli undervalues the intricacies of the enlightened reform policy of Peter Leopold and his advisor Gian Maria Gianni. Jews as all other Tuscans remained subjects, and therefore the term citizenship is rather misleading, as Bregoli herself indicates in a footnote. The question remains, in which way did the policies shaped by Gianni and the Grand Duke pursue relics of a hierarchical corporative society? Here a discussion of the constitution project of Peter Leopold could have been informative, but this is perhaps beyond the realm of a study on Leghorn.

*Ulrich Wyrwa*

However, these remarks do not diminish the worth of Francesca Bregoli's study. She has given us a well written and stimulating presentation of this inspiring and exceptional Jewish community in the exciting Age of Enlightenment.

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**Laurence Duchaine-Guillon, *La vie juive à Berlin après 1945*  
(Paris: CNRS Editions 2011), 464.**

by *Henri Zukier*

In Berlin, the modern era for the Jews started in 1671, when the great elector of Brandenburg, Friedrich Wilhelm, allowed fifty wealthy families from Vienna's expelled Jewish community to settle in Berlin and the Margravate Brandenburg, in return for heavy taxes and costly residence permits. Over the next few centuries, from Moses Mendelssohn to the end of the Weimar Republic, the community expanded and played an increasingly important role in the Jewish and German cultural, economic and political spheres.

The major periods in Berlin Jewish history have received extensive scholarly attention. This ambitious study focuses on a relatively neglected period: the post-war years, from 1945 till German reunification in 1989. During that period, Jewish life recommenced of course at a historical low, and was demographically and institutionally desolate. In 1933, there were about 170,000 Jews in the organized Jewish community. In 1946, the community numbered about 7,000 members: the majority, about 4,200, had been spared deportation because of a non-Jewish spouse; 1,500 had returned from concentration camps and 1,200 had survived in hiding. Various other Jewish groups also arrived in Berlin. In 1946, about 6,000 Jewish Displaced Persons (DPs) lived in Berlin, most of whom subsequently left the city; some Eastern European Jews also immigrated to Berlin, followed, in the 1970s, by about 3,000 Soviet Jews. The Jewish community remained unified through the beginnings of the Cold War in 1947, the Soviet blockade of the city in 1948, and the establishment of two German states in 1949. In 1953, however, the communities completed their own division, with profound demographic, social and political differences.

Post-war Berlin, then, is a city of many German and Jewish contradictions. The heterogeneous mix includes the political conflict between East and West, and a city in renewal and division; a Jewish community trying to rise from the ruins, amidst complexities of Jewish identity with most members intermarried, and tensions between Jewish groups of different religious and cultural backgrounds; and the inter-group dilemmas of a renewed Jewish-German relationship bringing victims and perpetrators together. The book explores these dynamics through

the use of the Berlin Jewish press after 1945, the very incomplete archives of the Jewish communities till 1978, and a number of interviews designed to supplement the historical information. Typically, the histories of the two communities are treated separately. Starting in 1952 with the Slansky show trial, a wave of Stalinist anti-Semitic propaganda and anti-Jewish persecutions in Eastern Europe led many of the few remaining Jews of East Berlin to seek refuge in the West. Thus, while the West Berlin community numbered over 6,000 from the 1960s on, the East Berlin community steadily declined from a few hundred members to under 200 in 1989. Given the considerable disparities in size, composition and political context of the two communities, a comparison is not unproblematic. This study seeks to transcend the differences with a comparative and “integrative historiography”.

The book is divided into five chapters, examining the early unitary history, then comparing the demographics, the institutions, the politics and culture in the two communities.

The first chapter explores the reconstruction of the community from 1945 to 1953; it describes striking resilience and distress. On 6 May, a few days after Berlin’s surrender, a first religious service is celebrated, followed by two Shabbat services on 11 May. The first wedding between two Auschwitz survivors takes place on 29 July. In the second half of 1946, the birthrate among Jewish DPs is the highest among worldwide Jewish communities. At the same time, the surviving Jews face considerable hardship, including shortages of housing and food and plenty of illness. The misery was somewhat eased by the assistance of international relief organizations, such as the Joint. The primary activity of the Jewish community in Berlin does not focus on culture or religion, but on social work. There are also repeated expressions of anti-Semitism, and debates rage within the community about the future, whether to stay or to leave. By 1953, the rupture between the two states is also finalized in the Jewish communities. The communities, too, are not divided by religious differences, but by the politics of the Cold War. The East Berlin community dwindles, led by officials loyal to the state.

The second chapter offers a comparative demographic analysis of the two communities from 1953 onwards. While the East Berlin community is an “endangered species” on the brink of extinction, the West Berlin community consolidates as a result of several waves of immigration. Both communities, though, are aging, have few youth, uncertain prospects, and an inverted

employment pyramid: only twenty percent of members are active in a very limited number of occupations.

The third chapter describes communal institutions of the two communities: cemeteries, synagogues, academic institutes, social clubs and the Jewish hospital. A “Jewish Cold War” marked the relations between the two communities until a detente in the late 1980s. The administration of the communities is transformed, as the role of rabbis and religious authorities declines, and leadership is instead assumed by communal officials.

Both Jewish communities forged close ties with the local and national authorities, a topic which is examined in the fourth chapter on the political and ideological relationships between the communities and the state. In contrast to the West, East Berlin Jewish officials were largely figureheads representing the government’s policies. The East Berlin community was even enlisted to legitimize the Berlin Wall, presented as a defense against imperialism and anti-Semitism. Stretching the search for parallels, the author suggests that both states treated the Jews as “court Jews,” affording them protection in return for their services. Jews were used for policy goals— primarily to gain international legitimacy for the state and its ideology. The Jewish experience in Berlin remains ambivalent, torn between integration and marginality, in “negative symbiosis.”

The final chapter presents Jewish culture in post-war Berlin, which remains largely barren during this period. The difficulties of the aftermath of devastation are further aggravated by design, as Jewish culture is suppressed in the East. In both societies, post-war Jews are sometimes treated as relics from the past and living “museum pieces.” The book sketches several types of artists and intellectuals of that period.

The book ends in 1990, on the cusp of a renewal of the community with the influx of Russian immigrants and, more recently, Israelis. The study’s macro and comparative focus on demographics, institutions, and on the political conflict between East and West, has inherent limitations. The elevated focus unfortunately leaves too little room to examine the intriguing and unique Berlin post-war questions about the disjunctures of identity and the moral and psychological complexities of victims returning to Germany. Throughout the period covered in the study, it remains unclear whether the Jewish return to Berlin would merely remain an epilogue, or would become yet another chapter

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in the city's long Jewish history. The book opens tantalizing perspectives and invites further exploration.

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