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## DISCUSSION



## REVIEWS

## Introduction

by *The Editors of Quest*

This volume of *Quest* offers to its readers a miscellaneous issue, with six research articles devoted to a variety of topics covering the eighteenth and twentieth century. There is no connecting theme, but some of the articles explore, from different angles, the issue of religious conversion.

Indeed, the first essay, by Samuela Marconcini, studies the topic of conversion to Catholicism and the right of inheritance, which was often linked to it. In eighteenth century Livorno the "Ergas-Fortunati case," which she analyses in detail, turned into a dispute concerning the confines of canon law and civil law, showcasing the defense or the opposition of converted Jews's right to inheritance. As the author demonstrates, the special legal privileges stated in the *Livornine Laws*, according to which the converted member of the family could not claim his/her inheritance, were effective until the unification of Italy.

The second article, by Michele Sarfatti, moves to the twentieth century and investigates the implementation of the laws against "mixed marriages" between 1935 and 1938, starting with the norms introduced in the Italian colonies and reaching up until the racist laws implemented in 1938. The author suggests that Mussolini unilaterally amended the Concordat of 1929 and illustrates the defeat, in that instance, of the Catholic Church vis-a-vis its relationship with the fascist regime.

Tullia Catalan's article is also about Italian fascism, and focuses on the years 1938-1939, analyzing conversions to Christianity in the city of Trieste, which hosted an important Jewish community and numerous foreign Jews who passed through the port city in those years. As Catalan chronicles, many Jews and foreign refugees from Austria, Germany, and Hungary converted to Catholicism on their way to the Americas. The article aims to describe individual paths to conversion, and the reaction of both the Jewish authorities and the local Church. Furthermore, the author attempts to disclose how the local clergy perceived the fascist racial laws.

Shifting to a different scenario and set of historical problems, David Guedj explores the establishment of Judeo-Arabic non-fiction literature in Morocco during the first half of the twentieth century. The rise of this literature was

engendered, according to the author, by changes that invested Moroccan Jewish culture and society: the establishment of local Hebrew publishing houses in many cities; the rise of a new intellectual elite; changing patterns of religious observance along with secularizing trends; the dissemination of Zionism.
The fifth article in this issue is written by Livia Tagliacozzo and analyzes Muslim-Jewish relations in Libya under the Italian colonial administration during War World II. As in other colonial contexts, the fascist regime implemented different policies in regard to Muslim and Jewish subjects, influencing the interactions between the two communities, causing distress and conflict but, at the same time, provoking shared feelings of opposition, caused by the experience of oppression.
The final article published in this issue of *Quest* is devoted to Baghdadi Jews and is authored by Marcella Simoni. The aim of this work is to integrate the well-known history of the Baghdadis' elites with the one of the middle classes, using different type of sources, from oral history repositories to articles from the monthly periodical *Israel's Messenger*. This research unearths a transnational history of a segment of the Jewish diaspora in the first half of the twentieth century, locating its imagined homeland and cultural identity in different spatial zones, which comprise Baghdad, London, and then Spain.

We are glad to announce that with this issue we are introducing a new section of our journal, which will be dedicated to "Review Essay(s)." The inaugural essay is authored by Arie M. Dubnov and is devoted to the figure of the Israeli poet Nathan Alterman.

The "Discussion" section is dedicated to Tudor Parfitt's book, *Hybrid Hate: Conflations of Antisemitism and Anti-Black Racism from the Renaissance to the Third Reich*. It is reviewed by Monica Miniati.
Finally, the "Reviews" section publishes concise but critical presentations of eight books dedicated to a wide range of topics.

**The Editors of Quest**

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# Jewish Converts' Inheritance Rights in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany: The Case of a Nun in the Convent of Santa Scolastica in Buggiano

by *Samuela Marconcini*

## Abstract

*"As defined by the Fortunati-Ergas case, catechumens and neophytes have a right to their allotted share of the estate of their parents, even while their mother and father are still alive, notwithstanding the privileges accorded the Jews of Livorno by Grand Duke Ferdinando I in 1593." This claim, written in Florence in 1825, tried to depict the Fortunati-Ergas case as a bridgehead breaking the guarantees offered to the Jews living in Livorno since the end of the 16th century. Papal laws explicitly offered converted Jews the right to immediately inherit from one's parents, as if they were orphans. On the other side, the so-called* Livornine*, issued in 1593, opposed this principle and stated that converted Jews could not inherit from their Jewish relatives. In the 18th century, the Fortunati-Ergas case became the battleground among canon laws and civil laws, defending or contrasting the right to inheritance of converted Jews. Sara Ergas was a Jewish woman from Livorno who did not follow the decision of her husband Moisè Ergas, a rich Jewish merchant who converted to Christianity together with their small child, taking the new names of—respectively—Francesco Xaverio Fortunati and Maria Maddalena Fortunati. Sara remained fiercely Jewish, and never satisfied the claims over her goods made by the apostates in Florence (where they had moved after their conversion), engaging in a legal battle that, as shown in this article, proved the* Livornine *to remain a strong pillar defending the Jewish privileged status in Livorno till the unification of Italy.*

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In the Early Modern Period, North-Central Italy witnessed the progressive and seemingly inexorable segregation of the Jewish population in numerous "*ghetti*"

or "*serragli*" (enclosures).[1] During this time, the establishment and development of the Livorno community—a unique city without a Ghetto—constituted a remarkable exception, due not least to the protection and legal autonomy guaranteed to its Jewish inhabitants. In 1593, Grand Duke Ferdinando I de' Medici granted the Jews freedom of belief and worship, as well as commercial and professional privileges that included administrative and jurisdictional autonomy.[2] The so-called *Livornine* (Leghorn Constitutions) assured ample religious liberty and even immunity from prosecution by the Inquisition—an essential consideration for *Marranos* (Jews forced to convert to Catholicism, who secretly remained faithful to the Jewish religion)[3] who wished to return to their ancestral faith without charges of reversion (or "Judaizing"). With this guarantee of immunity, Livorno's Jewish community flourished, becoming 5% of the total population by the early years of the Seventeenth Century.[4] The essential rights and prerogatives of these Livorno Jews remained intact till the second half of the Nineteenth century,[5] despite several efforts by Cosimo III Medici aimed at weakening them.

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[1] Original English translation by Edward Goldberg. The text was further elaborated by the author, who bears the ultimate responsibility for any error in the final version.

[2] Renzo Toaff, *La nazione ebrea a Livorno e a Pisa (1591-1700)* (Florence: Olschki, 1990), 41 and following; Lucia Frattarelli Fischer, *Vivere fuori dal ghetto. Ebrei a Pisa e a Livorno (secoli XVI-XVIII)* (Turin: Zamorani, 2008); Bernard Dov Cooperman, "The Establishment and Early Development of the Jewish Communities in Leghorn and Pisa (1591-1626)" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1976). There is a vast literature on this subject, as already noted by Cristina Galasso, *Alle origini di una comunità. Ebree ed ebrei a Livorno nel Seicento* (Florence: Olschki, 2002), 5, note 1. More recently, Francesca Bregoli, *Mediterranean Enlightenment: Livornese Jews, Tuscan Culture, and Eighteenth-Century Reform* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014); Stefano Villani, "Between Information and Proselytism: Seventeenth-century Italian Texts on Sabbatai Zevi, their Various Editions and their Circulation, in Print and Manuscript," *DAAT A Journal of Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah* 82 (2016): LXXXVII-CIII; Lucia Frattarelli Fischer, *L'Arcano del mare. Un porto nella prima età globale: Livorno* (Pisa: Pacini editore, 2018); Corey Tazzara, *The Free Port of Livorno and the Transformation of the Mediterranean World, 1574-1790* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[3] One can also use the Spanish word *conversos* or, in Hebrew, *anusim,* referring to all Jews "forced" to convert to another religion.

[4] In the census of 1622, Livorno registered 14,413 inhabitants, including 711 Jews; Toaff, *La nazione ebrea*, 119.

[5] August 1836 is often cited as the date of the complete and final repeal of the *Livornine*, as stated—for example—by Roberto G. Salvadori, *Gli ebrei toscani nell'età della Restaurazione (1814-1848).*

The twenty-sixth article of the *Livornine* regulated the thorny question of conversion to Christianity, banning the use of force and disallowing converts who were less than thirteen years old (against the will of their parents). Meanwhile, family members were guaranteed the right to speak with *catecumeni* (those undergoing Christian instruction and awaiting baptism), while protecting those who remained Jewish from eventual legal and financial claims by their newly Christians relatives.[6] This article of the *Livornine* explicitly states:

> Prohibendo a ciascuno dei nostri Cristiani, che non ardischino torvi, né raccattarvi alcuno di vostra Famiglia maschio, o femmina per doversi far battezzare e farsi Cristiano, se però non passano tredici anni d'età, e quelli maggiori mentre che saranno, e staranno nelli Catecumeni, o altrove alla loro quarantina per battezzarsi possino essere sovvenuti, e parlati da loro Padre, e Madre, o altri Parenti, che avessero volendo che qualsivoglia Ebreo, o Ebrea, che si facesse Cristiano, o Cristiana, essendo figlio, o figlia di Famiglia, non siano tenuti, né obbligati, il Padre, né la Madre dargli legittima, o porzione alcuna in vita loro, e che tali Battezzati non possino fare testimonianza in casi di Ebrei.[7]
>
> (Christians are categorically enjoined from alienating or removing any member of your family below the age of thirteen, whether male or female, in order to baptize them and make them Christian. In regard to those above that age, their father, mother and other relatives are allowed to converse with them and assist them, should they wish it, while they are isolated among the catechumens prior to baptism. When a Jew or Jewess becomes Christian, neither the father nor mother is held liable nor otherwise obliged to give them a share of any inheritance or property

*Uscire dal ghetto: divenire ricchi, divenire cristiani, divenire italiani* (Florence: CET-Centro Editoriale Toscano, 1993), 2. According to Carlotta Ferrara degli Uberti, this is not accurate: all that was abolished at that time was the travel document (*salvacondotto*) that guaranteed free and safe passage to registered persons (*ballottati*), not the *Livornine* themselves. I am grateful to Ferrara degli Uberti for this information.

[6] Toaff, *La nazione ebrea*, 419-435; he quotes a transcription of the text of the *Costituzione Livornina*, obtained by combining the Letters of Patent of 1591 and 1593.

[7] Ibid., 427.

> settlement which would otherwise be due to them, during their lifetime, as a member of that family. Furthermore, baptized Jews cannot testify in Jewish legal cases.)

As Renzo Toaff observes, this last point "explicitly contradicts one of Paul III's orders favoring neophytes," since the pope intended them "to claim an advance liquidation of hereditary assets from their still Jewish families."[8] In fact, the bull *Cupientes Iudaeos*, signed by Paul III on March 21st, 1542, foresaw converted children inheriting their allotted portions of the estates of living parents who remained Jewish, in abeyance of common law.[9] More than a century and a half later, Clement XI reaffirmed these dictates with the bull *Propagandae per universum*, issued on March 11th, 1704.[10] In this case, the legal standards promulgated by the *Livornine* openly conflicted with the stipulations of the pope. Contrary to the papal bulls, the *Livornine* expressly exempted Jewish parents from including apostate children in testamentary settlements, while also prohibiting these former Jews from bearing witness in cases heard by the *Giudice degli Ebrei* (the magistrature responsible for Jewish affairs).[11]

In a compendium of documentary material regarding the history of the Jewish settlement in Livorno beginning in 1593,[12] there are various sections dedicated to the issue of baptisms (before and after the age of 13, with or without parental consent, etc.). One of these, number 23, has the specific title, *Della legittima, ed*

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[8] Ibid., 51, note 18 and 28, note 5.

[9] Fausto Parente, "La posizione giuridica dell'ebreo convertito nell'età della Controriforma. La bolla *Cupientes Iudaeos* (1542) e la successiva elaborazione dottrinale," *Sefarad. Rivista de estudios hebraicos, sefardies y de Oriente próximo* 51, no. 2 (1991): 339-352; 341-342; Isabelle Poutrin, "La condition juridique du juif converti dans le *Traité sur les Juifs* de Giuseppe Sessa (1717)," in *Pouvoir politique et conversion religieuse. 1. Normes et mots*, eds. Thomas Lienard, Isabelle Poutrin (Rome: Publications de l'École française de Rome, 2017), https://books.openedition.org/efr/3511, accessed January 21, 2023; Kenneth Stow, "*Neofiti* and Their Families: or, Perhaps, the Good of the State," *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 47, no. 1 (2002): 105-113.

[10] Marina Caffiero, *Battesimi forzati. Storie di ebrei, cristiani e convertiti nella Roma dei papi* (Rome: Viella, 2004), 281-284.

[11] Toaff, *La nazione ebrea*, 51.

[12] "Recapiti riguardanti gli Israeliti in originale nella R. Segreteria del Governo," 154r-159v, *Ordini, statuti e regolamenti*, 5 (the archival numeration is relatively recent), Archivio della Comunità Israelitica di Livorno (henceforth, ACIL), Livorno, available online at http://www.keidos.net/digitalib/archliv/index.php, Accessed January 21, 2023.

*altro, preteso dai neofiti viventi il padre e la madre* (Regarding the testamentary allotment or other claims that neophytes might make against their living father or mother). After noting the clear statement in Article XXVI of the *Livornine* and the lack of contrary language in government records, a single exception is cited, the Fortunati-Ergas case:

> Nonostante le preaccennate disposizioni sopra tal materia, fu molto questionato intorno alla medesima nel 1700, in occasione che la neofita Maria Maddalena figlia di Francesco Xaverio Fortunati, pure neofito, domandò avanti il Magistrato Supremo la legittima in vita di Sara Ergas sua madre ebrea dal giorno della sua conversione. La causa fu delegata dal granduca Cosimo III ai tre giudici di Ruota, che erano allora gli auditori Carlo Bizzarrini, Ascanio Venturini e Bonaventura Neri Badia. I due primi riferirono essersi dovuta la legittima per le bolle di Paolo III e di Clemente XI. Il Neri Badia scrisse e riferì in suo motivo che non era dovuta alcuna legittima, perché le dette bolle non potevano aver luogo in Livorno, per non essere accettate e perché ostavano alle medesime i privilegi del Porto[...].[13] La detta causa, secondo ciò che rilevasi dai libri di cancelleria di questa Nazione Ebrea, terminò nel 1751 mediante un accomodamento fatto dal luogotenente Scaramucci, e dalla relazione al medesimo alla Reggenza [...] pare che fosse data agli eredi della neofita la terza parte di una casa restata nella eredità della di lei madre.
>
> (Notwithstanding the aforementioned rulings in this matter, there was much controversy in 1700, when Maria Maddalena, the neophyte daughter of Francesco Xaverio Fortunati, also a neophyte, made an appeal to the *Magistrato Supremo* (the judicial entity responsible for the administration of the law). She asked the *Magistrato Supremo* for her portion of the estate of her living Jewish mother Sara Ergas, as calculated

[13] Ibid., 155r-156v. A further matter, not addressed in Chapter XXVI of the *Livornine,* is discussed in the following sheets: the possibility of forcing Jewish relatives to pay subsistence allowances (*alimenti*) and dowries (*doti*) to neophytes after their conversion. The case of the Jew Modigliano emerges as the sole exception to the rule; in 1771 he was obliged to give a dowry and living expenses to his neophyte daughter, although he filed an appeal citing his own destitution. Ibid., 157v-158r.

> from the very day of her conversion. Grand Duke Cosimo III assigned the case to the three sitting judges, Carlo Bizzarrini, Ascanio Venturini e Bonaventura Neri Badia. The first two decided that she was owed the testamentary portion, considering the bulls of Paul III and Clement XI. Neri Badia found otherwise, rejecting her testamentary claim, on the grounds that these bulls could not be applied in Livorno since that was precluded by the privileges of that port [...] From what can be determined in the books of the Chancery of the Jewish Nation, the case was closed in 1751 with a negotiated settlement overseen by deputy Scaramucci, as communicated by him to the Regency Government [...] It seems that the heirs of the neophyte (Maria Maddalena) were awarded one third of a house that had belonged to the neophyte's mother.)[14]

The matter was settled by a private agreement, which awarded the neophyte one third of her mother's house (that was the same settlement foreseen by the sitting judges, back in 1706). The claimant only took possession of the inheritance decades later, after her mother's death, but some interpreted this as a victory for canon law over the *Livornine*. In 1825, an anonymous writer left a note among the papers of the *Casa dei catecumeni di Firenze* (that is, the House of Catechumens of Florence),[15] memorializing that apparent legal precedent: "As defined by the Fortunati-Ergas case, catechumens and neophytes have a right to their allotted share of the estate of their parents, even while their mother and father are still alive,

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[14] Giovanni Bonaventura Neri Badia, *Decisiones et responsa juris*, volume one, (Florence: Allegrini, 1769), 515-528, available online on the website of the Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze, https://www.bncf.firenze.sbn.it/, Accessed January 21, 2023.

[15] The Catechumens' Houses in Italy were established in the period of the Counter Reformation as institutions that offered to any non-Catholic person willing to convert to Catholicism food and shelter, the main principles of Catholic doctrine, the promise of a better life under a new Catholic name, and also economical support and social control after one's conversion, with the aim of enhancing the number of effective conversions to Catholicism; see Peter A. Mazur, *Conversion to Catholicism in Early Modern Italy* (New York-London: Routledge, 2016); Matteo Al-Kalak and Ilaria Pavan, *Un'altra fede. Le case dei catecumeni nei territori estensi (1583-1938)* (Florence: Olschki, 2013); Tamar Herzig, "Rethinking Jewish Conversion to Christianity in Renaissance Italy," in *Renaissance Religions* (Europa Sacra Series, no. 26), eds. Peter Howard, Nicholas Terpstra, and Riccardo Saccenti (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 63-79; Emily Michelson, "The World of Conversion in Early Modern Rome," in *Catholic Spectacle and Rome's Jews. Early Modern Conversion and Resistance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 2022), 17-61.

notwithstanding the privileges accorded the Jews of Livorno by Grand Duke Ferdinando I in 1593."[16] However, there is no record of a neophyte ever claiming an inheritance at the time of their conversion, from living Jewish parents, by reference to Fortunati-Ergas. So, for all intents and purposes, the *Livornine* remained in effect (including Article XXVI), guaranteeing the prerogatives of the Jewish community against papal claims.

How did the Ergas-Fortunati case come about and what were its implications? It all began in late July 1691, when Livorno was stunned by the decision of Moisè Ergas, a rich Jewish merchant, to convert to Christianity. His grandfather Abraham Ergas had relocated from Portugal to Livorno (after a brief stay in Pisa) around the beginning of the Seventeenth Century, attracted by the privileges granted to *Ebrei Levantini* (Jews that from the Iberian Peninsula had moved first to the Ottoman Empire before settling back in Europe) by Ferdinando I de' Medici in 1593. Moisè's family, the Ergas, were among those Sephardic Jews who took advantage of the opportunity to return to their ancestral religion after a forced conversion to Christianity at the end of the Fifteenth Century.[17] Then—nearly a hundred years later—Moisè Ergas decided to reverse course, abandoning Judaism forever. Specifically, he planned to move out of his own home and sell his furniture, although his wife Sara had no intention of converting. Soon after, Sara's three year-old daughter Juditta was taken away from her, by order of Grand Duke Cosimo III, probably "offered" to the Church by her father acting in the new role of catechumen[18] and entrusted to the temporary care of a Christian woman, the wife of a Livorno apothecary named Giacinto Cestoni.[19] During *Ferragosto* 1691 (around the time of the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin, on August 15th), Moisè Ergas was baptized in Florence, taking the new name of Francesco Xaverio

[16] *Compagnia, poi Magistrato del Bigallo, secondo versamento,* file 1169, insert 25, Archivio di Stato di Firenze (henceforth, ASFi), Florence.

[17] The history of the Ergas family and their commercial partnership with the Silvera family is at the heart of an exhaustive study by Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers. The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2009). Regarding the early years of the Ergas family in Tuscany, see Ibid., 23 and following.

[18] Regarding this custom, see Caffiero, *Battesimi forzati*, especially 159-197.

[19] "Letter from Livorno dated 30 July 1691," *Mediceo del Principato*, 2328A, ASFi. This letter is quoted by Frattarelli Fischer, *Vivere fuori dal ghetto*, 291, note 148. The convert remembered Giacinto Cestoni in his 1701 testament, as we discuss later.

Fortunati. One month later, on the Jewish Sabbath, his daughter Juditta was baptized as well, becoming Maria Maddalena.[20] Their conversion raised a furor that still resounded ten years later. In his *Catalogo de' neofiti illustri* (Catalogue of Illustrious Neophytes), Paolo Sebastiano Medici (himself a convert), cited Moisè Ergas, "one of the most important merchants of the city of Livorno," using him to demonstrate that those who wished to become Christian could still retain the same prestige and status that they enjoyed as Jews.[21] We don't know what Moisè's Jewish relatives thought of his transformation. At first, they evidently remained in touch and on fairly good terms,[22] but the relationship had deteriorated significantly by the time of Ergas/Fortunati's death in 1727.[23]

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[20] Registro (r.) 68, fotogramma (fg.) 211, Archivio dell'Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore di Firenze (henceforth, AOSMFF), Florence; Ibid., r. 290, fg. 235. The priest Filippo Franci acted as godfather at the girl's baptism; Franci was one of the most active promoters of the conversion of "infidels" in Florence and Livorno at the end of the Seventeenth Century; Daniela Lombardi, *Franci, Filippo*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 50 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1998), 133-134; Samuela Marconcini, *Per amor del cielo. Farsi cristiani a Firenze tra Seicento e Settecento* (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2016), 149-150.

[21] Paolo Sebastiano Medici, *Catalogo de' neofiti illustri usciti per misericordia di Dio dall'ebraismo e poi rendutisi gloriosi nel cristianesimo per esemplarità di costumi e profondità di dottrina* (Florence: Vincenzio Vangelisti, 1701), 66.

[22] In 1698, Francesco Fortunati apparently intervened on his brother-in-law's behalf with Florentine authorities. In *Vivere fuori dal ghetto*, 294, Lucia Frattarelli Fischer writes: "The Grand Duke requested that the richest Jews in Livorno invest heavily in order to offset the bankruptcy of the Perosio silk works in Florence. On that occasion, 'Fortunati who had become Christian' exerted himself for the Jews, especially Manuel de Mora (the husband of his sister Sara). Working to relieve and exempt him (Mora) from such contributions, he (Fortunati) promised money to those who would cooperate in this effort and did whatever he could to discourage others from competing." The documentary source is cited as ASF *Mediceo del Principato*, 1561, Lettere da Livorno ad Apollonio Bassetti, segretario granducale, 1698-1699, specifically a separate sheet following the letter of May 6, 1698. During a visit to the Archivio di Stato on July 25, 2019, I was unable to locate this document in a series of letters sent by Marchese del Borro; there were, however, references to this particular matter in del Borro's letters of May 5 and 6, 1698. Frattarelli Fischer cites this same source in a previous publication, "Percorsi di conversione di ebrei nella Livorno di fine Seicento," *Nuovi Studi Livornesi* 13: 139-171; 155.

[23] If we are right to identify a certain "zio Magno neofita" with Moisè Ergas/Francesco Fortunati, it would seem that his sister-in-law Bianca del Rio saw him as a threat. She was the widow of Moisé d'Abram Ergas (founder of the Ergas-Silvera firm that we discuss elsewhere) and the mother and guardian of four children: Abram Kai, David, Anna and Devora. In 1725, she appealed to the civil authorities, fearing that he would try to remove her children in order to have them baptized, while also impeding her commercial activities (see the letter of December 14th, 1725 from Senator Rinuccini to Barone Alessandro Del Nero, Governor of Livorno; D.2.1.2., fasc. 3, Archivio della

What impelled Moisè Ergas to abandon Judaism? This is difficult to determine but the Jesuit José Maria Sotomayor might have played a role, since he was also of Portuguese origin and served as Ergas' godfather at the baptismal font.[24] However, it does not appear that he had a particular commitment to fostering Jewish conversions (of Ergas or others). Our chief biographical source is the *Ragguaglio della vita, virtù e morte di padre Giuseppe Maria Sotomayor della Compagnia di Giesù* (Report on the Life, Virtues and Death of Father Giuseppe Maria Sotomayor of the Company of Jesus). An anonymous fellow Jesuit composed this account with the evident goal of furthering Sotomayor's candidacy for sainthood,[25] so we would expect a successful activity of promoting conversions to be featured among his other achievements.[26]

Two years before Moisè Ergas' conversion, we know that a series of dramatic events disrupted his life. His family had long enjoyed an elevated economic, social and intellectual status,[27] but they were then going through a difficult time. In 1684, his brother Abraham, the chief partner in the family firm (which traded as

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Comunità Ebraica di Firenze, Florence, cit. in Frattarelli Fischer, *Vivere fuori dal ghetto*, 294). The Governor of Livorno reassured Donna Bianca del Rio in an order found also in *Mediceo del Principato*, 2517, c. 258v, ASFi, Florence (not cc. 258v-259r, as stated by Frattarelli Fischer, *Vivere fuori dal ghetto*, 294, note 160).

[24] Frattarelli Fischer, *Vivere fuori dal ghetto*, 292 and note 152.

[25] *Manoscritti*, 695, ASFi, Florence (The manuscript is not number 685 and not dedicated to Anna Maria Luisa, the Electress Palatine, daughter of Cosimo III, as stated by Frattarelli Fischer in *Vivere fuori dal ghetto*, 292, note 152). Giuseppe Maria Sotomayor (Niccolò, before ordination) was born in Portugal in 1647 to a noble family of Spanish origin; he went to Rome to study, entered the Society of Jesus at the age of 21 and then moved to Florence. After a period in Germany as confessor to the future Grand Duke Giangastone de' Medici, he returned to Florence where he died at the age of 72, after living in poverty and spiritual reflection for 26 years, while comforting those condemned to death.

[26] As it actually happened in the process of beatification of another Jesuit who actively promoted conversions of Jews to Christianity in XVII century Padua, Gregorio Barbarigo, who, quite interestingly, shared the reports of his "successes" and "failures" (from his point of view, achieved or not achieved conversions) with Cosimo III Medici; Michele Cassese, "Gregorio Barbarigo e il rapporto con ebrei e non cattolici," in *Gregorio Barbarigo patrizio veneto vescovo e cardinale nella tarda controriforma (1625-1697), Atti del convegno di studi, Padova 7-10 novembre 1996*, eds. Liliana Billanovich and Pierantonio Gios (Padua: Istituto per la Storia Ecclesiastica Padovana, 1999), 1023-1056; 1046.

[27] One of Moisè's brothers was the important Rabbi Manuel, who was married to Sara, sister of the kabbalist Mosè Pinheiro. For a complete genealogical tree of the family, see Fig. 1.1 in Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers*, 24-25.

"Abraham, Isaac and Abraham Ergas"), was facing bankruptcy, then on January 21st, 1689,[28] he was murdered for reasons that remain unclear. The man ultimately responsible was granted immunity a few weeks later, after naming those who carried out the act. The perpetrators landed up in prison, except for one who took refuge in a church.[29] Turmoil of this kind was especially grave in a commercial port like Livorno, which depended on "good governance, since security is essential for trade."[30] The governor and syndics of the Jewish Nation demanded justice from the governor of the city and ultimately from the grand duke himself.[31] Seven months later, Moisè Ergas appealed to the authorities, alleging that his witnesses in financial transactions had all been threatened by his enemies (particularly Moisè Attias, who was an inveterate antagonist of his family).[32] We don't know if communal disorder played a role in Ergas' apostasy, nor do we know if the (presumably Jewish) instigator of the murder was ever brought to justice.[33] Many years passed, however, before Abraham's eldest son (another Moisè or Moses),[34] was able to reestablish his family's fortunes. In 1704, thirteen years after the conversion of his paternal uncle, he founded a new firm "Ergas and Silvera," in partnership with David Silvera, the husband of his sister Esther. This important trading company, based in Livorno with a branch in Aleppo, specialized in coral

[28] *Mediceo del Principato*, 2283, letter of January 23, 1689, ASFi, Florence. This refers to a homicide that took place two days earlier (correcting Frattarelli Fischer, *Vivere fuori dal ghetto*, 291, which indicates the date of the murder as 1690).

[29] *Mediceo del Principato*, 2283, letter of February 8, 1689, ASFi, Florence (not 1690, as cited by Frattarelli Fischer, *Vivere fuori dal ghetto*, 291, note 149).

[30] In the words of Moisè himself, "ben governata et in quale è necessaria per il commercio la sicurezza" (*Mediceo del Principato*, 2283, letter of January 23, 1689, ASFi, Florence).

[31] *Mediceo del Principato*, 2283, letter of February 25, 1689, ASFi, Florence (not 15 February 1690, as cited by Frattarelli Fischer, *Vivere fuori dal ghetto*, 291, note 149) with 18 signatures.

[32] *Mediceo del Principato*, 2283, letter of September 7,1689, ASFi, Florence.

[33] On June 13, 1692, about a year after Moisè Ergas' conversion, one of those indicted for the Ergas murder ("Daniello Fernandez ebreo, uno dell'inquisiti et processati per la morte dell'Ergas") was found in a vineyard (*vigna*) sitting at table with four French women. They were all taken off to prison but released on the following day, although a criminal case was initiated; *Mediceo del Principato*, 2328A, letter of June 16, 1692, ASFi, Florence. According to Frattarelli Fischer, *Vivere fuori dal ghetto*, 291, note 149, the records of the trial have been lost.

[34] We will refer to him as Moses/Moises, in order to avoid confusion with his uncle of the same name, Moisè Ergas, alias Francesco Xaverio Fortunati.

and diamonds.[35] It is worth noting that the Moisè Ergas on whom we are focusing was the paternal uncle of the other Moisè Ergas (founder of the firm) and also paternal uncle of his own wife Sara, since she was the daughter of his brother Abraham who was murdered in 1689. (Years later, Sara had to swear to this effect before a distrustful Christian.)[36] In this way, her father—the late Abraham—became the father-in-law of his own brother, her husband Moisè.[37]

The Sephardic community in Livorno maintained a matrimonial code that guaranteed "above all, the integrity of patrilineal assets and the coherence of the family group, strictly controlling the circulation of wealth and the role of women [in this exchange]."[38] As demonstrated by the intricacies of the Ergas family tree, this included the marriage of blood relatives, even cousins with cousins and uncles with nieces.[39] The families of Sephardic ascendancy dominated the economic and administrative hierarchy of Livorno Jewry, so marriage alliances served to cement essential commercial and financial relationships. Italian and Ashkenazic Jews were also present in the city, but generally excluded from this powerful elite, so intermarriage with "Levantines" almost never occurred. In this system of privileged exchanges between socio-economic equals, women played a crucial role, since endogamic unions were secured by dowries *(doti)* on the female side and

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[35] Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers*, 8 and passim. Esther Ergas' marriage to David Silvera was arranged by her brother Moses/Moises Ergas; Ibid., 29.

[36] *Notarile Moderno*, *Protocolli*, 25262, notary Giovanni Battista Gamerra, no. 236, "Recognitio personae," cc. 186r-v, ASFi, Florence, cit. in Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers*, 302, note 111. The act was recorded in Livorno on October 31, 1729 in the house of "signore David Silvera negoziante ebreo" (this Jewish merchant is presumably to be identified with the business partner of Moses/Moises Ergas, the brother-in-law of Sara), in the presence of two witnesses, "il signorino Francesco Ranieri Frosini neofito e Giovanni Giannenti del Tirolo," the former a neophyte, the latter from Tirolo, who had been a resident of Livorno for more than thirty years; there were two others, both Jewish: signor Daniel Pereira di Leone, "cancelliere dei massari di Livorno" and Joseph Levi Valle. "Signor Aiutante Talento Marchetti" was the Christian who needed to be convinced of Sara's alleged family relations and marriage. There is an error in the document, however, since Sara is described as "figlia di detto fu signore Abram d'Isach Ergas chiamato di poi Francesco Fortunati, come sopra"; in fact, the convert was her husband and uncle, not her father.

[37] I would like to thank Michaël Gasperoni for this observation. On the subject, see Michaël Gasperoni, "La misura della dote. Alcune riflessioni sulla storia della famiglia ebraica nello Stato della Chiesa in età moderna," in *Vicino al focolare e oltre. Spazi pubblici e privati, fisici e virtuali della donna ebrea in Italia (secc. XV-XX)*, ed. Laura Graziani Secchieri (Florence: Giuntina, 2015), 175-216.

[38] Galasso, *Alle origini di una comunità*, 27.

[39] Ibid., 40.

parallel property settlements *(controdoti)* on the male side.[40] As Luciano Allegra has observed in regard to the Jewish community of Turin, the dowry system was a kind of entail, which "served to maintain the integrity of a large portion of the family's assets, while the dowry itself functioned as a kind of private fund which the government recognized and protected."[41] In Livorno, dowries consisted mostly of cash, so they could be invested in mercantile and commercial ventures as soon as the marriage was contracted and then reinvested—again and again—after it took place. This powered a cycle of cash and credit that was essential to the Jewish economy.[42]

In this context, we see Sara as a wife, a niece and also a daughter orphaned by her father. She did not follow Moisè Ergas and their daughter Juditta in opting for baptism and obtained a divorce at an undetermined date before 1701.[43] Thirty years earlier, in a similar situation, the combative and resolutely Jewish wife of the neophyte Giulio Morosini had managed to regain control of a considerable sum of money.[44] We don't know if Sara Ergas ever obtained the return of her dowry from her converted husband.[45] We can, however, follow the struggle of her converted daughter—now Maria Maddalena—to access the inheritance from her mother.

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[40] Ibid., 41, 42 and 46.

[41] Luciano Allegra, *Identità in bilico. Il ghetto ebraico di Torino nel Settecento* (Turin: Zamorani, 1996), 197. On the subject, see also Stefanie Siegmund, "Division of the Dowry on the Death of the Daughter: An Instance in the Negotiation of Laws and Jewish Custom in Early Modern Tuscany," *Jewish History* 16 (2022): 73-106; Stefanie Siegmund, *The Medici State and the Ghetto of Florence. The Construction of an Early Modern Jewish Community* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), in particular the chapter "From Virilocal to Local: Marriage in the Florentine Ghetto," 332-385.

[42] Galasso, *Alle origini di una comunità*, 76-77. For a comparison with the Sephardic activity on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, see Viviana Bonazzoli, *Adriatico e Mediterraneo orientale, una dinastia mercantile ebraica del secondo 600: I Costantini* (Trieste: Lint, 1997).

[43] Galasso, *Alle origini di una comunità*, 68-69; the date of the divorce is indicated as 1746 but this is an error (Ibid. 25, fig. 1.1). In Moisè Ergas/Francesco Xaverio Fortunati will of March 18th, 1701 (which we discuss later), Sara is described as his former wife ("già sua moglie").

[44] Marina Caffiero, "Le doti della conversione. Ebree e neofite a Roma in età moderna," *Geschichte und Region/Storia e Regione* 19, no. 1 (2010): 72-91; 81.

[45] On this subject, see Kenneth R. Stow, "Ethnic Amalgamation, Like it or Not: Inheritance in Early Modern Jewish Rome," *Jewish History* 16 (2002): 107-121; 115.

The young Ergas/Fortunati reached her twelfth birthday in 1700[46] and then formally renounced any inheritance on her father's side, swearing before the *Capitani di Orsanmichele* (who guaranteed obligations of that kind) on July 29th.[47] She then appeared before the *Magistrato Supremo*, making a claim against her mother, who lived but remained "in the darkness of Judaism" (*nelle tenebre dell'ebraismo*). Maria Maddalena demanded her current portion of her mother's estate (*la legittima*), to be followed by the residual inheritance at the time of her mother's death.[48] In fact, she had awaited the age of reason for women, as defined by early modern legal and moral authorities[49] and we can discern the hand of her father in these machinations. Francesco Xaverio's goal was probably to force his ex-wife to convert. In that way, he could recover family property, since Sara was also the daughter of his murdered brother Abraham.

In Florence a year later, on March 18th, 1701, less than ten years after his conversion, Francesco Xaverio Fortunati registered his will and testament.[50] First, he chose the Jesuit church of San Giovannino as his place of burial. Before the opening of Florence's *Casa dei Catecumeni* in 1636, San Giovannino was a favored site for the conversion of "infidels"[51] and Fortunati had a personal connection through Giuseppe Maria Sotomayor, the Portuguese Jesuit. He specifically asked to be buried as near as possible to the altar of Saint Francis Xavier, whose name he had taken on conversion and to whom he ultimately entrusted his soul. After bequests to his servants, he remembered his daughter, leaving her a dowry of a thousand *scudi*, if she was not already married or a nun (in which case, she would have received a previous settlement). If she had in fact "taken the veil in the Benedictine

[46] Since she was baptized on September 15th, 1691 at the age of 3 years and 4 months, she would have been born in June 1688.

[47] This is demonstrated by the will which we cite below, in note 50, on c. 49r.

[48] *Raccolta delle decisioni della Ruota fiorentina* (1700-1808), vol. II (Florence: Marchini, 1837), no. 138, 326-353; 329-330. This is available online on the website of the Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze, https://www.bncf.firenze.sbn.it/, Accessed January 21, 2023.

[49] Caffiero, *Battesimi forzati*, 88.

[50] Notarile Moderno, Protocolli, notary Michel'Angiolo Brocchi, 22211 (1691-1707), no. 21, cc. 45r-56v, ASFi, Florence, cit. in Trivellato, *Familiarity*, 302, note 111 and discussed in Frattarelli Fischer, *Vivere fuori dal ghetto*, 292-293.

[51] Marconcini, *Per amor del cielo*, 26.

convent of Santa Scolastica in Buggiano or some other convent,"[52] her father wished her to have "a painting, about one *braccio* (0.5836 meter) high, of the Madonna with the infant Jesus, copied by tracing from an original by (Carlo) Cignani, so that she can pray to God for the soul of her father."[53] Next, he left his current wife (at the time of his death) "the usufruct [lifetime right to use and derive profit] from one third of his estate," so long as she does not contract a subsequent marriage and have sons or daughters by that marriage. Should the testator himself not have other children, he destined two-thirds of the usufruct of his estate to Giacinto Cestoni in Livorno, the apothecary who hosted his daughter at the emotionally fraught time of their conversions. Then, he left all other property to his male children, legitimate and natural, already born and yet to be born. Should he have no sons at the time of his death, he designated the eventual daughters of a future marriage, excluding however his converted daughter whose claim is limited to the aforementioned thousand *scudi*. Should he die without heirs, he directed the sale at auction of all of his property, with the cash receipts to be invested "in shares of the Monte del Sale [an investment fund floated on the salt tax] and the Monte di Pietà [a pawn-broking operation with religious associations]."[54]

At that point in his will and testament, Francesco Fortunati declared himself to be "strong in the evidentiary truth of the Roman Catholic Faith… and the various compelling motives that induced him to embrace it." He then addressed "those of his blood" who remain in "the Hebrew sect," confidently echoing the conversion strategies of the Church itself. In order to attract these family members to his new religion, he offered generous financial inducements, thereby guaranteeing their ability "to maintain the appropriate status and splendor…of their families" after

[52] On the role gradually undertaken by convents in assuring the stability of Jewish girls' conversion to Christianity in the period of the Counter-Reformation, see Tamar Herzig, "'For the Salvation of This Girl's Soul': Nuns as Converters of Jews in Early Modern Italy," *Religions* 8, no. 11/252 (2017), https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8110252, accessed January 21, 2023. For a specific monastery created in Rome to house female converts from other religions see Alessia Lirosi, "Monacare le ebree: il monastero romano della Ss. Annunziata all'Arco dei Pantani. Una ricerca in corso," *Rivista di Storia del Cristianesimo* 1 (2013): 147-180.

[53] Notarile Moderno, Protocolli, notary Michel'Angiolo Brocchi, 22211 (1691-1707), no. 21, c. 48r, ASFi, Florence. This regards the Bolognese painter Carlo Cignani, the most esteemed painter of his time in Bologna.

[54] Ibid., c. 49v.

becoming Christians. In order to achieve this, he assigned his estate to those relatives who converted within four years of his own death, according to a precise scheme of linear descent. In the first place, he designated the son of his sister Ester, followed by the three male children of his brother Abram (including Moses, the future founder of the Ergas-Silvera firm), then the male children of his sister Sara (and her husband Manuel Mora), then his ex-wife and finally his sisters and his nieces (daughters of Abram Ergas and Manuel Mora).[55] In fact, he was dictating a strict scheme for allocating his inheritance and if various relatives in fact converted (as he hoped), the first to inherit would be the one at the top of the list. Once four years had passed after Fortunati's death, the estate would pass to the first to convert or to that individual's direct male descendants.[56]

In May of 1706, the auditors Carlo Bizzarrini, Ascanio Venturi and Giovanbonaventura Neri Badia, all sitting judges of the Florentine civil court (*Ruota)*, finally began deliberating the case filed by Fortunati's daughter Maria Maddalena six years earlier, regarding her right to her allotted portion of her inheritance (*la legittima)*.[57] The legal rationale was explicitly expressed, "The prescribed share of her mother's property is due to the Jewish daughter who subsequently became Catholic, notwithstanding the fact that her mother is still alive. Then after her mother's death, she succeeds to the residual property, in the same manner as if she herself remained Jewish."[58]

The neophyte's request is presented as if it were incontrovertibly legal, but it clashed with two exemptions, as cited by Sara Ergas.[59] The first is rooted in the *Livornine*, since the neophyte's request explicitly contradicts Article XXVI in that charter. The second derives from the impoverished condition of the mother, whose sole possession is a house in Livorno "the annual income from which barely suffices to keep her in the necessities of life."[60] In objection to the first argument, the daughter cites Pope Clement XI's bull which purportedly supersedes the relevant article of the *Livornine* by ruling "*non obstantibus privilegiis, indultis*

[55] Ibid., cc. 49v-50r.
[56] Ibid., cc. 50r-v.
[57] *Raccolta delle decisioni della Ruota fiorentina* (1700-1808), 326.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid., *Decisione*, § 6, 332.
[60] Ibid.

etc"[61] (notwithstanding privileges, waivers, etc.). It was also noted that Grand Duke Cosimo III had legislated on various occasions, limiting the directives of the *Livornine*. Regarding Article I, for example, which asserts the freedom of Jews in Livorno and Pisa to reside wherever they wish, he sought to minimize "the danger of cohabitation with Christians"[62] with a decree ordering separate entrances and a barrier zone (issued on December 20th, 1680). Regarding Article XI, where the *Livornine* foresees Jewish tribunals to hear cases of Jews "having carnal relations with Christians,"[63] Cosimo III issued a decree on June 16th, 1679 increasing the penalties. Also, he acted to curb interaction between Jews on one hand and neophytes and catechumens on the other. While Article XXVII allowed Jews to own non-Christian slaves (usually Muslim), a grand ducal edict in 1667 extended the promise of freedom to any such slave who wished to convert to Catholicism, if they went to Florence and made this request in person (no such option was offered to non-Christian slaves owned by Catholics).[64]

The neophyte also objected to her mother's second claim of exemption, that is to say, her allegation of scant economic means. The daughter's allotted portion of the maternal estate (*legittima*) should be considered a legal debt, she argued, and the debtor's lack of resources did not modify the essential obligation. It was also

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid., *Decisione*, § 23, 338.

[63] Ibid., *Decisione*, § 24, 338.

[64] Toaff cites Article XXVII of the *Livornine* and the Letters Patent of 1595, noting that "the only legitimate way to remove a slave from a Jewish master was by paying the market price, if the master consented." Renzo Toaff, "Schiavitù e schiavi nella Nazione Ebrea di Livorno nel Sei e Settecento," *La Rassegna Mensile d'Israel* 51, no.1 (1985): 82-95; 85. For related observations, Toaff, *La nazione ebrea a Livorno e a Pisa (1591-1700)*, 329-334. On the subject of slavery and conversion in Livorno, see Cesare Santus, "Schiavitù illegittime e identità incerte," in *Il "turco" a Livorno. Incontri con l'Islam nella Toscana del Seicento* (Milan: Officina Libraria, 2019), 92-118; Tamar Herzig, "Slavery and Interethnic Sexual Violence: A Multiple Perpetrator Rape in Seventeenth-Century Livorno," *The American Historical Review* 127, no. 1 (2022): 194-222. Slavery was accepted as long as it could bring "infidels" to the knowledge of the "true" religion, and to liberate all of them would have meant eliminating such slavery system which had led them to their spiritual salvation; Peter Mazur, "Combating 'Mohammedan Indecency': The Baptism of Muslim Slaves in Spanish Naples, 1563-1667," *Journal of Early Modern History* 13 (2009): 25-48; 41. The case of Rome, where an act of liberation was granted to all the baptized slaves in 1566 thanks to pope Pius V, appears as an exception and contrasts with what happened in other cities of the Italian peninsula, such as Florence; Serena Di Nepi, *I confini della salvezza. Schiavitù, conversione e libertà nella Roma di età moderna* (Rome: Viella, 2022); Samuela Marconcini, "Una presenza nascosta: battesimi di 'turchi' a Firenze in età moderna," *Annali di Storia di Firenze* 7 (2012): 97-122.

suggested that the mother might remarry, since she was approximately thirty years old (a contingency cited by the mother's unidentified defenders). In that case, the possibility emerged of having to share the portion with others, or else the portion might be subsumed in debts. It was thus proposed that the mother be declared a debtor of her daughter and obliged to relinquish one third of the house. Meanwhile, the daughter would need to pay 33 *scudi* a year for her mother's maintenance.

The neophyte's second appeal concerned inheritance after her mother's death (*post mortem*). In this regard, the mother's defenders cited two legal exemptions. First, they claimed that Jewish parents were only responsible for the allotted lifetime portion (*legittima*), as stipulated by Pope Paul III's Bull. Therefore, they were not obliged to share their inheritance with their children as if they were intestate (*ab intestato*) and the children needed to await their parents' death before dividing the property. In reply, the sitting judges (*Giudici di Rota)* limited their reading to canon law, focusing on Innocent III, but harking back also to Justinian. The Byzantine emperor allowed the possibility of converted heretics (that is to say, schismatic Christians returning to Orthodoxy) inheriting, whether the estate holder left a viable will or remained intestate, citing a Theodosian precedent (which Justinian failed to include in his code). The sitting judges based their opinion on an imposing series of canonical authorities,[65] evidently seeking to undermine the *Livornine*, which had been viewed as the ultimate defense of Jewish prerogatives[66] for over two centuries.[67]

On August 17th, 1707, one year after the lawsuit was filed, Moisè Ergas (alias Francesco Saverio Fortunati) dictated a second secret will which was unsealed only

[65] These canonical authorities include Prospero Fagnani, Agostinho Barbosa, Pignatelli, Bonacina, Diana, Bellarmino, Menocchio, Suarez and many others. The point is that Canon law prevails over Civil law in matters that might give rise to sin or error, as in the case of the *Livornine*; *Raccolta delle decisioni della Ruota fiorentina (1700-1808)*, § 10, 333-334.

[66] An undated anonymous memorandum notes that the opinion of the auditors Carlo Bizzarrini, Ascanio Venturi and Giovanbonaventura Neri Badia found favor with the Grand Duke; it was published in 1739 by the Albizzini press. According to a textual note, "si trattava di revocare quella parte del capitolo 26 a favore dei neofiti" [the issue was to turn that part of chapter 26 in the neophytes' favor]; but there is no evidence that this actually happened; *Compagnia, poi Magistrato del Bigallo, secondo versamento,* f. 1169, fasc. 25, ASFi, Florence.

[67] Toaff, *La nazione ebrea*, 190. Article XXVI was explicitly confirmed in 1695 and 1793; Galasso, *Alle origini di una comunità*, 118.

after his death on May 12th, 1727.[68] In this new document, the neophyte focused on his daughter Juditta (alias Maria Maddalena) and her previous renunciation of her inheritance on July 29th, 1700. Only now do we learn that the earlier testament presumed that she would become a nun and forfeit both her paternal and maternal inheritance. Should that occur, she would turn over to her father, his heirs and successors "all goods, inherited property, accounts and shares in business enterprises, present and future, associated with the estate of both her father and mother."[69] Under these circumstances, the daughter's lawsuit against her mother can be seen—above all—as an attempt by Moisè/Francesco Saverio to recoup the family patrimony. However, he recognized that his daughter might eventually decide not to enter a convent "due to various intervening circumstances."[70] Was he thinking of a failed vocation, perhaps? This is quite interesting, as her daughter had *already* entered the convent he suggested for her in his first will, Santa Scolastica in Buggiano! This convent, originally Theatin and then Benedictine, housed the daughters of rich local families, from Buggiano and the rest of the Valdinievole area, but attracted also women from the main cities of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, such as Pistoia, Florence, and Livorno.[71] Although cloistered, it was submitted to less strict canonical rigor, so that nuns actually had some relationships with the outside world, enjoying a sort of privileged status which led

[68] *Notarile moderno*, *Testamenti segreti pubblicati dal 1571 al 1665*, 10, 21, "Testamento segreto di Francesco Saverio Fortunati, prima del battesimo Moisè di Isach Ergas, 17 agosto 1707," cc. unnumbered, ASFi, Florence; cit. in Frattarelli Fischer, *Vivere fuori dal ghetto*, 293.

[69] For his part, Francesco Xaverio undertook to pay the Monastery of Buggiano "la dote, sopradote, sacrazione, pietanze e altro," in addition to guaranteeing his daughter 12 *scudi* a year for her natural life; *Notarile moderno*, *Testamenti segreti pubblicati dal 1571 al 1665*, 10, 21, "Testamento segreto di Francesco Saverio Fortunati, prima del battesimo Moisè di Isach Ergas, 17 agosto 1707," cc. unnumbered, ASFi, Florence.

[70] Ibid.

[71] The dowry requested was 300 *scudi* or 400 *scudi* for foreign nuns, as mentioned in a 1648 memorial and confirmed again in 1733 (the amounts registered in a 1651 pastoral visit, respectively 200 and 300 scudi, seem not to be accurate), and lowered to 130 or 180 *scudi* for those coming from "outside the State" to become a "monaca conversa" (not yet ordained); Enrico Cerasi, "Santa Scolastica a Buggiano. Le complesse vicende di un monastero benedettino," in *Memorie del chiostro. Vita monastica femminile in Valdinievole in età moderna e contemporanea*, eds. Anna Scattigno, Roberto Pinochi, Irene Corradi, and Enrico Cerasi, Atti della 1ª giornata di studi, Massa e Cozzile, 29 gennaio 2005 (Lucca: Edizioni Vannini, 2006), 179, 194 and 207.

them to a longer average life than the local population.[72] Maria Maddalena was admitted to the convent of Santa Scolastica in Buggiano on April 18th, 1704: on that day, no mention of her Jewish origin was made.[73] Contrary to the other girls, though, who took the veil soon after their entrance, her formal investiture came only three years after.[74] At the time of his second will, then, his father could still consider the possibility for her to leave the convent and marry, in which case, he would allocate her a dowry of one thousand *scudi*.[75] Moreover, Moisè/Francesco's second will and testament ignores the possibility that one of his Jewish relatives might apostatize. No special inheritance is stipulated in the case of a conversion, although the document begins with an invocation to God and the saints—especially Saint Francis Xavier, to whom he was particularly devoted.

Juditta/Maria Maddalena remained in the convent of Santa Scolastica in Buggiano and received new names as nun on May 9th, 1708: "Maria Vittoria Scolastica Benedetta Serafina,"[76] to be confirmed (although in a slightly different order) a year after, on the day of her formal profession of faith.[77] Then, a year after her

[72] Ibid., 195, 202, and 204-209 (where the availability of chocolate is recorded as a proof of the wealth of the convent!).

[73] *Compagnie e luoghi pii soppressi da Pietro Leopoldo*, "Buggiano, Monastero di Santa Scolastica," no. 833, Ricordi (1638-1770), c. 52v, Sezione di Archivio di Stato di Pescia (henceforth, SASPe), Pescia (Pistoia): "Adì 18 aprile 1704. Maria Madalena [*sic*] figlia del signore Francesco Fortunati da Firenze fu messa a partito per monaca vocale come per lettera di monsignore Benedetto Falconcini preposto di Pescia, e fu vinta per voti tutti favorevoli, cioè n° 17." She would have been likely 17 years old.

[74] See below.

[75] In addition, there was a painting by an unknown author, valued at around 10 ducats and evidently dear to the testator; Ibid.

[76] *Compagnie e luoghi pii soppressi da Pietro Leopoldo*, "Buggiano, Monastero di Santa Scolastica," n° 833, Ricordi (1638-1770), c. 52v, SASPe, Pescia (Pistoia): "Adì 9 maggio 1708. Maria Maddalena figliola del signor Francesco Fortunati suddetta, questo soprascritto giorno prese l'abito monacale per mano dell'illustrissimo monsignore Pavolo Antonio Pesenti proposto di Pescia con nome di donna Maria Vittoria Scolastica Benedetta Serafina." What is noteworthy in this case is that this record comes immediately after the one previously mentioned in note 67, instead of following the chronological order (used by all the records referring to other girls), as if a blank space was intentionally left after Maria Maddalena's name, waiting for her final decision, which came at the age of 21/22 years.

[77] Ibid., c. 54v: "Adì primo agosto 1709. Donna Maria Serafina Vittoria Scolastica Benedetta professò questo suddetto giorno in mano dell'illustrissimo e reverendissimo monsignor Paolo Antonio Pesenti proposto di Pescia alla presenza di padre Giovanni Lorenzo Cartoni confessore e padre Curtio Tanucci, segretario del medesimo monsignore proposto."

father's death, in 1728, she decided to completely cover the expenses made by the convent for the purchase of a house for the confessor, and farmer, of the same convent, using the money she had "in deposit,"[78] and showing herself to be particularly determined to reach this goal ("*zelantissima*"), paying a considerable sum of 115 *scudi.*[79] Though she was a nun in a Christian convent, her mother had not forgotten her, as she had likely remained her only child.[80] In 1746, nineteen years after the death of Francesco Saverio Fortunati (formerly Moisè, her ex-husband), Sara Ergas filed her own will in Livorno.[81] In the first part of the document, she focused on her Jewish relatives, to whom she left most of her estate, especially her two great-nieces Ester and Rivca (also Rebecca), the daughters of her nephew Isaac Vita (son of Sara's sister Ester and the late David Silvera).[82] Sara

[78] At this stage of the research, it is not possible to indicate whether this sum of money "in deposit" was part of the dowry given by her father or was somehow earned through the artisan manufacture of silk made in the convent. For this activity, Cerasi, "Santa Scolastica a Buggiano," 202-203.

[79] *Compagnie e luoghi pii soppressi da Pietro Leopoldo*, "Buggiano, Monastero di Santa Scolastica," n° 833, Ricordi (1638-1770), c. 125r., SASPe, Pescia (Pistoia): "Adì 26 aprile 1728. Ricordo come questo presente soprascritto giorno le signore Antonia, e Lisabetta sorelle, e figlie del quondam ser Giovan Domenico Spadoni di Buggiano eredi beneficiate del medesimo hanno venduto alle reverende monache e convento di Santa Scolastica di Buggiano una casa dell'eredità di esso ser Giovan Domenico Spadoni, con tutte le sue aderenze e pertinenze, posta dentro il castello di Buggiano sotto li suoi noti confini etc e per il prezzo di scudi centoquindici a tutte spese di detto convento, il qual prezzo fu pagato de' denari, che teneva in deposito la reverenda madre donna Maria Serafina Fortunati, zelantissima che si facesse la compra di detta casa per il comodo del confessore, e fattore, e sborsati alla signora Maria Caterina Pasqualini vedova lasciata dal predetto ser Giovan Domenico Spadoni, in conto di sua dote, precedente la cessione di sue ragioni e sotto la sicurtà del reverendo signore Benedetto e Giuseppe Anselotti del comune di Uzzano, e del sergente Rocco Adani del comune di Montecatini, e come pare nell'instrumento rogato da ser Domenico Cartoni del Borgo, al quale."

[80] Sara does not mention issue from a second marriage in the will mentioned here, below.

[81] *Notarile Moderno, Protocolli, Testamento*, 27237, notary Roberto Micheli (1743-1747), no. 16, "Testamento di Sara Ergas del 13 settembre 1746," cc. 24r-27r, ASFi, Florence. The will was recorded a few days earlier on September 6th, 1746 "secondo i riti ebraici" (presumably sworn *more hebreo,* in the Jewish manner) so that it could be «registrato in un pubblico atto»; Ibid., c. 24r.

[82] She left them 400 *pezze* each. Other Jewish beneficiaries of her will are "Rachele d'Abram del fu Isac Nunes Vais" (who is to receive 100 *pezze* on the occasion of her marriage), "la figlia di Abram del fu Raffael Alfarin" (25 *pezze* on the occasion of her marriage), the rabbis of the city of Safed in the Holy Land (25 *pezze* to perform her funeral service) and "Abram del fu Isac Nunes Vais," this "in recognition of the service that he always rendered me." Ibid., c. 25r.

acknowledges that "Signora Maria Maddalena, who was Giuditta while Jewish,"[83] had renounced (or perhaps, had been forced to renounce) both her paternal and maternal inheritance. Still, she decides to leave her a one-time payment of twenty-five *pezze* (*25 pezze una tantum*). Then Sara adds, "if it emerges that my above-mentioned daughter has a legal claim on my estate in whole or in part, in spite of her rejection [of her inheritance]...I bequeath her the allotted portion (*legittima)*, as appropriate (*quatenus*) according to law (*de jure* dovuta)."[84] After many years, the mother entertains the possibility of giving her daughter voluntarily that for which she (Juditta) had fought so long (after having been manipulated by her father, it would seem). The only condition was that this concession fulfill the requirements of the law. Ultimately, the old case (begun in 1701) was rendered moot by Sara's voluntary acquiescence, without a clear determination of whether the converted daughter had a legal right (or not) to the allocated portion of her still living and still Jewish mother's estate.[85] Sara added two codicils to her will, two and four years later, both unrelated to her neophyte daughter.[86] Then after her death in 1750, [87] the matter was resolved—at very long last—with a private agreement,[88] not another lawsuit. As a Jewish convert, "Serafina" (alias Juditta, alias Maria Maddalena) was certainly not allowed to express gratitude for her mother's unexpected courtesy or to be present at her mother's deathbed, as she could not have any contact with her Jewish family. Her Jewish origin, though, which didn't seem to be relevant at all at the moment of her entrance into the convent, as much as not to be recorded, reemerged at the moment of her death, as

[83] Even though she was fully aware that her daughter was a nun in the convent of Santa Scolastica in Buggiano ("che presentemente ritrovasi religiosa nel monastero di Santa Scolastica di Buggiano, prepositura di Pescia"), Sara does not mention at all her daughter's new name, Serafina. Ibid., 25v.
[84] According to the will, "nel caso, nonostante la detta renunzia, fosse per qualche titolo dovuta alla suddetta mia figlia tutta o parte della mia eredità [...] lasso alla medesima la sua legittima, *quatenus* la medesima li sia *de jure* dovuta." Ibid.
[85] Unless Maria Maddalena died before her; Ibid. At the end of the will, Sara names as her universal heir her sister-in-law Ester, widow of her beloved brother Moisè Ergas, and in the case of Ester's death, her sons (also Sara's nephews) Abram Kai and David Kai.
[86] *Notarile Moderno, Protocolli, Testamento*, 27402, notary Antonio Chiocchini (1746-1773), no. 8, "Codicilli al testamento di Sara Ergas," August 6th, 1748, cc. 7r-v, ASFi, Florence, and *Notarile Moderno, Protocolli, Testamento,* 27562, notary Paolo Brignole (1748-1757), n° 6, "Codicilli al testamento di Sara Ergas," July 13th, 1750, cc. 6v-7v, ASFi, Florence.
[87] Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers*, 25.
[88] Galasso, *Alle origini di una comunità,* 118.

an open secret. "Donna Serafina" died at the age of 71 years, after receiving all the proper Catholic sacraments on September 30th, 1758, and was buried in front of the altar of the Visitation, which had been endowed with an ecclesiastical benefice.[89] The anonymous writer of her death record points to the fact that she once belonged to the "Jewish Nation" and had been baptized at the age of 30 months in Florence, for the will of her father, Francesco Fortunati, previously converted, too.[90] She had been the only nun of Jewish origin ever recorder in that convent.[91] Juditta, alias Maria Maddalena, alias "donna Serafina," a woman, a Jewish convert to Christianity, and then eventually a nun, was remembered in her mother's will, even though the twenty-sixth article of the *Livornine* would have permitted Sara not to give her daughter even "a share of any inheritance or property settlement,"[92] but in a city like Livorno women could make sentimental reasons prevail over economical ones, and a Jewish mother could decide to draw up her own will in favor of her Christian daughter, without wanting her to revert to Judaism.

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[89] Cerasi, "Santa Scolastica a Buggiano," 188, note 33.

[90] *Compagnie e luoghi pii soppressi da Pietro Leopoldo*, "Buggiano, Monastero di Santa Scolastica," no. 846, Registro di monache defunte (1648-1785), c. 14r., SASPe, Pescia (Pistoia): "Adì 30 settembre 1758. Donna Serafina del signore Francesco Fortunati di Firenze di nazione ebrea fu battezzata in Firenze in età di 30 mesi, stata condotta dal suo signor padre, il quale precedentemente era venuto alla Santa Fede, e ricevuti tutti i santissimi sacramenti passò da questa all'altra vita al suddetto giorno all'ore 24 italiane, essendo stata assistita da me Padre Giovanni Lorenzo Carrozzi del Colle, moderno confessore di questo monastero ordinario, e da me le furno fatte l'esequie il dì primo ottobre, e di poi fu seppellita in questa chiesa in Santa Scolastica nella sepoltura d'avanti l'altare della visitazione; e era d'anni 71." According to this source, she was then born in 1687. The transcript of this record given in Cerasi, "Santa Scolastica a Buggiano," 234, is not accurate at all.

[91] Cerasi, "Santa Scolastica a Buggiano," 233-235. The initial non-mention of her (and her father's) Jewish origin contrasts with what happened more than two centuries before, in a totally different context, to "Caterina, the former Jew, daughter of Master Ercole, the former Jew," who entered the Santa Caterina da Siena convent in Ferrara on August 5th, 1501; Tamar Herzig, "Sister Theodora: From Jewish Girl to Bride of Christ," in *A Convert's Tale. Art, Crime and Jewish Apostasy in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge-London: Harvard University Press, 2019), 146-161; 147. Caterina was not the only nun of Jewish origin accepted in that convent. Ibid., 154.

[92] Toaff, *La nazione ebrea*, 427.

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# *The Fascist Government, the Holy See and the Prohibition of "Mixed" Marriages 1935-1938*

by *Michele Sarfatti*

## Abstract

*In the spring of 1936, during the war against Ethiopia, dictator Benito Mussolini began sending directives to Italian authorities in Africa against so-called "mixed unions," from which "mixed-race" children were born. In the fall of 1938, the Fascist government permanently banned marriages of Italian citizens "of the Aryan race" with "Camites" and "Semites" of any citizenship. This essay tells the story of that course and documents the fact that the 1938 ban on "racially mixed marriages," which unilaterally amended the Concordat, constituted a clear victory for Mussolini over the Holy See and the Catholic Church. It thus demonstrated the strength that fascism had at that time.*

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In 1938 the question of the prohibition of "racially mixed" marriages, i.e. those between an Italian citizen "of Aryan race" with a person of any other "race," was at the centre of a serious conflict between Fascism and the Roman Catholic Church, that is, between the government of the Kingdom of Italy and the government of the Holy See. The matter was raised by the Fascist regime, which Mussolini had been steering for some years towards the building of a national racist State.[1]

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Translated from the Italian by Loredana Melissari.

[1] Michele Sarfatti, *Il fascismo alla costruzione di uno Stato nazional-razziale: cittadinanza, unioni bianchi-neri, leggi antiebraiche del 1938*, in *Culture antisemite. Italia ed Europa dalle leggi antiebraiche ai razzismi di oggi*, eds. Annalisa Cegna and Filippo Focardi (Roma: Viella, 2021), 87-105. For their help in locating some documents I wish to thank Annalisa Capristo, Alessandro Cassin, Giovanni Coco, Mara Dissegna, Giorgio Fabre, Roberto De Rose of the Archivio centrale dello Stato, Stefania Ruggeri of the Archivio storico del Ministero degli affari esteri and the librarians of the Biblioteca Minerva del Senato della Repubblica. The acronyms used for the archives are: AAV = Archivio apostolico vaticano, Vatican City; ACS = Archivio centrale dello

Already in 1937, the two sides had debated (at first only indirectly, it would seem, but later face-to-face) the question of marriages between Italian citizens (who were considered "Whites") and African subjects, reaching what the Holy See saw as a sort of alignment. The confrontation that took place the following year, on the other hand, ended with a clear display of supremacy on the Fascist side. Benito Mussolini's success in declaring a blanket legislative ban against all marriages of this type in November 1938 was a significant event. The present essay reconstructs the main aspects of the historical process that led to this outcome, highlighting the documents pertaining to the two sides.

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In July 1935, while the Fascist dictatorship was engaged in the preparations for the attack on Ethiopia, Mussolini received an *Appunto* (note) titled "L'impero mussoliniano non deve essere un impero di mulatti" (Mussolini's Empire Must Not Be an Empire of Mulattoes). The text warned of the likelihood of numerous "unions, either transient or permanent," between young Italian colonizers and Ethiopian women, leading to an increase of "*misti*" (half-bloods), a prospect that would not be hindered by religion, "which impels us towards brotherhood." In order to avoid this, the note continued, a range of measures would have to be put into place, including "not encouraging concubinage and even less marriage with people of color."

On August 8, Fulvio Suvich, Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs (the Minister being Mussolini himself), sent a copy of the document to the office of the Minister for the Colonies (here too, the Minister was Mussolini, and Alessandro Lessona was the Under-Secretary), and wrote in the accompanying letter:

> The Duce has [...] ordered that an action plan be urgently submitted to Him, in order to avoid a generation of mulattoes to spring up in East

Stato, Rome; ARSI = Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Rome; ASMAE = Archivio storico del Ministero degli affari esteri, Rome; ASSS-SRS = Archivio storico della Segreteria di Stato – Sezione per i rapporti con gli Stati, Vatican City; AUSSME = Archivio dell'Ufficio storico dello Stato maggiore dell'esercito, Rome.

> Africa. This Ministry [of Foreign Affairs] will be obliged if you will keep us informed of the steps undertaken in this matter.[2]

The "urgency" referred to the drafting of the plan, not to its implementation, which was not mentioned.

"Transient" relationships meant occasional ones of whatever kind, including prostitution. "Permanent" relationships included both cohabitations governed by local customs, often termed "*madamato*" by the colonizers,[3] and actual marriages, governed by Italian law. The "madamato" practically existed only in the colonies, while marriages (even if very few in number) were to be found also in the mother country.

The letter of August 8, made no mention of the passing of a law that would increase the repression of the "madamato" and would have been necessary in any case to formally prohibit new marriages. Such a prohibition, however, would have impinged on the Lateran Pacts between the Kingdom of Italy and the Holy See, signed six years earlier, which stipulated that marriages performed by the Catholic Church were to be automatically recorded in the Civil Register of the municipality. It is important to note that the Concordat of 1929 did not apply to Italian colonies. However, in the colonies there were laws in force which incorporated the Concordat's rules on matrimony.[4]

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[2] Sottosegretario agli Affari esteri to the Ministero delle Colonie-Gabinetto, with a copy to the Ministero della Guerra-Gabinetto and the Ministero della Stampa e propaganda-Gabinetto, August 8, 1935, enclosing a document titled "Appunto Riservato – L'impero mussoliniano non deve essere un impero di mulatti" (Confidential Note – Mussolini's Empire Must Not Be an Empire of Mulattoes); in AUSSME, D1, b. 110, fasc. 7, sfasc. 64; quoted in Giulia Barrera, "Colonial Affairs: Italian Men, Eritrean Women and the Construction of Racial Hierarchies in Colonial Eritrea (1885-1941)" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2002), 1.

[3] See at least Barbara Sorgoni, *Parole e corpi. Antropologia, discorso giuridico e politiche sessuali interrazziali nella colonia Eritrea (1890-1941)* (Napoli: Liguori, 1998).

[4] "The Concordat between Italy and the Holy See shall not be implemented in the Colonies. However, by virtue of Art. 43 of the Organic Law of Libya and of Art. 53 of the Organic law of Italian East Africa, the changes made by the Law No. 847 of May 27, 1929 to Section 5 of Book 1 of the Civil Code for the implementation of Art. 34 of the Concordat are applicable" ["Il Concordato fra l'Italia e la Santa Sede non è applicabile alle Colonie. Sono tuttavia applicabili, in virtù dell'art. 43 della Legge Organica della Libia e dell'art. 53 della Legge Organica per l'A.O.I., le modificazioni che la Legge 27 maggio 1929 n. 847 ha apportato al titolo V° del Libro I° del C.C., in esecuzione dell'art. 34 del Concordato"]; Ministero dell'Africa italiana – Direzione generale per gli affari politici to the Ministero dell'Africa italiana – Direzione generale degli affari civili, October

I have been unable to find documents proving that the "action plan" requested by Mussolini in August 1935 was being worked on while the bloody invasion of Ethiopia was taking place. Moreover, shortly after the proclamation of the empire on May 9, 1936, the government issued the Royal Legislative Decree No. 1019 of June 1,1936, titled *Ordinamento e amministrazione dell'Africa Orientale Italiana* (Internal Polity and Administration of Italian East Africa), which did not introduce new restrictions on marriages and limited itself to confirming, at Art. 28, that the "woman married to a subject" became herself a "subject" and was therefore no longer a "citizen" (a principle that had already been established in the 1927 law on Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, whose inhabitants, however, were styled "Italian Libyan citizens" and not "subjects," and in the 1933 law on Eritrea and Somalia).[5]

Towards the end of the military campaign, Mussolini did in fact issue individual orders against "alliances" and the procreation of "misti." On May 11, 1936, for instance, he telegraphed: "In order to ward off from the start the dreadful and not far-off consequences of *meticismo* [the procreation of half-breeds] I direct that no Italian—be he soldier or civilian—may remain in the viceroyalty [Ethiopia] over six months without a wife;"[6] and on May 26 telegraphed a list of instructions, including the "ruthless fight against any tendency towards meticismo."[7]

A sort of "action plan," on the other hand, emerged from the body of provisions concerning the "relationship between citizens and natives" in the "social sector" contained in the "fundamental principles" of the directives "for the organization and the optimization" of AOI (Africa Orientale Italiana = Italian East Africa), that Lessona, who had been appointed Minister for the Colonies a few weeks earlier, sent on August 5, 1936 to Rodolfo Graziani, Governor General of AOI and viceroy

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[between 27 and 31] 1937, "Matrimoni fra nazionali ed eritree"; in ASMAE, Ministero dell'Africa italiana, Direzione generale affari politici (1880-1955), Elenco 3, b. 107, fasc. 413.

[5] Kilian Bartikowski and Giorgio Fabre, "Donna bianca e uomo nero (con una variante). Il razzismo antinero nei colloqui tra Mussolini e Bülow-Schwante," *Quaderni di storia* 70 (July-December 2009), 181-218; 198-202. See also Gianluca Gabrielli, "Il matrimonio misto negli anni del colonialismo italiano," *I viaggi di Erodoto* 13, no. 38-39 (June-November 1999), 80-91; 87-89.

[6] Benito Mussolini to Pietro Badoglio and Rodolfo Graziani, May 11, 1936; in ACS, Fondo Graziani Rodolfo, b. 18, fasc. 21, sfasc. 6, ins. "1936: maggio 22-31."

[7] Benito Mussolini to Rodolfo Graziani, May 26, 1936; in ACS, Fondo Graziani Rodolfo, b. 26, fasc. 29, sfasc. 32; carbon copy in ASMAE, Ministero dell'Africa italiana, Gabinetto, Archivio segreto, b. 160, fasc. Direttive – Competenze.

of Ethiopia. On the matter we are examining here, the Minister urged the Governor to "deal with the utmost severity—in accordance with the Duce's orders—with the issue of 'madamismo' and of '*sciarmuttismo*' [prostitution]," favouring the immigration from Italy of families rather than single colonists and the transfer of prostitutes "of the white race," and proceeding to the immediate repatriation of "those—particularly if senior civil servants or officers—who cohabit or maintain stable relationships with native women."[8] Marriages were not mentioned. The phrase "Duce's orders" was but little employed in the other sections of the long document.

To summarize, the period from July-August 1935 to August 1936 saw a crescendo, beginning with Mussolini's request of a plan and reaching its conclusion when a plan was sent to the colony. At present, however, we are unable to document if during those twelve months there was simply a gradual increase in harshness, or if Mussolini and the other ministers decided not to start this action while the war was still going on, or if they decided to proceed step-by-step so as to allow time both for the racist propaganda to take hold and for senior civil servants and officers who were in a "madamato" relationship to decide on their own how to adjust (by breaking off the relationship or by converting it into marriage).

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In late 1936 it was decided to ban by law all "permanent unions" that did not constitute an actual marriage. This shift from order to law marks a qualitative leap in the management of the racist campaign.

On January 4, 1937 Minister Lessona sent the Council of Ministers the draft of a royal decree-law by which Italian citizens (but not other European citizen) who were in a "conjugal-like relationships" (not a "conjugal relationship," therefore) in Italy or in the colonies with a subject of AOI (not of Libya, therefore) or with a comparable foreigner, were liable to be sentenced to a prison term of one to five

[8] Ministro per le colonie to governatore generale dell'Aoi, August 5, 1936; in ACS, Fondo Graziani Rodolfo, b. 26, fasc. 29, sfasc. 32; carbon copy in ASMAE, Ministero dell'Africa italiana, Gabinetto, Archivio segreto, b. 160, fasc. Direttive – Competenze.

years. The original title read *Measures for the integrity of the race*.[9] The decree banned both new and already existing "relationships" of this kind. The penalty that could be applied was high. Making Italian citizens punishable was probably considered to require a state law. It was the first openly racist law of the Fascist Kingdom of Italy.

It should be noted that the decree provided a simple factual definition of the "madamato" and did not establish a penalty for the male or female subject involved. It did not define the two groups, and this could lead to very complex situations, such as a possibly opposite treatment of two "mixed" brothers with different legal status (for instance, one might be an Italian citizen, having been acknowledged by the "White" parent, and the other a subject).

The Council of Ministers approved the draft at the meeting of January 9. On that occasion, following a request by the Minister of Finance Paolo Thaon di Revel, it was decided to change the title to *Provvedimenti per i rapporti fra nazionali e indigeni* (*Measures concerning the relationships between nationals and natives*).[10] Eventually this was changed to *Sanzioni per i rapporti d'indole coniugale fra cittadini e sudditi* (*Sanctions for conjugal-like relationships between citizens and subjects*). As a result of this change, the decree's title no longer expressly mentioned the word "race," while retaining its racist nature.

In the report accompanying the draft of the decree-law, Lessona wrote: "The time of circular letters containing warnings [...] is at an end; the time has come to establish penalties." He went on to specify that "actual conjugal relationships" had not been banned as this "had been judged inappropriate in view of the spirit informing the Lateran Pacts [...], at least for the time being." He also reported that marriages were "quite rare. [...] Nonetheless, if they were to occur, there would be no lack of police measures (such as *confino*—internment—and expulsion), political sanctions (the cancelling of party membership) and disciplinary actions, such as the discharge from service for civil servants."[11]

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[9] Draft of Royal Decree-Law "Provvedimenti per l'integrità della razza," with covering letter of January 4, 1937 by Renzo Meregazzi, chief of the Minister for the Colonies' office; in ACS, Presidenza del consiglio dei ministri, Atti, 1937, Ministero dell'Africa italiana, fasc. 135.

[10] Appunto del Ministro delle Finanze, January 9, 1937; in ACS, Presidenza del consiglio dei ministri, Atti, 1937, Ministero dell'Africa italiana, fasc. 135.

[11] Report accompanying the Draft of the Royal Decree-Law "Provvedimenti per l'integrità della razza," with covering letter of January 4, 1937 by Renzo Meregazzi, Chief of the minister's office of

The report's content was summarised in a short *Appunto* (note) for the Duce dated January 8. It contained, among others, the following passage:

> The above-mentioned penalty cannot be applied in the case of occasional intercourse, nor does it apply to legitimate unions. The latter being quite rare, it was judged inappropriate to ban them, at least for the time being, in view of the spirit informing the Lateran Pacts. However, should these legitimate unions occur, police measures should suffice to prevent their spreading.[12]

The dictator wrote by hand his usual "Sì M (Yes Mussolini)" right next to this last phrase.

On January 10, reporting on the approval of the draft, Mussolini's daily Il Popolo d'Italia called it "a drastic and rigorous legislative measure," adding that "mixed" marriages had not been prohibited, because "in addition to various kinds of considerations, the danger posed by legitimate unions is not at all serious or worrying, since they occur very rarely and can always be fought by any means necessary."[13]

On that same January 10, Virginio Gayda wrote in the important fascist daily Il Giornale d'Italia that the decree did not ban the "much rarer" marriage "between Whites and Coloureds," stressing that this "is a sacrament that requires the Italian state, signatory of the Lateran Pacts, to respect its spirit and an act which for the Catholic faith is not contingent on prior limitations of race. We are confident, however, that the Holy See is no less anxious than the Fascist government to preserve in White Catholics their original spirit that can never be the same as the Blacks' and that, with its serene composure, plays so great a role in the conservation of the momentous work the Church has accomplished in the world." Furthermore—having perhaps read the ministerial report accompanying the decree's draft—he too admonished: "There will be after all no lack of means to

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the Minister for the Colonies; in ACS, Presidenza del Consiglio dei ministri, Atti, 1937, Ministero dell'Africa italiana, fasc. 135.

[12] Appunto per il Duce, January 8, 1937; in ACS, Presidenza del consiglio dei ministri, Atti, 1937, Ministero dell'Africa italiana, fasc. 135.

[13] "Energici provvedimenti a tutela della razza nelle terre conquistate," *Il Popolo d'Italia*, January 10, 1937.

repress mixed marriages too, be it through the State's and the Party's disciplinary powers towards civil servants and card-carrying members, or through the powers of the police, with measures of varying degree."[14]

Meanwhile, on January 9, the same day on which the Council of Ministers had met, Lessona had published in the daily La Stampa an extremely harsh article against "the mating with inferior creatures" and against the "meticci." The article did not describe the contents of the decree's draft. It stated instead that "the most serious cause, and one that still needs to be taken into consideration," of the high number of "meticci" in Latin America was the "the patronage granted by the Church to mixed marriages, blessed by Catholic rites as a way of redemption from free unions."[15] This open attack on marriages, published on the very same day that the draft of a decree outlawing only the "madamato" was being approved, reads like a sort of warning to the Vatican and needs to be seen in connection with the "We are confident ... that the Holy See is no less anxious than the Fascist government" claim asserted the next day by Il Giornale d'Italia.

Lessona's mention of "redemption" was openly disputed not long afterwards in an article by the Jesuit Angelo Brucculeri: "In the matrimonial doctrine of the Church, difference of race does not constitute an impediment. The Catholic missionary will not hesitate in the least to redeem by means of the sacrament the free unions between parties of different ethnicities." Brucculeri nevertheless praised the decree, which by then had been issued, writing that it "is a timely measure of prudent and far-seeing policy" and adding: "This however does not mean that the State cannot, should the high number of such unions [recte: marriages] cause an obvious social harm, inhibit them by indirect means."[16]

Nothing has been ascertained that might enable us to look upon the article written by the Jesuit as an official reaction by the Vatican, and the references to the Holy See by ministers and Fascist newspapers in January do not appear to be the result of a formal consultation between the two states, which is never hinted at. Only in the following summer and autumn is such a consultation documented.

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[14] Virginio Gayda, "Difesa e lavoro dell'Impero," *Il Giornale d'Italia*, January 10, 1937.

[15] Alessandro Lessona, "Gli italiani nell'Impero. Politica di razza," *La Stampa*, January 9, 1937.

[16] Angelo Brucculeri, "Chiesa e Stato nella politica della razza," *Antischiavismo* 49, no. 1-3 (1937); quoted in Lucia Ceci, *Il papa non deve parlare. Chiesa, fascismo e guerra d'Etiopia* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2010), 165.

The decree's progress through the various stages of the legislative process was marked by a noticeable slowness: it was approved by the Council of Ministers on January 9, 1937, promulgated as Royal Decree-Law no. 880 "*Sanzioni per i rapporti d'indole coniugale fra cittadini e sudditi"* on April 19, 1937, published in the Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia (Official Journal of the Kingdom of Italy) on June 24, 1937 (thus coming into force on that date), was "converted into law" (a formal parliamentary ratification required for all decree-laws issued by the government) with a minor change by Law no. 2590 of December 30, 1937, published on March 3, 1938. The gap of almost six months between the approval of the draft by the Council of Ministers and its actual coming into force may have been intentional, to allow Italian citizens the time to break up existing "relationships." The reason for this, in my opinion, is that racist colonial Fascism did not wish to act with sudden harshness against its own colonial civil and military senior staff and to inflict too many punishments on "Whites" within sight of the "Blacks."
The decree's text read:

> An Italian citizen who in the territory of the Kingdom or of the Colonies maintains a conjugal-like relationship with a subject of Italian East Africa or with *a foreigner belonging to a population having traditions, customs, as well as social and legal notions similar to those of the subjects of Italian East Africa* [emphasis added], shall be punished with a prison sentence of one to five years.

When the decree was converted into law, the phrase emphasized here was replaced by "*or an assimilated person.*"[17]
"Madamato" relationships could be ended either by breaking them off brusquely (for instance if the Italian partner left the colony) or by turning them into marriages. The press had already pointed out the steps that the government intended to take against the latter option. We also know that the King's Prosecutor in Eritrea (i.e. the representative of the executive power within the judiciary) had ordered—the exact date is not known, but somewhat earlier than October 1937—

[17] Emphasis added.

all registry offices to "defer, at least for the time being and awaiting instructions," the recording in the Civil Register of any "mixed" marriage performed only with religious rites.[18]

It is highly likely that it was this order which led to the following episode and to a direct talk on the issue between the Holy See and the Italian State. On July 28, 1937 the Secretary of the Sacred Congregation for the Oriental Church informed Eugenio Pacelli, Secretary of State of the Holy See, that the Vicar Apostolic of Eritrea had reported a not entirely clear objection raised by the local Italian authorities when they were requested to "formalize unions and legitimate the offspring" of "mixed" marriages that had been performed only according to Catholic rites.[19] It is quite likely that this refers to the stop to the recording of "mixed" marriages already mentioned. On July 31, Pacelli had this information forwarded to the Apostolic Nuncio to Italy, Francesco Borgongini Duca.[20] On August 5, Borgongini Duca informed him that he had seen both the Under-Secretary of the Interior Guido Buffarini Guidi and the Minister Lessona, and that they had assured him that "mixed" marriages were not banned either in the territory of the Kingdom of Italy nor in that of the colonies. The latter had stated—wrote the Nuncio—that

> I have wondered if it would not be advisable to simply prohibit marriages between the two races, but I stopped short of doing this because, pursuant to the Concordat, I could not ban marriages that the Catholic Church considers valid for superior reasons of which I, as a Catholic, acknowledge the supernatural premises.

[18] Governo dell'Eritrea to Governo generale dell'Africa orientale italiana and other recipients, October 4, 1937 (copy); in ASMAE, Ministero dell'Africa italiana, Direzione generale affari politici (1880-1955), Elenco 3, b. 107, fasc. 413.

[19] Segretario per la Sacra congregazione per la Chiesa orientale to Segretario di Stato della Santa Sede, July 28, 1937; in AAV, Nunziatura apostolica d'Italia, b. 4, fasc. 1, sfasc. Matrimoni con indigeni in A.O.I., foglio 79.

[20] Segretario di Stato della Santa Sede to Nunzio apostolico in Italia, July 31, 1937; in AAV, Nunziatura apostolica d'Italia, b. 4, fasc. 1, sfasc. Matrimoni con indigeni in A.O.I., foglio 81.

The Nuncio added that Lessona had told him:

> that he did not view unfavourably that people who up to that moment had been living in an illicit union should regularize their situation through matrimony: a further advantage would derive from this, namely the conferment of citizenship to the meticci. He pleaded with me, however, that in the future the Church would assist in deterring from unions between people of different races, in order to avoid the birth of mulatti, who are degenerates.[21]

On this last point, the Nuncio had promised the Minister that he would let him know "my opinion," that is the official view of the Holy See. The Holy See consulted with the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of the Sacraments, Domenico Jorio, who in his lengthy opinion wrote that "the Church may and even must, within the proper limits, amply provide the requested assistance through its Missionaries, by exerting its persuasion to prevent such hybrid unions," without however banning them entirely; and that, should the government in future enact a law prohibiting them, the Church should abstain from celebrating religious weddings "save for the proper exceptions suggested by canonical praxis."[22] The opinion was forwarded to the Nuncio, who on October 1 reported to Pacelli that he had seen Lessona "to whom I have explained the doctrine of the Church and also the limits within which the Missionaries will be able to support the Government's directives."[23] It would seem that he had reported Jorio's opinion to Lessona in full. Content and tone of the correspondence suggest that there had not been any earlier official or off-the-record consultation between the two governments on the issue. The minister's question and the Nuncio's answer are suggestive of an agreement, albeit a verbal and informal one, and probably sincere on the part of the Vatican.

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[21] Nunzio apostolico in Italia to Segretario di Stato della Santa Sede, August 5, 1937; in ASSS-SRS, Fondo Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, Pio XI, Italia, pos. 1040, fasc. 720, fogli 21-23.

[22] Prefetto sacra congregazione dei sacramenti to Segretario di Stato della Santa Sede, August 24, 1937; in AAV, Nunziatura apostolica d'Italia, b. 4, fasc. 1, sfasc. Matrimoni con indigeni in A.O.I., fogli 91-92.

[23] Nunzio apostolico in Italia to Segretario di Stato della Santa Sede, October 1, 1937; in ASSS-SRS, Fondo Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, Pio XI, Italia, pos. 1040, fasc. 720, foglio 37.

As for the Italian party, late in October of that same year, in the correspondence arising out of the above-mentioned refusal by the government of Eritrea to register "mixed" marriages that had been celebrated only with religious rites, the Direzione generale per gli affari politici del Ministero dell'Africa italiana (General Directorate for Political Affairs of the Ministry of Italian Africa) informed the Direzione generale degli affari civili (General Directorate of Civil Affairs) of that same Ministry that "from the hints that have been dropped on this issue it would seem that the Holy See is inclined to agree that it is advisable that marriages between nationals and native women be not allowed." [24] In spite of its hypothetical tone ("it would seem ... inclined ... be not allowed") the phrasing seems to me to twist Borgongini Duca's words.

Meanwhile, in May 1937, Lessona (whose department had been renamed Ministry of Italian Africa) had sent the Parliamentary Committee for the planned reform of the First Book of the Italian Civil Code a letter with "general instructions" on the questions of "mixed" marriages and of the conferment of citizenship to the "meticci," stating that the former "must not be allowed" and that the latter "must be equally prohibited." After examining the issues, however, the Committee in its conclusions suggested that these matters be ruled "rather than by legal criteria [...] by political criteria, which may be changed according to the needs that may arise," that is "through special provisions, rather than solemnly in the Civil Code"; and in any case referred the final decision to the government, which probably possessed and could evaluate "aspects that are not available to the Committee."[25] Already in May, therefore, Lessona had made known intentions that differed from what he would tell the Nuncio in August and in October.

On March 31 and on April 1, 1938 the Senate debated the bill for the budget of the Ministry for Italian Africa, which was no longer headed by Lessona, having been taken over by Mussolini himself some months previously. Both Giuseppe Facchinetti Pulazzini, the senator who read out the report presenting the budget,

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[24] Ministero dell'Africa italiana – Direzione generale per gli affari politici to Ministero dell'Africa italiana – Direzione generale degli affari civili, October [between 27 and 31], 1937, "Matrimoni fra nazionali ed eritree"; in ASMAE, Ministero dell'Africa italiana, Direzione generale affari politici (1880-1955), Elenco 3, b. 107, fasc. 413.

[25] *Atti della commissione parlamentare chiamata a dare il proprio parere sul progetto del libro primo del Codice civile "delle persone"* (Rome: 1937), 349-351, 359, 483 and 761; quotation on page 483.

and the new Under-Secretary for Italian Africa, Attilio Teruzzi, briefly mentioned the issue of "mixed" marriages, again stating that it would be unadvisable to ban them and claiming that, anyway, none had been performed recently.[26] Neither of them hinted at possible changes to the legislation. Teruzzi's speech, with its allusion to "problems of a superior nature" that had earlier advised against prohibiting such marriages, was published also in the main government magazine on the colonies.[27] In a public occasion, therefore, the Ministry's message was similar to the one conveyed to the Vatican; and this time it was even more evident that Mussolini was behind it.

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Meanwhile, between 1935 and 1936, Mussolini had decided to set Italy on a course towards a general anti-Jewish policy of a racist nature. The undertaking was complex and therefore required time.[28] Its operative and public launch was linked by the dictator himself to the circulation of an ideological text on all the various aspects of racism.[29] The document, sent out on July 14, 1938, was titled *Il fascismo e i problemi della razza* (Fascism and race issues) and may be called the Fascist Manifesto on Race.[30]

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[26] *Atti parlamentari, Senato del Regno, Legislatura XXIX, I^a sessione 1934-38, Discussioni* (Rome: 1938), 3833 and 3853.

[27] "I problemi dell'Africa Italiana nel discorso del generale Teruzzi al Senato," *L'azione coloniale* 9, no. 13 (April 7, 1938); quoted in Gianluca Gabrielli, "La persecuzione delle "unioni miste" (1937-1940) nei testi delle sentenze pubblicate e nel dibattito giuridico," *Studi piacentini* 20 (1996): 83-140; 115.

[28] Michele Sarfatti, *The Jews in Mussolini's Italy. From Equality to Persecution*, trans. by John and Anne C. Tedeschi, (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press 2006), 95-128 [Italian edition, *Gli ebrei nell'Italia fascista. Vicende, identità, persecuzione*, definitive edition, (Torino: Einaudi, 2018)]; see also Giorgio Fabre, "L'Informazione diplomatica n. 14 del febbraio 1938," *La rassegna mensile di Israel* 73, no. 2 (May-August 2007): 45-101.

[29] Giorgio Fabre, "I segreti sono ancora in quei ministeri," *Contemporanea* 19, no. 4 (October-December 2016): 617-633; 617-618.

[30] "Il fascismo e i problemi della razza," *Il Giornale d'Italia*, July 15, 1938 (already on sale in the afternoon of July 14); see Michele Sarfatti, *Mussolini contro gli ebrei. Cronaca dell'elaborazione delle leggi del 1938*, 2nd ed. (Torino: Zamorani 2017), 30-35 and 191-193; Id., *Il cielo sereno e l'ombra della Shoah. Otto stereotipi sulla persecuzione antiebraica nell'Italia fascista* (Roma: Viella, 2020), 33-42.

The text, arranged like a decalogue, proclaimed the existence of an Italo-Aryan "race," clearly distinct from the Jewish and the African "races." The last point stated:

> The purely European characteristics of Italians, both physical and psychological, must not be altered in any way. A union is acceptable only within the European races, in which case one cannot speak of an actual hybridism [...]. The purely European character of Italians would be altered by the cross-breeding with any extra-European race, bearer of a civilisation dissimilar to the ancient civilization of the Aryans.

The preamble to the decalogue made reference to Fascism and to the Ministry of Popular Culture, thereby giving the text an ideological-cultural slant (of a so-called scientific nature); the point quoted here stated a principle (the only one among all ten of them) that could be immediately converted into law. The tone and the words employed indicated that "not acceptable" unions also included marriages.
If the diary kept by Ciano, Minister of Foreign Affairs, is truthful, Mussolini informed him on July 17 that he was "working on a measure that would prohibit marriages of Italians with people of another ethnicity, including the Jewish race."[31]
The committee entrusted with preparing the anti-Jewish laws had been installed on June 1.[32]
The pre-announcement contained in the document instantly alarmed the Holy See. The prohibition would affect not just marriages between "White" persons and "Black" subjects, which was the issue the Holy See had been dealing with the previous year, but also marriages in which the "Black" (or the "White/Black 'mixed-blood' ") was an Italian citizen, as well as those between a person "of Aryan race" and one "of Jewish race" (or of any other race). According to the rules of the Church, if the "White" or "Aryan" was a Catholic and their spouse was christened or, at least, had pledged to raise the children in the Catholic religion, the union could be celebrated in a church and would therefore be entitled to the automatic registration agreed upon in the Concordat. Moreover, marriages of this kind had

[31] Galeazzo Ciano, *Diario 1937-1943* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1980), 159.
[32] Giorgio Fabre, *Il razzismo del duce. Mussolini dal ministero dell'Interno alla Repubblica sociale italiana*, in co-operation with Annalisa Capristo, (Rome: Carocci, 2021), 87 and photo no. 6.

important theological implications, particularly if the spouse belonged to a Jewish family. Therefore, during the first bilateral meeting after July 14, which took place on July 20, between Bonifacio Pignatti, ambassador of the Kingdom of Italy, and the Secretary of State of the Holy See, the latter—according to Pignatti's report to Ciano—"steered the conversation towards the issue of marriages between Catholics and Jews, specifying that in this matter Canon Law makes only one distinction, that is between people who are christened, between whom marriage is always permitted, and people who are not, who require a dispensation by the Church."[33] If the conversation is reported faithfully, Pacelli's words were more a warning than a real protest, as none could be raised against an ideological text at a time when it was still unknown which legislative measures would follow it. They show however that the Vatican was aware of the new situation, and that perhaps the matter had already been debated internally.

In his report to Ciano, the ambassador wrote further:

> In view of a possible slight revision of our legislation on mixed marriages, I believe it to be my duty to draw attention, so that it can be given proper consideration, to the content of Art. 34 of the Concordat. [...] [Because] Canon Law acknowledges as valid the marriage between christened spouses (Canon 1012) regardless of any other consideration.

At that date, therefore, Pignatti seems not to have been informed by his minister of what the latter had written in his diary: clearly the information Ciano had received from Mussolini (if the diary is truthful) had come with a request for secrecy.

In the days that followed, the Italian side seems to have deliberately avoided bringing up the issue of Aryan/Jewish marriages. The communiqué on the Manifesto issued by the Fascist National Party on July 25, and the Informazione Diplomatica (Diplomatic Bulletin) no. 18, released by the government on August 5, once again stressed the need to put an end to all unions between "Whites" and

[33] Ambasciatore d'Italia presso la Santa Sede to Ministro degli Affari esteri del Regno d'Italia, July 20, 1938, carbon copy; in ASMAE, Ambasciata d'Italia presso la Santa Sede, b. 102, fasc. 1, sfasc. 1.

"Blacks," but did not mention those other unions.[34] In the frequent meetings between the representatives of both states, dealing with various questions that were of importance to both, Italians did not dwell on the issue of the latter kind of marriages. On July 26 Pignatti saw Pius XI and in his report to Ciano wrote that he had simply told the Pope that: "The Jewish problem is a collateral issue, not the main one";[35] on July 30 Borgongini Duca saw Ciano and told Pacelli that, on the "question of Jews," the minister "has not offered any further clarification on the problems I had addressed."[36]

The Holy See continued to mark its disagreement, constantly stressing how the question of Aryan/Jewish marriages was linked to the Concordat. On July 30, in particular, the Nuncio reported:

> I then proceeded to speak to him [to Ciano] of the care the Church has always exerted to prevent not only the concubinage between Whites and Blacks, but also to discourage their marrying. [...] In this regard I also alluded to what I had stated last year to Minister Lessona on behalf of the Holy See [here he mentioned the reports of August 5 and of October 1, 1937]. Regarding Jews, I declared my concern because in Germany [...] [whereas] in Italy, on the contrary, there being the Concordat, it would be impossible to prevent the marriage between a converted Jew and a Catholic.[37]

The day after this meeting the Nuncio wrote a summary of the matter for the minister. The note was never delivered, probably because events overtook it; it did however set forth clearly the position of the Holy See. For a start, the Holy See "congratulated" Italy on its action against "the concubinage between Italians and natives of colour" that had let to the Royal Decree-Law of the previous year and

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[34] Partito nazionale fascista, *Comunicato*, July 25, 1938; in Sarfatti, *Mussolini*, 35-37 and 194; *Informazione diplomatica* 18, August 5, 1938; in Ibid., 41-42.

[35] Ambasciatore d'Italia presso la Santa Sede to Ministro degli Affari esteri del Regno d'Italia, July 26, 1938, no. 3819/82R; in ASMAE, Ambasciata d'Italia presso la Santa Sede, b. 102, fasc. 1, sfasc. 1.

[36] Nunzio della Santa Sede in Italia to Segretario di Stato della Santa Sede, August 2, 1938; in ASSS-SRS, Congregazione degli Affari ecclesiastici straordinari, Pio XI, Italia, pos. 1054, fasc. 728, fogli 46-48.

[37] Ibid.

explained the reasons behind the "very rare dispensations" granted by the Catholic Church to "religiously mixed" marriages between persons belonging to the two groups. The note then added:

> No less care has always been taken by the Church to prevent the marriage between Christians and Jews, by establishing a diriment impediment, which renders such unions not just illegitimate, but also null and void. [...] Pursuant to Art. 34 of the Concordat, this diriment impediment is acknowledged by the Italian State for religious marriages. [...] In some very rare cases, and always for weighty reasons of conscience, a mixed marriage has been permitted by granting dispensation from the diriment impediment.

Only after expounding all this, the note dwelled on "racially mixed" but "religiously homogeneous" marriages, which in Africa and in Italy were the more frequent kind:

> Finally, it should be kept in mind that the Catholic Church cannot, because of divine law, hinder the marriage between two christened believers, whatever their origin or their race, although it will endeavour to advise against it whenever it anticipates that the marriage may have a less happy outcome both for the prospective spouses and for the any future offspring.[38]

On August 6, Pius XI sent Father Pietro Tacchi Venturi, who for several years had been an unofficial intermediary between the two sides, a note with instructions for a letter that the Jesuit was to submit to Mussolini as if he had himself received it from the Pope. The note was about some points concerning Jews, one of them

[38] Nunziatura apostolica d'Italia, *Appunto*, August 1, 1938 [date added only on the carbon copy], n. 6359, with a handwritten note "non consegnato" (not delivered); in AAV, Nunziatura apostolica in Italia, b. 9, fasc. 5, fogli 88-92.

being: "What happens to marriages?".[39] The letter that Tacchi Venturi then read and gave to Mussolini on August 8 stated:

> [...] Many aspects of the question, such as those regarding converted Jews who live as good Catholics, or the children born of Jews who obtained a dispensation to marry a Catholic woman, and others of a similar nature, cannot be solved, particularly where a Concordat is in force, without reference to Canon Law, which in Italy regulates marriages.[40]

In the short space of a few days, then, there had been the Fascist pre-announcement that those marriages would be banned, and the warning by the Vatican that it intended to defend what had been agreed upon in the Lateran Pacts of 1929. This stance arose mainly from the reasons, both religious and diplomatic in nature, that have already been mentioned. The Church, maybe, was also concerned that future Italian laws might affect even already existing marriages, or that families legitimized only by the Church might be accused of concubinage or excluded from social welfare.

In the weeks that followed, the question of marriage was clearly treated as a minor issue in the accounts of the talks and in the public statements by both sides. It was not even included in the agreement reached on August 16 between Mussolini and Tacchi Venturi on the "problem of racism and Judaism" and on the Azione Cattolica (Catholic Action).[41] Nor was it touched upon in the Fascist anti-Jewish legislative measures approved by the Council of Ministers on September 1 and 2, which dealt with foreigners, education and other issues.[42]

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[39] Memorandum ("mente di udienza") with Pius XI's directions to Pietro Tacchi Venturi, August 6, 1938; in ARSI, Fondo Pietro Tacchi Venturi, b. 73, fasc. 2143/a, foglio 14; cf. Giorgio Fabre, "Un 'accordo felicemente conchiuso'," *Quaderni di storia* 76 (July-December 2012): 83-154; 108.

[40] Text in form of a letter of instruction from Pius XI to Pietro Tacchi Venturi in preparation for a meeting of the latter with Mussolini, written by Tacchi Venturi by order of the Pope, August 8, 1938 (handwritten draft, presumably identical with the typescript handed to Mussolini); in ARSI, Fondo Pietro Tacchi Venturi, b. 73, fasc. 2143/a, fogli 19-20; Fabre, *Un accordo*, 109-110.

[41] Ibid., 83-154.

[42] Sarfatti, *Mussolini*, 47-54 and 195-198.

Early in the same month of September 1938 it was made known that the Grand Council of Fascism would deal with the "problem of race" at the meeting scheduled for October 1, as announced earlier. The dictator's sudden departure for the conference in Munich caused this first meeting to be postponed to October 6. It was at this later session that the Grand Council of Fascism approved the *Dichiarazione sulla razza* (Declaration on Race).

Mussolini had devoted a great deal of time to the preparation of this document. The handwritten text, that appears to me to be its first detailed draft, had probably been written in the first ten days (perhaps towards the end of the first ten days) of September 1938. It already included the prohibition of "racially mixed" unions: "The Grand Council of Fascism decrees: a) the prohibition of marriages between Italian men and women with persons belonging to the Semitic or Hamitic races, or to other non-Aryan races." This wording remained unchanged through all successive drafts, including the final one approved on October 6.[43]

Thus the ideological principle stated in the Manifesto of July 14 was transformed into a political directive. The dictator, therefore, had decided not to grant the Holy See's request.

The Holy See, on the other hand, seems to have been taken unawares: they had fully lent credence to the verbal assurances given a year earlier by Lessona and Buffarini Guidi; they thought that the Italian State, being Catholic, would in any case respect the principle that any changes to the Concordat needed to be agreed upon; they hadn't seriously considered that Fascism might be capable to draw up plans independently and to carry them out on its own (although the Lateran Pacts of 1929 had shown clearly that the regime was capable of undertaking changes of historical relevance).

The *Dichiarazione* of October 6, 1938 established the new legal frame for State antisemitism. The document ended with the words: "the laws that shall be drawn up without delay by the various Ministries must take inspiration from the directives issued by the Grand Council."

The ideological and cultural manifesto of July had thus been followed by an official and political declaration, which in turn announced a specific legislative

[43] Gran Consiglio del fascismo, *Dichiarazione sulla razza*, October 6, 1938; in the newspapers of October 7, 1938 and in Partito nazionale fascista, *Foglio d'ordini* 214, October 26, 1938; Sarfatti, *Mussolini*, 60-67 and 199-201.

text; such a complex framework is rarely seen during the Fascist era. In my opinion, it was in order to allow this plan to unfold that in August and September the Italian side had avoided to discuss with the Vatican the issue of matrimony.

When the *Dichiarazione* was made public, there were several protests on the part of the Holy See, followed by complex negotiations with the Italian government, which this time around agreed to discuss the issue. During the discussion, the Vatican asserted again all the principles and aspects already set forth in its warnings and protests in late July and early August, suggesting some mitigations and exceptions to the law that was then being drawn up. Mussolini, on the other hand, amended the law's draft so as to render liable to punishment any "racially mixed" concubinage, a category that included also "mixed" couples cohabiting after a marriage performed only according to Catholic rites. In the end, however, the text approved by the Council of Ministers of the Kingdom of Italy on November 10, 1938, issued as the Royal Decree-Law no. 1728 of November 17 1938, titled *Provvedimenti per la difesa della razza italiana* (Measures for the defence of the Italian race), published in the Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno on November 19, and which came into force on December 4, curtly stated only the basic principle: "The marriage of an Italian citizen of the Aryan race with a person belonging to another race is prohibited. The celebrated marriage that fails to comply with this prohibition is null and void."[44] This rule (which did not invalidate "racially mixed" marriages celebrated previously) translated into legal terms, without changes, the *Dichiarazione* of October 6 by the Grand Council of Fascism.

It should also be added that on November 27—that is, in the days between the publication and the coming into force of the decree—Buffarini Guidi, Under-Secretary of the Interior, wired the Prefects (the chief government officials at provincial level) to start at once, "by order of the Duce," to "prevent" the

[44] Sarfatti, *Mussolini*, 70-90 and 202-207; on these negotiations see also Giovanni Coco, *Il labirinto romano. Il filo delle relazioni Chiesa-Stato tra Pio XI, Pacelli e Mussolini (1929-1939)* (Città del Vaticano: Archivio Segreto Vaticano, 2019), vol. II, 1040-1043 and 1056-1077; Roberto De Rose and Micaela Procaccia, "Le carte Buffarini Guidi all'Archivio centrale dello Stato (1938-1945)," *Contemporanea* 23, no. 3 (July-September 2020): 415-432; 415-420.

celebration of new "mixed" marriages.[45] This happened at least in one case, namely that of a wedding planned for December 1, in a church in Brescia.[46]

On November 2, the committee established in the Vatican to examine the issue reached the conclusion that, should the prohibition come into force, the Holy See ought to issue a public protest.[47] And on November 14 (that is, after the decree had been approved by the Council of Ministers and before it was issued) "L'Osservatore Romano" denounced in harsh terms the "wound [*vulnus*] inflicted on the Lateran Concordat," because the prohibition on these marriages decreed by Italy "unilaterally infringes something that was agreed upon in a bilateral pact." The article also explained that the prohibition was not in keeping with doctrine, because "races have never been a discriminating factor among the Catholic believers," because "everyone, whatever their race, is called upon to be a child of God."[48] The text made no mention of the many other racist and anti-Jewish rules contained both in that Decree-Law and in the other decrees issued in September. Its closing sentences hinted at the slim chance of a last-minute agreement with the government. In short, the article's content and tone were those of a strong diplomatic protest against unilateral changes to an international treaty. For the Holy See the new decree was something of a slap in the face. Apart from this article in the newspaper, however, there were no further public reactions by Pius XI. Even the project of an encyclic on racism and anti-Semitism, which he had entrusted the previous June to the Jesuit John LaFarge and his group,[49] and had since languished, and does not appear to have been revived in November. The note in L'Osservatore Romano, moreover, called "*vulnus*" the unilateral change to the

[45] Viviana Muscio, *Le leggi razziali a Taranto*, p. 15; in https://fdocumenti.com/document/le-leggi-razziali-a-taranto-le-leggi-razziali-a-taranto-linteresse-per.html?page=1, accessed: June 10, 2022; Marino Ruzzenenti, "La capitale della Rsi e la Shoah. La persecuzione degli ebrei nel Bresciano (1938-1945)," *Studi bresciani: quaderni della Fondazione Micheletti* 15 (2006): 7-232; 49; Andrea Bianchini, "La persecuzione razziale nel pesarese, 1938-1944," in *Studi sulla comunità ebraica di Pesaro*, ed. Riccardo Paolo Uguccioni (Pesaro: Fondazione Scavolini, 2003), 107.

[46] Ruzzenenti, *La capitale*, 48-50.

[47] Valerio De Cesaris, *Vaticano, fascismo e questione razziale* (Milano: Guerini studio, 2010), 226-229; Coco, *Il labirinto*, vol. II, 1071-1073.

[48] "A proposito di un nuovo Decreto Legge," *L'Osservatore Romano*, November 14-15, 1938.

[49] Georges Passelecq and Bernard Suchecky, *L'encyclique cachée de Pie XI. Une occasion manquée de l'Eglise face à l'antisémitism* (Paris: La Découverte, 1995); Peter Eisner, *The Pope's Last Crusade: How an American Jesuit Helped Pope Pius XI's Campaign to Stop Hitler* (New York: William Morrow, 2013); Coco, *Il labirinto*, vol. II, 950-951.

Concordat, not the passing of racist and anti-Semitic laws.[50] Basically, the Vatican abided by the agreement reached in mid-August 1938 between Mussolini and Tacchi Venturi, i.e. that there would be no public protest against those laws, although that agreement obviously could not include matters that were part of the international treaty between the two states.[51] It should further be noted that, after the prohibition had come into force, the Holy See continued to ask for it to be softened, but to no avail.[52]

For Fascism, the passing of the ban on "racially mixed" marriages was a success. For the time being, it is impossible to prove that Mussolini had been pursuing this outcome since the summer of 1935, because at times it is easier to discern the immediate aims of his actions than their strategic purpose. However, I am fairly sure that by late 1936 he had this end result in mind. As to the time needed to bring his plan to completion, one should consider that he had a fair amount of experience in letting things mature and then abruptly speeding them up. We can see evidence of this in the carefully crafted progression during the second half of 1938 from Manifesto to Declaration to Decree-Law, aimed both at establishing a racist and anti-Semitic state and—as we have seen—at bringing about a breach of the Concordat.

What mattered primarily to Mussolini was the overall plan. The Lateran Pacts (which he had wanted, after all) could not be allowed to be an obstacle to the course he was now pursuing. He felt that the transformation of Fascist and totalitarian Italy into a racist and anti-Semitic state was a mighty task, to be undertaken and pursued without hesitation. If one may resort to military terminology: Mussolini and his Fascism obtained a clear victory against the Holy See, and in denouncing the "*vulnus*" the latter ultimately certified its own defeat.

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[50] Paolo Zanini, "La Chiesa e il mondo cattolico italiano di fronte alle leggi antiebraiche," in *L'Italia ai tempi del ventennio fascista. A ottant'anni dalle leggi antiebraiche: tra storia e diritto*, eds. Marilisa D'Amico, Antonino De Francesco, and Cecilia Siccardi (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2019), 188-190.

[51] Giorgio Fabre, *Un accordo*, 83-154.

[52] De Cesaris, *Vaticano*, 231-234; Coco, *Il labirinto*, vol. II, 1088 ff.

Moreover, a comparison between the timelines of the Fascist regime and the Vatican highlights that in mid-1938 the Duce and the pope simultaneously set in motion the process aimed at producing two texts on the subject of "races." On June 23 Mussolini summoned the young anthropologist Guido Landra for the next day, to entrust him with the preparation of the first draft of an ideological manifesto;[53] on June 24 Pius XI summoned LaFarge for the next day to entrust him with the drafting of an encyclic.[54] Leaving aside the fact that only the first of these plans came to completion, the two projects were unique in Europe, sharing the same foundational nature but setting forth opposite views. The documents known so far do not allow us to infer some direct connection between the two projects, but the almost exact coincidence of dates is a further strong sign of the fact that the growth of racism and antisemitism in Italy and on the continent had by that time become an explosive issue.

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[53] Guido Landra, *Cronaca*, September 12, 1938, Guido Landra family papers, quoted in Aaron Gillette, "The origins of the 'Manifesto of racial scientists'," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 6, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 305-323; Guido Landra to Benito Mussolini, September 27, 1940, in ACS, Segreteria particolare del duce, Carteggio ordinario (1922-1943), b. 476, fasc. 183.506, published in Mauro Raspanti, "I razzismi del fascismo. Appendice," in *La menzogna della razza. Documenti e immagini del razzismo e dell'antisemitismo fascista*, ed. Centro Furio Jesi (Bologna: Grafis, 1994), 367-368; Fabre, *I segreti*, 617-618 .

[54] Eisner, *The Pope*, 55-56, where the Author draws attention to John LaFarge, "Memo on conversation with Holy Father, June 25, 1938"; in Georgetown University Library, Booth Family Center for Special Collections, John LaFarge S.J. Papers, box 38, folder 3. Cf. also Coco, *Il labirinto*, vol. II, 951, where the author draws attention to the list of Pius XI's audiences for June 25, 1938; in AAV, Prefettura casa pontificia, Udienze private 35, foglio 1050.

Melissari, Berlin, 2014). He published several other works on Jews and anti-Semitic persecution in Modern Italy.

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# Conversion Paths of Trieste's Jews in 1938-1939

by *Tullia Catalan*

## Abstract

*During 1938-1939, a large number of conversions of Jews to Catholicism took place in Trieste. It was not only Triestine Jews who converted, but also many foreign Jewish refugees, Austrian, German and Hungarian above all, in transit through the Adriatic port on their way to the Americas. The research has been carried on the basis of the documentation conserved at the Archiepiscopal Curia of Trieste, and has made it possible to analyze many individual paths, thus enabling the reconstruction of the personal motivations for conversion; the reactions of the Jewish community and those of the local Church. The essay also examines conversions in mixed marriages, also paying attention to gender roles in conversion paths. Special attention is paid to the mechanisms of the catechumenate and the correspondence between parish priests and the Curia, in order to understand the attitude of the city priests towards the racial laws.*



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## Introduction[1]

In previous research into Triestine Judaism in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, I have already explored the topic of conversion to Catholicism, highlighting above all the motivations behind this radical choice to distance oneself from the community of origin. It was a decision which was often driven by sentimental motives, but in some cases also by economic demands or dictated by political activism.[2] In this work I have been able to emphasize gender roles and the reactions of the Community's leadership and the rabbinate to these abandonment of the Mosaic faith. I have sought to understand how this phenomenon can be contextualized within the larger picture of the Jewish Communities of the Habsburg Empire and the process of integration which followed emancipation. In fact, the port of Trieste's crucial importance for the Habsburgs contributed to the freedom given to the Jewish Community, which was considered important because of its professional skills and its commercial and financial relationships. The Community was then, and remains today, somewhat heterogeneous in terms of its ethnic makeup, including both Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews. The Community integrated quickly and seamlessly into local society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, strengthening business links, as well as emotional bonds, as the high number of mixed marriages that characterized the Jewish nucleus of Trieste from the 1870s testifies. Indeed, mixed marriages

[1] I would like to thank the staff at the historical archives of the Episcopal Curia of Trieste, who kindly supported this research with great professionalism, generously allowing me to access all of the materials necessary for the study. Furthermore, special thanks are due to Dr Giselle Levy of the UCEI Bibliographical Centre in Rome, for her usual great willingness to help.
All of the surnames of the converted Jews present in the archival documents, have been given as an initial letter only. This was a decision taken to respect the privacy of the people and the families who took such a decision in trying times.

[2] Tullia Catalan, *La Comunità ebraica di Trieste (1781-1914). Politica, società e cultura* (Trieste: Lint, 2000), 197-220 and 242-250; Catalan, "Les conversions et les «désaveux» de la communauté juive de Trieste entre XIXe et XXe siècles," in *Entre Judaïsme et christianisme. Les conversions en Europe, de l'époque moderne à l'apparition de l'antisémitisme politique, eds.* Paola Ferruta, Martin Drumont, and Daniel Tollet (Paris-Louvain-Bristol: Peeters Publisher 2017), 119-1132. The conversions of Jewish women in Trieste is currently being studied by Paola Ferruta. See: Paola Ferruta, "Conversions de femmes «ordinaires» et monde intermédiaire entre «judaïsme et christianisme» à Trieste au tournant du XIX siècle," in *Entre Judaïsme et christianisme,* 133-166.

were widespread and frequent in the Jewish Community of Trieste until 1938, with higher numbers than in other parts of Italy.[3]

Another topic of this previous work has been the so-called "recantations" carried out by those wishing to abandon religion completely, a choice which was made by a significant number of the irredentist, pro-Italy component of the Jewish Community. This component took the decision to embrace the secular religion of the Fatherland, and therefore chose to formally distance themselves from the faith of their ancestors. In many cases the entire nuclear family left the Jewish Community.[4] Another phenomenon which is often neglected by historiography, but which had a significant weight in the recantations and the conversions to Catholicism in 1938, can also be witnessed in the numerous cases of conversions to Judaism. These conversions, registered during the Habsburg period, were primarily driven by the desire to marry a Jewish man or woman. The laws which regulated civil marriage in Austria required the abandonment of faith of one or both of the spouses, and local society demonstrated in this way its notable porosity to inter-ethnic and inter-confessional unions.[5]

We can say that the presence in the second half of the nineteenth century of these different types of conversions in the local Jewish Community, in an already very secularized urban context, played an important role during fascism, when Triestine Jews were forced to quickly choose their strategies to escape the racist persecution which was aimed at them.

The aim of this research is to understand how the Jews of Trieste that chose conversion to Catholicism as a path to salvation expressed their choice to the Bishop's Curia; how the ecclesiastical authorities reacted to the request; and how the leadership of the Jewish Community responded to this new, pressing loss of

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[3] On Jews in Trieste in the 1930s, see: Silva Bon, *Gli ebrei a Trieste 1930-1945. Identità, persecuzione, risposte* (Gorizia: LEG, 2000); Rene Moehrle, *Judenverfolgung in Triest während Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus 1922-1945* (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2014).

[4] On the religious disavowals of entire liberal-nationalist nuclear families, see Catalan, *La Comunità ebraica di Trieste*, 303-324. The topic is also discussed by Anna Millo, *L'élite del potere a Trieste. Una biografia collettiva 1891-1938* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1987), 55-67; Ilaria Pavan, "«Ebrei» in affari tra realtà e pregiudizio. Paradigmi storiografici e percorsi di ricerca dall'Unità alle leggi razziali," *Quaderni Storici* 114, no. 3 (2003): 777-821; 786-795, who cites many examples of abjurations by Triestine Jews.

[5] On mixed marriages in Austria, see: Steven M. Lowenstein, "Jewish Intermarriage and Conversion in Germany and Austria," *Modern Judaism* 25, no. 1 (2005): 23-61.

members, which seems to have stopped in part from 1931 to 1936.[6] It is, I believe, necessary to go beyond the figures which have already been outlined on a quantitative level and dwell on several qualitative passages of the conversions to Catholicism between 1938-1939, which primarily concern Triestine Jews but also foreign Jews in transit via Trieste for destinations overseas.[7] It is this interweaving of individual perspectives that allows us today to shed light on how much the choice to abandon the Jewish faith was, even in these moments of loss, fear and suffering, a difficult decision and sometimes a partial choice, which divided family groups, with just the children or only one of the spouses converting.[8]

For those who in the previous decades had converted into the Jewish faith in order to marry a Jew, this represented a re-entry into Catholicism which was primarily

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[6] See Tab. 2.

[7] For a complete picture of the period of persecution in Trieste, see Bon, *Gli ebrei a Trieste;* Moehrle, *Judenverfolgung in Triest.* On conversion as a means of reaction and escape for many Jews during the period of the racist persecutions, see: Michele Sarfatti, *Gli ebrei nell'Italia fascista. Vicende, identità, persecuzione* (Turin: Einaudi, 2018), 233-234. See also: Riccardo Di Segni, "Battesimi e conversioni all'ebraismo a Roma nella prima metà del Novecento. Indagine preliminare su due registri," *Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 81, no. 1 (2015): 21-49; Tommaso Dell'Era, "Leggi razziste, conversione degli ebrei e matrimoni misti a Torino nel 1938. Il cardinal Fossati, la Santa Sede e il S. Ufficio," *Giornale di Storia Contemporanea* 20, no. 1 (2018): 17-42, which is also a valuable source because of the rich bibliography it contains on conversions in Italy over a long period of time; Elena Mazzini, "Konversionen und Konvertiten im faschistische Italien zum Zeitpunkt der Rassenkampagne. Die Reaktion des Heiligen Stuhles und der katholischen Kirche in Italien," *Quellen und Forschungen aus Italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 95 (2015): 346-369; Robert Aleksander Maryks, *Pouring Jewish Water into Fascist Wine: Untold Stories of (Catholic) Jews from the Archive of Mussolini's Jesuit Pietro Tacchi Venturi* (Leiden-New York: Brill, 2011). Interesting reading for an overview of conversions in Europe during the Shoah: Yaakov Ariel, "From Faith to Faith. Conversions and de-Conversions during the Holocaust," *Sonderausdruck aus Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts* 12 (2013): 37-66. On the modern period, see the important area of study opened in Italy by Marina Caffiero, *Battesimi forzati. Storie di ebrei, cristiani e convertiti nella Roma dei Papi* (Rome: Viella, 2004). For a fundamental international overview, see: Todd M. Endelman, *Leaving the Jewish Fold. Conversion and Radical Assimilation in Modern Jewish History* (Oxford-Princeton: Princenton University Press, 2015).

[8] In Italy, unlike other countries, the topic of individual routes to conversion has not been studied in depth for the period of the racial laws. The first studies on this subject in the context of Trieste were conducted by Ellen Ginzburg Migliorino. See: Ellen Ginzburg Migliorino, "L'applicazione delle leggi antiebraiche a Trieste: aspetti e problemi," *Qualestoria* 1 (1989): 99-113; 106-113; Ginzburg Migliorino, "Note sugli esiti dell'applicazione delle leggi razziali a Trieste (1938-1942), in *Trieste in guerra. Gli anni 1938-1943,* ed. Anna Vinci (Trieste: Istituto regionale per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione in FVG, 1992) 297-335; 302-306.

driven by fear of persecution—a choice most often seen among the elderly and amongst widows and widowers.[9]

Particular attention should, in my opinion, be reserved for the decisions taken by the Curia of Trieste, guided at that time by Monsignor Antonio Santin,[10] Bishop of Trieste and Capodistria, regarding the procedures that every aspiring catechumen had to undergo. There were several requests from the various parish priests of Trieste, who were largely inclined to accept all of the many requests for conversion, even shortening the period of catechesis in some cases. As we will see, much depended on the impression the aspiring convert made on the parish priest, or on their network of relationships with the Catholic world, and whether or not they happened to be married to a Catholic. In this case, a religious marriage ceremony was often celebrated alongside the conversion. Furthermore, we must mention Monsignor Santin's request to Mussolini, which he made during the Duce's visit to Trieste on September 18, 1938, to clarify several passages from the announcement of the racial laws, which made a veiled attack on the Pope's position on antisemitic policies.[11]

This research will not examine conversions to Protestantism, which in Trieste are explained by the history of mutual collaboration and peaceful and fruitful

[9] There are currently no general studies on conversions to Judaism in the contemporary period [in Italy]: the first important study on the *ghiurim*, as they are termed in Hebrew, can be found in Di Segni, "Battesimi e conversioni," 24; Riccardo Di Segni, "Un secolo di conversioni all'ebraismo nella Comunità ebraica di Roma (1915-2015)," *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 83 (2017): 63-92.

[10] On Mons. Antonio Santin see the fundamental text by Paolo Blasina, *Vescovo e clero nella diocesi di Trieste-Capodistria 1938-1945* (Trieste: Istituto regionale per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione in FVG, 1993). Also useful: Pietro Zovatto, *Il vescovo Antonio Santin e il razzismo nazifascista a Trieste (1938-1945)* (Venice: Rebellato, 1977); Antonio Santin, *Al tramonto. Ricordi autobiografici di un vescovo* (Trieste: Lint, 1978).

[11] On Santin's intervention, see: Zovatto, *Il vescovo Antonio Santin*, 27-35. The bibliography on the different positions of the Church regarding the racial laws is vast, see: Giovanni Miccoli, "Santa Sede e Chiesa italiana di fronte alle leggi antiebraiche del 1938," in *La legislazione antiebraica in Italia e in Europa, Atti del Convegno del cinquantenario delle leggi razziali (Roma 17-18 ottobre 1988)* (Rome: Camera dei Deputati, 1989), 163-274; Raffaella Perin, "Pio IX, l'antisemitismo e le leggi razziste," in *La svolta del 1938. Fascismo, cattolicesimo e antisemitismo*, eds. Andrea Riccardi, Gabriele Rigano (Milan: Guerini e Associati, 2020), 63-75; David I. Kertzer, *Un papa in guerra. la storia segreta di Mussolini, Hitler e Pio XII* (Milan: Garzanti, 2022).

cohabitation between the two religious minorities: the Protestant Churches in Trieste showed great solidarity towards the Jews in their time of persecution.[12]
Thanks to the archival materials in the historic Archive of the Diocese of Trieste and Capodistria that I examined, it has been possible to establish an internal periodization for the numerous conversions which took place during the so-called period of persecution against the rights of the Jews,[13] which allows us to subdivide the period of 1938-3943 into two phases. The first can be defined as the first two years of persecution: from 1938 to 1939, and features the Jews of Trieste and many foreign Jews who were affected by the decree of expulsion of March 1939. On the contrary, the second phase, from 1940 to 1943, was characterized above all by the request for conversions among foreign Jews passing through the port of Trieste, assisted by the DELASEM, the Italian organization involved in Jewish emigration, which managed the movement of many German, Austrian and Eastern European Jews towards the countries who were willing to accept them.[14]
In this research we will focus primarily on the first two years of the persecution, since the second stage is currently the subject of ongoing research by the author.

## Conversions in 1938-1939: Individuals Routes, the Local Church and the Jewish Community

Between 1931 and the first months of 1938, according to the data of the Jewish Community of Trieste, 29 Jews abandoned their faith, a small figure, but one which is worth reflecting upon, even if only briefly, in order to better understand what took place when the persecution of Jews began in earnest.[15] In the 1920s and

[12] Bon, *Gli ebrei a Trieste,* 176. See the figures provided in Ginzburg Migliorino, "Leggi razziali a Trieste," 305-306 on the conversions of Jews to Protestantism.
[13] I refer here to the subdivision of the anti-Jewish persecution proposed by Michele Sarfatti in Sarfatti, *Gli ebrei nell'Italia fascista*.
[14] Tullia Catalan, "L'emigrazione ebraica in Palestina attraverso il porto di Trieste (1908-1938)," *Qualestoria* 2-3 (1991): 57-107.
[15] Archivio Storico Unione Comunità Ebraiche Italiane [henceforth AUCEI], *Attività dell'Ucei 1934-1948*, b. 31D, Account of the life of the Jewish Community of Trieste and the activities of its institutions during 1939, p. 5. Silva Bon also highlights this date, viewing the low number of conversions in this period as confirmation of the successful integration of Triestine Jews into the local fascist society: Bon, *Gli ebrei a Trieste*, 175.

1930s, the local Jewish Community was well integrated into the majority society and there were no particular signs of antisemitic outbursts that could concern Triestine Jews. There was high degree of adherence to fascism in the city, including within the Community itself, which from the very beginning of the fascist movement had seen its potential to fulfil Italian nationalist ideals.[16]

Jews and Catholics met each another daily at school, at work and in their free time, which led to friendships, business links and relationships. This free and unproblematic intermingling with the majority society proved so enticing that—as Giorgina M. claimed in a letter sent to the Curia in 1921—it paved the way for conversion. Giorgina wrote that her wish to embrace Catholicism was motivated by the fact that she felt "prepared by an innate aversion to semitism, developed through her extensive contact with Catholics."[17] Others converted in order to fit in better at work, as Captain Enrico W. did in 1920;[18] others converted to follow in the footsteps of their family, like the seamstress Amalia Elisa F., who candidly admitted in 1920 that "another 18 of her brothers and sisters have already been baptized."[19]

A certain fluidity of movement from one religion to the other was characteristic of the city, even in the fascist period, and was considered a real nuisance by the local Church, since there were many Catholics who abandoned their faith in order to enter into a mixed marriage. This is a topic which still has to be studied in depth, and one which is prominent when studying the documents: it is obvious that social pressure, family ties, romance, and economic considerations could often lead to such a radical choice, but this did not always mean the end of all ties with one's ex coreligionists, and this had not always been the result in the past either.[20] We

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[16] Millo, *L'élite di potere a Trieste*, 275-299; Renè Moehrle, "Fascist Jews in Trieste: social, cultural and political dynamic 1919-1938," in "Italy's Fascist Jews: Insight on an Unusual Scenario," ed. Michele Sarfatti, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC* 11 (2017): pp. 46-73, doi:10.48248/issn.2037-741X/814.

[17] Archivio Storico della Diocesi di Trieste [henceforth ASDTS], *Convertiti*, b. 1120, fasc. 4/23, 1921.

[18] Ibid., b. 1114, fasc. 31/20, 1920.

[19] Ibid., fasc. 31/28, 1920. Testimony to the strength of family ties is the fact that entire families, belonging to different social classes, decided to abjure. However, compared to the previous periods, adults were always free to make their own choice: cfr. Pavan, "«Ebrei» in affari tra realtà e pregiudizio," 787.

[20] Catalan, *La Comunità ebraica di Trieste*, 234.

must also bear in mind the high number of conversions to Judaism, even for marriage reasons, since they demonstrate without a shadow of a doubt the high level of integration of Triestine Judaism in the social fabric of the city.

In fascist Trieste, just like in the Habsburg city previously, secularism continued to permeate the whole society, making it open to these movements from one faith to another without particular soul searching or scruples.[21] Furthermore, there were many Jews, already by the second half of the 1800s, who preferred to live without any religions beliefs. In order to better understand these trends, there should be a study on all the religious confessions present in the city, because it is in this direction that the studies—and the nineteenth-century documentation on which historians have largely worked to date—point us.[22]

A slight increase in the number of conversions to the Catholic Church took place in 1937, when Triestine Jews were first subject to a mapping of their presence in the economic field: the investigations were carried out by the renowned antisemitic lawyer, Piero Pieri, President of the Province of Trieste, and the product of his research was more than 100 pages long, and it included the names of Triestine Jews, followed by their role and function in the economic panorama of the city.[23] Furthermore, the echo raised in the city by the beginning of the antisemitic campaign in Italy should not be overlooked. Antisemitic journalism had begun to prepare the ground for the growth of racist propaganda that would characterize the following years.[24] The new climate in the country caused immediate concern for the more informed members of the Jewish Community of Trieste, and they began to take their first individual steps towards disassociation. In the first months of 1938 there was an increase in the number of Jews abandoning their faith (37, to be precise), while many more took place in the terrible summer of 1938, which saw the start of the antisemitic campaign in Italy with the promulgations of the racist laws on the education and expulsion of foreign Jews at the start of September. Then, on September 18, in Trieste, Mussolini officially

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[21] Blasina, *Vescovo e clero,*1-12.

[22] Roberto Finzi, Giovanni Panjek, eds., *Storia economica e sociale di Trieste*, vol. I, *La Città dei gruppi 1719-1918* (Trieste: Lint, 2001).

[23] Bon, *Gli ebrei a Trieste,* 40-41.

[24] Mario Toscano, *Ebraismo e antisemitismo in Italia. Dal 1938 alla guerra dei sei giorni* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2004); Francesco Cassata, *"La Difesa della Razza". Politica, ideologia e immagine del razzismo fascista* (Turin: Einaudi, 2008).

announced the anti-Jewish campaign.[25] It is no coincidence, in light of these events, that in the second part of 1938 recantations reached 554 in number, roughly 12% of the local Jewish population.[26]

The persecutions of 1938 opened up a new phase in the type of conversions taking place in Trieste, a sort of tragic parenthesis, which gives us an insight into the great fear that for local Jews, amongst others, characterized the period. Those who distanced themselves from Judaism in order to save themselves from persecution did so hoping to find protection in the Catholic Church through conversion. With the documentary materials available to us we are able to trace several of the most common types of conversion. This is especially clear in the letters of motivation sent personally by aspiring converts to the Episcopal Curia directly or through a trusted Priest, but there were also numerous returns to Catholicism following a previous abjuration. There were even pre-printed letters prepared by the ecclesiastical authorities for local parish priests, which covered all the different cases: there were those for Jewish catechumens; those for people wishing to return to the Church; those for people who wished to carry out a religious marriage immediately following their baptism. From this emerges a tried and tested system, organized by Trieste's Curia, which was created in response to the high number of conversions.[27]

What is particularly striking when reading the documents is the extent to which the women's descriptions of their motivations for conversion differ from the men's. Men tended to be more concise, but this does not detract from the profound interior suffering which can be seen in their writing. Some, for example, asked the Curia if everything could take place in absolute secret, as in the case of the lawyer Guido M., "because he does not wish this to be viewed as motivated by opportunism."[28] To conduct the procedure as secretly as possible was also the

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[25] Bon, *Gli ebrei a Trieste,* 109-115; Michele Sarfatti, *Mussolini contro gli ebrei. Cronaca dell'elaborazione delle leggi del 1938* (Turin: Zamorani, 2017); Sarfatti, "Il discorso razzista e antisemita di Mussolini a Trieste il 18 settembre 1938," *Qualestoria* 1 (2013): 103-111; Sarfatti, *Gli ebrei nell'Italia fascista*, 152-171.

[26] Bon, *Gli ebrei a Trieste*, 177.

[27] Ginzburg Migliorino, "L'applicazione delle leggi antiebraiche," 107-108, which provides diagrams of the modules.

[28] ASDTS, *Fondo Diocesi di Trieste e Capodistria. Atti di gestione ordinaria*, b. 1212, fasc. 5/13-1938, Letter from the Parish Priest to the Bishop, Trieste, February 23, 1938.

desire of the elderly Alice B., born in 1859, who had had a civil marriage in 1893 and baptized her daughter Paola a few months after her birth. Alice, "for reasons of age and family," asked if she could convert "in maximum secrecy and without any publicity."[29] On the occasion of her baptism, her husband would return to the Church, which he had abandoned in order to marry her. It was a route, therefore, for the entire family, who wished to maintain their anonymity, probably in order to avoid the disapproval of their relatives and their acquaintances.

We find ourselves witnessing real family dramas, where several aspiring catechumens asked to speed up the process of conversion, which was supposed to last a month, because they already had a visa for a new country to emigrate to.[30]

A lot of files involve in the baptism of children, still often in their school years: their parents' anxiety to get them to safety is palpable in the questions they ask to the parish priest regarding the length of time necessary for the catechumenate.[31]

The most far-sighted families—by no coincidence the self-employed professionals, entrepreneurs and those with a high level of education—had already clearly seen by spring 1938 the government's change of attitude towards the Jews, and had hastily arranged to baptize their children. This is what happened in the family of the twins Enrico and Maria G., students at the classical high school, who at their parents' behest followed their older brother's footsteps and converted.[32] The same thing happened in the Frigessi of Rattalma Family, as has been well described in Anna Millo's study, when Arnoldo and Nidia Frigessi stated that they had nothing against the baptism of their five children.[33]

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[29] Ibid., 5/38-1938, Letter from Alice B. to the Episcopal Ordinariate, Trieste April 19, 1938.

[30] Ginzburg Migliorino, "Leggi razziali a Trieste," 304-305, where she mentions some emergency cases that led to the Curia's assent to the shortening of the rite.

[31] This is the case of the father of Rosa D., a twelve-year-old daughter from a mixed marriage. He put a great deal of pressure on Don Giusto Buttignoni, at that time the parish Priest at San Giusto, until "tired of the innumerable procrastinations": he gave a precise, close date for the baptism "and no later." ASDTS, *Fondo Diocesi di Trieste e Capodistria. Atti di gestione ordinaria*, b. 1212, fasc. 5/56-1938, Letter from Don Giusto Buttignoni to the Episcopal Ordinariate, Trieste May 20, 1938.

[32] Ibid., fasc. 5/45-1938, Letter from Mons. Valeriano Monti of the Chiesa della Beata Vergine del Soccorso to the Episcopal Ordinariate, Trieste May 11, 1938. Here again a private ceremony was requested.

[33] Ibid., fasc. 5/72-76-1938, Trieste June 7, 1938. For further details see also the fate of the family during the period of racist persecution: Anna Millo, *Trieste, le assicurazioni, l'Europa. Arnoldo Frigessi di Rattalma e la RAS* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2004). It is for this reason that I have used here the full family name, since many details are already publicly known.

The fact that Catholicism was the religion of the State was one of the motivations of some converts, including Daniele J., his wife and their four children. The parents explicitly admitted that the youngest child, born in 1926, had not become a member of the Jewish Community, and had not been circumcised, and having the intention of converting all of their children, "they had chosen excellent Catholic governesses who had, from the youngest age, imbued their children with Catholic sentiments and principles [...]." In 1938, the parish Priest of the Chiesa Beata Vergine del Soccorso contacted the Episcopal Ordinariate, saying "the parents have reached the point where they wish not only to baptize their children, but also themselves. Initially what motivated them was the idea of aligning themselves with the religion of the country in order to avoid appearing less Italian, but after studying the religion they now have superior motives to wish to enter the Church."[34] Here we find interwoven several motivations for conversion, which are worth dwelling on because they are present in other conversion requests. The political and instrumental use—if we can define it in this way—of conversion is evident and even admitted by the Priest, underlining the link between Italian national identity and religious affiliation. On the eve of the promulgation of the racial laws, several Jews thought of converting to Catholicism in order to be considered legitimate Italian citizens, and be spared from persecution, as it had happened for centuries in the past. We can infer from the rest of the documentation discovered in Trieste that many of these families had kept a very tenuous link with the Jewish Community for decades, to the point of not wishing to fulfil the rites of passage which form the basis of the faith, such as circumcising their sons.[35] Furthermore, some asserted that they had waited a long time to convert, since they did not wish to upset their observant parents by abandoning the faith of their fathers.

Numerous files were found regarding the conversion of children from mixed marriages, of whom there were many in the city in the late nineteenth century.[36] If one of the spouses was not Jewish and the offspring had been baptized before

[34] ASDTS, *Fondo Diocesi di Trieste e Capodistria. Atti di gestione ordinaria*, b. 1212, fasc. 5/106-110-1938, Letter from the Parish Prieste of the Chiesa della Beata Vergine del Soccorso to the Curia, Trieste July 4, 1938.

[35] There is, however, a precedent for the absence of circumcision, in notably large numbers, from the second half of the nineteenth century: Catalan, *La Comunità ebraica di Trieste*, 235-236.

[36] Ibid., 241-243.

October 1, 1938 then they were not considered Jewish.[37] As a result, in these families there was often a quick return to the Church by those who had left it to marry. This was followed in most cases by the conversion of the Jewish spouse. At this point the couple's marriage in church took place, even if they had perhaps been married for decades by civil rite only. In these particular situations, the Triestine Church came to the assistance of several families, backdating the baptism. The complaints of the Prefecture testify to the existence of these practices, of which we can also find a trace in the documents held by the Curia.[38] Amongst these we remember the request made by the priest Giovanni Grego of the Church of S. Antonio Taumaturgo on October 7, 1938, on behalf of a young Jewish woman, Fulvia G., who wished to convert in order to marry a Catholic. The priest was aware that the new laws forbidding mixed marriages would have made this wedding impossible.[39] The veiled request is worded in the following way:

> Since she is engaged to a Catholic, according to the present decisions of the Grand Council of Fascism, being a daughter of a mixed marriage, she is not considered Aryan if she was not baptized before 1 October. The undersigned asks if anything can be done in this sense, regarding the date of registration of the baptism.[40]

In February 1938 a well-known surgeon in the local "Regina Elena" hospital, Ferruccio Girolamo W., the son of a mixed marriage, who was himself married to a Catholic woman and whose children were baptized, asked the Priest of the

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[37] Article 8 of the R.d.l. 1728/1938, comma d. "We do not consider of Jewish race those whose parents have Italian nationality, if only one parent is of Jewish race but belonged to a different religion before 1 October 1938-XVI." The date of 1 October was made public with the declaration of October 6, and created many complications from then on.

[38] Bon, *Gli ebrei a Trieste,* 176 indeed describes the Prefecture's disappointment. See also Ginzburg Migliorino, "L'applicazione delle leggi antiebraiche," 112, which has compared the memories of the Parish Priest of San Antonio with the Curia's material, thereby identifying three cases of backdated baptisms.

[39] On the regulations surrounding mixed marriages see: Giuliana Cardosi, Marisa Cardosi, and Gabriella Cardosi, *Sul confine. La questione dei "matrimoni misti" durante la persecuzione antiebraica in Italia e in Europa (1935-1945)* (Turin: Zamorani, 2007).

[40] ASDTS, *Fondo Diocesi di Trieste e Capodistria. Atti di gestione ordinaria*, b. 1212, fasc. 5/338-1938, Letter from the Parish Priest to the Curia, Trieste October 7, 1938.

hospital to begin the process of his own conversion. The letter written in support of this request by don Carlo Della Mea and addressed to the Curia to obtain the necessary authorization is a masterpiece of balance and it is worth quoting a few passages from it here. This is how don Della Mea introduced the aspiring convert:

> Born of a Catholic mother, the other party being an Israelite, he was not circumcised, he always attended the lessons on Religion in school. His catechists [...] Mons. Tamaro and Giacomelli. He was married in a civil union around 17 years ago [...] to a Catholic woman, he had his children baptized and wished for them to be Catholics; he has never attended worship services in his religious community.
> He promised his wife many years ago that he would become a Catholic and for around a month and a half he has been reading the Catechism [...].[41]

The surgeon had, furthermore, demonstrated his intention to be baptized and married in the private chapel of the Elisabettine Sisters "whom he views with deference and veneration."[42]

It is evident that the families of converts in the course of the first half of 1938 were largely members of the local upper and middle class, and therefore already aware of the turning point brought about by Mussolini in the relationship between fascism and the Italian Jewish world. This demonstrates once more, in my opinion, how belonging to a certain social echelon offered an advantage in the path towards salvation from persecution: those with financial means could afford to leave the Community and give up the whole network of solidarity that had always supported poorer co-religionists.

Another type of conversion, notable in the large numbers of requests sent to the Curia of Trieste, were from the widows of mixed marriages—women already of a certain age, who had married a Jewish man, and in order to have a civil marriage (which was permitted in the Habsburg Empire) had chosen to abandon their Catholic faith, living without any religious affiliation. Some had indeed chosen to

[41] Ibid., fasc. 5/12-1938.
[42] Ibid.

convert to Judaism, in order to be married in the synagogue. Gabriella B., for example, was born in Vienna in 1862 where she was baptized. In Graz she married Dr Giulio B. in a Jewish ceremony, after having converted to Judaism. Widowed in 1923, and mother of a single Catholic son "she repented her deeds and prayed to be absolved and readmitted into the holy Church." The parish official of San Bartolomeo apostolo in Barcola warmly supported her request.[43]

Guglielmina S. in K.'s situation was somewhat different. She was also a Catholic who had converted to Judaism. She expressed to the Curia her desire to return to the Church and her wish to baptize her young daughter Liliana, who was 13 years old. Her husband, Egon S. gave his wife and daughter complete freedom to carry out their wishes, accepting that he would need to be married according to the Catholic rite, without however converting himself.[44] Different again was the case of Valeria M. born O., who converted to Judaism in order to marry. She confessed her long-standing regret of this decision to the Priest:

> She said she constantly thought about the Catholic Church, which she entered alone to pray, disliking the path she had taken but too weak to return, since she faced too much opposition from her new family. Once her husband and her father-in-law, on whom she relied, had been dead for several years she sincerely repented of her rejection of her faith and asked to be readmitted into the Catholic Church. [...] Unfortunately her children are Israelites.[45]

Here we witness the extent to which family conflict could affect the individual's decision. In this case the woman used it in her favor to convince the priest to intercede on her behalf with the Curia.

In the spring and summer of 1938 conversion requests from foreign Jews increased, especially among Austrians passing through Trieste in order to emigrate to the Americas, but there was also a significant flow of Hungarian Jews: some families

[43] Ibid., fasc. 5/61-1938, Letter from the Parish Priest to the Curia, Trieste, May 3, 1938.

[44] Ibid., fasc. 5/65-1938. Trieste, May 1938.

[45] Ibid., fasc. 5/198-1938, Letter from the Parish Priest of the Beata Vergine del Soccorso to the Curia, Trieste August 20, 1938.

came from Budapest and others from nearby Fiume. They reached the city and before they left they asked to convert to Catholicism.
The annexation of Austria to Germany in March of that year had indeed pushed many Viennese Jews to emigrate, and the old port of the Habsburg Empire became an important transit hub, since in the Adriatic city these people could count on the assistance offered by the Jewish Agency and by the DELASEM at the emigrant reception center in Via del Monte 7.[46]
The experiences of the old Barons of Strasser, Bela and Carlotta, born Leitner, are interesting. They had Austrian and Hungarian origins and escaped to Abbazia, in Istria. They wished to convert and having reached Trieste to do business with a well-known Triestine lawyer, they were directed by the latter to Mons. Giusto Buttignoni of the parish of San Giusto. Buttignoni described the couple to the Episcopal Ordinariate thus:

> they are both Israelites, duly instructed in our Religion by the undersigned. They wish to be baptized in San Giusto; and to renew their marriage vows there.
> They belong to the category of wanderers, because—forced to flee Vienna (due to the Hitlerian persecutions) they find themselves briefly at Abbazia.[47]

The Bishop, however, asked for more information on the couple, unable to fully understand why they had not chosen to be converted directly in Abbazia.
Buttignoni explained the details and added that the couple:

> [...] elderly and very distinguished people, they made upon the writer the very best of impressions. They listened with real understanding to the lessons, learning the formulas off by heart. The Baroness in particular, in

[46] On the vicissitudes of foreign Jews, see Klaus Voigt, *Il rifugio precario. Gli esuli in Italia dal 1933 al 1945*, 2 vols. (Florence: La nuova Italia, 1993 and 1996).
[47] ASDTS, *Fondo Diocesi di Trieste e Capodistria. Atti di gestione ordinaria*, b. 1212, fasc. 5/79-1938, Letter from Mons. Giusto Buttignoni to the Episcopal Ordinariate, Trieste June 11, 1938.

> practical terms, was more Christian than Jew, because as a child she had always visited the Herz-Jesukirche in Graz.[48]

The opinions of Don Giusto Buttignoni regarding the examples of the couple's religiosity are quite singular: having visited church as a child and learned rites by memory does not signify real and authentic spiritual conviction. However, in this particular conversion, the couple's aristocratic nature probably played a fundamental role, along with their choice of Don Buttignoni, who was very sympathetic to their case.

Don Giusto Buttignoni was not always so welcoming to Jews, and in his younger years he had been a fervent supporter of the Austrian Christian Social movement and had even written articles and a book with strong antisemitic tones, aimed against the Jews of Eastern Europe.[49] During the persecutions, however, the language he used to describe the Jews who asked to convert to Catholicism was always very careful and respectful: in his letters we often find the term "Israelite," which was often used in the 1800s and early 1900s, even by Jews themselves, to refer to their religious affiliation.

In summer 1938, due to the growing antisemitic measures rolled out by the regime, there came a turning point in the trend of conversions: an increasing number of individuals and entire families rushed towards the parishes to ask to be baptized, driven by the fresh outbreak of the antisemitic campaign.[50]

Parish Priests prepared the people who wished to convert, while the youngest catechumens were instructed by the Canossian Mothers and the Sisters of Notre Dame de Sion.[51] Compared to the first half of 1938, many mixed families were increasingly beginning to ask for their children to be baptized, a decision which must not have been easy for all, since some parents were sincerely devoted to their

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[48] Ibid., Letter from Don Giusto Buttignoni to the Episcopal Ordinariate, Trieste June 15, 1938.

[49] Catalan, *La Comunità ebraica di Trieste*, 257-258.

[50] Sarfatti, *Mussolini contro gli ebrei.*

[51] On the conversionist tradition of this order, see: Madeleine Comte, "De la conversion à le rencontre. Les religieuses de Notre-Dame de Sion (1843-1986)," *Revue Archives Juives* 35, no. 1 (2002): 102-119. On the baptism of Jews in particular, see 108-109. By the same author, see also: Madeleine Comte, *Sauvetages et baptêmes. Les religieuses de Notre-Dame de Sion face à la persécution des Juifs en France (1940-1944)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001).

Jewish faith. One example of this struggle is Sergio C., who accepted and declared himself happy for his son to be baptized, but who remained firm in his Jewish beliefs, refusing to marry his Catholic wife in a marriage *disparitas cultus*.[52] The first racist laws of September and the announcement of the antisemitic campaign by Mussolini in Trieste on September 18, were an important motivator to take these delicate decisions, especially for those who had been reluctant to make the leap. It is no coincidence that Sergio C. made his decision on September 19.
At the same time, there was a high increase in the number of requests from foreign Jews, especially Austrians, who were travelling through Trieste. Some, such as Giovanni R., from Vienna, could count on his cousins and other acquaintances in the local Azione Cattolica, which helped him down the path of conversion in the fastest way possible, since he was likely to be joining his siblings in Palestine at short notice. Precisely due to his file, however, notwithstanding the destination of his journey, the Priest of the Church of the Beata Vergine delle Grazie in via Rossetti, made an interesting remark to the Curia about the growing increase in Jewish immigrants from Vienna:

> It is indeed the case that similar questions are frequently repeated, especially by Israelites arriving from Vienna. It is tempting to suppose they are driven to some extent by opportunism. I say as much to the parties, insisting on the need for true conviction in order to be accepted into the Catholic Church. Faced by their claims how is it possible to be calm? This Most Reverent Curia deals with many other cases [...].[53]

Each parish priest, however, had his own style, if we can call it that, which characterized his personal idea of how the spirit of conversion should develop among the catechumens. There were scrupulous priests, suspicious ones, in some cases even discriminatory in the language used to define Jews, as we will see shortly. There were also some who were inclined to take every signal, even listening to a radio transmission, as an indicator of the desire to convert, like the Priest below,

52 ASDTS, *Fondo Diocesi di Trieste e Capodistria. Atti di gestione ordinaria*, b. 1212, fasc. 5/308-1938, Letter from the Parish Priest of San Vincenzo de'Paoli to the Curia, Trieste September 19, 1938.
53 Ibid., fasc. 5/132-1938, Letter from the Parish Priest to the Episcopal Curia, Trieste, July 21, 1938.

who in order to support the sincerity of Guglielmo C. (a Jew who had married a Catholic woman in Muggia in 1937) in his request, claimed that:

> It is understood by the undersigned that the interested party wishes to become a Catholic at the baptism of his future first child. As a child he sang in the chapel choir at school until his mother forbade him from doing so. As a youth he took part out of pure curiosity in the sacred functions of the Church in Turin and Padua. He listened to radio conversations by Father Petazzi, with whom he had the occasion to meet, Father Petazzi also wishes him to be converted soon.[54]

In any case, it was up to the priests to make the first contact and dialogue with the aspiring converts, and in this way they came into direct contact with their problems and their fears. The Bishop then either approved the conversion or, in some cases, referred the case for a more rigorous examination to establish the authenticity of the wish to be a catechumen.[55]

During the summer of 1938 the racist antisemitic propaganda became more entrenched amongst some representatives of the clergy; we can witness this shift in the language used in some letters sent to the Curia. The Priest of Scorcola at the end of August 1938, for example, in a letter about the request to convert of a Jewish man from Budapest, speaks explicitly of an "Israelite by race and by religion."[56] With the promulgation in September of laws regarding foreign Jews and their obligation to leave the country before March 19, 1939, there was a real need to speed up the process of conversion, as can be seen in the many requests to the Curia; these seem to have been met with the favor of the Priests, who wrote about the imminent danger of expulsion from Italy as a valid motive for shortening the possible period of catechumenate.[57]

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[54] Ibid., fasc. 5/211-1938, Letter from the parish to the Curia, Muggia August 21, 1938.

[55] Ginzburg Migliorino, "Leggi razziali a Trieste," 303.

[56] ASDTS, *Fondo Diocesi di Trieste e Capodistria. Atti di gestione ordinaria*, b. 1212, fasc. 5/229-1938, Letter from the Parish Priest di Servola to the Curia, Trieste August 26, 1938.

[57] One example is the case of Roberto H. and Virginia M. who had requested to be able to be baptized and united in matrimony at the parish of San Giovanni. Cfr. ASDTS, *Fondo Diocesi di*

The forced distancing from Italy pushed some families of foreign Jews who knew each other to embark upon the path towards baptism together. Two married couples, the S.-F. and B.-S. for example, were driven by the desire of the two wives (who were friends), and decided to begin the process of conversion at the college of Notre Dame de Sion, where one of the women had studied for six years. Their children, 9 year old Alfredo and 8 year old Tiberio, had recently been baptized on November 23, 1938 in the same institution, and both families had demonstrated their intention to move abroad "to begin a new life with a new spiritual foundation."[58]

The rate of conversions peaked following the big shifts in propaganda and the promulgation of the laws: on November 22, 1938, for example, there was a collective conversion of Jewish boys and girls, with the approval of their parents, at the college of Notre Dame de Sion. Nine children were baptized after a month of catechumenate which had taken place at the college.[59]

When the racial laws came into force on November 17, 1938, we can see another change in the way in which the Jews motivated their requests for conversion to the Curia. Perhaps influenced by the possibility of asking for "discrimination" for specific merits, including adherence to the fascist party, several of those closest to the regime began the path to conversion, seeing it as an inescapable step in order to be considered fully Italian. Professing one's patriotism and loyalty to the State was in fact part of the request for conversion to the Curia of Trieste forwarded by Adele L., who had been born in Padua in 1874 but who had lived in the Adriatic city from a young age. She had married a Catholic in 1930, first in a civil marriage and later with the Pope's dispensation. Adele lived with her husband and children in Pisino in Istria, and she wrote to the Bishop of Trieste thus:

> I ask this most Reverend Curia to be accepted into the heart of the Holy Mother Catholic Church due to my true religious sentiments and also due to my patriotic feelings, which will not allow me to belong to a religion

*Trieste e Capodistria. Atti di gestione ordinaria*, b. 1212, fasc. 5/454-455-1938, Letter from the Parish Priest to the Curia, Trieste October 20, 1938.

[58] Ibid., fasc. 5/564-1938, Letter to the Curia from Don Luigi Digiacomo, Trieste November 27, 1938.

[59] Ibid., fasc. 5/556- 564-1938.

> contrary to my fatherland and Fascism. I was educated as a little girl to love Italy, and one of the happiest days of my life was when the Italian troops entered Trieste where I lived with my parents from the age of five and where I was a teacher for 35 years, always teaching in an Italian manner, even when Trieste belonged to Austria.[60]

Adele also asked not to be prepared for baptism in the Croatian language, which she did not know, but in Italian. This was another important aspect, which highlights the way in which she sought to disassociate herself from the Slavic element of the population, against which the fascists in that period had also started campaigning.

With the escalation of antisemitism and later also the heavy attacks published in the fascist press on the number of conversions in Trieste, which was judged macroscopic in terms of its size,[61] some Priests began to insert allusions to the instrumental use of conversion in their letters in support of neophytes sent to the episcopal Curia of Trieste. One priest, for example, hastened to plead for the baptism of two siblings, Bruno and Emilia M., who from unsuspected times had been approaching the Catholic faith. The Priest in fact went so far as to claim that both "are so prepared both doctrinally and spiritually and that it [their request to be baptized n.o.a.] has nothing to do with the recent racial laws, but rather because they were not sufficiently prepared before now, and only now felt able to ask for baptism."[62]

Umberto F. also requested a baptism. He was a man without confession, married to the Catholic woman Ada C., and the priest describes the aspiring neophyte so:

> even though he has desired to embrace the Catholic religion for a long time, he did not wish to do so, as he feared that it would appear that he was acting out of interest. Now that he has nothing to gain from, being

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[60] Ibid., 5/ 630-1938, Letter from Adele L. in P., Pisino November 25, 1938. Adele abandoned Judaism on January 16, 1939, writing a formal letter to the Rabbi of Trieste. On conversion in this period as an affirmation of Italianness, see: Bruno Di Porto, "Gli ebrei italiani di fronte al 1938," *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 73, no. 2 (2007):249-276; 261.

[61] Bon, *Gli ebrei a Trieste,* 196, note 13.

[62] ASDTS, *Fondo Diocesi di Trieste e Capodistria. Atti di gestione ordinaria*, b. 1212, fasc. 5/794-1938, Letter from December 12, 1938.

> removed from his job, he humbly implores the most Reverend Curia to admit him to baptism.[63]

The year 1939 began with a notable increase in conversions among foreign Jews: March drew ever closer and expulsion from Italy was therefore a very real prospect. Attempts to find a more secure path towards safety multiplied. Elisabetta H., a middle-aged woman from Prague, prepared to be baptized on her own, while her husband and children remained steadfast in the Jewish faith. An imminent departure formed the basis of the request of mons. Giovanni Grego, who made do with a passport instead of a birth certificate, that was missing.[64]
Ilse J., on the other hand, asked to be baptized as soon as possible, since without being baptized she could not travel to his Catholic relatives in Brazil.[65]

It was not only foreign Jews who left: many Triestine Jews decided to abandon the city. Tullio S., a twenty-nine-year-old man, was one such example. He asked if he could do an abbreviated conversion: "I turn to the reverent Curia to grant me permission to be able to accelerate the standard speed of instruction in order to be baptized before I travel overseas."[66]
The story of Gertrude H.'s life is also touching. She was born in Vienna, and married to a Catholic Nazi. The catechist Luigi di Giacomo asked Bishop Santin to be authorized to conduct an exceptional procedure. He wrote of the aspiring convert's motivations thus:

> the marriage did not have a happy ending: because the wife had felt for some time strongly drawn to the Catholic Religion and against all the sentiments of her husband, who professes the Nazi principles with totality and fullness of heart, she asked to be separated from her spouse, and was later granted a divorce according to the laws of her country.[67]

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[63] Ibid., fasc. 5/33-1939, Letter from Mons. Valeriano Monti to the Curia, Trieste January 7, 1939.
[64] Ibid., fasc. 5/68-1939, Letter from Mons. Grego to the Curia, Trieste January 24, 1939.
[65] Ibid., 5/114-1939, Letter in German by Ilse J. to the Curia, Trieste February 17, 1939
[66] Ibid., fasc. 5/1939, Letter to the Curia, Trieste January 2, 1939.
[67] Ibid., fasc. 5/192-1939, Lettera to the Curia, Trieste April 15th, 1939.

Gertrude was also motivated by the urgency of an imminent departure for Buenos Aires at the end of the month.

The aforementioned are just some examples, and there were many others in these months involving foreign Jews. The Episcopal Curia showed themselves to be open and understanding of their situation, demonstrating also great awareness of the impact of the racial laws on Triestine society: this was the reason why the number of conversions to Catholicism was so high, especially in the first two years, demonstrating that the Diocese of Trieste and Capodistria, ruled by Bishop Antonio Santin, had not closed its doors to these attempts at salvation, as was the case for example in Turin.[68] This does not mean, however, that the requests were not very carefully evaluated, first by parish priests and then by the Episcopal Ordinariate. The Curia of Trieste was characterized by its openness to conversions, but also for the friendly behavior of mons. Santin towards the Jews, which was maintained even in the most difficult moments of the Nazi occupation.[69]

As in other dioceses, the main focus was on couples in mixed marriages and their children. There was however an openness also towards those who did not have a religious confession, and towards younger converts.

The most complex enquiries and the most difficult cases were however faced by the Curia in the wartime years, and currently they are the object of my ongoing research. There was, in fact, in this period a change of direction towards the aspiring converts with the adoption of stricter procedures.

The two-year period of 1938-1939 represented the start of a complex machine, made up of an extended network of relations between Jews and Catholics; of parish priests who were more or less in favor of pleading the cases of aspiring converts; of the feverish correspondence—mainly of foreign Jews—with the mediation of the parish priests, to obtain baptism in the shortest time possible. The Diocese of Trieste's opening of the baptismal fonts to the Jews brought many criticisms from various parties, creating concern and discontent in the local Jewish Community, in the UCII, in the local representatives of the fascist government and even in the

[68] Dell'Era, "Leggi razziste, conversione degli ebrei e matrimoni misti".

[69] It was the Bishop of Trieste who took into custody the Habsburg Patents of Toleration and the Torah scrolls from the secretary of the Jewish Community, Carlo Morpurgo, in order to keep them from falling into Nazi hands.

most visible elements of Italian antisemitism, who used propaganda and journalism to bitterly attack the Triestine conversions.

The criticisms of Giovanni Preziosi in the pages of *Vita Italiana*; the articles published in *La Difesa della Razza* in August 1938, but also the use of many instances of antisemitic satire in local newspapers centered on the high level of Triestine conversions.[70]

From the quantitative data in our possession, which was collected by Ellen Ginzburg Migliorino and by Silva Bon, we are able to quantify the total number of abjures and conversions to Catholicism in the two year period of 1938-1939.[71] Thanks to the work of Ginzburg Migliorino (see Tab. 1) we know the number of Jews baptized according to their age, which allows us to insert our qualitative analysis into a quantitative context; while Silva Bon (Tab. 2) has demonstrated the number of recantations according to the Community's figures, provided in the period to the Unione delle Comunità Israelitiche Italiane.

| Age | Number of converts 1938[72] | Number of converts 1939[73] |
|---|---|---|
| 0-10 | 34 | 14 |
| 11-20 | 101 | 26 |
| 21-30 | 116 | 16 |
| 31-40 | 83 | 27 |
| 41-50 | 67 | 33 |
| 51-60 | 73 | 31 |
| Above 60 | 41 | 35 |
| No age given | 246 | 88 |
| **Total** | **761** | **270 (out of 313)** |

Tab. 1. Jews who converted to Catholicism in 1938 and 1939.

[70] Bon, *Gli ebrei a Trieste,* 196, note 13.

[71] Ibid., 175-176; Ginzburg Migliorino, "L'applicazione delle leggi antiebraiche," 106-107 for the data on age groups.

[72] Collected by E. Ginzburg Migliorino at the Archive of the Episcopal Curia of Trieste, Position V, 1938; Ginzburg Migliorino, "L'applicazione delle leggi antiebraiche," 106-107.

[73] Number of conversions to Catholicism in 1939 collected by E. Ginzburg Migliorino at the Archive of the Episcopal Curia of Trieste, Position V, 1939. There were 313 cases registered, but the Curia holds the individual documentation for only 270 conversions, because the rest of the documentation was lost; Ginzburg Migliorino, "L'applicazione delle leggi antiebraiche," 106-107.

| Year | Number of abjures |
|---|---|
| 1931-1937 | 29 |
| 1938 | 591 |
| 1939 | 203 |
| **Total** | **823** |

Tab. 2. Number of abjures 1931-1939. Figures taken from the report of the President of the Jewish Community of Trieste, Egidio Canarutto[74].

Unfortunately, neither of the two studies has analyzed the aspect of gender in recantations and conversions, and there remains much work to be done in this area in order to understand, for example, the exact number of Jewish neophytes returning to the Catholic Church during the period of 1938-1939. The figures collected to this point, when compared with each other, clearly demonstrate the difference between the total number of recantations in the two years (794) and the number of conversions to Catholicism (1074).
The 280 people who are not registered in these years by the Community were probably either foreign Jews passing through Trieste, or likely citizens with Jewish origins who had already formally left the faith of their fathers for quite some time, remaining without religion.

## 1939: Fears and Departures

The hemorrhaging of members represented a major, immediate, problem for Italian Judaism , which was forced to confront this internal emergency.
The UCII's newsletter on September 1939 faced the topic of the abandonments of Jewish faith which had taken place in 1938, expressing profound regret and making an appeal to stand united to face the difficulties of the moment:

> Let us forget previous disagreements, let us forget our personal egoisms, we must all unite to resist the adversity and invoke from the Eternal the

74 The data can be found in Bon, *Gli Ebrei a Trieste*, 175-176.

> industrious peace of our blessed and beloved Fatherland, from which we cannot detach ourselves either mentally or physically, since we were born and educated here, because our dead are buried here, because we freely gave this land the best of our spirit, our work, our blood, just as our fathers did, and for its wellbeing, its triumph, we are ready to make the greatest sacrifice.[75]

In 1939, in its annual report to the UCII, the Jewish Community of Trieste addressed the painful consequences of the racial laws on Community life. They had been particularly affected by the new rules, since a good two thirds of the Community was formed of foreign citizens and stateless, who had lost the Italian citizenship they had acquired after 1919.[76] The report underlined the continuous loss of members, because of recantations, but because of the fact that many coreligionists, especially the young, had emigrated abroad in search of a brighter future. From a numerical perspective, removing those who did not belong to the Jewish faith, by mid 1939 there were 2,908 people in the community (1,294 men and 1,614 women).[77]

An important passage in the report was dedicated to the abjures, which—according to President Canarutto—had literally decimated the Community. It is worth quoting this passage from the report here:

As we have seen, the Jewish population of Trieste, at the midpoint of last year did not even number 3,000 people. This depopulation is even more serious, since the Community, in the census of 1932, had more than 5,000 members. One of the greatest causes is unfortunately the very high number of recantations.[78]

There followed a detailed schema (Tab. 2) from which we can clearly see the growing tendency of abandoning the faith precisely in Summer 1938: from July to December there were 554 abjures, while in the first semester of 1938 there were 37.

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[75] AUCEI, *Attività dell'Unione dal 1934 al 1948*, b. 11H, fasc. 11h-22, *Notiziario dell'Unione*, n. 10, September 5, 1939.

[76] Ibid., b. 31D, *Relazione sulla vita della Comunità israelitica di Trieste e sull'attività delle sue istituzioni durante l'anno 1939*.

[77] Ibid., p. 3.

[78] Ibid., p. 4.

As has already been underlined by Silva Bon, the figures provided by the President of the Community do not tally up with those from the prefecture of Trieste, which registered at the end of October 1939 a much higher number of recantations: 1,137. This differs by 314 from the figures provided by the Jewish institution for the entire period, namely from 1931.[79] It remains to be understand how there came to be such a significant difference between the figures provided by the two bodies, given the obligation for Jews, according to the Falco law of 1930, to be registered with the Community. Do the numbers from the prefecture also count foreign Jews travelling through the Port of Trieste and therefore not yet registered in the Community? Unfortunately the documentation available at the moment does not allow us to confirm this hypothesis.

We know with certainty that around 12% of Triestine Jews left the Mosaic faith from 1938 to 1939: among these there were many children and young people, pushed by their parents towards the option that in that moment seemed one of the few secure ways of avoiding persecution. The percentage in reality was probably slightly lower, since among those who had abjured and been baptized, there were also non-registered members of the local Community: Jews in transit for a short time through Trieste, for example. On his part, the vice president of the Jewish Community of Trieste, the engineer Clemente Kerbes, sent a new memorandum on the situation of the Triestine Jews to the Union on November 21st, 1940, in which he lamented an increasingly critical economic situation, which impacted above all the proletariat and the Jewish lower middle classes, gravely affecting the number of registrations to the Community, which were necessary to support the poorest members. Concerning these people he added an important consideration on the economic repercussions of the abjures on the Community, which sheds a light also on the implications of class in the phenomenon of recantation, which he claimed disproportionately attracted wealthier coreligionists:

> It is clear that the movement of disassociation from the Community has taken place largely following the racist laws, and has affected primarily the correligionists who were wealthy and independent, of those therefore who

[79] Bon, *Gli ebrei a Trieste*, 176.

> were not linked to the Community for any material motive, while on the other hand all those who found themselves in immediate or imminent need to call for assistance, drew closer to the Community, knowing that only through it would they receive, in greater or smaller measure, the necessary first help.[80]

The question of the growth of disassociations, linked often in their frequency to the growing anti-Judaism of the fascist regime, was also highlighted in the minutes of the UCII's (Unione delle Comunità Israelitiche Italiane) Giunta, which in January 1939 reported the figure of 2,232 recantations in Italy in the year 1938; the figure does not record the numbers from some Communities, who had not sent their information to the Union.[81] A new surge of abjures on a national scale was registered throughout 1941, when we see the figure of 835 notifications of recantation reaching the Union, increasing the total number of abandonments from 1938 to December 1941 to 6,417: a considerable figure, equal to more than 10% of Italian Jews, who just before the promulgation of the racial laws numbered around 45,000.[82] The tendency to choose recantation as a possible exit route seemed to diminish over the course of 1942, when in November the Council of the Union registered for that year "only 217," claiming that there had even been some members returning to Judaism.[83] When the Jews were forced into hiding following the Nazi occupation, the number and practices of conversion radically changed.

[80] AUCEI, *Attività dell'Ucei 1934-1948*, b. 31D, Memorandum November 21, 1940.

[81] Ibid., *Attività Unione dal 1848 al 1965*, vol.VI, *Verbali di Giunta e di Consiglio*, b. 268, Minutes from January 18, 1939, p. 10. The same minutes highlight the high number of conversions taking place throughout Italy from November 1932 to December 1938, amounting to 3,219. Unfortunately, no documents mention which Italian Jewish communities did not answer to the UCII request.

[82] Ibid., Minutes from the Council Meeting on January 13, 1942, p. 99.

[83] Ibid., Minutes from the Council on November 24, 1942, p. 122.

## Conclusions

In fascist Trieste in 1938 the start of the antisemitic campaign and the promulgation of the racist laws was experienced by the Jews as a real bolt out of the blue, threatening their sense of security and long-standing stability. Triestine Jews immediately implemented a set of strategies to avoid being hit by the antisemitic measures, and among the most radical of these was the decision taken by individuals and their families to formally leave the Community by recanting their faith, choosing later to convert to Catholicism, as well as Protestantism, hoping in this way—and not incorrectly, given the statistics of the Second World War—to have a greater possibility of being saved.[84],

In the lay and profoundly secularized society of Trieste there had already been for some time a shift to live religion as a purely private experience—a personal choice that was not very visible in public and barely affected interpersonal relationships. This led by the end of the Habsburg period to the proliferation of mixed marriages from the second half of the 1800s, a phenomenon which did not stop after the First World War and during fascism, and which was tangible proof of how porous the various ethno-religious communities in the city were. The number of conversions from one religion to another, or the widespread inclination to recant and remain without religion also represented for a long time one of the peculiarities of Trieste, and from the moment of the promulgation of the anti-Jewish laws, conversions to Catholicism were immediately viewed as one of the most secure solutions, without disturbing the Community environment too much, apart from the leadership and the rabbinate. Many of the converts were the spouses of mixed marriages and their resulting children; there were also many people who re-entered the Church as widows and widowers, deciding to re-embrace Catholicism in later life in order to be saved. Finally, it is worth outlining the high number of foreign Jews travelling through the Adriatic Port, who, through baptism, were able to display a new identity in the Americas, thus being more favorably received by the various states. The period from 1938 to1939 can be considered crucial, both in terms of the typology of the conversions as well as the very high numbers in which they were

[84] More than 700 Triestine Jews were deported by the Nazis to Auschwitz, during the occupation of the Adriatic Littoral (1943-1945). In this period no conversions took place in the city, because all the Jews went into hiding.

taking place. The war years, however, can be considered in light of the conflict trends, and introduce another phase which I do not have the space to discuss fully here.

The Episcopal Curia of Trieste decided to welcome baptism requests that reached them in the hundreds in these two years, demonstrating a particular understanding towards foreign Jews in transit, who were constrained by the timings of their journeys. The Curia also welcomed with minimal problems the spouses of mixed marriages and showed themselves open to the requests from young people to convert. The decisions were made by the Bishop, mons. Antonio Santin, after careful evaluation of the documentation submitted by the parish priests. The latter, who differed greatly between themselves, always supported, often with the same words as the aspiring converts, the requests for baptism. And from their letters emerge the various individual routes analyzed here, which were characterized by various sentiments: fear about the persecution in progress; the pressure of Catholic family members in mixed marriages; the presence of secure friendship and business networks in the Catholic world; fear for their children's fate, and also in some cases loyalty to fascism and patriotic sentiments.

Among those from the Jewish Community in Trieste who requested a conversion were entire nuclear families with small children, mixed couples, widowed women who had converted to Judaism in order to marry. The individuals who requested a conversion, especially in the first half of 1938, were largely self-employed people and those belonging to the economic establishment of the city, who had links with fascism and were able to anticipate the changing climate. In the second half of 1938, however, there were many foreign Jews, whose expulsion was scheduled for March 1939, and they asked to be converted as quickly as possible.[85] There were also at this time many young people and students, whose parents desperately sought a way of keeping them safe.

The picture that emerges is complex in many ways, and would benefit from further research and in-depth study, but it confirms without any doubt the profile of a secular Triestine Jewish society, in a certain sense detached and in some regards truly unprejudiced on a religious level, which was ready to take inter-confessional

[85] At the moment, it is not possible to say whether conversion represented a real lifeline for them. Their individual paths should be analyzed, but this is another research that should be done.

action in order to obtain a conversion. This was made possible thanks to the attitude of the local Church, which was ready to welcome the Jews without any qualms, understanding their motivation, but asking in return that they respect the formal rules demanded by the catechumenate. We do not know if this happened, nor are we able to reconstruct in this research how these converts related to their new faith.

It must also be taken into account ,in the long term, that the local Triestine society was accustomed to the practice of conversions, not only to Catholicism, which in my opinion influenced the open attitude of the local Church in the face of the emergence of the racial laws, of which even Bishop Santin had been critical with Mussolini.

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# Judeo-Arabic Popular Nonfiction in Morocco during the First Half of the Twentieth Century

by *David Guedj*

## Abstract

*This article is a first-of-its-kind exploration of the vernacular Judeo-Arabic popular nonfiction printed in Morocco between the early twentieth century and the 1960s, in the form of single pages, pamphlets or small books. This literature provided readers with knowledge pertaining to Jewish law (*halakha*), ethics, culture, history, and Zionist ideology, in order to reinforce Jewish religious and national identity. I suggest here that vernacular-speaking literatures emerged in Morocco in the early twentieth century following interwoven, mutually influential processes. The four processes that precipitated vernacular Judeo-Arabic nonfiction in Morocco consist of (1) the opening of local Hebrew printing houses across Morocco's cities; (2) the emergence of new elites within Morocco's Jewish communities; (3) the rejection of the obligation to observe religious strictures, coupled with secularization processes; and (4) the advent of a Jewish national movement, i.e. Zionism.*

## Introduction

## The Books

## The Historic Intersection: Writing Elites, Printing, Secularization and Jewish Nationalism

## Hebrew Printing at the Service of Judeo-Arabic Literature

## A New Writing Elite: Maskilim Writing/Editing in Judeo-Arabic

## Rejecting the Observance of the Commandments and the Counter-response of Judeo-Arabic Literature

## Jewish Nationalism

# Conclusion

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## Introduction

In 1919, Jacob Elkrief published *Hemed Bahurim* in Casablanca. It was the first book to be printed in Hebrew letters by the printing house *Imprimerie nouvelle*, established in the same year. Written in vernacular Judeo-Arabic, *Hemed Bahurim* comprised a selection of religious laws (*halakhot)* pertaining to Jewish daily life and the calendar, and some moral teachings.[1] Elkrief courted a wide sector of the community who were not proficient in Hebrew:

> u-rit di bzaf d-nas fḥali ma ka yfhamu šay ktir f-lšon ha-qodeš. b-l-ḥaqq b-l'arabiyya ka yfhamu mliḥ. biha ruaḥ adonay nosesa bi. u-zm'at dinim ši min hna u-ši min hna. dinim di ka yḥdazu l-baḥurim bne gili u-b-lšan 'rabiyyya fṣiḥa. lzakot et harabbim. (Many a people have I seen who, like me, cannot understand a word of the holy tongue. On the other hand, they understand Arabic very well. The spirit of the Lord lifted a standard against me and I gathered laws from here and there. Laws that must be delivered in clear Arabic, so as to grant merit to the many).[2]

In 1927, Elkrief published a series of booklets entitled *Ha-Madrikh* (the guide), instilling morals in Judeo-Arabic. In one such book he explained that "u-'mlnah b-lšon 'arabi u-bklam maxfut bas kul waḥid ykun 'andu tyyempo bas yqrah" (We employed plain Arabic, so that anyone might find the time to read it).[3]

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[1] Regarding the term Judeo-Arabic see for example: Benjamin Hary, "Judeo-Arabic in the Arabic-Speaking World," in *Languages in Jewish Communities, Past and Present*, eds. Benjamin Hary and Sarah Bunin Benor (Boston-Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2018), 35-69; Norman A. Stillman, "Judeo-Arabic—History and Linguistic Description," in *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, ed. Norman A. Stillman (Leiden: Brill, 2010), http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1878-9781_ejiw_COM_0012320, accessed November 21, 2022.

[2] Jacob Elkrief, *Hemed Bahurim* (Casablanca: Imprimerie nouvelle Amar and Elbaz, 1919), 12.

[3] Jacob Elkrief, *Ha-Madrikh* (Casablanca: Imprimerie nouvelle, 1927), 1.

These booklets published by Elkrief in Casablanca in the first two decades of the twentieth century are one instance of the nonfiction literary works that emerged across Jewish communities in Morocco's cities and continued to thrive until their massive immigration to Israel and elsewhere during the 1950s and 1960s. These works consist of a handful of pages, pamphlets or booklets, written in the Judeo-Arabic vernacular. These booklets courted the community's general public[4] and provided readers with information on the halakha, ethics, culture, history and Zionist ideology, with the aim of strengthening religious and national Jewish identity and drawing a line between the Jewish community and its Muslim or Christian neighbors. The emergence of these works in Morocco in the early 1900s was contingent on several factors; it followed the historical intersection of a set of political, social, and cultural circumstances unique to Morocco's Jewry. This article claims that Judeo-Arabic nonfiction works developed in this community thanks to four intertwining processes: (1) the opening of the first printing houses in Morocco's cities in the early 1900s and the new readership that emerged following the locally-flavored books printed by them; (2) the rise of new elites, including the authors under study, who were attentive to community needs, against the demise of the old Jewish oligarchy; (3) the rising trend of rejecting the obligation to observe religious commandments, coupled with secularization processes unique to Jewries in Muslim countries; and (4) the emerging Jewish national consciousness, including Zionist activity.[5]

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[4] Not unique to Morocco, Judeo-Arabic popular nonfiction could also be found in other North-African Jewish communities. There has yet to be a study dedicated to each such community or a comprehensive study into all those communities. Yosef and Tsivia Tobi discuss one example of nonfiction literature in the chapter "Essays on Ideology and Propaganda" and further research is required. See Yosef Tobi and Tsivia Tobi, *Judeo-Arabic Literature in Tunisia, 1850-1950* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2014). As of now, no study has been written on Judeo-Arabic nonfiction in Algeria. The extensive project of translating Hebrew literature into Judeo-Arabic by Rabbi Joseph Renassia from Constantine in the first half of the twentieth century has yet to be investigated. For more about the Rabbi, see Yossef Charvit, "Renassia, Joseph," *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World,* ed. Norman A. Stillman (Leiden: Brill, 2013), http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1878-9781_ejiw_COM_0018340, accessed November 21, 2022.

[5] Itamar Even-Zohar claims that one of the conditions for the crystallization of a translated work is a turning point, that is to say, a historical moment where established models are no longer relevant for a younger generation. Itamar Even-Zohar, "The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem," *Poetics Today* 11, no.1 (1990): 45-51.

I shall start by putting the Judeo-Arabic nonfiction printed in Morocco in the broader context of printed literature in Jewish vernacular languages—Yiddish, Ladino and Judeo-Arabic, while comparing the different literatures written in each vernacular. I shall then move on to review the corpus of Judeo-Arabic nonfiction booklets and explain the methodology of my analysis. The main part of the essay will discuss the four processes intersecting at the historical crossroads of Judeo-Arabic nonfiction in Morocco, while drawing a comparison with similar processes experienced by the kingdom's majority Muslim society. Judeo-Arabic nonfiction works are very valuable for the nascent research into book history across Jewish communities in Muslim countries. Scholarship hitherto has rarely tapped into this printed literature, branding it as popular and of little literary merit compared with the literature written in Hebrew and European languages by elites for an elitist readership. Nevertheless, this nonfiction was key in the contexts in which it was created, read or translated; it served its authors as a conscious means to shape a new Jewish culture that would be up to par with the zeitgeist and circumstances of the first half of the twentieth century. Moreover, the emergence of nonfiction allows us to look at a cluster of historic processes, that have hitherto been studied independently. This convergence offers a glimpse into historic phenomena that have yet to be researched, and may shed light on the lives of Jews from Muslim countries from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. The study of books holds the potential to reshape our understanding of Jewish society during the complex, turbulent transition to modernity.

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For centuries, Jews across the Diaspora experienced trilingualism, living with three languages: the everyday local language, the Jewish vernacular (Yiddish, Ladino, Judeo-Arabic and others) that was also used for certain types of writing, and Hebrew—the holy tongue, reserved for liturgical and religious works.[6] The

[6] Regarding the Jewish language varieties see the new comprehensive study: Ofra Tirosh-Becker and Lutz Herausgeber Edzard, *Jewish Languages: Text Specimens, Grammatical, Lexical, and Cultural Sketches* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2021). On trilingualism see for example: Benjamin H. Hary, Multiglossia in Judeo-Arabic, with an Edition, Translation and Grammatical Study of the Cairene Purim Scroll, *Études sur le Judaïsme médiéval*, vol. 14 (Leiden: Brill, 1992).

vernacular was their mother tongue, while Hebrew was an acquired language. Education at schools took place in the Jewish vernacular, while also teaching reading skills in the holy tongue. As the educational training and acquisition progressed, learners acquired further Hebrew reading skills and understanding of pertinent texts. Advanced learners went on to author Hebrew rabbinic literature. Nevertheless, Hebrew literacy was the preserve of a select rabbinic elite. Most men had a basic command of the holy tongue, allowing them, at best, to read or recite the prayers and weekly Torah portions. Virtually all women had no access to formal education and consequently, no command of Hebrew. In fact, the overwhelming majority of men in Jewish communities, and all the women—with few exceptions—could not read texts beyond the type mentioned above, and rabbinic literature was beyond their reach.[7]

This meant that different periods saw vernacular rabbinic printed literature develop across Jewish communities. Penned by learned rabbis for men and women illiterate in Hebrew, this literature unlocked traditional knowledge otherwise inaccessible to them. Zeev Gries points to a phenomenon he refers to as the awakening of the intelligentsia: vernacular literature earning a readership "that included people whose connection with the scholarly elite was, at best, tenuous."[8] Before rabbinic texts started being translated and printed in vernacular languages, rabbinic and Haskalah elites excluded such readers from this literature, which was written exclusively in Hebrew. Vernacular books, for the first time, prompted the masses to read and acquire knowledge that opened up their horizons.

The first vernacular-speaking Jewish literature was written in Yiddish. Vying for the general public (men and women alike), it started to appear irregularly by the mid-sixteenth century and turned into a steady stream of publications late into the same century. It was printed by turns in different centers across Europe: Poland,

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[7] Literature on the subject abounds. See Bernard Spolsky, *The Languages of the Jews: A Sociolinguistic History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Lily Kahn and Aaron D. Rubin, eds., *Handbook of Jewish Languages* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2016); Benjamin Hary and Sarah Bunin Benor, eds., *Languages in Jewish Communities, Past and Present* (Boston-Berlin: Walter De Gruyter Inc, 2018).

[8] Zeev Gries, *The Book in the Jewish World, 1700-1900* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007), 16.

northern Italy, Prague, Amsterdam and various German cities. By late eighteenth century, Yiddish rabbinic literature started to appear in print, comprising translations of the Old Testament, prayers, epic poetry on Biblical stories, *drash* (homiletics), ethics, halakha, tales and stories, and historical religious texts. This development was set against a feeling of crisis that had taken over Jewish society, and it aimed to educate readers on their duties, to spread knowledge of religious texts and instill fear of God and moral values. Its authors criticized the select circles of the rabbinical elite and strove to drive a far-reaching religious-social restorative change, individual as well as public.[9] During the Haskalah period, printing centers moved from the west of Europe to the continent's east, where secular Yiddish literature started appearing, including fiction, poetry, nonfiction, journalism and more.[10]

The printing of Ladino literature started in sixteenth century, on a small scale, vying for wide sections of Jewish society in the Ottoman Empire, and flourished in the second quarter of the eighteenth century. During this period the printed literature was rabbinic, encompassing translations of the Old Testament, prayer books, ethical literature, kabbalah, philosophy, history, stories and tales, as well as anthologies of commandments in prose and rhyme. Ladino printed literature followed the spread of Hebrew printing across the Ottoman Empire and was inspired by Lurianic ideas among learned rabbis. The latter acknowledged the gap between the rabbinic elite and the masses in terms of acquaintance with the Jewish bookshelf and the precepts of Judaism, and sought to close it by publishing books in the vernacular.[11] The nineteenth century saw the development of Ladino secular literature, including journalism, fiction, plays, poetry and nonfiction; at the same time, rabbinic literature remained in print.[12]

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[9] For the varieties of Yiddish literature, see Jacob Elbaum, *Openness and Insularity in Late Sixteenth Century Jewish Literature in Poland and Ashkenaz* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1990), 68-71 [Hebrew]. See the footnotes there.

[10] See for example: Benjamin Harshav, *The Meaning of Yiddish* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Dan Miron, *A Traveler Disguised: The Rise of Modern Yiddish Fiction in the Nineteenth Century* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996).

[11] Matthias B. Lehmann, *Ladino Rabbinic Literature and Ottoman Sephardic Culture* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005).

[12] Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Making Jews Modern: the Yiddish and Ladino Press in the Russian and Ottoman Empires* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004); Aron Rodrigue, "The

Judeo-Arabic printed literature, for the common people of the Jewish communities across the Middle East, emerged in the mid-nineteenth century. Printing houses were established during this period in Cairo and Alexandria, Egypt, as well as in Jerusalem, Aleppo (Syria), Baghdad (Iraq), Calcutta and Bombay (India) and Aden (Yemen). These establishments published translations of Old Testament books and liturgical rituals for Jewish festivals, retellings of biblical stories, ethical and homiletical literature. Alongside translated rabbinic literature, Judeo-Arabic translations of European Hebrew Enlightenment texts were also published, including original and European literature translated into Hebrew. In addition, stories from Muslim Arab popular literature were also translated.[13] The first half of the twentieth century saw social and political shifts that sidelined Judeo-Arabic, with Jewish authors in Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and the Land of Israel/Palestine opting to write and publish in Standard Arabic. Nevertheless, rabbis and Maskilim (intellectuals) continued to publish their popular literature in Judeo-Arabic.[14]

The first printed texts of Judeo-Arabic popular rabbinic literature for the North African readership appeared in Livorno, Italy, several years before the establishment of local printing houses. From the mid-eighteenth century, Livorno was the main Jewish printing hub in the Mediterranean Basin. The city's Sephardi Jewish community included a North-African Diaspora, comprising families of merchants, which took part in establishing the local Hebrew printing houses. As of the mid-nineteenth century, printing houses started publishing North-African Judeo-Arabic rabbinic literature, in the respective authors' dialects.[15] Kabbalist

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Ottoman Diaspora: The Rise and Fall of Ladino Literary Culture," in *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, ed. David Biale (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 863-985.

[13] Yitzhak Avishur, "The Folk Literature of the Jews of Iraq in Judeo-Arabic," *Pe'amim* 3 (1979): 83-90 [Hebrew]; Yitzhak Avishur, "Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic Books and Journals Printed in India," *Pe'amim* 52 (1992): 101-115 [Hebrew].

[14] Philip Sadgrove and Shmuel Moreh, *Jewish Contributions to Nineteenth Century Arabic Theatre: Plays from Algeria and Syria, A Study and Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 17-31; Lital Levy, "The Nahda and the Haskala: A Comparative Reading of 'Revival' and 'Reform'," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 16 (2013): 300-316.

[15] Francesca Bregoli, "Hebrew Printing in Eighteenth-Century Livorno: From Government Control to a Free Market," in *The Hebrew Book in Early Modern Italy*, eds. Joseph Hacker and Adam Shear (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 171-196.

and philosopher Elia Benamozegh, offspring of immigrants from Essaouira, Morocco, established a printing house where rabbinic literature was produced, including works by North-African sages. In addition to Hebrew rabbinic literature, Benamozegh published popular Judeo-Arabic rabbinic literature and made some short-lived efforts to publish Judeo-Arabic newspapers, for communities in Tunisia and Algeria.[16] Rabbi Joseph Knafo of Essaouira printed several books in Judeo-Arabic at Benamozegh's printing press. Motivated by his pedagogic and social ideology, Knafo addressed the general public and was probably the first Moroccan sage to print popular rabbinic literature in Judeo-Arabic, before the introduction of printing houses in Morocco.[17] The prohibitive costs meant that only a handful of authors could afford to print Judeo-Arabic books in Livorno, in limited editions and distribution.

In North Africa itself, Judeo-Arabic rabbinic literature started being printed from the mid-nineteenth century. The period saw the establishment of the first Hebrew printing houses in the big cities of Algeria and Tunisia. In neighboring Morocco, however, the first printing house was opened in Tangier in the late nineteenth century, in 1891, and it was not until the early twentieth century that a local literature in Judeo-Arabic developed in the kingdom. The Judeo-Arabic rabbinic literature encompassed Old Testament translations, Halakhic literature, biblical commentaries and books on ethics.[18] At the same time, Judeo-Arabic fiction flourished, including translated classic Arabic books and literary works from the Hebrew Enlightenment and European literatures, particularly French. The translated literature was complemented by original Judeo-Arabic literature, which evolved at the time throughout North Africa and reached its apex in Tunisia. Joseph and Zivia Tobi's study traces the different literary genres that appeared in printed texts in Tunisia: *Piyyutim* (liturgical poems), *Malzūmāt* (satirical ballads), *Qinot* (laments), *Ghnāyāt* (songs), essays on ideology and propaganda, drama and

[16] Clémence Boulouque, "An 'Interior Occident' and the Case for an Oriental Modernity: The Livornese Printing Press and the Mediterranean Publishing Networks of Elia Benamozegh (1823-1900)," *Jewish Social Studies* 23, no.2 (2018): 86-136.

[17] Gabriel Abensour, "In Praise of the Multitude: Rabbi Yosef Knafo's Socially Conscious Work in Essaouira at the End of the Nineteenth Century," *Jewish Social Studies* 27, no.1 (2022): 115-149.

[18] Robert Attal, "The Hebrew Press in the Maghreb," *Mashreq and Maghreb* 2 (1980): 121-129 [Hebrew].

the theater, *Ḥikāyāt* (stories) and Deeds of Righteous Men. Tobi and Tobi's study also cites nonfiction literature written in the region, but no discussion follows.[19]

Vernacular-speaking literatures, therefore, emerged gradually within the various Jewish communities: Yiddish in the late sixteenth century, Ladino in the second quarter of the eighteenth century and Judeo-Arabic in the mid-nineteenth century. Yiddish and Ladino literatures developed in two stages, distinguished by the time period, and the type of authors and content: from the late sixteenth century, rabbis published Yiddish popular rabbinic literature for the wider public, while it was only in the second quarter of the eighteenth century that a similar literature emerged in Ladino. Starting from the nineteenth century, Maskilim published secular literature in both dialects, alongside rabbinic literature. However, it was only in the mid-nineteenth century that Judeo-Arabic literature started to develop, encompassing rabbinic and secular texts, as well as a hybrid literature where elements of the two combined in response to shifts experienced by Jewish communities in Muslim countries. It was in the cities of Tunisia—Tunis, Djerba and Soussa—that the major printing houses were established and went on to print most of the fiction and nonfiction literature for North Africa's Jewish communities. The local printing houses in the cities of Morocco, Algeria, and Libya printed a distinct brand of literature, catering for the unique needs of each community. For example, the most popular genre to be printed in Morocco was poetry, *piyyut* and *kasida*, where the lion's share comprised religious poetry in Hebrew or secular poetry in Judeo-Arabic, rather than modern Hebrew poetry. The present discusses rabbinic and nonfiction literature that combines secular and rabbinic literature, all published in Judeo-Arabic in Morocco during the first half of the twentieth century.

[19] Tobi and Tobi, *Judeo-Arabic Literature in Tunisia.*

## The Books

Judeo-Arabic nonfiction in Morocco was printed in single page sheets, pamphlets and booklets. The essay discusses some such booklets.[20] Unlike single page sheets and pamphlets, which generally comprised only the text of the work, the booklets also included para-texts. A para-text is a text that accompanies another text, a secondary text to the book's core text. It includes a range of tools inserted at the beginning, conclusion and throughout the body of a book, in order to explain and manipulate the main text. The para-text contains the book's cover and opening pages, approvals and prefaces. It provides instructive testimonies that include information on the books, texts, authors, the target readership, and the circumstances that prompted the authors to write and publish the works; the para-texts lay out the author's ideological convictions. More broadly, they provide information on the political, social, and cultural reality in which the booklets were created.[21] The information included in para-texts is important for another reason: to date, no manuscripts of Judeo-Arabic books printed in Morocco have been preserved or uncovered, nor have any systematic archives of the authors' personal papers been preserved that could shed light on the circumstances around the books' creation.

Jacob Elkrief*'s Hemed Bahurim* (1919) was the first printed Hebrew booklet to appear in Casablanca. It comprised mainly a concise book of practical halakhot concerning prayers, charity, marriage etc., as well as Hebrew *piyyutim*. The two final pages of the book describe the work of Casablanca's *Magen David*. Starting out as a charity, after several years it was reorganized by its members as a society

[20] For a survey of the size and form of books, see: Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading* (London: Harper Collins, 1996), 125-148. For an inventory of Judeo-Arabic nonfiction literature published in Morocco in single pages, pamphlets and booklets, see: Eliyahu Refael Marṣiano*, The book of the sons of kings, that is the history of the Hebrew book in Morocco from 1517 to 1989* (Jerusalem: The Rasham Institute, 1989) [Hebrew].

[21] For an exhaustive relevant study, see Shlomo Berger, *Producing Redemption in Amsterdam: Early Modern Yiddish Books in Paratextual Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

for disseminating the modern Hebrew language.[22] Elkrief further published the series *Ha-Madrikh* (1927), thin booklets on morals, laws and *piyyutim*.[23]

Baruch Assabag published booklets that largely covered halakhic laws and morals: *Minha Belula* (1937) includes laws that pertain to Jewish daily life, with an emphasis on prayer and laws related to blessings.[24] In his *Qorban Minha* (1939), laws pertaining to the Jewish calendar are laid out, including Shabbat, New Moon, fasts, Tishrei holidays, Hanukah and Purim.[25] *Minhat Moshe* (1945) picks up from the previous work, covering Passover and Shavuot laws.[26] The booklet also includes *Minhat Qenaot* (zeal offering), which includes laws related to women, such as *nidah* (the menstrual period), *hakhnasat kalah* (charity for brides' dowries) and *tevilah* (immersion in a mikveh). These four booklets by Rabbi Assabag may be seen as a single tutorial book that pools together the laws on Jewish daily life and the Jewish year, for men and women alike.

*Toledot Ramba and Rashbi* (1944) by Ihiel Bouskila is a historically-themed book that unfurls the life story and lays out the teachings of Tannaim Rabbi Meir b'al ha-nes and Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai.[27] Bouskila collected, edited and translated into Judeo-Arabic Talmudic sources associated with the two Tannaim. While the book arguably falls under the Tsaddikim (righteous men) Deeds' category, as defined by Tobi and Tobi, it was inspired by both the European Hebrew Enlightenment movement and the Zionist movement and is not predominantly hagiographical in spirit, but rather straddles hagiography and biography.[28] The book includes two different titles, in Judeo-Arabic and Hebrew.

*Historiya d-l-yahud d-l-Maroq* b-l'arabiyya *mutarzama min l-fransiyya* (1953) by Haim Nahmany is a partial translation of the book *Musulmans andalous et judéo-*

[22] Elkrief, *Hemed*, 51-52.
[23] Elkrief, *Ha-Madrikh.*
[24] Baruch Assabag, *Minha Belula* (Casablanca: Imprimerie Razon, 1937).
[25] Baruch Assabag, *Qorban Minha* (Casablanca: Imprimerie Razon, 1939).
[26] Baruch Assabag, *Minhat Moshe* (Casablanca: Imprimerie Razon, 1945).
[27] Ihiel Bouskila, *Toledot Ramba and Rashbi* (Casablanca: Imprimerie Amar, 1944).
[28] Tobi and Tobi, *Judeo-Arabic Literature in Tunisia*, 323-240.

*espagnols*, published by David Abbou in 1952.[29] Abbou's book is divided in three sections: Moors in Spain, the history of Sephardi Jews and the history of Morocco's Jewry. Nahmany translated, but did not complete, the third section, while omitting the other two, as they did not directly concern the history of Moroccan Jewry. He complemented the book with treatises translated into Judeo-Arabic: a speech by Rabbi Yitzchak Nissenbaum, one of the first Religious Zionist and Mizrachi movement thinkers, entitled "The Reasons Why a Jew Must Be a Zionist," from Nissenbaum's book, *Derushim ve-homer le-drash* (1902),[30] and assorted *Midrashim* on the Land of Israel from different Talmudic tracts and books of the Midrash, including *iyalqut Shim'ni* and *Pirqei de-Rabbi Eliezer*.

The authors tried to make this specialized knowledge manageable for lay readers by restructuring it: these were not literal translation of the originals, but rather an adaptation (through additions, omissions, editing) of the gist of the original text to the Judeo-Arabic vernacular, informed by the authors' ideology and modified to meet the readership's needs as perceived by the authors. The books consist of short chapters, each providing concise information, organized under a clear table of contents that allowed readers to find the different subjects. Providing no references to other sources or accurate citations, the books offer general statements instead. They also lack introductory surveys, halakhic or kabalistic explanations and theoretical or abstract discussions that may require previous information, with nothing but the requisite knowledge included.

## The Historic Intersection: Writing Elites, Printing, Secularization and Jewish Nationalism

Outwardly, the authors declared their decision to write and edit literature in Judeo-Arabic or translate literature into this vernacular, because they knew that for the most part, the community could neither read nor understand Hebrew. In

[29] Haim Nahmany, *Historiya d-l-yahud d-l-Maroq* b-l'arabiyya *mutarzama min l-fransiyya* (Casablanca: Imprimerie Razon, 1953); David Abbou, *Musulmans andalous et judéo-espagnols* (Casablanca: Antar, 1953).

[30] Yitshak Nissenbaum, *Derushim ve-homer le-drash* (Vilnius: Hacefira, 1903).

the preface to his book, Nahmany writes that "Having realized that most of our people, a common folk like us, across cities and villages, would not obtain [the book] or find someone to read and translate it for them into Arabic, their spoken tongue, we deemed it our duty to seek Mr. David Abbou's permission to translate this book from French into Arabic."[31] I nonetheless find the authors' professed motivation, i.e., ignorance of Hebrew or French among the community's majority, an insufficient explanation for their enterprise. After all, the majority of the community had had no proficiency in Hebrew for centuries and nevertheless, no Judeo-Arabic nonfiction books had been written before. I propose that printed Judeo-Arabic nonfiction works emerged in Morocco in the early twentieth century following interweaving, cross-influential processes: both local and global processes, as well as intra-community processes and others initiated by the Jewish Diaspora. Some of these processes occurred in both the Jewish community and the Muslim majority society in Morocco.

The four processes that precipitated Judeo-Arabic nonfiction in Morocco were the opening of local Hebrew printing houses across Morocco's cities, the emergence of new elites among Morocco's Jewish communities, secularization processes and in particular the rejection of the obligation to observe religious commandments, and the birth of a Jewish national movement, i.e. Zionism. The authors under study considered themselves mediators on a mission to generate religious *Tiqqun*—reparation, and/or to instill the ideas of Hebrew Enlightenment or the Jewish national movement.

## Hebrew Printing at the Service of Judeo-Arabic Literature

From the second decade of the twentieth century the distribution of Judeo-Arabic nonfiction in Morocco was facilitated by the opening of local printing houses in several urban communities. Unlike Europe, Muslim countries in the Middle East and North Africa did not embrace printing in the fifteenth century for cultural,

[31] Nahmany, *Historiya*, 7.

social, religious, and political reasons that are beyond the scope of this article.[32] It was only in the mid-nineteenth century that the Sultan of Morocco approved the introduction of printing technology into his kingdom, due to the state's weakness vis-à-vis European powers. The first Arabic letters printing house opened in Fez in 1865, while others gradually followed in other cities. Muslim printing aimed to entrench religious faith, which meant that no general literature was printed. Only popular literature was produced, in three religiously-oriented fields: Sufi religious literature, popular religious law literature and political literature, which sought to reinforce Muslim identity and encourage religious war against the Christian foe from Europe. Hence, the birth of Moroccan Jewish printing culture in the twentieth century was not an isolated development; at the same time, Moroccan Arabic printing was also introduced, showing the same themes and genres.[33]

As noted before, it was not until the nineteenth century that a Hebrew printing house was established in Morocco, setting aside a brief period in the sixteenth century, involving a family of exiles from Portugal. The first Hebrew-French printing house in Morocco was opened in 1891 in Tangier by Shlomo Benayoun, an immigrant from Oran, Algeria. As colonial rule gained hold, several Hebrew printing houses were founded in the urban Jewish hubs of Morocco, including Casablanca, Fez, Meknes, Marrakesh, Essaouira, Rabat Oujda and Tétouan.[34] They were established by local Jews who had worked in the branches of European printing houses in Morocco. The relative boom of Hebrew printing houses in Morocco in the colonial period points to the link between Hebrew printing and European printing. However, Jewish printing in Morocco was far from a passive instrument of European colonialism, as print technology was used by printers for various purposes. This boom further suggests that in pre-colonial times, under

[32] For printing in the Ottoman Empire, see Ami Ayalon, *The Arabic Print Revolution: Cultural Production and Mass Readership* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). Ayalon reviews previous studies on the subject and explains the flaws in the explanations provided, or rather highlights the interpretations behind the explanations, while offering his own suggestions.

[33] Fawzi A. AbduIrazak, *The Kingdom of the Book: The History of Printing as an Agency of Change in Morocco between 1865 and 1912* (PhD diss., Boston University, 1990).

[34] Attal, "The Hebrew Press"; Marṣiano, *Sefer b-nei melakhim*.

Muslim rule, Jews were probably forbidden from opening printing houses, or at the very least, conditions were not yet ripe.[35]

The printing houses established in Morocco from the late nineteenth century changed attitudes towards the purpose of printing. For nearly 400 years, rabbis from Morocco had been printing their books in Jewish printing centers in different communities: Amsterdam, Livorno, Lwów, Vienna, Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Tunisia.[36] Book printing outside Morocco meant expensive, at time dangerous, travel. Only a handful of Morocco's sages could afford the high expenditure and so, until the early twentieth century, a considerable portion of rabbis' tracts survived only in handwriting, while many were lost to natural disasters and political upheavals. Book printing before the arrival of local printing houses in Morocco was therefore perceived as an act or preservation in the face of oblivion and loss.[37] In addition, Morocco's rabbis sought to print, and in so doing distribute, their books among the small rabbinical elite in Muslim countries and Europe. As local printing houses opened, printing was repurposed and beside preserving and saving manuscripts, printing became a tool for mass distribution of literature, which Ami Ayalon defines, in the Muslim context of the Middle East, as the popularization of printing.[38] Rabat's rabbis, for example, in their approval of Assabag's *Minhat Qenaot,* highlight the role of printing in disseminating knowledge to the public at large: "Let all his precious books follow the same path into the printing press, to be distributed and enjoyed among the sons of Jacob and the people of Israel, so they delight in words of morals and reason."[39]

Judeo-Arabic printing in the form of booklets and low-cost unlimited editions was the preserve of local printing houses. Printing houses outside Morocco aimed at the preservation of rabbinic literature by Morocco's sages through limited editions, and catered to the select rabbinic elite. Judeo-Arabic literature, on the

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[35] Noam Sienna, *Making Jewish Books in North Africa, 1700-1900* (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2020), 168-187.

[36] Bregoli, "Hebrew Printing"; Sienna, *Making Jewish Books*, 117-167.

[37] Yigal S. Nizri, "Writing Against Loss: Moroccan Jewish Book Culture in a Time of Disaster," *Jewish Social Studies* 26, no.1 (2020): 91-100.

[38] Ayalon, *The Arabic Print*, 33.

[39] Assabag, *Belula*, 1.

contrary, had to be a mass literature, printed and distributed widely, if it was to exist at all. Through the printed word, it could rely on a widespread readership among the general public. It was only local printing that made the existence of a Judeo-Arabic literature practically possible. Elkrief, for example, writes in the preface of a *Ha-Madrikh* booklet that he intends to issue an affordable booklet every two weeks: such an enterprise would not have been possible with the printing houses outside Morocco.[40]

## A New Writing Elite: Maskilim Writing/Editing in Judeo-Arabic

In the mid-nineteenth century, new leadership groups started to come together in Morocco's urban communities, alongside the rabbinic elite, the *Nagid* and the community committee. Daniel Schroeter and Joseph Chetrit point to new elites in Morocco's coastal cities, following Jewish communities' encounters with European powers and their Jews. These were elites of overseas merchants who had received foreign diplomatic protection, alongside local representatives of international philanthropic Jewish organisations, like the Alliance Israélite Universelle or the Anglo-Jewish Association.[41] Yaron Tsur and Hagar Hillel's study explores the new Jewish functionaries in Casablanca during the first half of the twentieth century, including Zionist activists, teachers and principals in the schools of the Alliance Israélite Universelle and the network of their alumni, alongside a pro-French or pro-Moroccan Jewish elite.[42] In addition to these elites, and as part of them, one could find the authors in question. They did not hail from elite rabbinic families in Morocco, with their inherited titles, or from wealthy merchant families, both social groups that sought to perpetuate the circumstantially-established status-quo. The authors came from the lower or middle class and moved up the ranks of Jewish society to become leaders, while tapping into the new opportunities created in the early-twentieth century colonial

[40] Elkrief, *Ha-Madrikh*, 1.

[41] Daniel J. Schroeter and Joseph Chetrit, "Emancipation and Its Discontents: Jews at the Formative Period of Colonial Rule in Morocco," *Jewish Social Studies* 13, no.1 (2006): 170-206.

[42] Yaron Tsur and Hagar Hillel, *The Jews of Casablanca: Studies in the Modernization of the Political Elite in a Colonial Community* (Tel Aviv: Open University of Israel Press, 1995), 31-74 [Hebrew].

Morocco and the new educational and economic prospects that opened up mainly for the country's urban coastal communities.

At the turn of the nineteenth century though, the authors under study were schooled in traditional settings—from the *sla* (Morocco's c*heder*) to the yeshiva. Traditional Jewish education trained them as *talmidei hakhamim* (students of the sages) with the goal of proficiency in Jewish sources and in the moral values and demands of everyday religious practices. Their command of the sources' Hebrew language allowed them to read the Hebrew press and literature from Europe and the Land of Israel. Some of these authors received a secular education and studied foreign languages, mainly French, in non-formal educational setups: they could therefore read the press and literary books in a foreign language. This exposure to the press and to rabbinic and *Haskalah* literature in Hebrew, as well as to the press and literature in foreign languages, inspired their writing. They operated in traditional educational and public institutions and a strong link can be found between the subjects they explored as authors and their positions and public endeavors: as a community rabbi, Assabag propagated halakhic knowledge, while Elkrief, as a *talmid hakham*, popularized halakhic and moral knowledge; as Hebrew language proponents and Zionist activists, Nahmany and Bouskila disseminated Jewish topics—history, culture, and ideology.

These authors were not part of the Enlightenment circles operating in Morocco during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. [43] They shared some biographical characteristics with the Maskilim: they were based in coastal towns, they had elementary and advanced religious education, high proficiency in Hebrew and partial command of European languages. However, the Maskilim were born in the 1860s century and worked at the turn of the nineteenth century, a whole generation before the authors in question. Unlike the former, who were influenced by the Enlightenment movement, the latter were inspired by the Zionist movement at large, including the national Hebrew movement. Unlike the Maskilim, who published most of their writings in Hebrew newspapers based in

[43] Joseph Chetrit, "La haskala hébraïque dans le monde sepharade," in *Le monde sépharade*, vol. I. Histoire, ed. Shmuel Trigano (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2006), 745-809.

Europe, the authors discussed here printed their texts in Judeo-Arabic for a readership in Morocco. Nor did these authors belong to the westernized intellectual circles, whose members had been educated in French schools, and whose works were written in a European language, either French or Spanish, for a westernized and European readership.

The authors who wrote in Judeo-Arabic were part of an imagined community of *talmidei Hakhamim* and Maskilim of all the different communities of Israel throughout the ages, who composed and edited vernacular literature with the aim of making rabbinic and Haskalah literature accessible to the broad public of their communities. In the preface to his *Minha Belula*, Assabag cites the inspiration he derived from the books *Ya'arot Dvash* by Rav Jonathan Eybeschütz (eighteenth-century Poland) and *Pele Yo'etz*, by Rabbi Eliezer Papo (nineteenth century Ottoman Empire).[44] These two *talmidei hakhamim* translated books of halakha into their respective vernaculars, Yiddish and Ladino. In the opening of his book, Nahmany offers a translation of the introduction to *Derushim ve-homer le-drash* by his contemporary Rabbi Yitzchak Nissenbaum, which elaborates on the importance of publishing books that can be read by the general public.[45] The authors from Morocco cite no inspiration from Muslim countries in general, particularly from their native country, because vernacular-speaking printed literature was a new phenomenon in the Muslim world. Nor do any of them cite translations by Rabbi Joseph Knafo. Probably, they were not familiar with him, as his enterprise was local, based in the city of Essaouira, while the distribution of his books in other Moroccan towns was limited.[46] Nevertheless, in the approval by Rabbi Moshe Meir Hai Elyakim, Casablanca's rabbi, of Assabag's *Minha Belula*, he goes back to the Middle Ages, noting that Assabag continues the translation tradition ushered in by Rabbi Saadia Gaon and Maimonides.[47]

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[44] Assabag, *Belula*, 6.

[45] Nahmany, *Historiya*, 5-6.

[46] Abensour, "In Praise of the Multitude."

[47] Assabag, *Belula*, 3. Bar-Levav shows that Yiddish authors too made references to Maimonides's works in Judeo-Arabic to justify their translations. Bar-Levav, "Between the World of the Texts," 104.

The authors' status as a new elite hailing from the lower or middle class made them familiar with the spiritual and educational needs of their readers. Nahmany and Elkrief even positioned themselves as part of the readership, the masses, the beneficiaries of their books, rather than outside or above them. According to Elkrief, "Many people, like myself, are insufficiently proficient in the holy tongue,"[48] while Nahmany referred in his book to "the majority of our brethren, the masses like ourselves."[49] Their statements can arguably be read as hyperbolic platitudes: after all, unlike their target readership, the two were Maskilim with cultural capital, proficient in several languages. However, they did rise from the lower ranks of their community and were no strangers to them; they spoke and wrote in the vernacular, were conscious of the masses' needs and sought to carry out change with their books. In fact, these authors can be seen as bridges between different worlds of knowledge and sectors of the community.

Assabag was not born into a family of rabbis, where the title was inherited; he was part of an emerging rabbinic elite in Morocco. Born and educated in Marrakesh, Assabag attended the Rabbi Avraham Azoulay Yeshiva, headed by Rabbi Mordechai Kurkus. Ordained as rabbi, he accepted a post in the coastal community of Safi, where he founded the *Etz Chaim* yeshiva. Aware of his community's spiritual needs, when he chose to write books in Judeo-Arabic he broke ranks with the rabbinic elite. In the preface to his *Minha Belula*, he explains the limitations of rabbinic texts: "The rabbis of our generation, God bless them, have composed some grand treatises, whether by homiletic exegeses or by casuistry and collations of laws, where any passerby might find delight and eat and live forever, and yet it is only sages and *talmidim* who can study them, while the masses are left in the dark, and the books are beyond their reach."[50] He therefore found it important to leave the rabbinic ivory tower, "step outside my framework and come hither, for I have seen some souls who pine for a homily, as all is not lost for the people of Israel, for it is only that their hand is shortened and they cannot grasp."[51] Unlike the rabbinic elite, who wrote and published rabbinic literature in

[48] Elkrief, *Hemed*, 12.
[49] Nahmany, *Historiya*, 7.
[50] Assabag, *Belula*, 6.
[51] Ibid., 5.

Hebrew, Assabag published books exclusively in Judeo-Arabic, and in fact made the choice of engaging in educational discourse with the wider public, while shunning all intellectual discourse with his peers.

The educational ideal of these Judeo-Arabic booklets established a standard that can be met by all, rather than an ideal level of knowledge only attainable by a handful. In the preface to his *Minha Belula*, Assabag explains that he chose to write in Judeo-Arabic for the "Israelite youth uninitiated in the light of Torah, so they may have a door to usher them into the light of the Torah and piety." In other words, he followed educational considerations. Bouskila seeks to initiate learners into the light of religious Jewish culture by translating *Agaddah* literature from Hebrew into Judeo-Arabic, and "sow the lofty moral and human virtues in the heart of the Jewish readership and instill therein the love of the Torah and its language."[52] In the preface to the book, he seeks to counter opposition from the older target readership, who may claim to be too old to learn, with the story of Rabbi Akiva, who only embarked on his Torah studies after turning forty, to become a great sage with many disciples.

A key element in the authors' educational ideology is the expansion of Jewish literacy's reach beyond select elites and its spread into new ranks across the community. These authors sought to allow the wider public access to knowledge hitherto stored in books either in Hebrew or French, to be mediated by elite groups. Direct, unmediated reading facilitated learning religious or national contents, unassisted by mediators.[53] Nahmany specifically notes in the opening to his book that he translated it so that readers or listeners in Arabic did not have to rely on anyone else—"find someone to read and interpret it into Arabic, their spoken tongue."[54] This ideal is amply reflected in Assabag's prefaces to his books.

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[52] Bouskila, *Toledot*, 5.

[53] Avriel Bar-Levav claims that small books published in Yiddish "helped 'little people' and 'little women' to harness the ritual act themselves, independent of the Shaliach Tzibbur (master of congregation ceremonies) or the collective Siddur." See Avriel Bar-Levav, "Solace of the Soul: Printed Prayers, Small Books and the Jewish Ritual Place," in *The Way of the Book: A Tribute to Zeev Gries*, eds. Avriel Bar-Levav et al. (Jerusalem: Carmel Publishing House, 2021), 299-314 [Hebrew].

[54] Nahmany, *Historiya*, 7.

He opens the preface to his *Minha Belula* with an allegory that aims to explain the exclusion of the masses in the Jewish communities from the treasures of Hebrew textual culture: a city's gatekeepers that reserve access to the vineyards and orchards, with their galore of fruit, for the rich, leaving the poor ones out: "And one of the poor did rise," elaborates Assabag, "and zealous for the Lord, he said why should the poor be deprived of this delight, consigned to collecting pittance from the homes of the generous, and he bought a mirror to be placed opposite the garden, for the miserable to stare and marvel and take joy at the sight inside the garden, if full or with a glimpse thereof."[55] This "one of the poor" is Assabag himself, as well as the other authors, whose books allow access, albeit vicarious, to the Jewish spiritual treasures that are the preserve of the elites, leaving the masses out. Assabag's action of expropriating knowledge from the rabbinic elite back to the people may have stirred opposition among Morocco's rabbinic class, in a similar way to the reception of vernacular rabbinic literature among rabbinic elites in other communities,[56] but I found no trace of it. On the contrary, the approvals extended by rabbis in the openings of his books point to their support of his knowledge-propagation project and attest that they deemed it vital to grant access to the masses to this religious knowledge, in an age that saw secularization processes become widespread.

## Rejecting the Observance of the Commandments and the Counter-response of Judeo-Arabic Literature

The authors at the heart of this article all published their books in Atlantic coastal cities (particularly in Casablanca), which started to experience significant changes in the early twentieth century. As the French Protectorate came into force in 1912, Morocco's coastal towns enjoyed an economic surge, with a developing modern economy, including industry and agriculture. Casablanca became the economic hub of Morocco: from a small fishing village with a Muslim quarter and a small Jewish neighborhood, it turned into a modern port city with new residential

[55] Assabag, *Belula*, 6.

[56] On the rabbinic elite opposition to vernacular literature, see Bar-Levav, "Between the World of the Texts," 104-105; Lehmann, *Ladino,* 44-45; Abensour, "In Praise of the Multitude."

quarters and a bustling commercial center. Shops, workshops, entertainment venues, cafes, cinemas, and hotels opened in the city for the first time. Alongside the migration to Morocco, internal migration to coastal cities began, including massive immigration of Jews from central Moroccan cities and villages, particularly to Casablanca, in search of new economic opportunities. The Jewish community in Casablanca, numbering just 5,000 in the early twentieth century, boasted by the middle of the century about 80,000 people, making up almost a third of all Moroccan Jews.[57]

The coastal cities, particularly Casablanca, saw the beginning of new trends of secularization, or rather a trend of rejecting "the yoke of the commandments." The secularization process in Morocco, as in other Muslim countries, was unlike those experienced by Jewish communities in Europe, with no dichotomous distinction between orthodoxy and secularization. Among Jews of Muslim countries, secularization processes and their reception were more akin to those experienced by the majority Muslim society. In these countries, religion was a holistic concept, drawing on strong faith and grounded in a theologically-binding text; it was integral to society and politics. Individuals who adopted a secular lifestyle renounced strict observance, but not their faith in God or their ties to the religious, familial tradition and its fundamental beliefs. Scholars define secularism in Muslim countries as conservative or fluid, and their religion as moderated or modular.[58] Muslim countries harboured coexistent secular and religious Jewish cultures, with no signs of separatism, though with a call for t*iqqun*, restoration, by the rabbinic elite, who were losing traction. Rabbis introduced regulations, wrote halakha rulings to help tackle modern realities, and established religious

[57] Andre Adam, *Casablanca: Essai sur la transformation de la société marocaine au contact de l'Occident* (Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1972).

[58] Avriel Bar-Levav, "Secularization and the Jews in Islamic Countries," in *Secularism and Secularization: Interdisciplinary Studies*, ed. Yochi Fischer (Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute Press, 2015), 170-196 [Hebrew]. Moshe Shokeid, "The Religiosity of Middle Eastern Jews," in *The Sociology of Religion in Israel: Israeli Judais,* eds., Shlomo Deshen et al. (New Brunswick :Transaction Publishers, 1995), 213-238; For a general discussion on the phenomenon of secularization in Judaism and the need to characterize it according to the discussions within different communities, see the introduction of Ari Joskowicz and Ethan B. Katz, eds., *Secularism in Question: Jews and Judaism in Modern Times* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

institutes to reinforce Torah studies, while maintaining an ongoing dialogue among themselves as well as with community committees and the regime.[59]

Nonfiction in Judeo-Arabic was another tool fashioned by *talmidei hakhamim* and *Maskilim* to counter the secularization and religion renunciation trends. The authors and the authorities who approved their work reacted to these prevailing trends across the community. Rabbi Avraham Abuchatzeira wrote in his approval of *Hemed Bahurim* that "It is a marvellous work and wonder indeed that in our generations, many do break the law in iniquity."[60] Assabag in turn elaborated on the secularization trend in the opening of his *Minha Belula*:

> Surely the people are grass, incited by urges. Enticed by pleasure, they pin their salvation and wishes to the Zuz (Jewish coin). They turn their back, not their face, to the Torah. They became her enemies, exchanging her glory [...] and they heed to the vanity of their mouths and gather wind in their palms and believe in the falsehood, for their hands have found many pearls and they are wise in their own eyes, and what is wisdom to them and prudent in their own sight and have not the understanding of a man, and they fancy themselves to don the light of enlightenment as they do their clothes and find crooked all that was straight and draw after them the majority of youth, the lofty people of the land and its nobles, and they dim the splendor of wisdom to replace it with false wisdom, to cut the reins of morals and ditch the reins of honest morals [...].[61]

Assabag refers to some sections of Morocco's society as "grass," after Isaiah 40:7, where "grass" denotes the prophet's dismay at the people's low spiritual merit. Assabag likewise argues that the people are grass, having turned their backs on the

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[59] For the rabbinic elite's attitudes to secularization processes and the trend of rejecting the yoke of commandments in Muslim countries, see Zvi Zohar, "Sephardic Rabbinic Responses to Modernity: Some Central Characteristics," in *Jews among Muslims: Communities in the Precolonial Middle East* , eds. Shlomo Deshen and Walter P. Zenner (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1996): 64-80; Avi Sagi and Zvi Zohar, *Circles of Jewish Identity: A Study in Halakhic Literature* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2000) [Hebrew].

[60] Elkrief, *Hemed*, 7.

[61] Assabag, *Belula*, 5.

Torah in favor of lust, pleasures, and money. He cites general education, with which many sections of the community were enthralled: the majority of youth across social classes, both rich and poor. Elkrief, Nahmany, and Bouskila also cite the young as the target readership of their books and seek to strike them with their teachings while they are hot and malleable.[62]

Secularization processes in Morocco gained pace from the early twentieth century, for internal and external reasons addressed by the authors in their books.[63] First, internal migration processes meant that leadership groups in the original communities had their authority undermined, along with the family setup. Over in the big cities, Jews interacted with western and eastern foreign cultures, in the cafes and through the press, literature, cinema, etc. The authors' prefaces offer examples of the trend: Bouskila notes that some sections of Jewish society read non-Jewish literature in Judeo-Arabic: "Many of our brethren enthusiastically, assiduously, pore over books in Arabic (in Hebrew alphabet) about the tales of the legendary knights and heroes."[64] Elkrief reveals a new leisure culture: young people out for day trips on the Sabbath, during hours previously dedicated to Torah study.[65] Moreover, the colonial rule had legal and social implications for individual Jews and the structure of the Jewish community: dwindling Jewish elites, integration in the job market, the colonial society and culture. These often meant breaking away from the community setup.[66] Finally, there was modern education—the Alliance Israélite Universelle, which would establish a Jewish education network across Jewish communities in Muslim countries, opened its first school in Tétouan, northern Morocco, in 1862. The network expanded over the years into most cities in Morocco and after World War II, gained a hold even in villages in the south of the kingdom. These schools shaped students' worldviews, with European—or more precisely, French—values, language, and

[62] Elkrief, *Hemed*, 11; Nahmany, Historiya, 7; Bouskila, *Toledot*, 5.

[63] About the reasons for secularization in Muslim countries in general, see Bar-Levav, "Secularization."

[64] Bouskila, *Toledot*, 6.

[65] Elkrief, *Hemed*, 11.

[66] Schroeter and Chetrit, "Emancipation and Its Discontents."

culture, which meant rejecting the yoke of commandments and growing farther away from religious and national Jewish culture.[67]

## Jewish Nationalism

Some of the Judeo-Arabic literature printed in Morocco is tightly linked to the Jewish national consciousness and Zionist activities in the kingdom, that started in the early twentieth century. The first Zionist associations were founded in the cities of Essaouira, Tétouan, Safi, and Fez. These associations engaged in propaganda and fundraising for the various national funds. The Balfour Declaration in November 1917 led to a resumed expansion of Zionist activities in Morocco, venturing into many communities. The colonial regime took a negative approach to those associations and would not allow them to operate legally, as they viewed Zionism as a rival element that vied for the local Jewish minority's loyalty and generally strove to stem any national unionization, whether Jewish or Muslim. The associations therefore sheltered under the Zionist Federation of France and their activities were restricted to propaganda and fundraising, which meant a small presence in the public sphere.

In late 1923, Jonathan Thursz, an immigrant from England, establish a Zionist cell of local activists in Casablanca, and fund-raised for Shekel, Keren Hayesod and the Jewish National Fund, while also running Zionist propaganda. A significant change in the situation of the Zionist organization in the country occurred with the National Conference of Morocco's Zionists in January 1936. The conference established a main organizational framework that represented the major urban communities and plotted a policy for a local Jewish organization: its institutions were elected and an action plan was laid out to collect money for the Jewish National Fund, Keren Hayesod and for the Shekel's trade, as well as for propaganda and Hebrew education. Zionist activities in Morocco, which started

[67] Michael M. Laskier, *The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Jewish Communities of Morocco, 1862-1962* (Albany, 1983); Aomar Boum, "Schooling in the Bled: Jewish Education and the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Southern Rural Morocco, 1830-1962," *Journal of Jewish Identities* 3, no.1 (2010): 1-24.

flourishing in the 1930s, were cut short by the second world war. In June 1946, the tradition was resumed and the annual conference of Morocco's Zionists took place in Casablanca with more than 50 representatives standing for thousands of members from ten major communities in the kingdom. Once the State of Israel was founded, a Zionist association was established in virtually every large or medium-sized community in Morocco.[68]

The authors at the heart of this article were key elements of the Zionist activities in Casablanca. In 1919, Elkrief was a co-founder of the Zionist society of *Magen David* for the propagation of Hebrew language and culture, where he remained an active member until after the second world war. Nahmany was a member of the society's managing committee from the mid-1930s and following the second world war, established the *Hoveve ha-safa* society for the propagation of Hebrew. He also opened an informal Hebrew school in his own home. Nahmany identified with Religious Zionist convictions and became one of the Mizrachi movement's leaders in Morocco. Bouskila attended *Magen David's* school. After graduation, he taught at the *Em ha-banim* school and after the war headed *Magen David*'s Hebrew club. The club hosted a weekly *'oneg Shabat* (Joy of the Sabbath) activity, combining talks and sing-alongs with Hebrew lessons and an annual literary competition. At the same time, Nahmany was a leader in Morocco's *Poale Zion* movement. Bouskila further served as co-founder of the Hebrew teachers' association after the war, an institution that sought to change Hebrew teachers' professional and economic status in Morocco.[69]

Their books popularized knowledge on halakha, ethics, culture and history, while explaining their importance in terms of national reasons. The preface and back cover of Nahmany's book feature a key phrase that encapsulates his national conviction: "Just as it is every nation's duty to know its history and the history of

[68] Ample literature explores the Zionist movement in North Africa, particularly in Morocco. See for example: Michel Abitbol, "Zionist Activity in the Maghreb," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 21 (1981): 61-84; Michael M. Laskier, *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century: The Jews of Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria* (New York: New York University Press, 1994); Yaron Tsur, *A Torn Community: Moroccan Jews and Nationalism, 1943-1954* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2001) [Hebrew].
[69] About the authors' Zionist activities, see *A Torn Community.*

its forefathers, so must we know our history and the history of our forefathers."[70] Albeit acknowledging the importance of the past, for Nahmany, teaching history was not driven by theological and religious motives, but rather grounded in the will to enlighten the wider public and forge a Jewish national identity by revealing the Jewish people's past and charting the Jewish continuum over generations. Constructing a shared past, Nahmany incorporated propaganda materials in the second part of his book, advocating for the Zionist movement and the importance of making aliyah. As noted before, he translated into Judeo-Arabic parts of the speech by Rabbi Yitzhak Nissenbaum, one of the first thinkers of Religious Zionism and the Mizrachi movement, entitled "The Reasons Why a Jew Must Be a Zionist," included in his *Derushim ve-homer le-drash* (1902).[71] The choice of this text goes back to Nahmany's identification with Mizrachi ideologies, as well as with the religious language and values woven into Nissenbaum's essay. He further translated a collection of *Midrashim* on the Land and its settlement, the love of the Land and its Torah, from different Talmudic treatises and *Midrashim* books. Nahmany clearly wrapped up traditional texts in Zionist propaganda, while employing a religious language, familiar to his readership, to advocate for the Land of Israel and aliyah.

In his *Hemed Bahurim*, Elkrief describes the Magen David's mission of spreading the knowledge of Hebrew, as part of which he published the book. His text forges an unbreakable link between Hebrew and the national idea, by employing religious language. Elkrief translated the national message into a religious language and terminology, so that readers might grasp and accept the new ideas. Accordingly, Hebrew figures as the "holy tongue," while the necessity of a single language for the Jewish collective draws on Hebrew sources as "the precious tongue of our fathers, the holy prophets, and ourselves," alongside a quote from the Book of Esther and another one from the sages: "There is no nation without language."[72] Elkrief's spatial perception was not community-based; it was neither about Casablanca nor Morocco, but drew on the entire Jewish Diaspora. The Jewish People were dispersed across the nations, speaking different tongues,

[70] Nahmany, *Historiya*, 7.
[71] Nissenbaum, *Derushim*.
[72] Elkrief, *Hemed*, 51-52.

therefore it was necessary for Hebrew to serve as a linguistic, cultural inter-community bridge. Aware of the Zionist activities and the rise of the Hebrew language and culture in Europe and the Land of Israel, Elkrief called upon his community to join the movement's ranks.

Bouskila sought to forge a national Jewish identity and instill knowledge of Hebrew through exposure to the spiritual and cultural treasures of Judaism. In the preface to his book, he calls upon Judeo-Arabic readers to learn Hebrew, so that they may read literature of all times. He deemed the book a gateway to spiritual richness that the reader might expand by delving into the Jewish bookshelf in Hebrew. He enlists Rabbi Meir b'al ha-nes: "Whoever occupies himself with the Torah for its own sake, merits many things; not only that but he is worth the whole world. He is called beloved friend; one that loves God; one that loves humankind; one that gladdens God; one that gladdens humankind." He then adds: "And if my booklet serves to spark in our brethren the Sons of Israel the desire and passion to learn the Hebrew language and Torah, this shall be my reward, for this is my sole purpose."[73] By means of Judeo-Arabic literature, Bouskila sought to encourage Hebrew learning. He incorporated an essay in his book, "A Word for Hebrew Teachers in Rabat and Sale," where he expounded his ideological and national-pedagogic views and expressed his appreciation of the Hebrew he had heard spoken by students at *Bate Midrash* seminaries in Rabat and Sale, stressing the importance of venturing into audiences other than yeshiva and Talmud Torah students, or groups whom he thought disregarded their national language, including the men, women and youth who attended Alliance Israélite Universelle schools and swore by French.[74]

## Conclusion

The article is a first of its kind exploration of the Judeo-Arabic popular nonfiction printed in Morocco between the early twentieth century and the 1960s in the form

[73] Bouskila, *Toledot*, 6.
[74] Ibid., 7-10.

of single pages, pamphlets or small books. This literature provided readers with knowledge pertaining to the halakha, ethics, culture, history, and Zionist ideology, so as to strengthen religious Jewish identity and national identity. The beginning of this literature in early twentieth century Morocco followed the convergence of four historic processes: the opening of the first printing houses opening in Morocco in the early twentieth century, which allowed to print locally-flavored books and generated a new readership; the rise of new elites (including the authors studied here) who were attuned to the needs of their community, set against the dwindling old Jewish oligarchy; the growing trends of rejecting the yoke of commandments and the secularization processes, both unique to Jewries in Muslim countries; and the emergence of a nationalist Jewish consciousness, including Zionist activities.

The development of this popular, vernacular, Judeo-Arabic literature can be seen as an attempt to articulate a vision of modernity in a distinctly Moroccan form. Lucette Valensi's study offers an overview of multiple Jewish modernities across North Africa, including a variety of cultural programs that were in evidence from the nineteenth century: the adoption of Western cultural components, modified to accommodate local cultures; participation in the Hebrew Haskalah movement and later the Jewish national movement, including the new Hebrew culture; the shaping of an Orthodox Jewish culture, inspired by interactions with other Jewish communities; and the creation of a new Judeo-Arabic written culture in literature and journalism, inspired by Muslim Arab, Eastern and Western European Jewish cultures.[75]

This last trajectory of modernity also includes the nonfiction published in Morocco early in the twentieth century. A distinct sector of the Jewish community in Morocco experienced modernization processes in Judeo-Arabic, marked by a religious and nationalistic Jewish orientation. This trajectory of modernity coincides with the conclusions of Daniel Schroeter, who has shown that Jews in Muslim countries continued to observe the commandments and uphold

[75] See Valensi's comprehensive article: Lucette Valensi, "Multicultural Visions: The Cultural Tapestry of the Jews of North Africa," in *Cultures of the Jews: A New History,* ed. David Biale (New York: Scjocken Books, 2002), 887-931.

community and family values even as they underwent processes of modernization.[76]

The authors who published nonfiction literature in Morocco during the first half of the twentieth century were of Jewish, religious and nationalist dispositions. With their books, they sought to disseminate religious and nationalist ideas, in order to erect walls around the community. In their works they struck a synergy between religion and Zionism, which meant religion brought readers who had been spared modernization processes closer to the modern Zionist movement. Zionism had no interest in undermining Judaism as a parameter of national affiliation. Anthony Smith associates Zionism with a rather uncommon brand of nationalism—diasporic nationalism. The uniqueness of this type of nationalism lies in its emergence among diasporic minorities, while its main purpose is to generate a return movement to the diasporic people's land of origin. The essential link between the return movement and the destination of this migration is usually provided by religion, which points to the chosen territory. Thus a strong affinity is established between religion on the one hand and nationalism on the other, as shaped by the authors in their books, with the purpose of influencing their readership.[77]

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[76] Daniel Schroeter, "A Different Road to Modernity: Jewish Identity in the Arab World," in *Diasporas and Exiles: Varieties of Jewish Identity*, ed. Howard Wettstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 150-163.

[77] Anthony. D. Smith, "Introduction: The Formation of Nationalist Movements," in *Nationalist Movements*, ed. Anthony D. Smith (London: Macmillan, 1976), 12-13. Yaron Tsur, "The Religious Factor in the Encounter between Zionism and the Rural Atlas Jews," in *Zionism and Religion*, eds. Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinharz, and Anita Shapira (Hanover: Brandeis University Press 1998), 312-329.

Visual and literary images of Jews from Muslim countries in their native lands and in Israel.
His first book, *The Hebrew Culture in Morocco*, explores the Attitudes of Moroccan Jewry toward the Hebrew language and the building of Hebrew culture during the colonial period (1912-1956). Currently he is working on a monograph tentatively titled: The development and modernization of a Jewish polyglot book culture in twentieth century Morocco.

**Keywords:** Morocco, Books, Printing Press, Secularization, Nationalism

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# Solidarity Among Colonial Subjects in Wartime Libya, 1940-1943

by *Livia Tagliacozzo*

## Abstract

*During World War II, Jews in Libya faced persecution and adversity. In response, Muslim individuals often became aides to the Jews, driven by economic reward, shared benefits, and genuine empathy. Examining the manner Jews and Muslims interacted in these circumstances sheds light on the complex relationship between the two communities, influenced by factors such as religious affiliation, connections to the regime, and personal interests. The fascist regime's differential policies towards the two communities over two decades also played a role in shaping this relationship, sometimes causing conflict between the communities, but also leading to a shared sense of opposition to the Italians following common experiences of persecution.*



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## Introduction

Under Italy's colonial control of Libya, the daily lives of Jews and Muslims, as well as the persecution of the two communities, were deeply intertwined.[1] This connection, however, is seldom considered, even with the recent growth of interest in the repression of colonial subjects by an Italy driven by Fascist ideology, domestic and foreign politics, and economic and social interests.[2] This article examines the solidarity between Libyan Jews and Muslims during the Second

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[1] A 1936 general population census, conducted by the Istituto Generale di Statistica del Regno d'Italia and expanding upon the census of 1931, divided Libya's population into four categories: Italian nationals, foreign, assimilated and population of Libya. In addition to these also the indigenous cohabitants of the latter were registered in terms of religion, race, language, tribe etc. Some categories of people were to be considered *assimilati agli stranieri* (assimilated to the foreigners): Maltese and their descendants, Armenians, Indians; Muslims and Jews with foreign nationality who were born on foreign territory that were neither colonies nor protectorates; the stateless and non-indigenous and their descendants. To be instead considered as *assimilati ai metropolitani* (assimilated to the metropolitan citizens), were the Libyan Muslims and Jews holding Italian citizenship since the Ottoman Empire or following Royal Decrees and Italian subjects of the Aegean islands, belonging to any religion. The census also included Muslims and Jews of foreign nationality who were born in other colonies and moved to Libya, as well as Muslims and Jews who by birth or origin "belonged" to Libyan territory but were foreign subjects. The 1936 census highlights various aspects of the population, including territorial distribution, sex, age, civil status, occupation, religion, and race ("*araba, berbera, arabo-berbera, negra, razze varie dell'Africa Orientale, altre*"). Jews were included not as both a racial category and as a distinct religious group that was referred to as either *ebrei* or *israeliti*. The 1931 census specified that the "Jewish race" was omitted because Jews are already distinguished by religion and were therefore considered under the "others" category. Significantly, the 1931 census, which was not published until 1935, also mentions the decade-long decline, by 43,455 individuals of the Muslim population of Cyrenaica, without, unsurprisingly, disclosing the reasons for it. According to that same census, the Jewish community of Libya consisted of around 25,000 individuals, with over half living in Tripoli and the next largest concentration in Benghazi. According to the 1938 census, the resident population of Libya was 95% Muslim, 3.9% Jewish and 1.1% Coptic, meaning Eritrean *askaris* temporarily stationed in the colony. Istituto Generale di Statistica del Regno d'Italia, *VII Censimento Generale della Popolazione* (Roma: Tipografia Failli, 1935), 30; Istituto Generale di Statistica del Regno d'Italia, *VIII Censimento Generale della Popolazione* (Roma: Tipografia Failli, 1939).

[2] On Italian colonialism, see Giorgio Rochat, *Il colonialismo italiano* (Turin: Loescher, 1973); Angelo Del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Libia* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1986-1988); Angelo Del Boca, "La repressione in Libia," *Studi piacentini* 2 (1987): 31-44; and Nicola Labanca, ed., *Un nodo. Immagini e documenti sulla repressione coloniale italiana in Libia* (Manduria: Lacaita, 2002).

World War.[3] I argue that the specific policy of violence adopted by the regime in its *posto al sole* (place in the sun) sheds light on some aspects of the continuity of the fascist policy of violence in the colony, and the triangular relations these policies entailed. I will show how wartime acts of solidarity between the Muslim majority and the Jewish minority were informed by the two communities' experiences of coexistence and persecution and took the form of providing shelter, food, and security.

As Italy joined the Second World War in early June 1940, Libya's strategic position made it a major hotspot of belligerent activity. The war reshuffled the priorities of the Fascist regime in the colony and affected its handling of the local Jewish minority. Between 1940 and 1943, Libyan Jews turned into targets of radicalized antisemitic legislation, endured the physical attacks of settlers and Italian colonial personnel, and were subjected to forced labor and deportation to camps in the colony and abroad.[4] These anti-Jewish measures, along with the shadow of war and the increasing radicalization of Fascist rule between 1940 and 1943, affected relations between local Jews and Muslims.[5] Both groups faced similar challenges,

[3] The paucity of research in this area is highlighted by the increasing interest in the common experiences of Jews and Muslims in colonial environments as well as the growing overlap between studies of genocide, Shoah and colonialism. For examples, see Mehnaz Afridi, *Shoah Through Muslim Eyes* (Boston: Academic Publishing Press, 2006); Ethan Katz, Lisa Moses Leff, and Maud S. Mandel, eds., *Colonialism and the Jews* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017); Ethan Katz, *The Burdens of Brotherhood* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2015); and Norman H. Gershman, *Besa: Muslims who saved Jews During World War II* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2018). In addition, studies on the North African Campaign continue to raise questions over the contextualization of the dynamics of violence and memory, see: Nicola Labanca, David Reynolds, and Olivier Wieiorka, eds., *The Desert War 1940-1943* (Rome: Perrin, 2019).

[4] On the Jews of Libya during the Second World War, see Renzo De Felice, *Ebrei in un paese arabo. Gli ebrei nella Libia contemporanea tra colonialismo, nazionalismo arabo e sionismo 1835–1975* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1978); Irit Abramski-Bligh, ed., *Pinkas ha-kehilot, Luv–Tunisya: Entsiklopedyah shel ha-yishuvim ha-yehudim le-min hivasdam ve-ad le-ahar shoat milhemet ha-olam ha-shniyah* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1997); Liliana Picciotto, "Gli ebrei in Libia sotto la dominazione italiana," in *Ebraismo e rapporti con le culture del Mediterraneo nei secoli XVIII–XX*, ed. Martino Contu (Florence: Giuntina, 2003), 79-106; Maurice M. Roumani, *The Jews of Libya: Coexistence, Persecution, Resettlement* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2008); Rachel Simon, "It could have happened there: the Jews of Libya during the Second World War," *Africana Journal* 16 (1994): 391-422; Eric Salerno, *Uccideteli tutti. Libia 1943. Gli ebrei nel campo di concentramento fascista di Giado. Una storia italiana* (Milan: Saggiatore, 2007).

[5] On Jewish relations with Muslims during the Second World War, see Patrick Bernhard, "Behind the Battle Lines: Italian Atrocities and the Persecution of Arabs, Berbers, and Jews in North Africa

including economic hardship, political limitations, and violent attacks encouraged by a racist ideology.[6] In this context, the small Jewish population became increasingly dependent on the support of the Muslim majority. That support, however, was uncertain. Some local Muslims actively collaborated with Italian authorities or found other ways to take advantage of the situation, and many were simply passive observers or preoccupied with their own difficulties.[7]

This article examines the ways in which Muslims identified with Jews or collaborated with the Italians and explores the role of self-interest in Jewish-Muslim relations. These interactions are set against the backdrop of colonialism and the Fascist regime's official treatment of Jews and Muslims, both before and during the war, since these issues affected the way in which the communities related to one another.[8] Concentration camps, displacements, violence, and racism

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during World War II," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 26, no. 3 ( 2012): 425-446; Irit Abramski-Bligh, "L'influence de la Seconde Guerre mondiale sur les relations judéo-arabes en Libye et en Tunisie," *Revue d'Histoire de la Shoah* 205 (2016): 317-353; Harvey Goldberg, "Itinerant Jewish Peddlers in Tripolitania at the End of the Ottoman Period and under Italian Rule," in *Jewish life in Muslim Libya. Rivals and relatives* (Chicago-London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 68-81; Robert Satloff, *Among the Righteous: Lost stories from the Holocaust's long reach into Arab lands* (New York: Public Affairs, 2006).

[6] Bernhard, "Behind the Battle Lines," 425-446.

[7] Both Muslims and Jews exhibited a wide spectrum of behaviors, including indifference. Relevant here is Rothberg's concept of the "implicated subject," which transcends the binary of active and passive and rejects the neat categorization into subjects, victims, bystanders and perpetrators, Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019). Rothberg pushes us to reflect on the role that individuals play in propagating the historical structures and legacies of violence. While his context is the pursuit of justice, his framework is helpful in considering the entanglements among different groups in racist and violent settings. In light of this rejection of black-and-white thinking, it is worth noting that despite this paper's focus on the help *received* by Jews, Jews also *provided* support, not just to one another but also to their Muslim neighbors.

[8] Although I speak of Muslims and Jews as two distinct groups, in reality they were neither isolated from one another nor internally cohesive. A complete picture would consider the manner in which elements such as socioeconomic standing or geographic location affected the relations between the two communities as well as the relations between each community and the colonial authorities. As it turns out, coming into contact with Italians created further splits within each community, neither of which was homogeneous at the outset. De Felice distinguishes between a minority of wealthy, Europeanized Jews, both foreign and Libyan-born, who felt an active concern over Italy's interventions, and a majority of traditional Jews who remained indifferent. Harvey Goldberg stresses the economic and cultural split that Italian colonization created among the Jews of Tripoli, Simone Bakchine-Dumont examines the relations between Italian and Tripolitanian Jews during

produced tremendous divisions among Libya's population during the Fascist *ventennio*, but they also forged significant links between Muslims and Jews and gave rise to concrete acts of support. To analyze these phenomena, this article considers Jews and Muslims within a single analytical framework and makes use of Jewish witness testimonies as well as official documents of the Italian regime.[9]

## Shifting Fascist Policy: Jews as the Fifth Column of the Fourth Shore (1938-1943)

Three days after the March on Rome, Mussolini met with the Governor of Tripolitania, Giuseppe Volpi, to stress the urgency of the reconquest of Libya for Italy's political prestige and economic prosperity.[10] With the Pacification of Libya, the territory became a testing ground for Fascist Italy's policies of control, including deportation, internment, and most infamously the use of chemical gasses, dropped by air, on civilians.[11] By 1934, following twenty years of fighting

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the colonial period, and Anna Baldinetti shows how Italian rule had a different impact on Muslim elites in Tripolitania than on the Sanusiyya of Cyrenaica.
Harvey Goldberg, "The Jewish community of Tripoli in relation to Italian Jewry and Italians in Tripoli," in *Les relations intercommunautaires juives en méditerranée occidentale. XIII^e-XX^e siècles,* ed. Institut d'études africaines (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 1984), 79-89; Simone Bakchine-Dumont, "Les relations entre les Juifs italiens et les Juifs libyens pendant la période coloniale," in *Les relations intercommunautaires juives en méditerranée occidentale*, 90-98; Simone Bakchine-Dumont, "Les Relations Entre Juifs Italiens et Juifs Tripolitains de 1911 à 1924," *La Rassegna Mensile Di Israel* 49, no. 1/4 (1983): 298-311; Anna Baldinetti, "Italian colonial rule and muslim elites in Libya: a relationship of antagonism and collaboration," in *Guardians of Faith in Modern Times: 'Ulama' in the Middle East* (Leiden-Boston: Brill:, 2009), 91-108. For a background on Jewish customs and traditions, see Mordechai Coen, *Gli Ebrei in Libia: Usi e Costumi* (Florence: Giuntina, 1994).

[9] Since few written sources are available, oral history is essential to any study of the experiences and perceptions of the Libyan Jewish population during periods of persecution. Oral sources are similarly critical for understanding the experiences of the Arab population during Italian rule, especially in non-urban areas, where illiteracy was widespread. Recognizing the value of these sources, archives in Europe, Libya, the United States and Israel have collected thousands of recordings regarding the Italian colonial period. For a discussion of the uses and challenges of Libyan oral history as a source for historians, see Eileen Ryan, "Essay on Sources: Memories of Resistance in Libyan Oral History," in *Religion as Resistance: Negotiating Authority in Italian Libya* (New York: Oxford Academic, 2018), 174-182.

[10] Giuseppe Volpi, *La Politica Coloniale del Fascismo* (Padova: CEDAM, 1937), 12.

[11] Italy is also infamous for being the first country to use airplanes for military purposes; the first occasion took place in Libya in 1911, under Corporal Carlo Piazza. In addition, Italy was responsible

against the anti-colonial resistance, the Italian regime declared Cyrenaica pacified. Italy achieved that outcome by following a "policy of prestige"[12]—which entailed the deportation of over 110,000 nomads and semi-nomads to sixteen concentration camps, as well as the death of 60,000-70,000 individuals and about 600,000 animals.[13] In the decade that followed the pacification, Italy changed its policy toward Muslims,[14] giving them access to special citizenship,[15] recruiting their youth into Italian military ranks,[16] and offering an ostensibly protectionist

for the first aerial bombardment, the launching of a record four bombs by Lieutenant Giulio Gavotti (b. 1882, Genova) at Ain Zahra on November 1, 1911. Thomas Hippler, *Bombing the People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1-2.

[12] As Giuseppe Volpi, Governor of Tripolitania explained, the Fascist policy of prestige was meant as a "government action that gives to the subject populations—clearly and unequivocally—not only the feeling of our military superiority, but also the conviction that we are determined to make use of this superiority, always and wherever necessary. [It was also meant to show] that we, in addition to military superiority, have also and above all a moral superiority that derives from the value and strength of our historical traditions and from the greatness of the civilizing process that Italy has fulfilled for centuries… as relentless to punish as to reward," Volpi, *La Politica Coloniale del Fascismo*, 13; Eileen Ryan, "Violence and the Politics of Prestige: The Fascist Turn in Colonial Libya," *Modern Italy* 20, no.2 (2015): 123-135.

[13] Estimates on the number of victims vary. See, Giorgio Rochat, "La Repressione della Resistenza in Cirenaica 1927-1931" in *Omar al-Mukhtar e la Riconquista Fascista della Libia* (Milan: Marzorati, 1981); Angelo Del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Libia. Dal Fascismo a Gheddafi* (Milan: Oscar Mondadori, 2010); Nicola Labanca, *La guerra italiana per la Libia 1911-1931* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2012); Ali Abudllatif Ahmida, *Genocide in Libya. Shar, A Hidden Colonial History* (London-New York Routledge, 2021).

[14] Italy's policy toward Muslims was influenced by its increasing mistrust of the British, and that policy, in turn, influenced Italy's position on Zionism. For more on the subject, see Renzo De Felice, "Il sionismo e la politica estera fascista," in *Storia degli ebrei Italiani sotto il fascismo vol. 1* (Turin: Mondadori, 1977), 194-220.

[15] Special citizenship could be extended because of Libya's inclusion in the Kingdom of Italy, as stated by Royal Decree No.70 of January 9, 1939: "Aggregazione delle Quattro Provincie Libiche al territorio del regno d'Italia e concessione ai Libici musulmani di una cittadinanza Italiana speciale con statuto personale e successorio musulmano," Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia No.28, February 3, 1939, 584.

[16] Muslim natives between the ages of 17 and 30 who had never served in the military were required to serve by the Governor General of Libya in the Libya Military Division. Ensuring that this service occurred was clearly not an easy feat. The colonial authorities lacked a registry of names, much of the target population led a nomadic lifestyle, and the territory in question was vast. Italian documents indicate that out of 8,000 men to be recruited only 6,000 actually showed up, and of these 1,400 were subsequently dismissed because of physical incapacity or family circumstances. Significantly, according to Italian reports, the recruitment that did occur was enabled by the cooperation of native tribal leaders. These cabila heads and mudir were encouraged by pro-Italian sentiment, by the Abyssinian experience of war, and, to a smaller extent, by the droughts that

policy within the colonial regime.[17] This last point was epitomized in 1937, when Benito Mussolini declared himself Protector of Islam (*Hāmī al-Islām*).[18]

Following the pacification, Libya's Jews were no longer a marginal issue. The regime began to see an inherent link between its policy toward Jews and its policy toward Arabs,[19] and what were once disinterested and infrequent interventions in Jewish affairs gave way to direct, hard-line interference.[20] This shift coincided with the deterioration of the government's relationship with the Jewish community, largely a result of the Sabbath Crisis, that erupted when the government mandated that all businesses open on Saturdays. Jews who refused to comply were publicly flogged, and the Chief Rabbi of Tripoli was expelled in 1935.[21] These ruptures also

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damaged the local agriculture and the livelihood of the population. Colonial racism and hierarchical thinking permeate the reports. For instance, a report declares that indigenous Libyans are to be trained in order to fight other "colored armies" in a "perfectly European formation, even if formed by natives." The "particular nature, quality and character" of the native military personnel is deemed essential to the conduct of successful colonial warfare. Taddeo Orlando, "Relazione Semestrale Gennaio-Giugno 1936, Ordinamento ed Addestramento," July 7, 1936, Archivio Stato Maggiore Esercito, N-11, b. 4026, f. 11. Among the well-known Libyan divisions was the Ascari del Cielo, a paratrooper division formed in 1938 and made up of Libyan Berbers.

[17] Italian policy towards the Jews in Libya must be considered in relation to Badoglio's recognition that by the early 1930s, the Arab rebellion was fueled not by political antagonism but by economic suffering of the Cyrenaican population as a whole, and the Sanusi in particular; Badoglio concluded, as a result, that the Arabs should be treated with tolerance. So as not to arouse the Arabs' jealousy and displeasure, Jews were not to be favored. This more favorable policy towards the Muslim majority should itself be considered in relation to the shift in Fascist foreign policy as a whole, and in particular to the conquest of Ethiopia and the Declaration of the Empire in 1936.

[18] "Il Duce sulla Litoranea fino al Confine Tunisino," *Corriere della Sera*, March 20, 1937, 1.

[19] Both in 1916 and 1931, as the regime discussed changes in the Jewish community of Tripoli, foreign and domestic interests superseded colonial ones (Renzo De Felice, *Jews in an Arab Land. Libya, 1835-1970*, trans. Judith Roumani [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985], 126-133). A January 1933 meeting between Mussolini and Ravenna illustrates how pacification affected the regime's attitude toward Jews in the colony. When Ravenna mentioned the need for the Union of Italian Jewish Communities to devote attention to the Jewish Community of Tripoli, the Duce replied that "the occupation of Tripolitania could not be considered to have taken place twenty years earlier; instead, considering the great war and the long period he had needed to dedicate to the reconquest of the colony, one could affirm it was only six years that Tripolitania fully belonged to Italy" (Felice Ravenna, "Udienza con S.E. Il Capo del Governo, January 17, 1933," Comunità Israelitiche Italiane Fino al 1933, Rapporti con lo Stato Italiano e con l'Ebraismo della Diaspora, Colonie, Archivio Storico dell'Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, b. 43/30, f. 156/8-83/1, sf. 7.

[20] De Felice, *Jews in an Arab Land*, 117-119.

[21] The flogging was attended by Muslims, who were reported to be pleased that the Italians were inflicting violence on "*al-yahud al-kuffar* [the infidel Jews]." (Goldberg, *Jewish Life in Muslim*

coincided with the regime's ideological shift toward antisemitism and racism,[22] which found expression in the Racial Laws of 1938, targeting Jews in the peninsula as well as the colonies.[23] There ensued a reversal in the standing of Muslims and Jews.[24] Until the early to mid 1930s, the regime had characterized the Jewish minority as *italianizable,*[25] and accorded them preferential treatment and a degree of autonomy.[26] After that time, however, Jews gradually became the principal

*Libya*, 108). This fact is significant to any study of the relations between Jews and Muslims in Libya at the time.

[22] On Italian Fascist antisemitism, and in particular the changes which occurred in the aftermath of the Abyssinian war, see Michele Sarfatti, *The Jews in Mussolini's Italy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2017). For a comprehensive overview of the regime's racist ideology and its political repercussions, see Aaron Gillette, *Racial Theories in Fascist Italy* (London-New York: Routledge, 2014).

[23] It is notable that on his 1937 visit to Libya, the Duce was enthusiastically welcomed by the Jewish communities of Benghazi, Barce and Tripoli and given precious gifts, including a menorah. During this visit Mussolini affirmed that his government would respect Jewish traditions. The Jewish community believed that the episode signaled a new era of peaceful coexistence among the colony's Italians, Jews, and Muslims (Vittorio Naim, "Le popolazioni ebraiche della Libia partecipano entusiaste alle trionfali accoglienze al Capo del Governo," *Israel*, March 25, 1937, 2-4). On the relationship between the Jewish community of Tripoli with Italians and Jews in Italy, see Goldberg, "The Jewish community of Tripoli in relation to Italian Jewry and Italians in Tripoli," 79-89.

[24] The reversal of position with regards to the Racial Laws had mainly a psychological impact; the economic repercussions were minor. While the dismissal of Jews might have benefited Muslims who could fill vacant posts, few had the economic means or education to carry out those jobs. Abramski-Bligh, "L'influence de la Seconde Guerre mondiale sur les relations judéo-arabes en Libye et en Tunisie."

[25] Thus, for instance, policies on the education of Libyan Jews, and especially of Libya's "modern" Jewish elites, was similar to the ones regarding Italian Jews. Members of the Jewish community, and especially the urban elites, attended Italian schools in large numbers as soon as those schools were established in the colony. Jewish attendance was high even before colonization: in 1907, Jews comprised 80% of the student population in Benghazi's two Italian schools. By contrast, the colonial approach to Muslim education during the *ventennio* was driven by assimilation, and therefore italianization and fascistization. The education of Jewish pupils and school attendance on the Sabbath created a rift with the fascist government, particularly after 1931, when the journal *Israel* accused the Italian government of discrimination towards Jews and the upholding of Muslim religious rights. De Felice, *Jews in An Arab Land*, 136-140 and 153-154; Luigi De Rosa and Gabriele De Rosa, *Storia del Banco di Roma*, vol.3 (Rome: Banca di Roma, 1982), 245.

[26] Here I refer to autonomy at the community's administrative level. The regime interfered in certain matters such as the 1921 engagement between a Jewish girl and a non-Jewish Italian, whose marriage was opposed by the Jewish community council and chief rabbi but approved by an Italian court. "Contro una sentenza della Corte d'Appello per la Libia," *Israel*, July 28, 1921; Mario Nunes Vais, "Regia Corte di Appello per la Libia in Tripoli, 23 June 1921"; Luigi Mercatelli, "Al Consiglio

targets of ideological and physical persecution, and with the introduction of the Racial Laws, their official standing dropped below that of Muslims.[27] Nonetheless, enforcement of the Racial Laws in Libya was lax.[28] Governor Italo Balbo persuaded Mussolini that a lenient policy made sense, arguing that Italians were economically dependent on Jews and that a worrisome sympathy was arising between the colonial minority and majority populations: "[T]he Arabs, the traditional enemies of the Jews," Balbo warned, "now show signs of feeling sorry for them."[29] In the previous decades of their brief colonial venture, Italians had already witnessed the effects of favoring one religious group over another, and they understood that a divide-and-rule approach would not necessarily achieve the desired submissiveness.[30] Solidarity between Jews and Muslims was therefore a reason for authorities to adapt the racist agenda to local needs. Still, Jews were perceived (and represented in propaganda) as economic rivals, profiteers, and political opponents, who did not uphold Italian interests and were actively antagonistic towards the regime.[31]

The distinct treatment of Jews and Muslims and their different status vis-à-vis the regime affected the groups' interactions with Italian functionaries and settlers, as well as their interactions with each other. New tensions arose during both the

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della Comunità Israelitica Tripoli, 8 July 1921"; Attività del Consorzio delle Comunità Israelitiche Italiane Fino al 1924, Rapporti con le Comunità ebraiche italiane all'estero, Tripolitania," Archivio Storico dell'Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, b. 6, f. 21.

[27] Abramski-Bligh, "L'influence de la Seconde Guerre mondiale sur les relations judéo-arabes en Libye et en Tunisie."

[28] De Felice, *Jews in an Arab Land*, 169.

[29] Historians often characterize Balbo as a defender of Jews for three reasons: his close relation with Jewish individuals such as Ivo Levi and Renzo Ravenna; his famous 1934 speech in the Miramare Theater, where he silenced a group of Black Shirts who were shouting "Death to the Jews"; and his well-known correspondence with Mussolini, which I have just cited, that softened the application of Racial Laws in the colony. Nonetheless, as he acknowledges himself, as governor of Libya he forced Jewish shop owners to keep their shops open on Saturdays, and flogged those who refused, restricted the jurisdiction of rabbinical courts, and expelled Rabbi Castelbolognesi. Italo Balbo to Benito Mussolini, January 19, 1939, and Mussolini's reply by telegram on January 23, 1939, Ministero dell'Africa Italiana, Direzione Generale Affari Politici, Archivio Segreto, Direttive Politiche di Carattere Generale, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, b. 21, f. 11, sf. 1.

[30] Another concern for the Italian regime would have been the rebelliousness of those Muslims who could imagine that the laws might eventually extend to them as well.

[31] This view of Jews predated 1938. For more on the subject, see Sarfatti, *The Jews in Mussolini's Italy*, and Gene Bernardini, "The Origins and Development of Racial Anti-Semitism in Fascist Italy," *The Journal of Modern History* 49, no.3 (1977): 431-453.

Pacification and the Second World War. One example is the trial and subsequent acquittal of Eugenio Nahum, a Jew who confessed to spying and smuggling in collaboration with Arab rebels in 1923. The incident caused an uproar among Italian Fascists, as well as local Arabs. The latter perceived the acquittal as the regime's protection of the wealthy, and possibly as the regime's favorable treatment of Jews, given that Arabs facing similar accusations did not escape the death penalty.[32]

The tensions rose with the outbreak of the Second World War. One example appears in a report by the Questura di Polizia dell'Africa Italiana dated June 25th, 1940, just two weeks after Italy's entry into war. The report describes a discussion that took place in the office of Eduardo de Paz, an Italian Jewish lawyer. In addition to de Paz, the participants included Nello Toso, an "Aryan" Italian citizen, Scerif Duebi Omran, a Libyan Muslim, and Renato Labi, a Jewish resident of Tripoli who held British citizenship. Labi, commenting a speech by Mussolini, reportedly expressed his contempt, "*Vedrai che Mussolini lo piglierà in culo*" ["You will see that Mussolini will take it in the ass"] and warned Omran that he should not believe Mussolini only because he had given Italian citizenship to Arabs, since Italy and Germany had agreed to destroy all Jews and Arabs after the war. Toso might have been expected to object but apparently remained passive, probably because de Paz was his father-in-law, but Omran reported the incident to the Italian authorities and Labi was arrested. The case rested entirely on Omran's accusation and exemplifies the tensions that grew out of the war, the different standings of the Jewish and Muslim communities, and the police's reliance on a particular sort of testimony. The episode illustrates the friction between the Jewish and Muslim communities, but it also suggests, through Labi's warning about the agreement between Italy and Germany, that the two groups perceived that they shared a common fate.[33]

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[32] "Nahum, Eugenio," pos.150/27, fasc. 127, Archivio Storico Ministero dell'Africa Italiana. Cited in De Felice, *Jews in an Arab Land*, 122.

[33] This event reportedly took place in the month of May, but was reported to the police in June. G. Bonfanti to the Tribunale Speciale per la Difesa dello Stato, Tripoli, "Labi Renato fu Mosè e di Levy Miha nato a Bengasi il 10/10/1902 residente a Tripoli – impiegato privato – suddito inglese di razza ebraica – coniugato con prole. Riservato," June 25, 1940, Miscellanea: fascicoli processuali e affari diversi 1927-1942, Tribunale Speciale per la Difesa dello Stato (1925-1945), Archivio Centrale dello Stato, b. 10; See also Archivio Stato Maggiore Esercito, F-19, b. 88, f. 49.

The war context exacerbated both antisemitic propaganda and the persecution of Jews in both the peninsula and Libya. Jews were pointed out for their belligerent activity, identified as a fifth column, and presented as a direct threat to the regime's hopes of creating a "new man." In a memo to the PNF inspector for Libya, Jews were described as a political menace that could be neutralized only through a decisive racial policy with extreme measures, such as putting Jews in concentration camps.[34] Jews were also seen as a threat because of their influence over the local economy, which meant, ironically, that the German Expeditionary force relied on them for provisions. The problem was swiftly addressed through political means.[35] The alliance with Nazi Germany and the Wehrmacht presence on Libyan soil also affected the Jews' fate.[36] Control over Libyan territory changed hands five times between 1940 and 1943, and Jewish support for the occupying British troops fueled and justified, in the eyes of the regime, additional persecutory measures.[37] Once they regained control, the Italians began identifying Jews and who had collaborated with the Allies whether by expressing support, joining the military, or providing their troops with goods or services such as translating or doing their laundry.[38] Jews suspected of these violations were registered and sometimes

[34] Ministero dell'Africa Italiana, Archivio di Gabinetto, file 99/IX, fasc. "Varie-1941." Cited in De Felice, *Jews in an Arab Land*, 176.

[35] Ibid.

[36] For a discussion on the issue of the responsibility for the persecution of Jews see Jens Hoppe, "The Persecution of Jews in Libya Between 1938 and 1945. An Italian Affair? ," in *The Holocaust and North Africa*, eds. Aomar Boum and Sarah Abrevaya Stein (Stanford: Stanford University Press: 2019), 50-75.

[37] Jews were the targets of looting and violent attacks by Italian settlers, soldiers and fascists, but also the regime. While at times the justification for anti-Jewish acts were the same for settlers, soldiers, and the regime this was not always the case. Thus, at a cabinet meeting on February 7th, 1942, Galeazzo Ciano described the Jewish welcome of British troops after Italians had temporarily withdrawn. Jewish-British cooperation was also signaled by the presence of the Jewish Brigade and restoration of the synagogue and Jewish cemetery in Tobruk in 1941 and Derna in 1942. Other actions on the part of the British, such as schooling Jewish children, may have promoted the regime's concerns about a Jewish-British alliance. Picciotto, "Gli ebrei in Libia sotto la dominazione italiana," 102. Louis Rabinowitz, *Soldiers from Judea: Palestinian Jewish Units in the Middle East, 1941-1943* (New York: American Zionist Emergency Council, 1945), 67-69, cited in Norman A. Stillman, *Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 445-446.

[38] In one case, a Jew in Tripoli was accused of sending light signals to Allied planes at night and arrested. Apparently he was simply smoking outside so as not to disturb his family. Vittorio Halfon, "Tripoli – ricordo di guerra e dell'olocausto," in "L'Olocausto degli Ebrei in Libia," ed.

reported, and they often faced legal prosecution. It was not just officials of the regime who went after these alleged violators. Italian settlers and soldiers, as well as German soldiers, actively participated in the pursuit.[39]

When a tribunal was set up in Benghazi in May 1941 to prosecute Jews accused of collaborating with the enemy, one Jewish man who had been sentenced to death dodged his execution because of the second British invasion.[40] Others were not so lucky. Three other Benghazi Jews were executed in June 1942, and many others were sentenced to long imprisonment.[41] The Muslim community suffered the

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Mati Gilad, *Livluv/Germogli* 2017, 44. Accessed January 17, 2023, https://www.livluv.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/%D7%9C%D7%91%D7%9C%D7%95%D7%91-%D7%A9%D7%95%D7%90%D7%94INT.pdf

[39] These attacks, justified in the eyes of the attackers because of the Jews' anti-Italian or pro-British sympathies, ranged from verbal assaults to physical attacks including beatings and attempts to run vehicles over the victims. This was the case for instance in Tripoli, in response to reports that Jews in Benghazi supported the Allies. Yet, it had not always been the case that violence towards Jews by settlers or Blackshirts and governmental interests coincided. In this respect the growing influence of the PNF in determining colonial policy should be considered. See the following: Riccardo Maraffa, "Genah Iusef fu Mosè Missaudi Labi, nato a Tripoli nel 1891 – Zuares Pintas di Rahmin e fu Zora Sciathun, nato a Tripoli nel 1906 – Barda Elia fu Hai e di Elisa Bugobza, nato a Bengasi il 9/4/1903-ebrei," Ministero dell'Africa Italiana, Confidential, April 11 ,1942; see also Riccardo Maraffa, "Gabso Sarina (detta Angelina di Hacun e di Sabban Messauda nata a Tripoli nel 1914," April 13, 1942 ; Riccardo Maraffa, "Abib Abramo di Elia e di Habib Clementina nato a Bengasi, di anni 40 circa – condannato a morte," March 17, 1942; Riccardo Maraffa, "Libici che hanno seguito gli inglesi in ritirata," March 17, 1942; Riccardo Maraffa "Mohai Dadusc fu Beniamino e fu Rachele Beruh, di anni 42, nato a Bengasi, domiciliato a El Tama – ebreo-," April 11, 1942; Riccardo Maraffa, "Mohai Dadusc fu Beniamino e fu Rachele Beruh, di anni 42, nato a Bengasi -israelita.," April 28, 1942; Questura di Polizia Africa Italiana, "Verbale di denunzia in istato di arresto del musulmano Farag Afeda ben Abdulladi ben Aua, cabila Tuagir, nato a Derna, di anni 17, qui residente al campo sudanese, per i reati di prestazione di servizio nelle forze armate nemiche (art. 242 C.P.) e di favoreggiamento bellico (art. 2747 C.P.)," February 23, 1942; Riccardo Maraffa, "Labi Vittorio fu Mosè e di Levi Milka, nato a Bengasi il 3/8/1896 – ebreo suddito inglese," confidential, August 17, 1941; "Manifestazioni di antitalianità da parte di stranieri e libici in Bengasi durante l'occupazione nemica," confidential memorandum, July 30, 1941, Ministero dell'Africa Italiana, Direzione Generale Affari Politici, Archivio Segreto, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, b. 16, sf. 9, ssf. 1.2-4.

[40] Riccardo Maraffa, "Abramo Abib di Elia e fu Habib Clementina, nato a Bengasi, di anni 40 circa – condannato a morte," confidential, Indigeni Processati e Condannati epr delitti commessi durante l'occupazione inglese, March 17, 1942, Ministero dell'Africa Italiana, Direzione Generale Affari Politici, Archivio Segreto, b. 16, f. 9, ssf. 1.2-4. De Felice, *Jews in an Arab Land*, 179. Cited in Hoppe, "The Persecution of Jews in Libya Between 1938 and 1945," 59.

[41] See footnote 40; And "Indigeni processati e condannati per delitti commessi durante l'occupazione inglese," Ministero dell'Africa Italiana, Direzione Generale Affari Politici, Archivio Segreto, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, b. 16, sf. 9, ssf. 1.2-4; and Riccardo Maraffa, "Esecuzione di

same fate, as dozens of Italian reports indicate.[42] Both Jews and Senussis[43] were accused of cooperating with Allied soldiers, or joining their ranks, as well as compromising Italian interests by destroying urban infrastructure, attacking Italian settlers, and plundering property.[44] Moreover, Jews and Muslims sometimes collaborated in anti-Italian and pro-British activities. The Jewish School of Via Marina in Benghazi was transformed into barracks for Senussi soldiers during the British occupation.[45] In another example, after the first Italian reconquest of Benghazi, Italian authorities seized a car that was driven by Mohamed Zarrù, a Muslim, and owned by Renato Halfon, a Jew. Italian authorities searched the car and found two hand grenades and a photo of British soldiers; Zarrù and Halfon were apparently collaborating against Italian interests.[46] In another instance Farag Afeda was arrested in Benghazi, and tried for being an informer for the British, joining the British police, and together with a

condanne a morte di ebrei," Promemoria per la Direzione Generale Affari Politici, July 25, 1942, Direzione Generale Affari Politici, Archivio Segreto, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, b. 16, f. 9, sf. 1.2-4.

[42] For example, Italian authorities used a photo published by the Greek newspaper *Estia* on March 10, 1941, in order to identify fifteen Jews (nine French, two British , three Libyan and one Italian), and thirteen Muslims who applauded the British troops in Piazza del Municipio in Benghazi, and three of the fifteen Jews were arrested. Riccardo Maraffa, "Manifestazioni di antitalianità da parte di stranieri e libici in Bengasi," Promemoria per il Gabinetto del Ministro e la Direzione Generale AA.PP, July 30, 1941, Ministero dell'Africa Italiana, Direzione Generale Affari Politici, Archivio Segreto, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, b. 16, f. 9, sf. 1.2-4.; and various examples in Tribunale Speciale per la Difesa dello Stato in Tripolitania (Libia), Miscellanea, Archivio Centrale di Stato, b. 11.

[43] Senussis who had escaped Italian persecution prior to the Second World War organized a defense force in collaboration with the British. See W. H. Kingsberry, "The Cyrenaica Defense Force," *The Royal United Services Institution Journal* 88, no. 551 (1943): 210-214.

[44] See the collections "Tribunale Speciale per la Difesa dello Stato 1925-1945"; "Tribunale speciale per la difesa dello Stato in Tripolitania (Libia) 1927-1939"; and "Tribunale Speciale per la Difesa dello Stato in Tripolitania (Libia)," Miscellanea, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, b. 11.

[45] For examples of Jews who faced the Italian tribunal, see "Procedimento contro Daudi Vittorio," Tribunale Speciale per la Difesa dello Stato in Tripolitania (Libia), Sentenze 1941-1945, Archivio degli Organi e delle Istituzioni del Regime Fascista, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, b. 1. See also collections "Tribunale Speciale per la Difesa dello Stato 1925-1945," "Tribunale speciale per la difesa dello Stato in Tripolitania (Libia) 1927-1939," and "Tribunale Speciale per la Difesa dello Stato in Tripolitania (Libia)," Miscellanea, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, b. 11.

[46] Letter sent from the Questura PAI of the Prefettura of Derna to the Reggimento Artiglieria celere Eugenio di Savoia, cited in a letter from the Secretary of the PNF to Attilio Teruzzi, September 21, 1941, Attilio Serena, "Caro Teruzzi, ritengo opportuno segnalarti," Archivio dell'Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, N-11, b. 4026, f. 8.

Jewish colleague, apprehending an Italian soldier hiding at the house of another Jewish man, Vittorio Douani.[47]

Despite these occasional collaborations, the multiple occupations and changes of leadership provided a dynamic setting in which the growing tensions between Jews and Muslims could play out. In one incident, Mohamed Bumedian, a Muslim, was denounced to the British by his Jewish neighbor Abramo Arbib; according to Arbib, Bumedian was hiding two Italian soldiers in his house in Benghazi. The British arrested Bumedian as well as the two fugitives, one an Italian soldier and the other an Arab sergeant in the Italian army. The background to the incident was complicated, though. Arbib's wife had reportedly welcomed Senussi agents and British soldiers to their home; had disparaged Bumedian, Mussolini and Italy ("*cornuto ascari italiano devi crepare tu, la tua Italia e quel cornuto di Mussolini*." ["cuckold Italian ascari, you, your Italy and that cuckold of Mussolini"]).[48]

[47] It is noteworthy that it was a Jewish woman, Maria Sadon, who denounced Farag Afeda to the Italians, claiming he and a Jewish colleague had picked up the Italian soldier hiding in the house of Vittorio Duani, a Jew, and handed him over to the British. U. Mantineo, "Verbale di denunzia in istato di arresto del musulmano Farah Afedo ben Abdulladi ben Aua, cabila Tuagir, nato a Derna, di anni 17, qui residente al campo sudanese, per reati di prestazione di servizio nelle forze armate nemiche (art. 242 C.P.) e di favoreggiamento bellico (art. 2747 C.P.)," February 23, 1942, Indigeni Processati e Condannati per delitti commessi durante l'occupazione inglese, Ministero dell'Africa Italiana, Direzione Generale Affari Politici, Archivio Segreto, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, b. 16, sf. 9, sf. 1.2-4.

[48] The case was considered especially grave in view of the offense to Mussolini. Arbib's wife had also reportedly changed her dog's name to "Mussolini," and once he died was reportedly heard chanting "Mussolini is dead" together with British soldiers. She would later deny all accusations: she defended herself claiming she only did the laundry for the British. It is important to note that Senussi and Jews are seen as acting together, collaborating against Italian interests. Genna Mario and Giacomo Agrigento to the Tribunale Speciale per la Difesa dello Stato, "Denunzia di Abib Abramo, Gabso Angelina e Mimun Jacobbe per favoreggiamento bellico (art.247 C.P.); il Mimun e la Gabso per offesa all'onore del Capo del Governo (art. 282 C.P.) e la Gabso per disfattismo politico (art.265) e calunnia (art.368 C.P.)," Ufficio Speciale d'Istruzione di Polizia, May 17, 1941, Ministero dell'Africa Italiana, Direzione Generale Affari Politici, Archivio Segreto, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, b. 16, f. 9, sf. 1.2-4; Alessio Talarico, "Sentenza nella causa contro Abib Abramo, Gabso Angelina, Mimun \Iacobbe," October 1, 1941, Tribunale Speciale per la Difesa dello Stato in Libia (e territorio Egiziano) e Tribunale Straordinario di Guerra, Sentenze 1941-1945, Archivi degli Organi e delle Istituzioni Fasciste, Archivio Centrale di Stato, b. 1 ; Maraffa, "Denuncia al tribunale speciale per la difesa dello Stato ai cittadini libici Arbib Abramo, Gabso Angelina e Mimun Jacob," Promemoria per il Gabinetto dei del Ministro e per la Direzione Generale AA.PP, October 18, 1941, Ministero dell'Africa Italiana, Direzione Generale per gli Affari Politici, Archivio Segreto, b. 16, f. 9, sf. 1.2-4; Maraffa, "Libici che hanno seguito gli inglesi in ritirata," Promemoria per il Gabinetto del Ministro e per la Direzione Generale AA.PP, March 17,

According to the Italian police report, Arbib's denunciation of Bumedian to the British authorities was an act of revenge for Bumedian's having hit Arbib's wife in the past. Once Italians returned to power, Bumedian, now with the upper hand, filed a report against Arbib with the Italian police, presumably in retaliation for what Arbib did to him under the British occupation. During the war, a dispute between neighbors could easily escalate into a matter of national prestige and security, with serious ramification for the individuals involved. The case also illustrates how different persecuted groups joined forces: Senussis, who had been oppressed by the regime a decade earlier, associated themselves with the Jews who collaborated with the British.

An additional source of tension was the everyday stress of war. The emotional burdens and, even more, the economic hardships, including food shortages, were felt by all sectors of society. Italian antisemitic propaganda blamed Jews for the war and portrayed them as a major threat to Muslims in North Africa and Palestine.[49] Some Muslims in Libya were convinced of this. Internalizing

1942, Ministero dell'Africa Italiana, Direzione Generale Affari Politici, Archivio Segreto, b. 16, f. 9, sf. 1.2-4; Maraffa, "Gabso Sarina (detta Angelina)," Promemoria per la Direzione Generale Affari Politici, April 13, 1942, Ministero dell'Africa Italiana, Direzione Generale Affari Politici, Archivio Segreto, b. 16, f. 9, sf. 1.2-4.

[49] See for example: "'La informazione R,' Ebrei e negri Americani dovrebbero...colonizzare l'Africa a favore degli Stati Uniti," *La Stampa* no.103 (Torino), February 5, 1943, 3. At the same time that it was spreading antisemitic propaganda, Italy had to counter anti-Italian propaganda appearing in Arabic-language pamphlets and newspapers, including Jewish-owned ones. Examples of how the Italian fascist regime and its actions in Libya were presented in the Arab press abound. The Arab anti-Italian press made parallels between the disappearing populations of Palestine, due to Zionist immigrants, and Libya, due to Italian settlers, and Libyan refugees in Palestine organized anti-Italian protests. On the other hand, pro-Italian propaganda used British actions in Palestine and leveraged Jewish Muslims tensions there, in order to garner support. See, for example, "Servizio Informazione-Spionaggio, Propaganda Araba anti-Italiana," Ministero dell'Africa Italiana, Direzione Generale Affari Politici, Archivio Segreto, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, b. 23, f. 13, sf. 1.2.

antisemitic tropes disseminated by Fascists through Radio Bari,[50] Radio Tripoli[51] and the printed media,[52] the Muslim community began to hold Jews responsible for the war and the resultant lack of food.[53] During the Allied occupation of Libya, the Italian media depicted the involvement of Palestinian Jews, who fought alongside the British, as additional evidence of an Anglo-Jewish conspiracy.[54] This propaganda aimed to arouse anti-Jewish animosity and punitive behavior within the Muslim population, as well as to encourage more Muslims to enlist in the Italian forces. The Italians were leveraging preexisting anxieties to drive a wedge between the communities—and to reap for themselves the benefits of the discord.

## Finding Shelter from Airstrikes

One of the direct consequences of the war was the bombardment of Libyan cities by both Allied and Axis forces.[55] During the North African Campaign, over 16

[50] Radio Bari had been broadcasting in Arabic since 1934. On Radio Bari, see Arturo Marzano, *Onde fasciste. La propaganda araba di Radio Bari (1934-1943)*, (Rome: Carocci, 2015). On Fascist propaganda in Libya see: Manuela Williams, *Mussolini's Propaganda Abroad. Subversion in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, 1935-1940*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2006) ; Antonio Campana, "'Trasmette Radio Bari.' Politica e Propaganda Fascista alla Vigilia della Seconda Guerra Mondiale," *Eunomia. Storia e Politica Internazionali* 2 (2015): 247-294. On anti-Zionist propaganda disseminated by Radio Bari, see: Esmonde Robertson, "Race as a Factor in Mussolini's Policy in Africa and Europe," *Journal of Contemporary History* 23, no.1 (1988): 37-58, 47.

[51] Radio Tripoli was established in 1938 specifically as a vehicle for Fascist propaganda in the colonies. See Campana, "Trasmette Radio Bari," 278.

[52] Italian media fueled anti-Jewish sentiment by connecting racial antisemitism to political enmity and using Muslim figures such as Shakib Arslan to spread the notion that Jews were responsible for Muslim grievances both in Palestine and North Africa. Italian media also glorified Italy, Fascism, and Mussolini, even declaring him a "20th century Mahdi," while downplaying colonial rivals France and Britain and calling for support of the Axis. Campana, "Trasmette Radio Bari," 278.

[53] De Felice, *Jews in an Arab Land*, 183, and Hoppe "The Persecution of Jews in Libya Between 1938 and 1945. An Italian Affair?," 59.

[54] "Poliziotti Giudei Mandati in Libia dagli Inglesi," *La Stampa* no.103 (Turin), April 30, 1943, 4.

[55] Jews in labor camps were also victims of the bombardments. The labor camp of Buqbuq—which lacked a shelter—was bombed multiple times. It was targeted because of its strategic position on the Libyan-Egyptian border.

million tons of explosives were dropped.[56] Tripoli, the site of the port that was vital to Italian supplies, was bombed 41 times between 1940 and 1941, and Benghazi was targeted hundreds of times between 1940 and 1943.[57] The Jewish *hara* of Tripoli, located near Italian anti-aircraft batteries, the port, and the power station, suffered direct hits. Four synagogues were completely destroyed, others were damaged, and the cemetery was targeted repeatedly, its tombstones repurposed to build forts. Houses were reduced to ruins, and numerous residents were killed.[58] Many Jewish homes were destroyed in Benghazi too, and then they were looted.[59] The bombardments were doubly devastating for Jews, who not only suffered through the fear, destruction, and chaos, but were also made scapegoats for the situation. They endured an increasing number of attacks, the violence encouraged by the frequent power vacuums.[60]

Given the danger of staying in the city and the limited space in public shelters, where fascists sometimes taunted Jews and blocked their entry,[61] many Jews sought refuge in villages and towns on the outskirts of urban areas. In places such as Gharyan, Jaonis, Quwefia, Salawi, Sidi Khalifa, Tajura, and Zavia, Jews rented

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[56] Federico Cresti, *Storia della Libia contemporanea*, (Rome: Carocci editore, 2018), 129.

[57] Conservative British Communiqués from 1941 claimed that the damage to Benghazi was restricted to the harbor, customs house, and military shops; civilian life was claimed to be continuing as usual since civilians were "hardly injured." Nonetheless, the heavy bombardments which took place in Benghazi and Tobruk destroyed their ports. Prime Minister Winston Churchill, Debate in the House of Commons (Libyan Operations and Bombing of Germany), Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons Official Report, June 2, 1942.

[58] Roumani, *The Jews of Libya*, 28; Stillman, *Jews in Arab Lands*, 448; Abramo Herzl Reginiano, interview by the author, Bat Yam, 8 July, 2019 ; And Raffaele Luzon, interview by the author, via Zoom, November 7, 2019.

[59] Undated, signed copy, Central Zionist Archive, S 6/4582 cited in Stillman, *Jews of Arab Lands*, 450-51. Several Jewish witnesses provide accounts of wartime profiteering, as looting of Jewish property often followed the chaos caused by aerial bombardments: Miriam Levi, undated, born in Benghazi in 1927, regarding her experiences in Benghazi and Tunisia, Yad Vashem Testimonies Collection, Interview 0.3/3558527; Liza (Suares) Naim, interview by Miriam Aviezer, November 19, 1998, born in Derna in 1934, regarding her experiences as a child in Derna and Giado, Yad Vashem Testimonies Collection, Interview 0.3/3565403.

[60] Notably two Jews, Huato Rubin and Nissim Duani, were killed after the first British retreat in April 1941 (Hoppe, "The Persecution of Jews in Libya Between 1938 and 1945," 59; Roumani, *The Jews of Libya*, 29).

[61] Effraim Sadan, interview by Dov Gedi, August 14, 2008, born in Benghazi in 1925, regarding his experiences in Benghazi and Giado, Giv'atayim, Yad Vashem Testimonies Collection, Interview 0.3/7338459.

houses from locals. Some stayed in Arab homes, rooms, and tents,[62] while others built shelters of their own.[63] This dependence of urban Jews on rural Muslims, and the latter's willingness to offer housing, have sometimes been interpreted as demonstrations of solidarity; the Muslims' responsiveness to the Jewish refugees has even been described as an act of righteousness. Nonetheless, the refuge extended to the Jews was in many cases based on an economic transaction.[64]

The heads of Jewish families who took refuge in towns and villages around Benghazi, Derna, Tripoli and Tobruk ordinarily went to the city to work during the daytime, and returned at night. Women and children were left behind in the Arab towns and villages, a practice indicating a sense of trust and security and being on good terms with their hosts. These positive feelings are also suggested by the movement of some families from one village to another during the war, in a repeated reliance on the friendly reception of local Arabs.

In most cases urban Jewish families paid rent to Arabs for their lodgings, but some were hosted free of charge, whether for just the first few nights or for the long term.[65] The Nahum family from Tripoli enjoyed free housing for two years in the town of Kussabat, 90 kilometers from Tripoli. In addition to giving them a room and plenty of food, which was originally meant for the black market, their host provided armed protection.[66] It appears, then, that the host understood the

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[62] Hayun Hayun from Derna, for instance, remembers being hosted in the tent of a sheikh and emphasizes the hospitality and help received from Arabs, who assisted his sick brother. Hayun Hayun, interview by Yehudit Soloveichik, December 18, 1995, born in Derna in 1933, Yad Vashem Testimonies Collection, Interview 0.3/3562536.

[63] Sion Nemni of the Jewish community of Tripoli raised substantial funds to aid homeless Jews who could not afford to rent houses. Sion Nemni, unpublished memoir, cited in De Felice, *Jews in an Arab Land*, 178.

[64] Satloff, *Among the Righteous*.

[65] Victor (Vittorio) Kenaf (Genah), interview by Shira Shoshana Carmon, October 13, 1996, born in Tunis in 1918, regarding his experiences in Libya, the British army and aliyah to Eretz Israel in 1943, Yad Vashem Testimonies Collection, Interview 0.3/3564406, and "Testimony of Victor Kanaf," The Documentation Center of North African Jews During World War II, Ben Zvi Archive, f. 9960.

[66] From there, the Italian police took one of the men of the family to the labor camp of Sidi Azaz, which was located in the periphery of Homs, between Misurata and Tripoli. The camp was established in July 1942. Male Jewish laborers between the ages of 18 and 45 were employed mostly in railway and road construction. Of the 3,000 Jews who were brought to the camp, only 1,000 remained there, as most were freed because it was too challenging for the Italians to provide them

persecution the family was suffering and willingly put himself in the way of danger.[67] Abraham Cohen and his family rented an apartment from Arabs in the outskirts of Tripoli following their escape from Allied bombings. Cohen recalls the arrangement as more than a financial transaction. He recounts how his Muslim hosts welcomed his family "in an extraordinary way, the truth has to be told. They received us, they gave us water and food and whoever was missing things, they brought it to us. [They were] simply partners with all of this, together; what was ours and what was theirs was the same."[68] Testimonies such as this show how the common hardships brought the two communities in close contact and forged bonds between them.

Although Muslim hosts usually made a profit, they were also probably motivated by humanitarian concerns, shared grievances, and a sense of common distress. The challenges of war created such a sense of solidarity that the relationship between the two communities during this period has been described as "a honeymoon."[69] The harmony ended, however, when the religious integrity of the occupied space was seen to be threatened. A group of Jews from Misurata was pressured to leave the village of Zawiet el-Mahjub after they attempted to set up a synagogue.[70] Religious tensions often superseded friendly relations, economic incentive, and wartime solidarity.[71]

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with food and water. Shmuel Spector and Geoffrey Wigoder, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Life Before and During the Holocaust*, vol.2 (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 1331.

[67] Herbert Samuel Arbib, "Guerra e Fuga," in "L'Olocausto degli Ebrei in Libia," ed. Mati Gilad, *Livluv/Germogli* 2017, 40. Accessed January 17, 2023, https://www.livluv.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/%D7%9C%D7%91%D7%9C%D7%95%D7%91-%D7%A9%D7%95%D7%90%D7%94INT.pdf

[68] Avraham Cohen, undated, born in Tripoli in 1918, on his experiences in Tripoli and Tunisia, Yad Vashem Testimonies Collection, Interview 0.3/ 3558528.

[69] Ibid.

[70] De Felice, *Jews in an Arab Land*, 183.

[71] Religion was a source of tension prior to the war as well. Witnesses who were young boys at the time recall being beaten for no reason by Muslim youth on the streets of Tripoli and Benghazi. When adults looked into the incidents, however, the juvenile assailants justified their actions by claiming that the Jewish boys had insulted Muhammad. This basic narrative appears in a number of oral interviews as well as Italian documents of the period. For more on the subject, see Harvey Goldberg, "Jewish-Muslim Religious Rivalry in Tripolitania," in *Jewish Life in Muslim Libya*, 82-96.

In Benghazi, the chaos of bombardments and military conflict encouraged wartime profiteering and looting.[72] The Jews who fled Benghazi left their shops, homes, and synagogues vulnerable to pillage and destruction, as was the case after the Italian re-conquest of Cyrenaica in April 1941.[73] Some Arabs took advantage of the situation, joining the Italian *camicie nere*, soldiers and Fascists in the raids, but others helped Jews protect themselves and their property.[74] The Jews who benefited from this help usually belonged to the upper class, had business relations with Arabs, or lived in mixed neighborhoods.[75] Joseph Fadlun recounts that while the shops of his grandfather and uncle were pillaged, his father's shop was spared. His father owed his good fortune to Mustafa, a friend and neighbor shop-owner who wrote the word "*Arabo*" on the front of the father's store, a mark that apparently sufficed to dissuade looters. This was not an isolated case: "whoever had an Arab friend, [the friend would protect] his shop. He wrote on his shop

[72] Although here I emphasize the looting of Jewish property, all locals were targets. Widespread looting occurred during the second British occupation of Cyrenaica, when local Arabs questioned the Italian ability to maintain control and continue promoting their interests. Disillusioned Arabs joined Allied soldiers, who included Indians, Poles, New-Zealanders, Australians, and the Libyan Arab Force, in ransacking hundreds of homes belonging to Italian settlers. The effect on the latter group was dramatic. Italian settlers feared Arabs and Bedouins more than the British, and half of the Italian population fled the Jebel before the third British offensive. (Del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Libia*, 315.)

[73] Jews who remained in the city recount remaining behind locked doors for days on end as they waited for the violence to subside. Joseph Fadlun, interview by Bina Kutner, January 9, 2007, Giv'atayim, born in Benghazi in 1933, on his experiences in Benghazi, Giado and Tripoli, Yad Vashem Testimonies Collection, Interview 0.3/6346354; Shlomo Abramovitch, *Ha-yoman ha-ganuz mi-machane ha-rikuz Giado. Sipur shel Shoah neelma be-Luv (mi-yoman shel Yosef Dadush)*, (Rishon LeZion: Yedioth Ahronoth, 2020), 171.

[74] Ibid; Jean Nism, interview by Sigal Amitai Holzmann, July 5, 2017, born in Tripoli in 1927, on his experiences in Benghazi and Giado, Yad Vashem Testimonies Collection, Interview 0.3/13172552; Misa Barda, interview by Eliyahu Ben Harush, January 14, 1996, born in Benghazi in 1931, on her experiences in Giado, Yad Vashem Testimonies Collection, Interview 0.3/3563786.

[75] A number of testimonies point to the difference in the treatment of Jews by Muslims of different social status. For example, see Rachel (Tshuva) Beni, interview by Dov Gedi, August 7, 2008, Jaffa, born in Benghazi in 1930, on her experiences as a child in Benghazi, various villages and a camp in Giado, Yad Vashem Testimonies Collection, Interview 0.3/7321975; see also Liliana Debasc, interview by the author, Rome, February 21, 2019, born in Tripoli in 1939, on her childhood in Tripoli; and Rossana Turi Albanozzo, interview by author, Rome, February 20, 2019, born in Tripoli in 1933, regarding her life in Tripoli.

'arabo,' and nobody touched it."[76] The pervasiveness of looting involved a combination of profiteering, religious and socio-economic rivalry, and encouragement by Italians.[77] On the contrary, protection of fellow residents and their property seems to have been initiated by individuals and driven by selflessness.

Heavy bombardments by the Allies also threatened Jews in forced labor camps.[78] In the labor camp of Buqbuq, located on the Egyptian-Libyan border, Arab Bedouin spies met with Jewish laborers;[79] the meeting points to the Bedouins' association with the Allies that supported and included Jews. During the meeting, Jews reportedly expressed their fear of the bombings, to which the Bedouins responded "*La tachafu"* ("Do not be afraid"). Immediately afterward, the bombing ceased, and the Jews were liberated by the British. Hearing of the incident, an Italian officer asserted that all Bedouins were double agents. The assertion highlights the complexity of the affiliations on the ground and the ways in which various communities were pitted against each other.[80]

[76] Joseph Fadlun, interview by Bina Kutner, January 9, 2007, Giv'atayim, born in Benghazi in 1933, on his experiences in Benghazi, Giado and Tripoli, Yad Vashem Testimonies Collection, Interview 0.3/6346354.

[77] Ibid.

[78] No monograph on the labor camps of Libya has yet been published. For an overview of the camps during the Second World War see: Jens Hoppe, "Giado," in Geoffrey P. Megargee, Joseph R. White, Mel Hecker, eds., *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos 1933-1945*, Vol. III, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2018), 527-529.

[79] The camp of Buqbuq was established in August 1942, and most of the inmates were Tripolitanian Jewish men between the ages of 18 and 45. 350 Jewish laborers from the camp of Sidi Azaz were transferred to Buqbuq.

[80] Despite examples of solidarity within the camps, tensions also arose between the Jewish and Muslim laborers. When a dispute between groups of Jews and Muslims in the camp of Sidi Azaz escalated into stone-throwing, an Italian officer shot and killed a Jew. Moshe Hadad/Khadad, January 1, 1984, born in Tripoli in 1905, Yad Vashem Testimonies Collection, Interview 0.3/3558534; and Rachamim Sidi Ben David, interview by Adina Ben Moshe, December 11, 1984, born in Tripoli in 1913, Yad Vashem Testimonies Collection, Interview 0.3/ 3562685.

## Barter for Survival

The Jewish communities of eastern Libya endured particularly difficult conditions during the war. Cyrenaica was invaded twice by the British before the Italians' final retreat in February 1943, and after the British withdrew from the region in January 1942, Italy organized the concentration of Jews.[81] During the span of five months in the first half of 1942, around 2600 Cyrenaican Jews with Italian or Libyan citizenship were deported to the concentration camp of Giado, and around 3000 Jews from the region of Tripolitania were enlisted in forced labor.[82]

The use of concentration camps was not new. Two-thirds of Cyrenaica's nomadic and semi-nomadic population had been interned in such camps a decade earlier, when Italian authorities tried to put an end to the anti-colonial resistance. The internment of Bedouins cut them off from the resistance and halted their support for the *mujahedeen*. Additional benefits to the regime included the breaking down of the Bedouin lifestyle and the promotion of sedentarization, as well as the assertion of Italian authority through fear and indoctrination.[83] The historical background shows that the Fascist policies of violence and genocide,[84] which are

[81] This round-up was seen as a necessary retaliation for the Jews' support of the Allies. A letter dated February 7, 1942, from the Minister of Italian Africa Attilio Teruzzi to the Governor General of Libya Ettore Bastico, and the Army Chief of Staff Ugo Cavallero required that "All the Jews of Cyrenaica be evacuated to a concentration camp to be set up in the hinterland of Tripolitania." (Attilio Teruzzi to Ettore Bastico and Ugo Cavallero, "Per ordine Superiore," Archivio dell'Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito [AUSSME], N-11, b. 4026).

[82] Approximately 47 of the Jews sent to Giado had Italian citizenship. Foreign Jews were also rounded up, held in camps in Libya and Italy and later turned over to Vichy and Nazi authorities. On British citizens deported to Italy, see Giordana Terracina, "The Deportation of Libyan Jews in the Concentration Camp of Civitella del Tronto and Confinement Town of Camerino," *Trauma and Memory* 4, no.3 (2016): 9-31.

[83] For more on this subject, see Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, *Forgotten Voices: Power and Agency in Colonial and Postcolonial Libya* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Ahmida, *Genocide in Libya*.

[84] Here I discuss the Fascist regime's displacement of populations and use of concentration camps, but such tactics were used by the liberal regime as well, which had deported to the Italian peninsula individuals and families who were perceived as a threat to colonialism. For more on the subject, see Francesca Di Pasquale, "The 'Other' at Home: Deportation and Transportation of Libyans to Italy during the Colonial Era (1911-1943)," *International Review of Social History* 63, no.26 (2018): 211-231.

still too often ascribed to the Axis alliance or the German presence, were deeply rooted in the longstanding myth of the *Italiani brava gente*.[85]

The concentration camp of Giado, a former army base located on the Tunisian border south-west of Tripoli, was established after the second British retreat.[86] Italians sent Jewish families to Giado beginning in March 1942, with the last large transport leaving Benghazi on June 25th, 1942.[87] Convoys of trucks filled with men, women and children traveled for days to reach the desert camp, where inmates were held for up to fourteen months in appalling conditions that resulted from Italian mismanagement. During World War II, Giado had the highest death rate among the North African concentration camps.[88] Of the 2600 Jews interned there, over 560 died of disease, starvation, and hard labor. Survivors had to await liberation by the British, which took place in January 1943.[89]

The Italian authorities provided little food to the Jews in Giado and the other labor camps, including Buqbuq and Sidi Azaz. In Buqbuq, the daily ration included a loaf of bread and broth with pasta,[90] hardly enough in the dry environment, especially because water was supplied irregularly.[91] The scant rations in Giado consisted of a few grams of rice, oil, sugar, and coffee made of barley.[92] The biggest problem though, was the scarcity of water and the Italian inability to supply it.[93]

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[85] On the historic memory of colonialism in Italy, see: Angelo Del Boca, "Il Colonialismo Italiano tra miti, rimozioni, negazioni e inadempienze," *Italia Contemporanea* 212 (1998): 589-603.

[86] Testimony of Benedetto Arbib cited in Salerno, *Uccideteli tutti*, 119.

[87] Questura PAI "Due israeliti sono stati avviati in Tripolitania, essendo stato autorizzato tale trasferimento," August 1942, and Comitato di Ricerche Deportati Ebrei, 1964, Yad Vashem Italy Collection 0.31/JM/3383.

[88] Satloff, *Among the Righteous*, 44.

[89] Due to overcrowding in the camp, some Jews were transferred to nearby places, including Gharyan, Yefren and Triginna. Hoppe, "Giado," 528.

[90] Ibid., 89.

[91] "Buqbuq," in Jeffrey P. Magargee, Joseph R.White, and Mel Hecker, eds., *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos,* 1933-1945, vol. 3 (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2018), 527.

[92] Roumani, *The Jews of Libya*, 35.

[93] This issue affected both access to safe drinking water and clean water for hygiene. The poor water conditions were one of the causes that led to a typhus epidemic in Giado in December 1942.

Italians were aware that the rations were insufficient:[94] functionaries openly stated that their goal was to starve the Jews to death.[95] Nonetheless, for a brief period of time, relatives of internees in Sidi Azaz were allowed to send or bring provisions,[96] and forced laborers with money could buy foods such as onions, barley, dates and meat from Arabs in the surrounding villages.[97] Italians allowed some Jews to leave Giado for purchases on a weekly basis, and other inmates took advantage of their labor assignments beyond the barbed wire fence to stop at villages and exchange money, goods, or services for a meal.[98] Others, especially children, sneaked out of the camp to bring back some food.[99] These surreptitious dealings ended when the camp commander allowed Arabs to sell their goods in the camp.[100]

Giado survivors emphasize the importance of bartering that took place at the fence between local Bedouins and Jewish inmates. The goods that Bedouins received, such as diamonds, gold, and clothing, had little or no value within the camp; the food that the Bedouins provided, by contrast, could mean the difference between life and death. Handing over jewelry, golden coins,[101] and wedding gifts in exchange for food was the only way to survive.[102]

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[94] Salerno, *Uccideteli tutti*, 141.

[95] Roumani, *The Jews of Libya*, 35.

[96] Salerno, *Uccideteli tutti*, 88.

[97] Nisim Bekhor Mahlouf, interview by Dalia Maoz, March 7, 2010, born in Libya in 1920, on his experiences in Sidi Azaz and World War II, Yad Vashem Testimonies Collection, Interview 0.3/8776776.

[98] Some who ventured out to a village near Giado exchanged money or goods for milk and food. Others offered their services, such as sewing clothes.

[99] For examples of children who did so, see Yaakov Khaion, interview by Ronit Wilder, July 12, 1995, born in Benghazi in 1934, Yad Vashem Testimonies Collection, Interview 0.3/3562777; Amos Naim, interview by Miriam Aviezer, July 21, 1998, born in Benghazi in 1928, Yad Vashem Testimonies Collection, Interview 0.3/3741592; Eliyahu Fadoln (Fadlun), interview by Dov Gedi, January 8, 2008, born in Benghazi in 1931, Yad Vashem Testimonies Collection, Interview 0.3/6963445. Women also sneaked out of the camp for food. See Moshe Mighish, born in Cyrene / Shahhat in 1926, on life under Italian rule and his experiences in Giado, Yad Vashem Testimonies Collection, Interview 0.3/7392149 and USC Shoah Foundation Archive, no.10595-13.

[100] Amos Naim, interview by Miriam Aviezer, July 21, 1998, born in Benghazi in 1928, on his experiences in Giado, Yad Vashem Testimonies Collection, Interview 0.3/3741592.

[101] "Haim Arbiv," Yad Vashem Torchlighters, 2020. Accessed January 17, 2023, https://www.yadvashem.org/remembrance/archive/torchlighters/arbiv.html.

[102] Rachel (Teshuva) Levi, interview by Sigal Holzmann, September 11, 2006, born in Benghazi in 1925, Yad Vashem Testimonies Collection, Interview 0.3/5880765.

When the transactions were forbidden, buyers and sellers incurred significant risk unless the Italian supervisors or the Arab watchmen deliberately or unintentionally ignored the proceedings. Giado survivor Jean Nissim describes the situation: "whoever brought from the Arabs [would] put himself in danger...it was absolutely forbidden... it was a danger, really a danger. If you did such a thing you took responsibility for yourself. They [Italians] did not allow us to do such a thing."[103] One man who was caught exchanging a golden belt for a watermelon was hit by the camp's guards.[104] Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that Jews were willing to risk repercussions; what is less obvious is the willingness of Arab sellers to put themselves in danger. A survivor recalls: "they were also afraid because they were forbidden from doing it, so it was through signals and under the fence. It's possible they spoke to the elders or gave signals or that the guards looked the other way."[105] An Arab guard's simple act of turning away could be crucial to the possibility of bartering across the barbed wire.[106] This complicity, especially against the background of Italians' ruthlessness, explains why survivors of Giado characterize the Arab guards as gentler than their Italian counterparts.[107] The relationship between local Arabs and Jewish internees was clearly not one between equals; aside from the different status of Jews and Arabs on the colonial regime's racial scale, there was the obvious fact that one group was confined and the other was free. But the Arab population of Cyrenaica had endured its own displacement and imprisonment in previous decades, and to some degree, the experience must have encouraged them to provide support for the current victims of the same fate.

Some Arabs, however, felt little empathy. When the convoy to Giado passed through villages and cities, Jews had a chance for last-minute purchases or a final

[103] Jean Nissim, interview by Sigal Amitai Holzmann, July 5, 2017, born in Tripoli in 1928, on his experiences in Benghazi and in Giado, Yad Vashem Testimonies Collection, Interview 0.3/13172552.
[104] Hana Ben Oz, interview by the author, born in Benghazi 1938, on her life in Benghazi and Giado, Ramat Gan, 2 February, 2020.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Italian guards could also be corrupted, and would look away. Yaakov Khaion, interview by Ronit Wilder, July 12, 1995, born in Benghazi in 1934, on his experiences in Giado, Yad Vashem Testimonies Collection, Interview 0.3/3562777.
[107] Yehuda Chachmon, interview by Adina Ben Shemesh, undated, born in Benghazi in 1932, on his experiences in Giado, Yad Vashem Testimonies Collection, Interview 0.3/3562945.

meal in freedom.[108] In at least one case, Arabs threw rotten tomatoes at Jews who passed through their town.[109] Giado survivor Eliyahu Fadlon recalls that Arabs who lived nearby exhibited hostility and threw stones at the prisoners.[110]
There was no uniformity, then, in the Muslim attitude, but the Jews who were interned in Giado, Sidi Azaz, Buerat el Hsun, and Tajoura,[111] camps where bartering occurred, relied heavily on their Arab neighbors. Without these exchanges, the Jews could not have sustained themselves on the meager rations provided by the Italians.[112] Significantly, Jews could ensure their survival in this way only because of the Italians' disregard, tacit approval, or corruption, as well as the willingness of Zaptié guards to turn a blind eye.[113]

## Muslim Men in Italian Uniforms

It is hard to determine the exact number of *mutalinin* literally, "those who 'went Italian.'" Muslims from both modest and high-ranking families from Tripolitania and Cyrenaica collaborated with the colonial regime.[114] Some were motivated by personal interest and ambitions, but other factors included Italian coercion and ingrained colonial control structures.[115] Muslims became soldiers, *carabinieri*, and policemen, and these roles led to encounters with members of the Jewish

[108] Abramovitch, *Ha-yoman ha-ganuz*, 174-175.
[109] Jean Nissim, interview by Sigal Amitai Holzmann, July 5, 2017, born in Tripoli in 1928, on his experiences in Benghazi and in Giado, Yad Vashem Testimonies Collection, Interview 0.3/13172552.
[110] Eliyahu Fadoln (Fadlun), interview by Dov Gedi, January 8, 2008, born in Benghazi in 1931, on his experiences as a child in Benghazi and Giado, Yad Vashem Testimonies Collection, Interview 0.3/6963445.
[111] Jews in these camps were allowed to purchase food from villages surrounding the camps.
[112] Abramovitch, *Ha-yoman ha-ganuz*, 175. Roumani, *The Jews of Libya*, 35; Simon, "It Could Have Happened," 411.
[113] Abramovitch, *Ha-yoman ha-ganuz*, 177.
[114] As Ahmida stresses, the tribal makeup of Libyan society played an essential role in the decision of individual tribes to collaborate or resist. There were also "waverers," or tribes who did not take a stance for or against the Italian occupation. Some tribes that fought alongside Italians and enjoyed the associated profits did so for reasons that had little to do with Italy: these tribes saw their collaboration as a way to retaliate against their tribal enemies, whom they considered a greater threat to their interests than the colonizing forces. Ahmida, *Forgotten Voices*, 30.
[115] Ibid., 27-30.

community during the Second World War II. Within the colonial ranks, Muslims both contributed to anti-Jewish persecution and alleviated Jewish suffering.

Italians had enlisted Libyan Muslims in the military since the liberal period and efforts to retain these soldiers persisted throughout the *ventennio*.[116] The eruption of the Second World War intensified recruitment efforts, whose success owed much to the droughts that affected the livelihood of Bedouins in eastern Libya.[117] A classified Italian letter of 1941 shows the colonial interests that underlay this recruitment effort.[118] The letter describes the natives as "disoriented," labels them as either traitorous or indifferent, and proposes a carrot-and-stick solution. The carrot would consist of generous distribution of food to the majority population,[119] along with an increase in pay for military recruits, and the stick would include the "disciplining" of Muslims who had deserted the army during the Italian retreat of 1941. Deserters were indeed rounded up and sent to Tripolitania for more military training,[120] and after the first British retreat, a larger number of Libyan natives were recruited into the Italian army, the PAI and the Carabinieri, as well as hired as laborers, and their pay was increased.[121]

As members of the Italian forces, Muslim men were involved in the deportation of Jews to Giado and the supervision of Jewish prisoners in that camp as well as others. Through these assignments, the Italian colonial authorities tried to create a rift between the two communities.[122] Nonetheless, Jews found the presence of Muslims somewhat helpful, since Arab guards were apparently less strict than

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[116] After Graziani was promoted to vice-governor, he expelled Libyan battalions as well as bands of irregular soldiers, whom he did not consider trustworthy. Angelo del Boca, *Italiani brava gente?* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 2019), 181.

[117] Taddeo Orlando, "Relazione Semestrale (Gennaio-Giugno 1936). Ordinamento ed Addestramento," Archivio dell'Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, f. N-11,b. 4026, f. 11.

[118] Already in previous decades the Italian army had hired Eritrean troops and local Arabs, particularly from Tripolitania, in an effort to quell the anti-colonial resistance in Eastern Libya. Letter from Badoglio to Rodolfo Graziani, "Governo della Tripolitania e della Cirenaica Il Governatore," July 16, 1930, Fondo Rodolfo Graziani, Documentazione 1903-1955, Archivi di Famiglie e di Persone, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, b. 8.

[119] During World War II, the General Commander of Armed Forces in Libya visited the colonial forces in the Sahara region and distributed food to Muslims there.

[120] Ibid. Letter dated April 22, 1941, sent from A. Ferrara to Meregazzi.

[121] Ibid.

[122] This divide-and-rule policy and colonial violence intertwined with the development of racism and antisemitism, were determining factors in the definition of the New Italian.

their Italian counterparts. Arab guards not only turned a blind eye to the dealings at the barbed-wire fences but also avoided using violence against the prisoners.[123] Giado survivor Yehuda Chachmon remembers that the Arabs under Italian command maintained good relations with Jews, unlike the Italian guards that would use torture or "make trouble."[124] The same perception was shared by Bedouins. Said Yousef Absa, who joined the ranks of the Italian PAI, asserts that while Italians were mean, Arab members of the PAI and askaris tried to make the internment less burdensome for the Jews.[125]

Significantly, no Arabs from Cyrenaica volunteered to fight in Nazi Arab units; instead, they fought German and Italian forces alongside the Allies. Bedouins helped transport supplies across the Libyan-Egyptian border and carried out guerrilla warfare. Indeed, the Senoussis, unlike the secular nationalists of Tripolitania, fought on the same side as Jews during the war—a fact that was recognized by the British authorities following their takeover and that determined the leadership of the future independent state of Libya.[126]

## Sharing Peril and Opposition

The solidarity between Libyan Jews and Muslims during the Fascist period as a whole and the Second World War in particular has received less attention than the worsening of the relationship between the two communities. The Italian occupation and its Fascist "parenthesis"[127] has been deemed a period of general well-being for the Jewish community of the colony, at least in comparison to later persecutions.[128] The prevailing narrative of Jewish-Muslim relations in Libya is

[123] Hana Ben Oz, interview by the author, on her life in Benghazi and Giado, February 2, 2020, Ramat Gan.

[124] Yehuda Chachmon, interview by Adina Ben Shemesh, undated, born in Benghazi in 1932, on his experiences in Giado, Yad Vashem Testimonies Collection, Interview 0.3/3562945.

[125] Salerno, *Uccideteli tutti*, 146.

[126] Abramski-Bligh, "L'influence de la Seconde Guerre mondiale sur les relations judéo-arabes en Libye et en Tunisie," 332.

[127] The notion that Fascism was merely a "parenthesis" in Italian history has been a major stumbling block in Italy's reckoning with its past.

[128] This view is linked to nostalgia for life under Italian rule, which is frequently expressed in memories and testimonies by Jews in Israel, Italy and the US. Harvey E. Goldberg, "Jews in Libya

linear: antagonism that escalated with the Second World War and the British occupation of 1943, culminating in the anti-Jewish pogroms of 1945 and 1948 during the British Military Administration, and the final exodus of Jews in 1967.[129] Instead of seeing the final years of Italy's occupation as a prelude to the disintegration of amicable relations, I suggest that the period should be understood as a time when Jews and Muslims shared a variety of challenges that brought the communities closer together, despite the shifting political and legal frameworks that threatened each group differently. The war brought common concerns that contributed to a sense of camaraderie, and these concerns went beyond everyday difficulties such as food scarcity and lack of security.

Most fundamentally, the two groups were united in the goal of ridding Libya of Italians. The Italians themselves saw Jews and Senussis as partners of the British, and indeed individuals from both groups sided with the Allies, engaged in anti-Italian activity,[130] and worked together in the pillage of Italian properties and the destruction of Italian agricultural villages.[131] The common goal of Jews and Muslims, "that the Italians and Germans would lose,"[132] could outweigh pre-existing tensions between the two religious groups and even eclipse the inter-religious violence, that still occurred.

The war intensified the Italians' response to individuals and groups who were perceived as a threat to the regime, and both Jews and Muslims felt the effects. Italian efforts to eliminate espionage, along with the lack of local infrastructure, led to the expulsion of foreign citizens, Jews and Muslims alike.[133]Accusations of

during WWII and the 1945 Anti-Jewish Riots. Aspects of History and Memorial Making," unpublished.

[129] Roumani, *The Jews of Libya*; Maurice Roumani, "The Final Exodus of Libyan Jews in 1967," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 19, no. 3-4 (2007): 77-100.

[130] The Senussi, a Sufi order, were active in the fight against colonial expansion in the early 1900s. On Senussi resistance to Italians, see Edward Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949); Saima Raza, "Italian Colonization and Libyan Resistance to the Al-Sanusi of Cyrenaica (1911-1922)," *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies in Asia* 6, no.1 (2012): 87-120.

[131] Picciotto, "Gli ebrei in Libia sotto la dominazione italiana," 102.

[132] Moshe Mighish describes numerous acts of animosity between Jews and Arabs, including being exposed as a Jew to Germans by Arab coworkers. Nonetheless, he concludes that the aim of overthrowing Italians took precedence over any interest in inter-religious tensions.

[133] Muslim foreigners were mostly French subjects (*sudditi* or *protetti*). Jewish foreigners included refugees from Europe who were passing through Benghazi on their way to further destinations.

disloyalty to the regime were used to legitimize persecution. While Jews faced collective punishment, individual Arabs who supported the British were detained in camps.[134]

The main trend I have identified during this period, a time when Jews faced unprecedented persecution by the Fascist regime, is that ordinary Muslims provided significant assistance, particularly in non-urban areas, offering shelter during air raids, making food available in labor and concentration camps, and even helping some Jews escape their internment.[135] Muslims continued to help as Jews

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After the Italian declaration of war, these refugees were also detained. Their ranks included many Germans as well as a group of 300 who were on their way to Thailand when they were arrested. The Italian authorities debated whether to send the group to Italy and subsequently to their original countries or to allow them to continue their journey. The case demonstrates the colony's lack of infrastructure and funds during the period: in their communications, the colonial authorities in Libya pointed out that they could neither afford to maintain the group nor cover the costs of their transport elsewhere. Meanwhile, authorities in Rome discouraged the transfer of foreign Jews to Italy because the peninsula lacked a system of camps where they could be detained. Despite these obstacles, Italian authorities began arranging for the internment of foreign Jews in Libya in 1941 and the eventual deportation of British subjects among them. The same year, negotiations began with France regarding the expulsion and transfer of French Jews from Libya. Finally, in February 1942, Minister of Italian Africa Attilio Teruzzi wrote to Governor General of Libya Bastico and Chief of Italian Supreme Command (the armed forces) Ugo Cavallero that all Jews in Cyrenaica were to be interned in a camp in Tripolitania. The message also specified that Jews of Tripolitania would be transferred at a later stage and the possibility of deporting all Jews to Italy had been considered but ultimately rejected for lack of infrastructure. "Internamento stranieri residenti in Libia," Ministero dell'Interno, Direzione Generale Pubblica Sicurezza, Divisione Affari Generali e Riservati, Archivio Generale (1870-1958), Massime, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, b. 105, f. 16, sf. 1, ins. 23/1. Attilio Teruzzi to Ettore Bastico and Ugo Cavallero, "Per ordine Superiore," September 8, 1941, Archivio dell'Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, N-11, b. 4026.

[134] Benghazi resident Abdalla ben Auad was interned on October 20, 1942, in Sidi Abdulkerim (Tagiura/Tajoura) for sympathizing with the British, and Ali Hassan Lunes, suspected of planning anti-Italian actions, was sent to the concentration camp of Zuetina in 1940. While some Arabs were detained in camps, others were sent to the *confino*, as was the case for Ali Ben Hamed, arrested on suspicion of spying in 1942. "Indigeni processati e condannati," Ministero dell'Africa Italiana, Direzione Generale Affari Politici, Archivio Segreto, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, b. 16, f. 9, sf. 1.2-4; And Ministero dell'Africa Italiana, Vol. II, Archivio Storico Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 180/44, f. 155.

[135] Zion Labi, a Tunisian citizen who lived in Tripoli, was interned at Buerat el-Hsun following the Italian declaration of war in June 1940. After spending three months at the camp, he was sent back to Tripoli, then brought back to the camp for a year. He was freed through the intervention of Shekh Bey Frebisha, but he was eventually deported to Civitella del Tronto and later Bergen-Belsen. Zion Lavi, undated, born in Tripoli in 1922, on his experiences in Civitella Del Tronto,

returned to the cities after the liberation of the camps. On their way to Tripoli from Sidi Azaz, freed Jewish laborers with no ability to pay were nonetheless given bread and dates by Arabs.[136] Urban Muslims offered food and employment and extended a warm welcome to their neighbors and business partners.[137] Jews were told that they had been missed during the period of hardship, and that their return was seen as a sign that calm was returning.[138]

It is notable that under the Italian regime both communities experienced the camps, but at different periods. The camp was not only the setting of a common experience of suffering, but also a space where the colonial divide-and-rule method was revealed. This strategy went beyond the attempt to isolate groups in order to minimize or eliminate the impact of those who opposed the Italian regime, as in the way Bedouin tribes were separated from anti-colonial fighters during the Pacification or Jews were excluded from society during the Second World War. The colonial regime was actively trying to manipulate the relations between Jews and Muslims. Thus, even the son of a Bedouin leader who had fought Italians in the 1920s and1930s and who might have himself been interned by the Fascists, could become a guard in Giado. This was the case of Said Yousef Absa, and it shows how different generations of colonized subjects, even within the same family, could change loyalties. As he shared his memories, Said Yousef Absa proudly gave a Roman salute, perhaps a sign that the history of the Fascists' brutal repression still demands our attention.[139]

In studies of Fascist repression, Jewish and Muslim victims rarely appear simultaneously. Jewish suffering of the period tends to be enveloped in Holocaust

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Bergen-Belsen and camps in Germany, Yad Vashem Testimonies Collection, Interview 0.3/3558538.

[136] Josef Dabash (Davash), interview by Moshe Shickler, August 9, 2000, born in Tripoli in 1923, on his experiences in forced labor camps in Libya, Yad Vashem Testimonies Collection, Interview 0.3/3764095.

[137] Josef Naim, born in Benghazi in 1928, Yad Vashem Testimonies Collection, Interview 0.3/7285647; Joseph Fadlun, interview by Bina Kutner, January 9, 2007, born in Benghazi in 1933, on his experiences in Benghazi, Giado and Tripoli, Yad Vashem Testimonies Collection, Interview 0.3/6346354.

[138] Rachel (Tshuva) Beni, interview August 7, 2008, born in Benghazi in 1930, on her experiences as a child in Benghazi, villages and a camp in Giado, Yad Vashem Testimonies Collection, Interview 0.3/7321975.

[139] Salerno, *Uccideteli tutti,* 145.

narratives, and the Jews of Libya are generally excluded from the European paradigm of Holocaust research. Muslim suffering, seen as part of the purview of colonial history, is generally omitted from Italian historical accounts. A careful look at the Jews' and Muslims' common experience of racial persecution, deportation, internment and forced labor may not only explain acts of solidarity between the two communities but also open up the possibility of dismantling paradigmatic memory politics. Instead of focusing on a hierarchy of suffering or a comparison between colonial repression and the Holocaust, we might see instead the complexities of the Jewish and Muslim experience under colonizers too often depicted as *brava gente*, and the racial paradigms and modes of violence which drove the fascist agenda.

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# Imagined Homelands: Baghdadi Jews in South, East and Southeast Asia, and Europe (1850-1950)

by *Marcella Simoni*

## Abstract

*Adopting a transnational perspective, this article investigates the history, mobility and identity of Baghdadi Jews in South, East and Southeast Asia and in Europe between 1850 and 1950. Unlike previous works on the subject, which have focused mainly on the magnates among the Baghdadis of the Asian hubs, this article also includes many references to the middle classes. The first part of the article examines how Baghdadis in the Asian hubs transformed their collective identity by dwelling in and across India, Singapore, Burma (Myanmar) and China and what role did mobility play in this process. Individuals travelled for reasons and work or leisure, they exchanged money and commodities, used different languages (among them Judeo-Arabic and English), and objects circulated too; among them liturgical and religious objects, as well as the Jewish press. The second part analyzes what was the significance of Europe for this group. London represented a point of arrival for many of the most successful traders among them, especially the tycoons. However, in the first half of the twentieth century other capitals (Paris, Madrid, and even New York) acquired a growing relevance in connection to the contemporary contraction of the Sephardic space and expansion of the Ashkenazi one. Sources for this work come from oral history repositories at the National Archives of Singapore, the Hong Kong Oral History Project, the memorial website* Jewish Calcutta *and from the contemporary Jewish press, and in particular the Shanghai based monthly publication* Israel's Messenger.

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## Introduction

The history of Baghdadi Jews in South, East and Southeast Asia is often associated with the names of the Sassoons, the Kadoories, the Ezras and (usually) their (male) descendants, as well as those of several other wealthy families, like that of Silas A. Hardoon. The historical trajectory of these families, how they accumulated fantastic wealth and built economic empires while trading in Bombay, Calcutta, Rangoon, Singapore, Hong Kong and Shanghai in the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries, and their ultimate acceptance into British elites in London, has usually been told from a top-down perspective as a single trajectory of an elite that from the Middle East headed eastwards, following the expanding commercial routes of the British Empire. This history has inevitably lent itself to sensationalism: after all, the wealthiest among the Baghdadis contributed to the development of the main capitals of South, East and Southeast Asia from the point of view of finance, economy and even architecture,[1] factors that recently even earned them the title of "last kings of Shanghai."[2] The methods of economic history, family history, network analysis and a top-down perspective have therefore intertwined to create a single narrative that celebrates Baghdadi Jews as an incredibly successful

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[1] Nancy Berliner, *Shanghai's Jews: Art, Architecture and Survival*, Contemporary Jewish Museum of San Francisco. Accessed May 19, 2022, https://thecjm.org/learn_resources/301. See also, Stephanie Po-yin Chung, "Floating in Mud to Reach the Skies: Victor Sassoon and the Real Estate Boom in Shanghai, 1920s–1930s," *International Journal of Asian Studies* 16 (2019): 1-31.

[2] Jonathan Kaufman, *The Last Kings of Shanghai: The Rival Jewish Dynasties that Helped Create Modern China* (New York: Viking, 2020).

commercial and financial elite. [3] This has caused a partially distorted representation, as if they were all magnates and all aspired to leave the Middle East and become (or be acknowledged as) Europeans. With few exceptions, this elite has been taken as representing the whole group, though its composition was far more varied: most Baghdadis doing business in Asia were indeed merchants, but some were not, and very few of the approximately 10,000 of them who lived between Bombay, Calcutta, Rangoon, Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai and then London ever came close to owning as many assets and estates as the Sassoons, the Kedoories, the Ezras or Silas Hardoon.[4] Some indeed transferred their business and lives to London and Europe, but many remained in Asia, in India for instance, well after 1950.

In part, such a distortion is inevitable and has been caused by a combination of various factors. First, the greater availability of sources: these extended families often operated as large family firms and have left plenty of commercial and personal correspondences as well as photographic archives. Furthermore, given the personal and/or professional relationships of many of them with British institutions and even some royals, their names are often found in official records from the British governments and the Foreign Office. The press (both the general and the Jewish one, including those periodical publications which defended their economic interests) wrote often about them. Administrative sources are also available from the numerous charitable institutions that these families funded across the Middle East, South, East and Southeast Asia. Second, the elites among the Baghdadis were pictured and discussed publicly more often than the middle classes because of the striking impression that their rapid upward social mobility made, accompanied as it was by their determination to be included as equals among the (British and European) Jewish and non-Jewish economic and social elites. Finally, it is difficult to resist the glamour that accompanied most of their social undertakings. The professional and social standing of different generations of Sassoons illustrates clearly the intertwining of these elements: in 1873 the first son of David Sassoon, Abdallah (Albert), as the new head of the David Sassoon & Co. after his father's death in 1864, was the first Jew ever to be given the "Freedom of the City" of London award, in recognition of extraordinary success or celebrity.[5]

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[3] Yuk Chui Kong, "Jewish Merchants' Community in Shanghai: A Study of the Kadoorie Enterprise,1890-1950" (PhD diss., Hong Kong Baptist University, 2017). See also Joseph Sassoon, *The Sassoons: The Great Global Merchants and the Making of an Empire* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2022).

[4] These are the estimates of Sasha R. Goldstein-Sabbah, *Baghdadi Jewish Networks in Hashemite Iraq: Jewish Transnationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 225.

[5] Sassoon, *The Sassoons*, 114.

At the end of the century, the Sassoons were well-known as fabulous hosts in the merry-go-round of parties and receptions held by British aristocracy in London, Bombay, Rangoon and Shanghai. In the 1930s, a few generations later, Victor Sassoon hosted sumptuous balls in his Cathay hotel in Shanghai, the highest skyscraper in Asia (1929). These were attended by famed celebrities, as the numerous photographs of him with Vivian Leigh, Marlene Dietrich and Charlie Chaplin show.

In the last two decades, scholarship has begun to address the history of Baghdadi Jews in Asia from different geographical and methodological perspectives. From the vantage point of India, Baghdadis have been conceptualized as "super-diverse" for their varied Middle Eastern origin and composition.[6] Some of them have had their life stories told through the lenses of family history and a gender perspective has also entered the picture.[7] Seen from Burma (Myanmar), Baghdadis have been framed as a "connected Diaspora" because of the identity networks to which they participated.[8] Taking into consideration their main point of origin, Baghdad and Iraq, they have been recently analyzed as "satellite communities" and Goldstein-Sabbah has demonstrated the mutual cultural, political and economic influences that shaped these communities.[9] In general, regardless of their location, Baghdadi Jews living in Asian countries have been seen as "almost Englishmen" and/or "imagined Britons," a group that aspired to be accepted as equals by the ruling class in the British colonial world, and that Elizabeth E. Imber aptly termed a "late imperial elite."[10]

The economic and social parable of the Jewish Baghdadi elites in South, East, Southeast Asia and Europe is certainly very important in itself. It is also crucial to understand the history of non-elite Baghdadis who followed them to Asia, but more rarely to Europe. Many Baghdadis who were engaged in trade in the Asian hubs were employed by the Sassoons in one of the branches of their family firm and some of them later turned into tycoons themselves, like Eliezer (Ellis)

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[6] Shalva Weil, ed., *The Baghdadi Jews in India: Maintaining Communities, Negotiating Identities and Creating Super-Diversity* (Abingdon-New York: Routledge, 2019).

[7] Jael Silliman, *Jewish Portraits, Indian Frames: Women's Narratives from a Diaspora of Hope* (London-New York-Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2022, 1st ed. 2001); Sassoon, *The Sassoons*, 170-192.

[8] Ruth Fredman Cernea, *Almost Englishmen: Baghdadi Jews in British Burma* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007).

[9] Goldstein-Sabbah, *Baghdadi Jewish Networks*.

[10] Chiara Betta, "From Orientals to Imagined Britons: Baghdadi Jews in Shanghai," *Modern Asian Studies* 37, no. 4 (2003): 999-1023; Sarah Abrevaya Stein, "Protected Persons? The Baghdadi Jewish Diaspora, the British State, and the Persistence of Empire," *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 1 (2011): 80-108; Elizabeth E. Imber, "A Late Imperial Elite Baghdadi Jews in British India and the Political Horizons of Empire and Nation," *Jewish Social Studies* 23, no. 2 (2018): 48-85.

Kedoorie and Silas A. Hardoon. However, as Jael Silliman and Maisie J. Meyer have shown, others owned and managed small businesses and were not dependent on the commercial enterprises of the British or elite Jews.[11] Indeed, this was a socially diversified group that included also middle-class Jews, as well as Jews that "were all struggling, living hand to mouth, buying something and selling something and trying to make a living,"[12] as Jacob Ballas from Singapore recalled. These groups, and not only the elites, deserve visibility.

In this study, that includes middle classes as well as tycoons, I use an approach of entangled and transnational history[13] and, therefore, I look at the mobility and circulation of capital, people, goods, ideas, information, news and their influence in shaping the collective path of Baghdadi Jews through South, East and Southeast Asia, as well as collective memories and self-representation. The primary sources for this study are photographic and oral, and I have integrated them with articles from the Jewish press of Shanghai. The first two come from various repositories of oral history interviews: the oral history project at the National Archives of Singapore, the Hong Kong Heritage Project (HKHP)[14] and the memorial website *Recalling Jewish Calcutta*, which would deserve an analysis of its own.[15] All these archives make us hear the voices (and see the faces) of Baghdadi Jews from all walks of life outside of Iraq, in their dwellings at work, at school, in their dealings with either the magnates on the one hand or local Jews on the other (for example in India), while traveling, studying, working, on holiday or at home with their families. The other main source that I use in this research is the newspaper *Israel's Messenger*. Carrying the subtitle "fortnightly journal for the Jewish home" (later a monthly), the *Israel's Messenger* was established in Shanghai in 1904 by Nissim

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[11] Silliman, *Jewish Portraits, Indian Frames*, 33; Maisie J. Meyer, *Shanghai's Baghdadi Jews: A Collection of Biographical Reflections* (Hong Kong: Blacksmith Books, 2015).

[12] See the oral history collection of the National Archives of Singapore (henceforth NAS), Communities of Singapore (part 1), Accession Number 000163, *Interview to Jacob Ballas*, December 6, 1983, Transcript Reel/Disc 2, 18.

[13] Tansen Sen, *India, China and the World: A Connected History* (Boulder: Rowman &Littlefield, 2019); Fiona Paisly and Pamella Scully, *Writing Transnational History* (London-New York: Bloomsbury, 2019).

[14] "Oral History Interviews Collection," The Hong Kong Heritage Project, accessed December 28, 2022, https://www.hongkongheritage.org/pages/oral-history. Founded by Sir Michael Kadoorie in 2007 to preserve the history and promote the heritage of Hong Kong (and not just Jews in Hong Kong).

[15] At the time of writing (early December 2022) a new version of the website Recalling Jewish Calcutta is online at www.jewishcalcutta.in though many of the web-pages that populated its older version do not appear online (yet?). For this reason, I refer here to some of the material from the older version that was saved on the website Internet Archive, Wayback Machine at web.archive.org.

Elias Benjiamin (N.E.B.) Ezra and published until 1941 as the mouthpiece of the Shanghai Zionist Association, founded in 1904. Despite its explicit political and national orientation, the *Israel's Messenger*, was not concerned with Zionism alone; in 1904 there was little to report anyway, at least from Palestine. On the contrary, the journal dealt with numerous subjects and questions of Jewish and broader interest that reveal the cultural, political and economic transnational web in which the Baghdadis of all social extractions moved and interacted.

I have divided this article in two main parts: first, I examine the uninterrupted flow of communication and the continuous connection between Baghdadis of various social backgrounds in South, East and Southeast Asia and their point of origin, Baghdad and Iraq until the mid-1930s. In this context, Baghdad, more than Jerusalem, often represented the Homeland, while the elites had already identified London as the promised land, or rather as the capital of that transnational financial, economic and cultural space in which they had been moving since the mid-nineteenth century. Second, I focus on the period that followed, after 1931, when Baghdad could realistically no longer be used as a practical or an ideal reference point and the Baghdadi Jewish (and by extension the Sephardi) identity entered a period of decline. Beyond London, during the 1930s another European country—Spain—entered into this multi-layered and complex Baghdadi identity: in this context, nostalgic visions of an idealized past in medieval Spain became the foundation of a narrative that moved the point of origin of this group back in time and helped imagine another possible homeland in yet another European context.

## Baghdad

As it is well known, between the early nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries Jewish communities in Iraq saw a constant growth in numbers: in the early nineteenth century there were about 10,000 Jews in Baghdad and less than 1,500 in Basra; by 1908, Jews amounted to 53,000 of Baghdad's 150,000 inhabitants; the last Ottoman yearbook for Baghdad of 1917 indicated that the number of Jews had risen to 80,000 out of 202,200 residents. According to the national census of 1947 there were 118,000 Jews out of a population of 4,5 million (2,6 percent). Jews were largely concentrated in the largest cities with 77,500 in Baghdad, 10,500 in Basra, and 10,300 in Mosul.[16] Such a growth should be understood in the framework of

[16] These data are taken from Nissim Rejwan, *The Last Jews in Baghdad: Remembering a Lost Homeland* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), xi-xii.

a growing tension between the administrative reforms of the Ottoman empire and the progressive secularization of the Jewish community of Iraq, which in turn set in motion various other processes: a professional diversification of the Jewish population, the political and national engagement of active groups of intellectuals and a general enhanced prosperity of the community itself, despite the persistence of pockets of poverty also among Jews. If the 1920s were somewhat of a golden age for this community, they also represented the starting point of increasing discrimination, antisemitism and persecution that culminated in the *Farhud* of 1941 and in the successive tragic exodus of large part of the Jewish community of Iraq between 1949 and 1951.[17]

These numbers provide some context to the volume and nature of the political, economic, social, cultural and linguistic interactions between Baghdadis in Iraq and those in the Asian hubs; indirectly, they also indicate that these exchanges occurred in a transnational perspective and that they were not conducted only by the magnates among the Baghdadis in South, East and Southeast Asia, but also by the middle classes, both in Iraq and abroad.[18]

In the following pages, I give several examples of such mobility and circulation, considering some of the tangible and intangible elements that kept the connection flowing. These included individuals who moved between places for professional or recreational reasons, capital that flowed for business, donations and endowments, objects that circulated widely, like secular or religious books and newspapers. Mobility transmitted ideas, replicated and amplified languages, transformed religious rituals, and conveyed a shared identity and a collective heritage. In time, across the generations, it also changed this group, as those who had been born and brought up in the Baghdadi hubs in South, East and Southeast Asia, often remained there or later migrated to Australia or the US, and Israel to a much lesser extent.

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[17] See for example Nissim Kazzaz, *The Jews in Iraq in the Twentieth Century* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 1991) [Hebrew]; Esther Meir-Glitzenstein, *Zionism in an Arab Country: Jews in Iraq in 1940* (London-New York: Routledge, 2004); Orit Bashkin, *New Babylonians: A History of the Jews in Modern Iraq* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012); Aline Schlaepfer, *Les intellectuals juifs de Bagdad: Discours et Allegiances 1908–1951* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Orit Bashkin, *Impossible Exodus: Iraqi Jews in Israel* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017); Jonathan Sciarcon, *Educational Oases in the Desert: The Alliance Israélite Universelle's Girl's Schools in Ottoman Iraq, 1895–1915* (Albany: Suny, 2017). See also the documentary by Fiona Murphy, *Remember Baghdad*, 2017, available with Arabic subtitles on YouTube, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LHBoM9f3bMc, accessed December 18, 2022.

[18] Goldstein-Sabbah, *Baghdadi Jewish Networks*.

## *Mobility: Individuals*

The journeys that Baghdadi Jews continued to undertake throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century to Baghdad and Basra for family or business reasons had an important effect on the community, its composition, and on the mobility of its members. David Sassoon sent Sassoon David (1832-1867), one his sons, to study in Baghdad; others "would be sent to Baghdad to encourage young men and their families to pastures new."[19] Hiring employees from families that the Sassoons knew was a way to build trust, and enabled the company to continue its correspondence in Judeo-Arabic, a language that was indecipherable to outsiders and that, therefore, gave them an edge in business. In Shanghai, "the China Directory for 1874 record[ed] the names of 20 employees in the two Sassoon firms."[20] In Singapore, Samuel Bernard Sassoon's grandfather—whose family was originally from Basra—had been an employee of Singapore's Baghdadi tycoon Menasseh Meyer, while his father was a small businessman[21]. In Shanghai, others pursued different careers: Eliahu Silman Levy (ca. 1870-1941) was a merchant; David Saul Levy (1898-1939) was a shop owner; David Abraham (1893-1958) was a bookkeeper.[22] Looking at India, and at Calcutta in particular, Jacob Isaac Jonah had come "to Calcutta from Baghdad in 1900, worked in the jute industry for E.D. Sassoon [while] his brother worked in the silk industry in Shanghai." His son Isaac also "worked for E.D. Sassoon at the age of sixteen" and later married an English woman, whose "father had come to India as an engineer."[23] The family of Nissim Matook immigrated from Baghdad to India in the early 1800s following the Sassoons; he was born in Shanghai and then moved to Hong Kong.[24] Shlomo Ezra Pinhas Barook Mizrahi was a cook who arrived in Calcutta from Baghdad in 1903 and then turned to the import/export business with offices in Calcutta and

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[19] Sassoon, *The Sassoons*, 66.

[20] Meyer, *Shanghai's Baghdadi Jews*, 68. The two Sassoon firms were "David Sassoon & Co. Ltd." and "E.D. Sassoon & Co., Ltd."

[21] NAS, Communities of Singapore (Part 1), Accession Number 004502, *Interview to Samuel Bernard Sassoon*, December 30, 2019.

[22] Meyer, *Shanghai's Baghdadi Jews*. The biographies of the individuals mentioned above are respectively at pages 147-163; 164-177; 178-186; 325-331; 354-364.

[23] "Jonah Family. Rachel Jonah note," Recalling Jewish Calcutta, accessed December 8, 2022, https://web.archive.org/web/20190728204051/http://www.jewishcalcutta.in/exhibits/show/com_portraits/jonah_com.

[24] The Hong Kong Heritage Project (henceforth HKHP), Oral History Collection, I373, Nissim Matook.

Rangoon.[25] The grandparents of Charles Simon, who arrived in Singapore from Baghdad via the Dutch Indies, "were in the jute business" and "had the usual kind of business with people who had come here from the Middle East."[26] Pnina Ashkenazi (née Howard) "worked with the Indian Railway Service and then practiced law at the Guwahati High Court (and) was the first Khasi [sic?] woman advocate."[27] Such interactions would also take place on holiday, as other testimonies recall:

> Members of the Jewish community rented cottages in Mudderpore and Gopalpur and socialized with one another there. They played Backgammon, Poker and Mahjong just as they did in Calcutta, but in a holiday setting.[28]

Oral and photographic sources tell of the high mobility of the members of this community, through different social classes, for reasons of study, work, as well as of their interactions with local Jews, whether on the workplace, in the city or on holiday.

From a different geographical perspective, the *Israel's Messenger* of Shanghai too shows the high mobility of this community; it published the news of the travels of many Baghdadis (and the outcomes of their visits) to the many locations where this newspaper was sold and read, in Shanghai, India, Burma, Singapore, Hong Kong (often referred to as "the Colony") and London. From 1929, a new subtitle was added to this publication to reflect this new reality "The International Jewish Monthly."[29] The *Israel's Messenger* represented the interests and the voice of the wealthier among the Baghdadis; thus, the more distinguished the travelers, the more detailed the descriptions of their relations with (and their contributions to) Iraq and its population. The travels and visits of middle-class Baghdadis were also

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[25] "Mizrahi family," Recalling Jewish Calcutta, accessed December 8, 2022, https://web.archive.org/web/20190801052013/http://www.jewishcalcutta.in/exhibits/show/com_portraits/mizrahi-family.

[26] NAS, Communities of Singapore (Part 1), Accession Number 000395, *Interview to Charles Simon*, February 18, 1984, Transcript Reel/Disc 1, 2.

[27] "Ashkenazi family," Recalling Jewish Calcutta, accessed December 8, 2022, https://web.archive.org/web/20190729234559/http://www.jewishcalcutta.in/exhibits/show/com_portraits/ashkenazy-family.

[28] "Jonah Family, includes a note on Rechel Levy née Jonah," Recalling Jewish Calcutta, accessed December 8, 2022, https://web.archive.org/web/20190728204051/http://www.jewishcalcutta.in/exhibits/show/com_portraits/jonah_com.

[29] *Israel's Messenger* 26, no. 1, "Silver Jubilee Number" (April 5, 1929 - Adar Sheni 25, 5689): 1.

reported, though in less detail, in the journal's section "Social and Personal," which is likely to have been paid for by the individuals concerned. This type of coverage was reserved for those who belonged to the rising professional middle classes, as in the case of "Dr. and Mrs. Aflatoun" whose return to Shanghai from Baghdad was announced on the pages of the *Israel's Messenger*.[30] Here, a brief professional presentation and family lineage gave context for the readers: in this case, Dr. Aflatoun "from a well-known family hailing from Bagdad [sic]" was married to the unnamed (but well-traveled) only daughter of Mr. Sassoon Kajamon from Baghdad, herself a "graduate of the Dutch College at Java." More simply, in July 1925 the *Israel's Messenger* just reported that "Mr. Albert Loya returned to Bagdad [sic] on the *Delta* on the 18th instant."[31]

## *Mobility: Philanthropy*

Money was another element that flowed extensively in these exchanges. When tycoons were involved, currency flowed mainly into Jewish, and sometimes also into some non-Jewish, welfare and educational institutions in Iraq, for example through the endowment of a school or a hospital in Baghdad that would be open to all. This was the case of Mr. and Mrs. David Ezra from Calcutta, who in 1925 had donated "Rs 75,000 to schools, hospitals, orphanages without distinction of race or creed" and who had been very "well received by the Jewish notables of Bagdad [sic] and Basrah."[32] Likewise, "Mr. E[llis] S. Kadoorie, Mr. Laurence Kadoorie and Mr. Horace Kadoorie of Shanghai" had donated "Rs 15,000 to Mohammedan institutions" and had been welcomed at the train station by the notables of the Jewish community of Baghdad, led by the principal of the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) school. They then had entertained private conversations with the Prime Minister of Iraq (former, Ja'afar Pasha Al Askari, and current, Yassim Pasha al Hashmi) and with the King himself.[33] The year before the *Israel's Messenger* had praised the Laura Kadoorie School for Girls in

[30] "Notes from Iraq," *Israel's Messenger* 10, no. 10 [B] (July 31, 1925 - Ab 10 5685): 10. Some issues of the *Israel Messenger* carry the same volume and issue numbers even though published on different dates. Those that follow this different system are here labelled as [B] in order to distinguish them from the issues that follow the overall regular numbering. The first issue that repeats an already assigned number - and should therefore be considered as [B] - is 10, no. 1 (June 6, 1924 - Elul 27, 5684).

[31] "Social and Personal," *Israel's Messenger* 10, no. 10 [B] (July 31, 1925 - Ab 10 5685): 12.

[32] "Notes from Iraq," *Israel's Messenger* 10, no. 9 [B] (June 5, 1925 - Siwan 13, 5685): 6.

[33] Ibid.

Baghdad (as well as the Boys' School, established by Sir Albert Sassoon) as "the best model to their sister institutions throughout Mesopotamia" for "the cleanliness of the pupils, their standard of education, their perseverance and zeal." Included was also a profile of Eliezer (Ellis) Kedoorie taken from the local Arab press, and in particular *Al Iraq*:

> A great benefactor and philanthropist who left Baghdad when young and whom the Almighty helped to acquire huge wealth (...), who allotted a big portion of his money to charitable works in his motherland especially in Iraq (...) for the moral upheaval of his co-religionists (...). He also appointed a committee from bis [sic] family at Baghdad for the inspection of the Institution he maned [sic] after his late wife Laura Kadoorie.[34]

Funds for education and welfare in Iraq were collected not only when tycoons went back to visit but also when Jewish emissaries (usually rabbis) from Iraq traveled to the hubs of the Baghdadi diaspora in South, East and Southeast Asia. In 1908, for example, the Grand Rabbi of Mosul Elia S. Sayigh left on a fund-raising trip that brought him first to India, and then to Shanghai, to collect donations for the construction of a boys' and girls' school in Mosul to be managed by the AIU.[35] On that occasion the *Israel's Messenger* reported that the Baghdadi community in Shanghai had "extended their helping hand to their sister Communities [of Mosul, Basrah and Baghdad] in the time of need"[36] and Rabbi Sayigh collected enough funding to establish a girls' school next to the one for boys. Indeed, education, and its importance in raising the general welfare of the Jewish population in Iraq, was central in these exchanges and travels.

When travel was not possible, the search for funding for the education of the new generations in Iraq took the form of appeals that from Baghdad were directed "to the many co-religionists in China, who formerly had their origin in Iraq." This was the case of the appeal that Ezekiel H. Haroon, the principal of the Midrash *Talmud Torah* in Baghdad published on the *Israel's Messenger* in 1926, in order to save "the institution from being wrecked and paralyzed," as at the time it was unable to "give shelter to the thousands of poor and orphan children who

[34] Geo S. Shina, "The Laura Kadoorie School for Girls at Bagdad [sic]," *Israel's Messenger* 11, no. 7 (April 11, 1924 - Nisan 7, 5684): 24.

[35] "The Jews of Mossoul," *Israel's Messenger* 5, no. 7 (July 10, 1908 - Tamuz 11, 5668): 1; "The Jews of Mossoul," *Israel's Messenger* 5, no. 8 (July 24, 1908 - Ab 25, 5668): 4-6.

[36] "The Jews of Mossoul," *Israel's Messenger* 5, no. 7 (July 10, 1908 - Tamuz 11, 5668): 1.

wish[ed] to receive education within its walls," and was "consequently [...] obliged to turn them away."[37]

## *Mobility: Rituals and Ritual Objects (Prayer and Religious Books)*

Traveling to Iraq and supporting the education and welfare of local Jews was not the only way to keep a connection and a continuity alive between the points of origin and the Asian hubs; another was maintaining the liturgical style of Baghdad—the *Minhag Edot HaMizrach*—in the synagogues that Baghdadis built in Poona, Bombay, Singapore, Rangoon, Shanghai and Hong Kong between 1856 and 1932. Given that this group imagined and represented itself as an orthodox community with a specific identity, it saw *Sifrei Torah* (Pentateuchs) and prayer books as crucial instruments to maintain and transmit that identity.

At the beginning of the 1920s the question of which prayer book should become the standard for the Baghdadi communities in South, East and Southeast Asia was discussed extensively between D. S. Gubbay, from the Ohel Leah congregation of Hong Kong, and Rabbi W. Hirsch of the Ohel Rachel Synagogue of Shanghai. Competing for selection were three texts: first, the *Book of Prayer and Order of Service according to the customs of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews with and English translation*, which Rabbi Haham Moses Gaster had published in London in 1904 with Oxford University Press; second, the Livorno edition of the *Shabbat and Holiday Prayer* book and, finally, the Baghdad edition of the same volume. All followed a Sephardi tradition, but there were language and liturgical differences between them. Adopting the first would have helped those who attended religious service but who could no longer understand Hebrew, or who did not find it easy to follow the *minhag* from Baghdad (including some Ashkenazi Jews who were also living in Hong Kong), but it implied renouncing some of the Baghdadi distinctiveness. In a long exchange of letters, Rabbi D.S. Gubbay (Hong Kong) described to Rabbi Hirsch (Shanghai) how the discussion around this issue had developed in the community he represented:

> Several members opposed the suggestion [of adopting the book by Gaster] on the ground that they were desirous that no prayer book should be used, other than the Livorno edition or the Baghdad edition, since Haham Gaster's book eliminated the *Pitum Haketoret* in the Sabbath Musaph [sic]. It was further pointed out that several other piyutim [sic]

[37] "An Appeal from Iraq," *Israel's Messenger* 11, no. 11 (August 6, 1926 - Ab 26, 5686): 16.

> and prayers were not included in the Books in question. Another opposer argued against the new innovation on the fact that the Livorno and Bagdad [sic] editions are the only ones that are established by the Anshey keneseth Hadgedola [sic] and that they are based on the Cabalistical [sic] theory of beri'a w'atziah [sic].[38]

Rabbi Hirsch rectified most of the statements on which the congregation of Hong Kong had based its refusal of Gastner's book, arguing that the Livorno and Baghdad prayer books were not the same, that they could not be traced back all the way to *the Anshei Knesset HaGedolah*, and that their kabalistic references were incorrect. Still, he recommended that "the official service of your synagogue [Hong Kong] should not depart from the Bagdad [sic] Minhag to which it rightly belongs."[39] Even if the two rabbis concluded that the standard prayer book for the communities of the East should conform to the *minhag* of Baghdad, not many such volumes seemed to be easily available. The question remained open and re-emerged a decade later.

In 1934 Dr. Moses Gaster himself was asked about specific liturgical matters concerning the synagogues of the Baghdadis living in Shanghai and in the same year he published in London a ruling that caused much controversy in those communities. This referred to the *Amidah* (prayer) during *Mussaf* (additional service for Saturdays, the first day of the month, holidays and for the intermediate days of Passover and Sukkot), that the Baghdadi community of Shanghai repeated twice, and which Gaster ruled was "not obligatory by any Din." As he wrote:

> The Repetition is only a question of Minhag, which however is not the one of the Sephardic Congregations of England and America. and I believe also of Holland, and elsewhere. You write that your congregation follows the Minhag of Baghdad, but this has already been put aside at least fifteen years ago, and it would therefore not be advisable to unsettle it again, especially as there is no Din connected with it. Such changes only

[38] "Minhag Baghdad and a Standard Prayer Book," *Israel's Messenger* 10, no. 7 (April 6, 1923 - Nissan 20, 5683): 24-25; 24 The *Pitum Haketoret* (Incense offering) is read to obtain protection and open roads towards success. *Anshei Knesset HaGedolah* (Men of the Great Assembly) was the Synod of 120 scribes, sages and prophets who fixed the biblical canon, introduced the feast of Purim, and instituted various prayers, rituals and blessings between 516 and 333 BCE. A *piyyut* is a Jewish liturgical poem. The Kabalistic theory referred to here is usually spelled as Beri'ah or Bryiah and Assiah and can be broadly translated as "creation and action," comprehensive categories of spiritual realms in the Kabbalah in the descending chain of Existence.

[39] Ibid.

> contribute to undermine the validity of the Minhag. It follows also that the Birkhat Kohanim could not be repeated, even if the Amidah should be. The Pittum Haketoret should not be repeated a second time. The incense was offered in the Temple only twice, in the morning and in the afternoon, and not three times.[40]

Beyond the liturgical question itself, the matter concerned the survival of the *minhag* from Baghdad, and is revealing under many respects: it showed the differences between generations in matters of religious practice, and it undermined the claims to uniqueness of the Baghdadi identity as expressed through the religious practice of the older generations of this community. Moreover, Gaster had grouped Baghdadis with other Sephardi Jews, bringing into the open the fact that the *minhag* from Baghdad had not been in use for the previous fifteen years, despite the claims of the older generation to the contrary.
In what appears to be a unique case, in 1934 the *Israel's Messenger* published a long article in Judeo-Arabic transliterated in Latin characters that leaked a conversation on this liturgical question between "some elderly men of Iraquian [sic] origin" of the Ohel Rachel synagogue of Shanghai.[41] The article itself is also a most interesting document: it was written in Latin characters, whether because the press did not have Hebrew characters, or because few readers could understand the written language (in Hebrew characters), while they could still understand it in its transliterated form; indirectly, it stated that the newer generations had adopted a broader Sephardi *minhag* and possibly identity, to the point that few could understand the contents of the article transliterated in Latin characters. In the following issue of the *Israel's Messenger*, a prize of $2 was offered "to a boy or girl between the age of 14 and 18 who can give us the best translation of the dialogue in English." In the same article, the elderly men whose private dialogue had been leaked were termed "the 'four musketeers' from Babylon," their conversations a "conclave" and their meeting place a "lodge,"[42] somewhat signaling that these liturgical questions that the old generations considered crucial to the group's identity were not as important for the new ones. The question did not resurface in later issues and from a liturgical point of view at least the majority accepted their

[40] "Dr. Gaster renders an important Din," *Israel's Messenger* 31, no. 8 (November 2, 1934 - Heshwan 24, 5695): 8; "Mussaf Amidah and Pittum Haketoreth stir local interest," *Israel's Messenger* 31, no. 8 (November 2, 1934 - Heshwan 24, 5695): 9-10.
[41] "Mussaf Amidah and Pittum Haketoreth stir local interest to discontinue both – Dialogue in Arabic," *Israel's Messenger* 31, no. 8 (November 2, 1934 - Heshwan 24, 5695): 8-10.
[42] "That Arabic Dialogue," *Israel's Messenger* 31, no. 9 (December 7, 1934 - Tebeth 1, 5695): 16.

placement within a broader Sephardi sphere in which the Baghdadi specificity was no longer represented.

Still, in general, it was difficult to find religious texts in South, East and Southeast Asia, and in the 1920s various Baghdadi families residing in one of the Asian hubs sponsored the publication of some religious volumes, writings and *responsa* by famous rabbis of Baghdad. Beyond providing the Baghdadi hubs in Asia with actual religious material, these publications also consolidated relations with the point of origin of this Diaspora by strengthening family connections. I will just give three examples here of a practice that was widespread both among the very wealthy and among some middle-class families. The first comes from Singapore where, in 1905, the magnate Manasseh Meyer had sponsored the building of the new local synagogue; at the same time, he also financed the publication of "the second volume of Bab Pealim by Rabbi Joseph Hayeem [sic] Moses of Baghdad" (Ben Ish Hai), considered one of the living authorities on ritual matters,[43] and head of the community of Baghdad until his death in 1909. A few years later, again in the 1920s, "the children of the late Mrs. Luna Sopher" in Shanghai defrayed the costs of printing the "useful work for burial service adopting the Bagdad [sic] ritual" by Rabbi Hirsch, that was then "distributed gratis to all the Congregations in the Orient, including India and Bagdad [sic]."[44] Referring to this particular volume, the *Israel's Messenger* gave a partial explanation of why so few religious books were available:

> This volume contains the Bagdad Funeral Rite; it was published in Bagdad [sic] in 5633, and is the adopted burial service of the Far Eastern Sephardi communities. Bad and unserviceable as that edition was, it is now out of print, and no longer obtainable. Even the Hazanim [cantors] have to depend on written notes when conducting a funeral service. This publication will, therefore, supply a need that is keenly felt throughout the Far East. The Chinese printer who had no type for the vowel points, nor understood Hebrew experienced the utmost difficulty in producing the Hebrew part of the service. This will account for its inattractive [sic] appearance, as well as for errors in vocalization which could not altogether be eliminated.[45]

[43] "A Valuable Work," *Israel's Messenger* 4, no. 5 (June 14, 1907 - Tamuz 2, 5667): 11-12.

[44] "The Burial Service," *Israel's Messenger* 11, no. 4 (January 4, 1924 - Nisan 7, 5684): 1.

[45] Ibid.

In 1925 Mr. and Mrs. Myers of Shanghai had a "Sepher shel Haftaroth and Sepher Torah" from Baghdad consecrated for the Ohel Rachel Synagogue in Shanghai (financed and built by Sir Jacob Elias Sassoon in 1921) to commemorate the death of Mr. Myer's mother, Kathoun Buth [sic] Yatter, who had died in Baghdad the previous year aged ninety-two.[46]

## *Mobility: A New Leadership for a Transnational Community outside Iraq*

The publishing of these (and other) texts responded to the need to preserve an identity that was also based on religious practice. This became especially urgent from the mid-1920s, when changes in politics, generations and religiosity were seen as threatening such an identity, and the glorious history it represented. At home (Iraq), the government was introducing more stringent discriminatory measures against Jews: from the imposition of opening Jewish schools on Saturday in 1933 to a progressively harder economic boycott which included the *de facto* impossibility to buy/sell lands; from the general incitement against the Jews, that was consistently reported upon from the late 1920s to the 1930s, to the prohibition of buying/selling the *Israel's Messenger* in 1935, which for obvious reasons received ample coverage on the journal itself. In 1936 N.E.B. Ezra, the founder of the journal, sent a letter to Leonard G. Montefiore[47] summarizing the worsening situation of the Jews of Iraq starting from the local crisis of its religious leadership, which reverberated dramatically in the Asian hubs.

> For some years, the Rabbinate [of Iraq] has fallen into desuetude, and is impotent to stop the surge of materialism and indifference which has affected a large number of the youthful section of that Community. At one time Bagdad [sic] was noted for its renowned Rabbanim [Rabbis]; to-day it has need of outside help. [...] Some three years ago, the present writer succeeded in arranging with the kind collaboration of Dr. Leo Jung of New York, the sending of a diligent student from Basra, and who was subsequently enrolled in the New York Yeshiba [sic], and is to-day undergoing a rigid training in preparation for the great work which he will be called upon to perform. Another young student from Rangoon, Burmah [sic], who originally hailed from Bagdad [sic], was equally

[46] "Consecration of Sepher shel Haftarot and Sepher Torah," *Israel's Messenger* 11, no. 1 (October 9, 1925 - Tishri 21, 5686): 11.

[47] Leonard Nathaniel Goldsmid-Montefiore (1889-1961), not to be confused with Leonard A. Montefiore, the grandnephew of Sir Moses Montefiore.

> successful in gaining admission to the same Yeshiba [sic] last year, thanks to Rabbis David Miller, Leo Jung and others. [...] To-day all the professions are over-crowded with the exception of the Rabbinate, for which there is a crying need. I sincerely trust that you will give this letter the deep attention it merits and thus be instrumental in saving the day for the Jewish youth of Asia.[48]

In South, East and Southeast Asia two other phenomena increased a growing sense of insecurity: the inevitable secularization of the new generations of Baghdadis born and raised in Asian lands at a time when religious leaders of the older generations were gradually ageing and retiring, or dying; and the fear that the Baghdadi heritage would be lost because of new generations coming into contact with "Other" Jews: these could be Ashkenazi Jews or, worse of all from a Baghdadi religious and cultural perspective, Jews who had adhered to Reformed Judaism, against which the *Israel's Messenger* conducted a relentless and constant campaign. In October 1926 it even added a subtitle (that was later dropped) that clearly indicated its stand on the matter: no longer just "Shanghai's only Jewish organ for the Jewish home" but also "A fearless exponent of traditional Judaism and Jewish nationalism."

Against what appeared a "religious crisis of Eastern Jewry" or the "deterioration of Oriental Jewry"—news of which came in equally from India, Burma, Singapore, Shanghai and other sites[49]—the Baghdadi communities in the Asian hubs tried to respond with a strategy of recruitment of a new religious leadership.

New rabbis, cantors and scholars could come from Iraq to work in the synagogues and *Talmud Torahs* of Poona, Calcutta, Singapore, Rangoon, Shanghai, Hong Kong; or, they could be "natives of the East with a Western education," educated in this very same Asian network, or sent to the US for religious education, so that they could then return to Iraq or in one of the Baghdadi Asian communities after

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[48] "Iraq Violating Minority Rights," *Israel's Messenger* 29, no. 11 ( February 3, 1933 - Shebat 7 5693): 16; "Iraq indicted for violating minority rights" *Israel's Messenger* 31, no. 8 (November 2, 1934 - Heshwan 4, 5695): 16 ; "Iraq abuses confidence of League of Nations," *Israel's Messenger* 31, no. 8 (November 2, 1934 - Heshwan 4, 5695): 23; "Arab Teacher Beats Children and Iraq's treachery to Jews & League of Nations," *Israel's Messenger* 31, no. 10 (January 4, 1935 - Tebeth 29, 5695): 2 and 6; "The Iraq State and 'Israel's Messenger'," *Israel's Messenger* 31, no. 11 (February 1, 1935 - Shebat 28, 5695): 6-7; "Iraq lifts up the Ban Against "Israel's Messenger'," *Israel's Messenger* 32, no. 2 (May 3, 1935 - Nisan 30, 5695): 19; "Iraq government re-ban 'Israel's Messenger'," *Israel's Messenger* 32, no. 5 (August 2, 1935 - Ab 3, 5695): 10; "The Rabbinate and the Jews in Iraq. An open letter to Mr. L. G. Montefiore," *Israel's Messenger* 32, no. 10 (January 3, 1936 - Tebet 12, 5696): 11.

[49] Elias Levi, "The position of Oriental Jews: Bombay to Bandoeng," *Israel's Messenger* 29, no. 4 (November 4, 1932 - Heshwan 5, 5693): 13.

ordainment. An example of the former case was the candidate to replace Rabbi Hirsch of Shanghai in 1924: Myer Moses, born in Baghdad, student for many years in a *yeshivah* in Bombay and for a time in England "to secure a secular education and to return to the East as a modern Rabbi" became in this context an ideal candidate to succeed Rabbi Hirsch. As the letter of introduction from London concluded:

> If the Shanghai community would be prepared to make a grant—it would not be many hundreds all told—they might secure a man who better understands them and one more in sympathy than a fresh European arrival would be.[50]

Another route was the American one: in 1934 the *Israel's Messenger* published some news about the rabbinical student Rahmin Sion, who had matriculated at Yeshiva College in New York and was now ready to take a course in journalism to establish a "Hebrew paper in Basrah."[51] As we saw above, N.E.B Ezra had written about him to Leonard G. Montefiore in 1936. In 1932 Elias Levi, whose family had left Baghdad in 1913 and settled in Rangoon, had also been accepted as a student at Yeshiva College where he arrived in 1934 and graduated in 1938. In mid-1939 he was still looking for an appointment, as one can read on the *Israel's Messenger*.

> Rabbi Elias Levi, A.B., Graduate of Yeshiva College, New York, is open to receive a "call" from any of the Progressive Jewish Communities of India, Burmah or the Straits Settlement. He will be assisted in his task by Mrs. Elias Levi who is a Graduate of the New Jersey State Teacher's College, Montclair. Together they offer their services as Spiritual Leader and Educator respectively to any Community which wishes to avail itself of this opportunity.[52]

In the end Elias Levi did not return to South, East or Southeast Asia, but remained in the US, serving at Kahal Joseph in Los Angeles, a congregation "that continues

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[50] "The Shanghai Rabbinate," *Israel's Messenger* 11, no. 6 (March 7, 1924 - Adar Sheni 1, 5684): 1.
[51] "Iraquian prepares for rabbinate in New York," *Israel's Messenger* 31, no. 3 (June 1, 1934 - Siwan 18, 5694): 2.
[52] Quoted in Levi Cooper, "Elias Levi: The Rangoon Rabbi," *Jewish Educational Leadership* 13, no. 1 (2014): 58-62; 61; see also Margot Lurie, "The Boy From Rangoon. How my grandfather landed at Yeshiva University," *Tablet,* October 27, 2009. Accessed December 28, 2022, https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/community/articles/the-boy-from-rangoon.

to pride itself on being the only one to follow Baghdadi custom in Western United States."[53]

Altogether, these campaigns to recruit a new religious leadership did not seem to be particularly successful until much later. Rabbi Ezekiel N. Musleah was one of such success stories: born in Calcutta into a family that had migrated from Baghdad in 1820, Ezekiel N. Musleah graduated at the University of Calcutta and then proceeded to study at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. Ordained as a rabbi in 1952, he served as religious leader of his native community until 1964; then he moved to Philadelphia to work as rabbi of the Congregation Mikveh Israel. Tellingly, his PhD thesis at the Jewish Theological Seminar of New York researched the history of Jews in India, and later became the first scholarly publication on the subject.[54] In different ways, the histories of Rabbis Elias Levi and, later, Ezekiel N. Musleah, show that, for different reasons, by the second half of the twentieth century Baghdadi Jews had started to look beyond London. As the horizon of Sephardi Judaism was contracting in Asia and in the Middle East, it was expanding in other imagined homelands, the US and, in different ways, also in Europe.

Until then, when in need of learned opinions or rabbinical *responsa*, Baghdadis in South, East and Southeast Asia turned to the Rabbis of Baghdad, and later to Rabbis in London. Two well-known controversies showed such religious counseling from outside the Asian areas in which Baghdadis were dwelling: first, a court case in which members of the Bene Israel community in Burma challenged Baghdadis in a British court to establish their right to access and pray at the latter's synagogue. At the core of this case was the non-recognition of Bene Israel as real Jews by the Baghdadi community of Rangoon, which had therefore excluded them from services in their synagogue. Ascertaining whether they could be considered Jews required the learned opinion of rabbis in Baghdad and of the Great Rabbi of the British Empire in London.[55] Second, the legal controversy over the will and millionaire inheritance of Baghdadi-born and Shanghai-based Silas A.

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[53] Cooper, "Elias Levi," 62.

[54] Ezekiel N. Muselah, *On the Banks of the Ganga: The Sojourn of Jews in Calcutta* (North Quincy, MA: Christopher Pub. House, 1975). See also "Rabbi Ezekiel Nissim Musleah, Religious leader," Recalling Jewish Calcutta, accessed December 24, 2022, https://web.archive.org/web/20200128101851/http://www.jewishcalcutta.in/exhibits/show/notable_members/rabbi_musleah.

[55] "Elders of Rangoon Jewry lose case in court," *Israel's Messenger* 32, no. 4 (July 5, 1935 - Tammuz 4, 5695): 4; See also Fredman Cernea, *Almost Englishmen*. For Baghdadis challenging Bene Israel's Jewishness in India see Mitch Numark, "Constructing a Jewish Nation in Colonial India: History, Narratives of Discent [sic], and the Vocabulary of Modernity," *Jewish Social Studies* 7, no.2 (2001): 89-113.

Hardoon (1851-1931). This case too necessarily involved the opinion of rabbis and religious courts from Baghdad and London, when relatives of the deceased from Baghdad raised claims to the inheritance on grounds of family descendance and religious tradition.[56]

## *Mobility: Languages and Travel*

As all these different examples demonstrate, the connections between Iraq and the Asian hubs of the Baghdadi Diaspora continued to flow uninterrupted across continents and generations for decades, touching many private and public aspects of individual, family and collective lives and transforming the identity of this group in multiple ways. Both elite and middle-class Baghdadis moved between countries, studied in various schools and universities across educational traditions, and worked and traded across borders. They also spoke multiple languages, had multiple nationalities and various residences and funded philanthropic endeavors outside the country in which they resided. As a result, most of them embraced an identity that remained *in-between*. The opening lines of the will of Farha (Flora) Sassoon "of Malabar Hill, Bombay, and Bruton Street, London" are very telling in this respect:

> I declare that I am, and my late husband, Solomon David Sassoon, were descended from Jewish ancestors of Baghdad, who migrated to India more than 100 years ago; both I and my late husband were born of parents who were domiciled in Bombay, and I still own and maintain as my permanent residence the house in Bombay in which I lived with my husband during his lifetime.[57]

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[56] "Mr. S.A. Hardoon summoned by death," *Israel's Messenger* 28, no.4 (July 3, 1931- Tammuz 18, 5691): 14-15; "Buddhist memorial for the late Mr. A.S. Hardoon and Strange burial service in Shanghai," *Israel's Messenger* 28, no. 5 (August 1, 1931 - Ab 18, 5691): 8 and 12; "Khan Bahadour Ezra S. Hardoon contests the will of his next of kin the late Mr S. A. Hardoon," *Israel's Messenger* 32, no. 10 (March 3, 1936 –Tebet 12, 5696): 7; "The Hardoon will case," *Israel's Messenger* 33, no. 9 [B] (January 15, 1937- Shebat 3, 5697); 16-19; "Hardoon appeal pending," *Israel's Messenger* 34, no. 12 (March 18, 1938 - Adar II 15, 5698): 16; "Hardoon will case revived again," *Israel's Messenger* 38, no. 7 (October 17, 1941 - Tishre 26, 5702): 11; "Miss Liza Hardoon," *Israel's Messenger* 38, no. 7 (October 17, 1941 - Tishre 26, 5702): 14.

[57] "Mrs. Flora Solomon David Sassoon," *Israel's Messenger* 33, no. 1 (April 3, 1933 - Nisan 11, 5696): 15.

The languages they used, the clothes they wore and the food that they ate or served in their receptions are other indicators.[58] In 1859 Jacob Sapir arrived in Bombay; he was a well-known rabbi and an emissary from Palestine who in 1866 published an extensive travelogue (*Even Sapir*) of his trip to India and all the way to Australia.[59] Joseph Sassoon has reproduced some excerpts of this travelogue in his work where he described the Baghdadi community of Bombay:

> the language of the Jews in their house and between themselves was Arabic, their mother tongue, and their customs and habits, their manners... were without any change or modification. They had neither changed their language nor their mode of dress, nor their way of living.[60]

As we saw above, Judeo-Arabic was a *lingua franca* for business; it was also used in the private sphere, inside families and, to a certain extent for matters pertaining liturgy. As Simon Ballas from Singapore recalled: "Arabic was the main language spoken among the Jews" together with Malay. Speaking about the 1930s, he recalled:

> [my father] never learned how to speak English. My mother [...] doesn't speak English. She speaks Malay and Arabic and that's about all. I speak to her in Arabic. [...] Hebrew was not spoken, it was the language of the Bible.[61]

As Zvi Yehuda reminds us, until 1901 there existed five Jewish newspapers in Judeo-Arabic of the Baghdad variation that were published in India.[62] These played a fundamental role at the time when the "Ottoman authorities refused to allow the publication of a Jewish newspaper in Baghdad [...] not only for Baghdadi Jews in the Far East but also for the Jews of Baghdad, who regularly sent these

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[58] Sassoon, *The Sassoons*, 149-150.

[59] Richard Marks, "Jacob Sapir's Journey through Southern India in 1860: Four Chapters on Indian Life from Even Sapir. Translated, Annotated and Introduced," *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies* 13, (2013): 73-95; 75. See also Mathias B. Lehman, *Emissaries from the Holy Land: The Sephardic Diaspora and the Practice of Pan-Judaism in the Eighteenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 261-275.

[60] Sassoon, *The Sassoons*, 139.

[61] NAS, Communities of Singapore (part 1), Accession Number 000163, *Interview to Jacob Ballas*, December 6, 1983, Transcript Reel/Disc 2, *Interview to Jacob Ballas*, Trascript, p. 14.

[62] *Doresh Tob le-'Ammo*, published in Bombay from 1855 to 1866; *Mebasser*, published in Calcutta from 1873 to 1877; *Pēraḥ*, published in Calcutta from 1878 to 1889; *Magid Mesharim,* published in Calcutta from 1889 to 1899; *Shoshana,* published in Calcutta in 1901.

newspapers reports about events in the community, both via reporters stationed in Baghdad and via members of the community itself."[63] *Shoshana* (1901) was the last of the periodical publications in Judeo-Arabic, and new ones in English (from India, China and later Singapore) followed.

Beyond language, another more "modern" way to show attachment to the Baghdadi heritage was travel. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century tourism and leisure travel became one of the new ways to confirm one's social status and provide a sentimental as well as a classical education to the younger generations, as the extensive literature on the European *grand tours* has shown. In time, travels that only the elites could undertake became available also to others.[64] For some, travels and tours also represented an opportunity to explore one's own roots. Joseph Sassoon has described the trip that Farha (Flora) Sassoon—the nephew of David and the wife of her great-uncle Suleiman—undertook in 1910 with her three children as "retracing in reverse David Sassoon's flight eight decades earlier;" their party visited some of the thirty-seven synagogues of Baghdad, the tombs of ancient Jewish prophets and rabbis and David (Farha's son) "went out hunting for antique books and Bibles."[65] David (Suleiman/Solomon) Sassoon would become a rabbi and, most importantly, one of the greatest collectors of Hebrew manuscripts of the twentieth century, especially from the Middle East. In 1935 he published a memoir of this family trip that reads at the same time as an anthropological study, an exercise in travel literature, and a research into an individual and collective heritage.[66] The diary of another child who took part in this trip, Mozelle, is also available in parts.[67] David Suleiman returned from this trip loaded with some of the Hebrew manuscripts that made the core of his famed collection, which represented yet another way to come into contact with, and

[63] Zvi Yehuda, "Jewish press in India in Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic as an indispensable source for the ihstory of Iraqi Jews in the nineteenth century," in *The Baghdadi Jews in India*, ed. Weil, 145-162; 145.

[64] For just two examples see Lynne Withey, *Grand Tours and Cook's Tours: A History of Leisure Travel, 1750 to 1915* (New York: W. Morrow, 1997); Keith Hanley and John K. Walton, Constructing Cultural Tourism: John Ruskin and the Tourist Gaze (Blue Ridge Summit, PA: Channel View Publications, 2010).

[65] Sassoon, *The Sassoons*, 199.

[66] Rabbi David Salomon Sassoon, *M'sa Bavel* [*Journey to Babylon,* Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1935), available at Otzar HaChochma https://tablet.otzar.org/#/book/149421/p/-1/t/827980/fs/0/start/0/end/0/c, accessed December 4, 2022.

[67] "The Sassoon's return visit to Baghdad. A Diary by Mozelle Sassoon," *The Scribe* 74 (2001). Accessed January 5, 2023, http://www.dangoor.com/74007.html.

eventually own, an individual and collective heritage that was gradually disappearing *in loco*.[68]

This deep cultural, linguistic and religious attachment to the broader Middle East, and particularly to Iraq, started to change in the first half of the twentieth century, as a new generation born in the Asian diaspora came of age during the political changes caused by the end of the British Mandate over Mesopotamia and the establishment of the Hashemite Kingdom of Iraq (1932). From being a real place where one could go back to study, conduct business, visit family or choose a bride, in the early 1930s Iraq became a less accessible country, slowly sliding into a mythical and symbolic dimension, a source of collective identity in terms of religious, cultural and linguistic heritage. Even the publication of the Babylonian Talmud, one of the cornerstones of this complex and multi-layered identity underwent a similar process: in 1921 the *Israel's Messenger* was advertising the delivery "to your door of the Babylonian Talmud, ornament to every Jewish house."[69] Twelve years later, the journal published a long article to inform its readers of the publication and availability of the very same item in the "first complete and unabridged English translation [...] edited by the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire."[70]

## Europe

As we saw above, since the mid nineteenth century London was the main pole of attraction for many Baghdadis, especially those belonging to the elites, as the capital of the transnational imperial space in which they had been moving since they left Iraq. As it is well known, David Sassoon, the family patriarch, had already signed his certificate of naturalization as a British subject in 1853 in Hebrew; several of the fourteen sons and daughters of David Sassoon had anglicized their names (Abdallah-Albert; Shalom Sassoon-Artur; Farha-Flora, Faraj-Hayyim-Frederick etc.) and some of them were knighted from 1890 onward. Right up to the turn of

[68] David S. Sassoon, *Ohel Dawid: Descriptive catalogue of the Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscripts in the Sassoon Library* (London: Oxford University Press, 1932). David Solomon Sassoon also directly negotiated purchases for items that entered the Valmadonna Trust Library. See LaVerne L. Poussaint, "From Babylonia to Bombay to Burma: Sojourning through Asian Hebraica by Way of New York," *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* 10, no. 2 (2009): 122-143.

[69] *Israel's Messenger* 8, no. 4 (August 5, 1921 - Ab 1, 5681): 20 and 41.

[70] *Israel's Messenger* 30, no. 4 (June 2, 1933 - Siwan 8, 5693): 6 and 14.

the twentieth century, "if asked, most members of the Sassoons would have described themselves as Baghdadi Jews first and foremost."[71] By the 1920, they considered themselves fully English: by then, they had been accepted by British aristocracy, were close to royals, and Sir Philip Sassoon (grandson of Albert Abdallah) had been elected to the British Parliament. As the symbols that they chose for their coat of arms show, the Sassons still continued to negotiate their belonging to different countries and cultures: the mottoes were in Hebrew and Latin; under a dove carrying an olive branch was the rose of England next to a lion of Judah; the botanical choice fell on a palm tree and an opium poppy, that had made much of the family's fortunes. This very same crest was then reproduced on numerous family artifacts, like the silver tray auctioned by Kedem in November 2015; or the porcelain dish set auctioned in a Sotheby's single owner sale in Tel Aviv on October 25 and 27, 2000.[72] As Joseph Sassoon writes: "when a relative arrived from India or China, the Society Sassoons would be slightly disconcerted, as this was an untimely reminder of their non-Society existence."[73] In a brochure of the early 1920s describing Ashley Park, one of the family mansions in England, the Sassoon crest appeared "shorn of the Hebrew motto [...] and the family [was] identified as originating from Toledo in Spain, whose exiles were evidently more prestigious than their counterparts in Babylon."[74] Whether to refute this idea, to support it, or just to collect news that concerned the family, on one of his trips to Europe Victor Sassoon cut a newspaper article claiming (erroneously) that the Sassoons were from Toledo in Spain and that one of them had been a Cabalist in Venice.[75] Other Baghdadis from the elites followed the same or a similar path, like Eliezer (Ellis) Kedoorie and his family; others really were of Spanish (and then Venetian) origin, like Emanuel Belilios, whose family history, trading networks and whereabouts have been amply researched by Francesca Trivellato.[76] From the mid-1920s onward, Spain started to acquire a significant cultural and political role

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[71] Sassoon, *The Sassoons*, 141.

[72] Kedem Auction House, Auction 53, Lot 120, https://www.kedem-auctions.com/en/content/large-silver-tray-sassoon-family-crest; and Sotheby's, Judaica, Lot 30, https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2013/judaica-n09060/lot.30.html, both accessed December 3, 2022.

[73] Sassoon, *The Sassoons*, 242-243.

[74] Ibid., 243.

[75] Ibid., 264.

[76] Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). See also "Emanuel Belilios, Business," Recalling Jewish Calcutta, accessed December 24, 2022, https://web.archive.org/web/20200128101841/http://www.jewishcalcutta.in/exhibits/show/notable_members/emanuel-belilios.

in this history, even though, as we shall see, in an entirely different way. In the following decade, Paris and New York also entered the picture.

The second part of this article is therefore divided in four sections: first, I discuss some of the critical implications of considering Baghdadis as British, as having European roots or as having become Europeans. Second, I compare them to some brief case studies of Baghdadis that did not take the European route but stayed in South, East and Southeast Asia, and especially India. Third, I examine how these European imaginary homelands were articulated within the broader horizon of Sephardi Jewry from the 1930s. Finally, I consider the political and cultural construction of Spain as another imagined homeland for Baghdadis and other Sephardi Jews on the pages of the *Israel's Messenger* from 1925 onward, while Paris and New York were also rising to new prominence as sites where to elaborate a new Sephardi identity for the twentieth century.

## *The "Rothschilds of the East"?*

Since the founding volume by Cecil Roth on the Sassoon dynasty (1941),[77] the fascination with the (male) path-breakers of this history, and with the elites has consistently placed Baghdadis in the company of other European businessmen, both in Asian cities or in a European context. In Shanghai, for instance, they have been clustered with so-called Shanghailanders, other non-Jewish foreigners residing in the International Settlement and making business in the city. In Europe, their marriage strategies have been analyzed as key to enter the highest ranks of Jewish and non-Jewish aristocracy. Abraham Shalom (Arthur) Sassoon—one of the sons of David—married Eugenie Louise Perugia from Triest in 1873 and other European marriages followed in later generations, with the Poliakovs of Moscow, the de Gunzburgs of St. Petersburg and the Rothschilds of Paris and London.[78] Within the space of two generations since their departure from Baghdad, the Sassoons were often compared to the historically most affluent Jewish families of bankers: the Rothschilds, the Ephrussis, the de Camondos, and even the Lehmans, and to other transnational Jewish families that raised immense fortunes in a few generations and whose lines of descent have at times interlocked.

[77] Cecil Roth, *The Sassoon Dynasty* (London: R. Hale, 1941).
[78] Sassoon, *The Sassoons*, 133.

In 1908 a brief article on the *Israel's Messenger* presented the Rothschilds and the Sassoons on the same footing,[79] in a way anticipating the fortunate, exotic and misleading definition of the Sassoons as "the Rothschilds of the East." This analogy, which is still very much in use today, is problematical for various reasons: first, it adopts uncritically the narrative of the Baghdadi magnates themselves, that helped build this cultural construction with their eagerness to be recognized as members of the British elite in the colonial world in which they lived. Secondly, as it is known, taking the Rothschilds as a yardstick to measure wealth is always very questionable. In this specific context, it is also wrong: the princely fortunes of the Sassoons had longer and more distinguished roots than those of any other European Jewish banking and/or aristocratic family. They had begun with the appointment of Sheikh Sassoon ben Saleh, father of David Sassoon, as chief treasurer (*Sarraf Bashi*) to the governors of Baghdad (*pashas)* between 1781 and 1817, a role that came with the appointment to the leadership of the Jewish community of Baghdad (*Hacham Bashi*), and their fortunes continued to grow through the generations and across continents. From this perspective, the Rothschilds appeared only bankers who had entered the world of finance and trading in recent times. Moreover, the Rothschilds lacked the global outreach of the Sassoons, that the «North-China Herald» in 1881 summarized for its readers in this way:

> The name of Sassoon is less known in Europe than that of Rothschild, but among Arab or Banyan traders, even with Chinese and Japanese merchants, in the Straits as well on both sides of the Ganges, it is a name to conjure with; and the strange ignorance of these facts [...] which once prevailed in England has long been dispelled.[80]

The author of this article underestimated the generalized sense of European superiority that would continue to make the Rothschild better known than any other banking and aristocratic Jewish family for generations, precisely because of their European origin as opposed to the Arab/Asian one of the Sassoons, the Kedoories, the Ezras and other families of the Baghdadi elites. Finally, this analogy shifts the focus of this history away from the sites where these economic fortunes originated and were consolidated, thus detaching elite Baghdadis from their point of origin and from the areas wherein they moved, the Middle East and South, East

[79] "The Rothschilds and the Sassoons," *Israel's Messenger* 4, no. 23 (February 21, 1908 - Adar 19, 5663): 6.
[80] Sassoon, *The Sassoons*, 144-145.

and Southeast Asia and where other Baghdadis that belonged to the middle classes continued to dwell for generations.

### *Baghdadis Staying: A Few Examples from India*

Rather than associating these businessmen with their European counterparts on account of their wealth and aspirations to nobility, it would be more fruitful make local comparisons. Other Jewish and non-Jewish merchants and traders built fortunes that were no less impressive, and their global economic outreach was no less vast; many of them remained on site (until the early 1950s and after), and many of them joined the rising professional middle classes, especially in the second and third generations. Some married local Jews in India and even Ashkenazi Jews in Shanghai and Hong Kong.

For reasons of space, I mention here only a few examples; they show that while business and trade might have been the starting point of most Baghdadis in India, the following generations embraced diverse careers and professional activities that did not necessarily bring them to London or elsewhere in Europe, but kept them there. Rather, their geographical horizon often took them further East, from India to Hong Kong for instance, or from Shanghai to Australia.[81]

Joseph Ezra Baher had arrived from Baghdad in Calcutta in 1821 via Bombay. His son David Joseph Ezra (1796-1882) became a trader in indigo and silk and exported opium; he worked as an "agent for Arab ships arriving in Calcutta from Muscat and Zanzibar importing dates and other produce from their countries in exchange for rice, sugar and other food items." Like other Baghdadis he had invested in real estate and, when he died in 1882, he was the largest property owner in Calcutta.[82]

A similar story from later generations is that of Benjamin Nissim Elias (1865-1943) who created a vast economic empire based on jute and rubber, and then expanded his activities to other fields: bone mills, tobacco, electric supply, engineering, dairy, as well as real estate. His greatest rivals were not (necessarily, or only) the Sassoons, but rather the Tatas and the Birlas, Indian companies that, as it is well known, are global business conglomerates today.[83]

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[81] HKHP, Oral History Collection, I084, Leigh Masel.

[82] "David Joseph Ezra, Business," Recalling Jewish Calcutta, accessed December 24, 2022, https://web.archive.org/web/20200128101852/http://www.jewishcalcutta.in/exhibits/show/notable_members/david_j_ezra.

[83] See Aditya Birla Group at https://www.adityabirla.com and Tata at www.tata.com. See also, "B. N. Elias, Business," Recalling Jewish Calcutta,

Looking at the second and third generations, the picture becomes even more diversified: D.J. Cohen (1883-?), for example, sat on the boards of various educational institutions and hospitals and held important institutional roles as a member of the Bengal legislative council from 1921 to 1947.[84] Other examples come from all walks of life: Josh Solomon Joshua (1920-?), trained as a policeman who reached the rank of Superintendent of Police, was posted to Darjeeling.[85] The most famous military man was Jack Farj Rafeal Jacob (1921-2016) who, as Chief of Staff of the Eastern Command of India, played a crucial role in the victory of India over Pakistan after it had occupied Bangladesh in 1971.[86] J.R. Jacob owned and directed the B.N. Elias conglomerate, that owned and manufactured jute, tobacco, cigarettes, dealt in real estate and maintained other commercial interests. His son Bernard (Bunny) Jacob was a musician and became the last conductor of the Calcutta Symphony Orchestra.[87] Eddie Joseph, instead, was an internationally recognized magician, making over thirty broadcasts from the All India Radio stations in Calcutta, Bombay and Lucknow.[88]

Many other examples could be quoted that, together, show how varied and diversified was the group usually referred collectively as Baghdadi Jews, and that they were not just a group of magnates and a commercial elite aspiring to join British high society and aristocracy and move to London. In this respect, embedding the middle classes—and even more so the even larger group that lived

https://web.archive.org/web/20200128101958/http://www.jewishcalcutta.in/exhibits/show/notable_members/b--n--elias. All accessed December 24, 2022.

[84] "D. J. Cohen, Community leader," Recalling Jewish Calcutta, accessed December 24, 2022, https://web.archive.org/web/20200128101934/http:/www.jewishcalcutta.in/exhibits/show/notable_members/d--j--cohen.

[85] "Josh Solomon Joshua, Asst Superintendent of Police," Recalling Jewish Calcutta, accessed December 24, 2022, https://web.archive.org/web/20200128101850/http://www.jewishcalcutta.in/exhibits/show/notable_members/josh-solomon-joshua.

[86] "J F R Jacob, Army," Recalling Jewish Calcutta, accessed December 24, 2022, https://web.archive.org/web/20200128101850/http:/www.jewishcalcutta.in/exhibits/show/notable_members/j-f-r-jacob. On Jacob Farj Rapheal see the short film by Manu Chobe, *Mukti. Birth of a Nation*, 2017, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bGdIAf2J_k, accessed December 25, 2022. See also J.F.R. Jacob, *Surrender at Dacca. Birth of a Nation* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1997); Jacob, *An Odyssey in War and Peace. An Autobiography* (New Delhi: Roli Books, 2011).

[87] "Bernard Jacob, Musician," Recalling Jewish Calcutta, accessed December 24, 2022, https://web.archive.org/web/20200128101933/http://www.jewishcalcutta.in/exhibits/show/notable_members/bernard_jacob.

[88] "Eddie Joseph, Magician," Recalling Jewish Calcutta, accessed December 24, 2022, https://web.archive.org/web/20200128101842/http://www.jewishcalcutta.in/exhibits/show/notable_members/eddie_joseph.

below poverty and on Jewish charity—into the history of Baghdadi Jews in South, East and Southeast Asia provides a more comprehensive and articulated understanding of their individual and collective path.

As a large Baghdadi middle class gradually diversified in various contexts in South, East and Southeast Asia, and as new generations were developing new differentiated local identities, the *Israel's Messenger* started to put forward a new case for a European origin—and an eventual mythical return—of Baghdadis (and Sephardi Jews more generally) to Spain, as the new original starting point and imaginary homeland of the Baghdadi diaspora. The more the real Baghdad disappeared, the more that heritage became associated with past glories imagined in connection with medieval Spain, Maimonides and a broader Sephardi/Oriental/Eastern Jewish identity which, however, also appeared to be inexorably declining.[89] The construction of this narrative can be understood as a reaction to a combination of various factors: a decline in Sephardi identity in connection to the collapse of the rabbinical authority of Baghdad from the mid-1930s; the rise to centrality and normativity of Ashkenazi Judaism in Jewish world affairs, that was perceived as aggressive and discriminating (as political Zionism developed in Eastern Europe and from there came the first immigration waves to Ottoman and then Mandatory Palestine);[90] and the growing importance of American Jewry and the spread of Reform Judaism. It is to these points that I now briefly turn.

## *Oriental/Eastern/Sephardi Jewry*

Whether seen from the US, the Middle East (including Tel Aviv) or indeed from South, East, and Southeast Asia, Baghdadi Jews described the broader Sephardi identity to which they belonged as lying in ruins, impoverished from a religious and spiritual point of view, lacking religious leadership, and not sufficiently understood by Ahskenazi Zionism, which underestimated and undervalued the potential of its human, intellectual and spiritual contribution.

Already in 1925, Rabbi Benzion M. Ouziel, the Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv-Jaffa and Salonika (who would become the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of the Land of Israel in 1938), had written to the *Israel's Messenger* describing "the lethargic sleep" that had fallen "upon the dispersed Sephardi Communities." He continued by

[89] I use the term Sephardi here, rather than the more accurate *Mizrahi* or the more political Arab Jewish identity, as this is the term used in the original sources.

[90] "Sephardim and Ashkenazim," *Israel's Messenger* 25, no. 8 (November 2, 1928 –Heshwan 19, 5689): 4-6.

warning that "there might come a time, which may be not very far off but quite near, when in all the large Communities in the East, there will be no cantors, no teachers nor Rabbis to lead these scattered sons of the Diaspora, in the light of the great traditions of Judaism."[91] His words reflected the search that Baghdadis from the various Asian hubs were conducting in Baghdad, London and New York for new rabbis, cantors, ritual slaughterers, that we saw above. They were also echoed by J.E. Joshua from Rangoon who in 1929 provided a bleak picture of the decline, isolation, lack of vision, teachers and leaders; most of all, he described each synagogue from Karachi to Shanghai "as a kingdom, independent and all by itself (...)," a situation in which "the Jewish communities of Bombay, Rangoon, Calcutta, Singapore, Hongkong and Shanghai have remained more like aliens to each other and their activities were not characterized by any cooperation."[92] This picture strongly contradicts the idea of a connected diaspora, or of a network between the different hubs of their Diaspora and with Baghdad, which instead works well in describing Baghdadis in their commercial activities and family relationships. These depressing descriptions of an unstoppable decay returned often in this newspaper, regardless of the geographical perspective, from Asia,[93] the Middle East and even South America.[94]

Salvation appeared to come from the West, more than from the Asian countries in which many Baghdadis had made a (good) living, or from a Zionist ideology that was generally dominated by Ashkenazi Jews who did not appear to know or value the glories of the Sephardi past. Here an altogether different picture was taking shape: in Paris, for example, where the establishment of a World Confederation of Sephardic Jews announced in 1932 had raised great hopes of a Sephardi religious and cultural revival, given the role of France in the countries and mandates where the majority of Sephardi Jews lived at the time (considering both the *Maghreb* and the *Mashreq*).[95] Even more optimistic was the perspective emerging from the US, where a beacon of light was represented by the inspirational leadership and scholarship of Rabbi David De Sola Pool in New York, Rabbi Abraham A. Neuman in Philadelphia and by the later consecration of a new Sephardic Synagogue in Los Angeles under the leadership of Rabbi

[91] "Chief Rabbi Bension Ouziel on Sephardic Jewry," *Israel's Messenger* 10, no. 7 [B] (April 3, 1925 - Nisan 10, 5685): 10.

[92] "The Decline of Oriental Jewry. A telling indictment," *Israel's Messenger* 29, no. 10 (January 1, 1933 - Tebeth 3, 5693): 29.

[93] "Sephardim Jewry awake!," *Israel's Messenger* 24, no. 4 (July 8, 1927 - Tammuz 8, 5687): 4.

[94] "Sephardim Jews and Judaism in the Orient," *Israel's Messenger* 11, no. 3 [B] (December 4, 1925 - Kislew 17, 5686): 9-11.

[95] "Reviving Sephardic Jewry," *Israel's Messenger* 29, no. 6 (September 1, 1932 - Elul 1, 5692): 4-5.

Salomon I. Mizrahi, thanks to the sponsorship of members of the Shanghai Baghdadi community.[96] As mentioned above, this is where Elias Levi eventually found a position.

While the decay of Sephardi culture was amplified by the increasingly influential religious and ideological developments taking place in the Ashkenazi world, the former continued to maintain its relevance for some time still, when the Baghdadi community, and the magnates among them in particular, responded generously to the call for help of the tens of thousands Jews from Germany and Central Europe who started to arrive in Shanghai in the late 1930s and where they remained for about a decade. At the same time, before 1936, another European country acquired the features of an imagined homeland.

## *Spain/Sefarad*

Starting from 1925, the *Israel's Messenger* started to construct a case for Spain as an "old-new" country of origin where there existed the realistic possibility of obtaining citizenship for Jews with original papers from Turkey that could prove Iberian descent. Here Sephardi Jews (and Baghdadis too) would find a place in the restoration of the ancient glories of a faraway past. As if the flow of time was uninterrupted, in this cultural and political construction Spain came to represent a foundational myth and an "imagined community,"[97] a homeland, and, possibly, also another way to make the individual and collective origins of the Baghdadi elites more European.

Spain as the site of the Baghdadi origins could also deliver important practical outcomes in the 1930s. One of these was the readiness of Spain to grant citizenship to those Jews of Iberian descent who would care to apply. This responded to a political and cultural construction: Baghdadis in Shanghai, and the *Israel's Messenger* in particular, connected with members of the Spanish government known for their philo-sephardism. Between 1924 and 1934 the Government of Spain had undertaken various administrative and political steps to grant citizenship to Jews that were eager to connect to their Spanish roots, in what appeared to be a forthcoming Sephardic renaissance in Spain, supported by

[96] "Sephardim Jewry," *Israel's Messenger* 24, no. 11 (February 3, 1928 - Shebat 12, 5688): 4; "Sephardic Jewry in Los Angeles consecrate synagogue," *Israel's Messenger* 32, no. 4 (July 5, 1935 - Tammuz 4, 5695): 9.

[97] Chiara Bottici, *A Philosophy of Political Myth* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London-New York: Verson, 2006).

numerous politicians and intellectuals. Famously, Dr. Angel Pulido Fernandez, physician and vice-president of the Spanish Senate, referred to Sephardi Jews as "Spaniards without Fatherland"[98] and the *Israel Messenger* adopted him as a representative of the "the real soul of Spain." In this context, Baghdadis in Shanghai also emphasized the new centrality given in Spain to the "Science of Judaism at the University of Madrid," "the issue of a decree by King Alphonso [sic] permitting Sephardi Jews to become Spanish subjects" and the government's contribution of Spanish books to the library of the newly established Hebrew University."[99] These contemporary acts were presented only as the final act of an "immortal glorious epoch of the history of the Jewish people which had its setting during many centuries" in Spain.[100]

On April 7, 1931 the government of Spain "had taken steps to facilitate the naturalization of Spanish speaking Jews" and the new Republican government of 1931 confirmed the possibility to obtain citizenship; no exact numbers were available as to how many Sephardi Jews existed in the world at the time, but the estimate was about one million "to be found in Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria, Algeria, Tunis, Morocco, Tripoli and Egypt."[101] A few months later, the *Israel's Messenger* reported enthusiastically that the ministers of Justice (Alvaro Albornoz), of the Interior (Miguel Maura) and of Finance (Indalecio Prieto) had

> declared that an ordinance granting equal rights to all citizens of Spain has now been promulgated and will shortly be made public. Discussing the position of the Jews in Spain with the correspondent of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, the cabinet ministers took occasion to voice their unanimous determination to extend to the Jews equal rights with all other citizens without discrimination of any sort and their desire of bringing this to public attention as soon as possible.[102]

Baghdadis believed they could also be included in this large Sephardi Diaspora and, in order to give a cultural dimension to this political aspiration, the *Israel's*

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[98] Alisa Meyuhas Ginio, "El encuentro del senador español Dr. Ángel Pulido Fernández con los judíos del Norte de Marruecos," *El Presente. Estudios sobre la cultura sefardí* 2 (2008): 111-26.

[99] "Spain and Jewry," *Israel's Messenger* 10, no. 7 [B] (April 3, 1925 - Nisan 10, 5685): 4-5; "Spanish Government issues decree inviting Sephardim Jews to become Spanish subjects," *Israel's Messenger* 10, no. 7 [B] (April 3, 1925 - Nisan 10, 5685): 17-18.

[100] Dr. Angel Pulido, "The Sephardic Movement in Spain," *Israel's Messenger* 10, no. 7 [B] (April 3, 1925 - Nisan 10, 5685): 25-26.

[101] "Sephardic Jews Invited to Return to Spain," *Israel's Messenger* 28, no. 4 (July 3, 1931 - Tammuz 18, 5691): 32.

[102] "Immigration favored in Spain," *Israel's Messenger* 28, no. 4 (July 3, 1931 - Tammuz 18, 5691): 32.

*Messenger* presented a narrative imbued with nostalgia where Spain was depicted as a Sephardi lost paradise, whether the one before 1492, or even afterwards. This imagined Spain/*Sefarad* never took the place of Baghdad in the Baghdadi Diaspora's imagination (as reflected in the pages of the *Israel Messenger*), but nevertheless it played an important role in terms of identity: by adding *Sefarad* before Baghdad to their heritage, Baghdadis in Asia could still imagine themselves as the carriers of an important tradition originating from a mythical place, and not from a real city that had become increasingly hostile to Jews.

Politicians and intellectuals from Spain contributed to such a nostalgic construction on the *Israel's Messenger*, and so did authors and commentators from Baghdad. Sephardi life in Spain was presented as being historically shaped by foundational characters like Ibn Gvirol (c. 1022-1070?), Yehuda Ha-Levi (1075-1141), Abraham Ben-Ezra (1089-1164), Maimonides (1135-1204), and the later Abravanel (1437-1508), "all products of the Jewish Renaissance in Spain who have added glorious chapters to the history of Judaism."[103] Writing especially for the *Israel's Messenger*, Jose M. Estrugo (Smyrna 1888-Havana 1962), a well-known public intellectual of the Sephardi sphere, celebrated the "peaceful and contented atmosphere which pervaded the 'Juderia' of a city in Turkey [Smyrna]" where he had grown up, the sweetness of "the old Andalusian music, the sermon which the Chief Rabbi delivered in perfect medieval Spanish."[104] One of the cornerstones of this cultural and political construction was the celebration and memorialization of the historical character of Maimonides, that featured regularly on the pages of the *Israel's Messenger* between 1934 and 1938, starting from the eight hundredth anniversary of his birth in Cordova in 1935.[105] Numerous articles focused on the celebrations organized in Spain, in Cairo, in England, in New York and among Sephardim worldwide, and on the tribute paid by different religious leaders.[106] Some articles described the initiatives of Baghdadi Jews in Bombay and Shanghai to join the celebrations, [107] while others retraced his life and intellectual achievements as a teacher, writer and physician. Special emphasis was placed on his

[103] "Yehuda Halevi's defense of his Faith," *Israel's Messenger* 11, no. 6 (March 5, 1926 - Adar 19, 5686): 3.

[104] Jose M. Estrugo, "Ancient Jewish life in Spain," *Israel's Messenger* 11, no. 6 (March 5, 1926 - Adar 19, 5686): 12.

[105] "800th Anniversary of Moses Maimonides' Birth Cairo and Cordova Celebrations: Call to General Jewry," *Israel's Messenger* 31, no. 7 (October 5, 1934 - Tishri 26, 5695): 9.

[106] "Maimonides Tribute by Christian, Moslem and Jew in honour of the 800th birthday of Moses Maimonides," *Israel's Messenger* 32, no. 2 (May 3, 1935 - Nisan 30, 5695): 27.

[107] "Rambam 800th anniversary," *Israel's Messenger* 31, no. 12 (March 6, 1935 - Adar Sheni 1, 5695): 13.

dwelling among Moslems[108] and on his ability to unite peoples of different faiths. When in 1938 Rabbi Yaluz of Tiberias suggested that a monument in Tiberias be erected in honor of Maimonides, the *Israel's Messenger* gave wide resonance to the initiative

> to render homage to the memory of the sage in consideration of the 800th anniversary of his birth which was recently celebrated. Such a monument, says Rabbi Yaluz, would serve to reflect credit on the Jewish people and to focus world-wide attention on their cultural contributions to civilization. The name of Maimonides is revered by Jews and Mohammedans as belonging to a man supreme in the branches of science and philosophy of his time. [...] In times of stress when the Jewish nation was in danger he instilled in his co-religionists life, courage and unity.[109]

This appears particularly significant as these were indeed times of great stress for Jews (and others) worldwide; as these words were being printed in Shanghai, Jewish refugees from Germany and Central Europe had already started to flock to the well-known "port of last resort." In this context therefore, celebrating Maimonides was also a way to motivate and support other Jews and to extend a helping hand. As Rabbi Yaluz had embarked on a fundraising trip to erect the monument for Maimonides, "the Shanghai Jewish Community lent their whole-hearted support to the scheme outlined above as a glowing tribute to the greatest Jew of Medieval times."[110]

The beginning of the Spanish civil war in 1936 led to the collapse of the whole scheme; this was resumed only in 2015, when both Spain and Portugal passed nationality laws that allow descendants of Sephardi Jews expelled from the Iberian Peninsula in 1492, or forced to convert to Christianity, to claim citizenship status through naturalization as a form of restorative justice.[111]

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[108] "Moses Maimonides," *Israel's Messenger* 31, no. 12 (March 6, 1935 - Adar Sheni 1, 5695): 4; S. S. Levin, "The Eight centenary of the Birth of Maimonides," *Israel's Messenger* 32, no. 1 (April 5, 1935 - Nisan 2, 5695): 11; "Moses Maimonides As A Physician" 32, no. 1 (April 5, 1935 - Nisan 2, 5695): 26; "Moses Maimonides-An Eminent Sage in Israel" 32, no. 1 (April 5, 1935 - Nisan 2, 5695): 27.

[109] "A Monument to Maimonides," *Israel's Messenger* 35, no. 4 (July 12, 1938 - Tammuz 13, 5698): 8

[110] Ibid.

[111] For a recent perspective on applicants, see Rina Benmayor and Dalia Kandiyoti, "Ancestry, Genealogy, and Restorative Citizenship. Oral Histories of Sephardi Descendants Reclaiming Spanish and Portuguese Nationality," in *Genealogies of Sepharad*, eds. Daniela Flesler, Michal R. Friedman and Asher Salah, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History* 18, (2020), 219-251. On the shortcomings of this program see Nicholas Casey, "Spain Pledged Citizenship to Sephardic

## Conclusions

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the relationship between the Baghdadis in Iraq and in South, East and Southeast Asia continued to develop in many directions, and Baghdad as a linguistic, religious and cultural (in the broadest sense possible) point of origin always continued to resonate with this group of Jews. This was a dynamic relationship, changing across generations and having both a real and a symbolic dimension. Both coexisted, but until the early 1930s there were many real elements that shaped it: from Bombay, Rangoon Singapore and Shanghai middle class and elite Baghdadis went to Iraq to conduct business, visit close and distant relatives, chose rabbis and brides. In return, news about the Jewish communities of Baghdad, Mosul and Basra flowed to Bombay, Rangoon, Singapore and Shanghai. With the political changes that Iraq underwent in the 1930s, and with the coming of age of new generations of Baghdadis born and raised in multiple sites in Asia, the real connections thinned, and Baghdad acquired a more symbolic dimension. It became the marker of a collective identity defined interchangeably as Sephardi, Oriental or Eastern, founded on the (sometimes only nominal) strenuous defense of religious orthodoxy. When Baghdad could realistically no longer be used as a real reference point because of the political situation there, which made life for Jews increasingly difficult, Baghdadis moved their point of origin back in time and a different geographical context to Spain/*Sefarad*, that became a new imagined homeland. When Spain too fell into the convulsions of a civil war and Fascism, Baghdadis looked for a place within a broader Sephardi sphere that led Westwards, towards Paris or—more likely for a community that had developed in the shadow of the Anglophone world—towards the UK and, increasingly so, the US and Australia.

In this article on the imagined homelands of Baghdadi Jews in South, East and Southeast Asia on the one hand, and in Europe on the other, I have integrated the well-known history of the Baghdadis' elites, whose history is better known, with that of the middle classes, whose paths have been less investigated, probably also because fewer primary sources appear to be available. I have therefore made use of some of the material available through oral history repositories and of many articles from the monthly newspaper *Israel's Messenger*. The former, and to a lesser extent also the latter, represent a way to access the life stories, and often to hear the voices and the memories, of Baghdadis in South, East and Southeast Asia, to see the influence that their Middle eastern origin and identity continued to exert

Jews. Now They Feel Betrayed," *The New York Times*, July 24, 2021. Accessed December 31, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/24/world/europe/spain-jews-citizenship-reparations.html.

on them in far-away lands and for generations, in various sites and in different ways. As for the latter, during the thirty and more years of its existence, the *Israel's Messenger* represented the mouthpiece of the Baghdadis in Shanghai, Hong Kong and Bombay, promoting and reflecting their transnational connections, a sense of collective belonging and their relations across countries and generations. Even though Baghdad itself, and more broadly Iraq, obviously stood at the center of this complex identity, other cities and lands were in time identified as real or imagined homelands, while this large group continued to live and move across the globe in the twentieth century.

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**Keywords:** Israel's Messenger, Baghdadi Jews, Jews in India, Jews in China, Jews in Singapore, Sephardi Jews, Jews in Asia, Spain/Sefarad

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# A Poet in Search of His Voice: Nathan Alterman before "The Seventh Column"

by *Arie M. Dubnov*

**Nathan Alterman, *Ha-Tur Ha-Shvi'i* (The Seventh Column), ed. Dwora Gilula, 6 vols. (Bene Beraḳ: ha-Ḳibuts ha-me'uḥad, 2010-2017), pp. 2646.**

**Nathan Alterman, *Sa'ar U-Ferets: Prozah U-Maamarim, 1931-1940* (Essays and Articles, 1931-1940), eds. Uri S. Cohen and Giddon Ticotsky (Bene Beraḳ: ha-Ḳibuts ha-me'uḥad, 2019), pp. 384.**

**Avraham Shlonsky, *Lo Tirzah: Yalkut Katan Shel Shirim Neged Hamilchma* (Thou Shalt Not Kill: A Small Collection of Anti-War Songs), with an introduction in Hebrew by Hagit Halperin (Jerusalem: Blima, 2022), pp. 84.**

Every year, after I invite students taking my survey of Israeli cultural history to choose and analyze a Hebrew poem, I find myself grading, on average, two or three papers discussing Nathan Alterman's "The Silver Platter." Inspired by a speech by Chaim Weizmann, who stated that the Jewish state "will not be given to the Jewish people on a silver platter," Alterman's poem picked up the famous literary trope of the living dead and described a young girl and a boy rising from the dead dressed in battle gear, telling the nation in tears with a soft voice: "We/Are the silver platter/ On which the Jewish state/ Was presented today."[1] The poem was first published in the labor Zionist daily *Davar* in December 1947, a few weeks after the beginning of the hostilities known today as the 1948 War. It has been often cited ever since and turned into a staple text always recited at commemoration ceremonies during Israeli Memorial Day, regularly reproduced by Jewish Agency emissaries, and turned into a pennant.

[1] Nathan A. [Alterman], "Magash Hakesef" (The Silver Platter), *Davar*, December 19, 1947, 2 (All translations from Hebrew in this article are by the author). On the poem's reception and instant canonization, see Dan Laor, *Ha-Maavak `Al Ha-Zikaron: Masot `Al Sifrut, Hevrah Ve-Tarbut* (The Struggle for Memory: Essays on Literature, Society and Culture) (Tel Aviv: `Am `Oved, 2009), 110-141.

My students are not alone in conceiving Alterman as the poet laureate of the Israeli nation-in-arms. For almost a quarter of a century since its appearance (1943-1967), readers of Alterman's weekly poetry column, "The Seventh Column" ("hatur hashvi'ee"), encountered a unique poetic persona, writing in rhymes and combining the role of the prophet, the public moralist, and the political commentator. Later disciples and admirers like Moshe Shamir, who recruited him for the Greater Land of Israel Movement, described Alterman as a poet who was simultaneously a prophet and a political leader.[2] Alterman's uncompromising obedience to the tenets of labor Zionist ideology and his unflagging admiration of David Ben-Gurion and Israel's armed forces can explain in part why he is still recited today outside literary circles. Back in the 1980s, Dan Miron, the influential Israeli literary critic, went as far as to argue that, from the 1940s on, Alterman was "not only a full member of party-line literature, but, one might argue, its clearest symbol."[3]

Puzzling as it may appear, a factor no less significant in Alterman's canonization was his willingness to criticize Israeli politicians and the cases in which he used his column and his privileged status to stand up for what is morally right and even, as in the case of the poem "'Al Zot" (On This) of November 1948, shed light on war crimes and condemn them.[4] It was perhaps this duality that played in his favor

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[2] Moshe Shamir, *Nathan Alterman: Ha-Meshorer Ke-Manhig* (The Poet as a Leader) (Tel Aviv: Devir, 1988).

[3] Dan Miron, *Im Lo Tihyeh Yerushalayim: masot 'al ha-sifrut ha-'Ivrit be-heḳsher tarbuti-poliṭi* (If There Is No Jerusalem: Essays on Hebrew Writing in a Cultural-Political Context) (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1987), 54. Miron's provocative statements yielded a controversy. For alternative readings, see Dan Laor, *Hashofar Ve-Hakherve: Masot 'Al Natan Alterman* (The Shofar and the Sword: Essays on Nathan Alterman) (Tel Aviv: hakibbutz hameuhad, 1983); Zivah Shamir, *'al 'et Ṿe-'al Atar: Po'eṭiḳah U-Poliṭiḳah Bi-Yetsirat Alterman* (Sites and Situations: Poetics & Politics in Alterman's Work) (Tel Aviv: hakibbutz hame'uhad, 1999).

[4] Nathan A. [Alterman], "Al Zot (On This)," *Davar*, November 19, 1948, 2. Notably, the poet did not disclose what specific battle or massacre his poem was referring to. Due to the date of its publication and the reference to a "[military] jeep crossing [the streets of] a conquered city" in the opening stanza, most critics assumed the poem was referring to the brutal conquest of Lydia. However, it is not unlikely that it was written in response to the al-Dawayima massacre, which took place a couple of weeks earlier (October 29, 1948), especially given the hint in the third stanza of "fiercer battles." The use of such imprecise coordinates should be taken into consideration. Nonetheless, the poem condemned the usage of euphemistic language, using the word "murder" instead of "delicate situation," and concluded with an explicit demand not to whitewash but to prosecute the soldiers involved. Following its publication and an exchange of letters between

posthumously. Alterman has had such a long-lasting impact on Israeli culture that even the late retired Colonel and military historian Meir Pa'il and, more recently, the retired Major General Menachem Finkelstein, the former Chief Military Advocate, included lengthy analyses of Alterman's poems in their writings. The latter went as far as authoring an extensive essay recommending reading Alterman's poetry, perhaps as a substitute to a long line of philosophers who developed *jus ad bellum* theories, to guide Israeli officers and jurists about just war and the "purity of arms" (*tohar haneshek*).[5]

Shortly after the poet's death in 1970, the literary editor Menachem Dorman established the Alterman Institute, which oversees his estate, and began publishing the poet's writings, including the *Seventh Column*. During the 2010s, Dwora Gilula, a classicist by training, took upon herself the daunting task of preparing a revised, annotated edition, correcting errors and omissions, and rearranging the columns in their chronological order (rather than by themes, as Dorman's edition did). Notably, on top of the 700 columns, Gilula's new edition also includes "Rega'im" (Moments), a series of nearly 300 similarly rhyming

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Alterman and Ben-Gurion, the poem was reportedly reproduced and distributed among IDF soldiers. For discussion, see Yitzchak Laor, *Anu Kotvim Otakh Moledet: Masot `Al Sifrut Yisreelit* (Narratives with No Natives: Essays on Israeli Literature) (Tel Aviv: ha-Kibuts ha-meuhad, 1995), 122-124; Haggai Rogani, *Mul Ha-Kefar She-Harav: Ha-Shirah Ha-`Ivrit Veha-Sikhsukh Ha-Yehudi-`Arvi 1929-1967* (Facing the Ruined Village: Hebrew Poetry and Jewish Arab Conflict 1929-1967) (Haifa: Pardes, 2006), 105-145; Hannan Hever's introduction to the anthology *Al Tagidu Be-Gat: Ha-Nakba Ha-Falastinit Ba-Shirah Ha-Ivrit, 1948-1958* (Tell It Not in Gath: The Palestinian Nakba in Hebrew Poetry), ed. Hannan Hever (Haifa: Pardes, 2009), 9-55.

[5] Menachem Finkelstein, "'The Seventh Column' and the 'Purity of Arms': Nathan Alterman on Security, Morality and Law", *IDF Law Review* 20, no. 1 (2009), 1-229 [in Hebrew]. Finkelstein's extended essay was republished as a book in 2011. In applying such a term, Finkelstein continues a long labor Zionist discursive tradition, extending all the way back to the debates surrounding the doctrine of "restraint" (*havlaga*) during the events of 1936-39, which was examined ad nauseam in Israeli historiography and shall not be repeated here. For a succinct summary, see Meir Pa'il. "Moral System in the Act of Fighting," in *Tohar Haneshek: Siach Mefakdim, Mishpatanim U'mechanchim* (Purity of Arms: A Dialogue between Commanders, Jurists and Educators), eds. Meir Pai'l and Yehuda Wallach (Ramat Efal: Yad Tabenkin and the Israeli Society for Military History, 1991), 9-15. As the literary scholar Yael Dekel has persuasively shown, the categorical rejection of this euphemistic language helped authors affiliated with the so-called Canaanite movement, writing in the magazine *Aleph* (1948-1953), to crystalize their own idiosyncratic artistic language. See Yael Dekel, "A Report on Culture's Losses and Victories: The Canaanite Literary Criticism of Hebrew War Fiction," *Mikan, Journal for Hebrew and Israeli Literature and Culture Studies* 20 (2020): 333-354 [in Hebrew].

sketches and columns Alterman published infrequently from late 1934 to January 1943 in the newspaper *Haaretz*, which were missing from previous editions. The result—a monumental six-volume book—is a remarkable scholarly achievement that provides yet another indication of Alterman's eminence in contemporary Israeli culture.

A happy consequence of digging deep into the poet's literary *Nachlass* is that it provides readers with an opportunity to revisit the poet-in-the-making while he is still searching for his own poetic voice and persona. If the "mature" Alterman of the *Seventh Column* was "double voicing"—expressing the hegemonic discourse while criticizing it at the same time—Alterman's writings from the late 1920s and 1930s disclose a set of two seemingly different contradictory trends: on the one hand, as a poet, he was drawn to symbolist, universal, and autonomous poetics, purposely bereft of direct references to concrete or contemporaneous events, while on the other hand, his newspaper articles and essays are imbued with profound historical and political awareness, a strong tendency to social engagement, and a decisive commitment to interwar pacifist ideas.

* * *

What did Alterman's youthful commitment to pacifism emerge from? Though it would be difficult to pinpoint a single source of influence, there is no doubt that Avraham Shlonsky's work in general, and his 1932 anti-war treatise *Lo Tirzah* (Thou Shalt Not Kill) in particular, played a major role in shaping the young poet. A decade older than Alterman, Shlonsky positioned himself since the mid-1920s as a proponent of modernist and symbolist poetry. He did not hesitate to launch a campaign against the cliché and the didactic, haughty, and biblically infused rhetoric of his predecessors. His poems portrayed the poet as a prophet or as a lunatic and a stranger misunderstood by his audience, living outside society and against it, in a manner akin to the French *poète maudit* (accursed poet) tradition. His artistic stance led him not only to a dispute with Berl Katznelson—the labor Zionist ideologue and editor of *Davar* scorned outdated bourgeois notions of "professional writers" distinguished from ordinary dilettante comrades—but also enraged H. N. Bialik, leading the Hebrew Writers' Association to withdraw its

sponsorship of *Ketuvim*, the influential literary magazine Shlonsky co-edited.[6] In 1933, when Shlonsky resigned from *Ketuvim* (due to yet another dispute) to found the magazine *Turim* (Columns), the young Alterman, alongside Leah Goldberg, accompanied him.

*Lo Tirzah*, which has recently been republished after being almost entirely forgotten, belongs to that period. A hybrid text, fusing the political pamphlet with an artistic manifesto, the treatise reflects Shlonsky's uncompromising commitment to pacifism and, by the same token, his admiration of European antiwar poetry. For him, like so many poets of his generation, World War I represented a kind of madness and, no less significantly, the treason of Europe's men of letters. The colossal conflict revealed the culpability of the romantic-poetic mind and how easily it collapsed and turned to pro-Patria hymns producing machines feeding the fodder. He explicitly referenced Julien Benda's *La trahison des clercs* (1927), the famous French critique of intellectual corruption and surrender to authority, and stated that the war created a stark division between "the murdered poet and the murderous poet" (p. 32). The list of culprits he compiled included poets such as Richard Dehmel, Edmund Rostand, and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, who were contrasted with writers such as Vladimir Mayakovsky and Max Brod, Stefan Zweig, Georges Duhamel, and Franz Werfel. Critically, unlike advocates of art for art's sake, Shlonsky expected authors to engage in politics and use their craft to prevent future bloodshed and warn of future wars and onslaughts. Shlonsky concluded his treatise with a condemnation of the "lead soldiers of extremist nationalism" in Hebrew poetry, Uri Zvi Greenberg and Yaakov Cohen, "who sanctify the symbols of heroism and trill the outward forms of hollow militarism" (p. 47), alongside an unflinching critique of the corrupting power that militarized language had on labor Zionism:

> For we perceive military terminology not only among the *Sitra Deyamina* (right-wing camp) but even in a camp that follows the light of the religion of labor and dreams of beauty in an honest and serious communal life. Note: Battalion, Conquest, Front, etc.—these words, borrowed from the

[6] Hagit Halperin, *Ha-Ma'esṭro: Ḥayay Ṿi-Yetsirato Shel Avraham Shlonsḳi* (Maestro: The Life and Works of Avraham Shlonsky) (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat po'alim, 2011), 332-356; Anita Shapira, *Berl: Biyografyah* (Berl Katznelson: Biography) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1980), 259-260.

> military lexica, supplement newspaper articles, conversations, and poems whose entire essence, all their content, is utter enmity to this military barracks spirit (p. 48).[7]

Following his own advice, Shlonsky concluded his treatise with a warning

> After all, many thought that among us, more than any other nation, such madness and perversion would be impossible—not only because we are, so to speak, the "chosen people" (which nation is not chosen and just in its own eyes?), but mainly because we are a people learned in torment. Many thought so—and were deceived. All indications are that according to the law of reaction, once he arrives in his homeland, the Jew can miss all this deceptive shine [...]. We are now a "parvenu," a beggar who has turned rich, adorned with precious stones that the "masters" rejected from generation to generation (p. 53).[8]

As Hagit Halperin explains in her introduction to the reissued treatise, Shlonsky published the text four times between 1929 and 1933, each time slightly differently (the first publication, on 1 August 1929, was merely three weeks before the outbreak of the 1929 riots in Palestine). Its republication—as an elegant pocket-sized booklet—nearly a century after its original publication tells us much about the deep frustration felt by the Israeli intelligentsia today. Yet, in the context of our present discussion, it also reminds us of the prevailing cultural atmosphere to which Alterman was exposed. Like his mentor Shlonsky, who spent a short but influential year in Paris (1924), Alterman also traveled to study in France (1929-1931; he spent the first year at the Sorbonne followed by two years at an agricultural college near Nancy); like Shlonsky, he was enamored of the anti-war poetry; and

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[7] The term "Sitra Deyamina" is one of Shlonsky's linguistic renewals. Derived from the Aramaic expression "Sitra Achra" (lit. "the other side") used in Kabbalistic writing as a general name for all the forces of impurity and satanic evil, the phrase "religion of labor" is a direct reference to the writings of A. D. Gordon, one of the sages of socialist Zionism. The passage criticizes terms such as "battalion of labor" (*gdud ha'avoda*), "conquest of labor" (*kibush ha'avoda*), and "work front" (*hazit ha'avoda*) popularized by the members of the Second and Third Aliya.

[8] The term "parvenu" appears in the Hebrew original. The final sentence paraphrases Psalms 118:22: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone."

both suffered from a similar bipolarity that was most probably an inevitable consequence of the attempt to forge a subversive bohemian-modernist poetic persona while simultaneously remaining within the labor Zionist camp, loyal to the party.

Young Alterman's commitment to anti-war rhetoric lapsed over the years, and it was pushed to the margins of the scholarship dedicated to him. Regrettably, Alterman's translation of R. C. Sherriff's *Journey's End*, a highly popular 1928 anti-war play, is nowhere to be found in the archives and is thus considered lost.[9] A significant relic that survived is his 1934 poem "Do not give them arms," written after he learned from reading a newspaper about the death of a veteran French soldier who was injured during a German gas attack during World War I. The composer Stefan Wolpe, who fled Germany following Hitler's rise to power, helped turn the poem into a popular anti-war anthem by adding a tune, sung many times in later years in kibbutzim choirs and performed by Israeli singers such as Yehoram Gaon and David Broza. In an ironic twist of Israeli history, during the 1990s, the settler movement opposing the Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinian Authority appropriated the poem's title and turned it into a catchy slogan that was printed on posters and bumper stickers opposing the Yitzhak Rabin government's decision to allow the establishment of a Palestinian police force. What an odd comeback into the public agora.

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*Sa'ar U-Ferets* (*Sturm und Drang*), a superb assemblage of Alterman's short newspaper articles and sketches from the 1930s, provides yet another significant sequel to the Alterman of the *Seventh Column*. We meet an Alterman who is not yet the sermonic court lyricist but a novice poet who fumbles and probes for his distinctive aesthetic stance and voice, still under the strong influence of Shlonsky;

[9] The English play premiered in London in December 1928, starring the young Laurence Olivier. The Hebrew play, based on Alterman's translation, was first staged in October 1934 by the New Theatre, cast with recently arrived German-Jewish actors. For discussion, see Tom Lewy, *Ha-Yekim Veha-Teatron Ha-`Ivri: Be-Maavak Ben Ma`Arav Le-Mizrah Eropah* (The German Jews and the Hebrew Theatre: A Clash between Western and Eastern Europe) (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2016), 228-236; Dan Laor, *Alterman: Biyografyah* (Alterman: A Biography) (Tel Aviv: `Am `oved, 2013), 154-155.

a *feuilletonesque* Alterman, who relied on caustic humor and irony when writing about theater, cinema, his impressions from a visit to a museum, or his strolls in the streets of Tel Aviv or Haifa. We encounter an Alterman who writes very little about "world events" and newspaper headlines. An Alterman passionate about art and deeply suspicious of grand political elocutions, scouring to find an intimate, fresh way of looking at the world, not crushed by the weight of the big words and the noise of lofty rhetoric. Take, for instance, his proclamation of October 1938, originally published in *Turim* (Columns), Shlonsky's literary journal:

> There are words with which it is uncomfortable to be alone, in solitude, even for a short while. When you stand face to face with them, with no background noise, with no witness, the silence begins to weigh on you like a foreign garment. You know such words. They are prosperous, their strides are broad, and their voice is abundant and very generous. They scatter gold in mass assemblies. They bravely risk their souls in speeches and debates. They are the spirit of anthems. They were, and certainly will forever remain, the great patrons of the wars and the barricades. There is no limit to their inheritance in wealth and youth. But when they suddenly come to you, fatigued from generosity and heroism, battered by the many hugs and handshakes, standing solitary in the doorway—it seems to you that they have been diminished to a loaf of bread (p. 273).

Echoes of Alterman's short but formative French period can still be heard in many of the early articles in this collection. Equally estranged from the Jews of France and the boastful display of France's overseas possessions at the International Colonial Exhibition in Paris, he ponders the connection between displacement (*'akira*) and infertility (*'akrut*) and the special position of the Jewish student in relation to his environment and toward his own kin. Alterman returns to Palestine, a consciously parochial Eretz-Israelian *flâneur*, forging a new persona: a stroller walking leisurely through the streets of Tel Aviv, the city he adores. Anthropomorphism is a recurrent, favorable technique he employs. When looking at the city map, he sees

> Nahalat Binyamin Street went out on his way, reckless and dandy. The Rothschilds' blood is flowing in his arteries. [...] The municipal police tower took a large watch out of his waistcoat pocket and forgot to put it back in out of boredom [...]. Allenby Street was getting ready to swim and put his head in the water, but his legs got tangled up in the net of the commercial center, and he could not move (p. 57).

One cannot ignore Alterman's male gaze; the personifications repeatedly compared the urban setting to an exotic, seductive woman. "The Jaffa-Tel Aviv Road is foreign and different from all its sibling streets. Solemn and heavy, she rises and passes next to them without a chuckle or a nod. Originating from Jaffa, she is a beautiful and brave *giyoret* [convert to Judaism] who is afraid to encounter hidden disdain under the guise of courtesy, passing as a Ruth, silent and gathered within herself" (p. 71). The rural landscape is eroticized as well. Similes compare Haifa Bay to a maternal sea pulling out from its sand-yellow shirt a blue-veined nipple to breastfeed Haifa-baby who would not let go (p. 121), in close proximity to Mt Carmel, "An old sultan, shrouded in hookah fumes" (pp. 107-108). Haifa eventually turns out to be also a woman-child, "who was constantly hiding behind her Carmel-dad's back, like a shy and dopey child, but suddenly leaped up and began limping in a hurry toward the car on all fours, with her crooked arms and legs," who transformed into a no less seductive Zuleikha, Potiphar's wife (pp. 106-107). *Ōdī et amō*: Like in his love poetry, Alterman's love-hate relationship with Palestine's Jewish cities, and Tel Aviv in particular, is equally saturated with hints of violent jealousy and aggressive reactions toward the object of his desire:

> Tel Aviv is beautiful at twilight. She adds charm every evening, day by day. She beautifies herself as a city lady who opens her purse, directs a tiny mirror in front of her, while tilting her head slightly, coloring her lips, puffing clouds of powder on her cheeks, touching her hair flutteringly [...] I so love her and hate her as much, and I always want her to be, to grow up to be precisely as she is: frivolous and sincere; secular in her life and sacred in her mystery; bold-faced and deep-eyed (pp. 96-97).

These urban sketches, "postcards" and snapshots from wandering in the country, do not seek to describe as much as to invite readers to a kind of aesthetic re-enactment, to re-experience. Poetry, Alterman declared in 1933, "does not describe life [...] but lives it once more, in a primal, virgin, and inner form, full of wonder and surprise" (p. 186). True writing is a campaign against descriptive art and the overused symbol. Can one's commitment to labor Zionist ideology coexist with these categorical demands? In an article titled "Postcards from the Jordan Valley" (December 1933), laden with endearing descriptions of the Sea of Galilee and the northern valleys, Alterman ends up apologizing: "I forgive myself for those few lines that pretended to 'describe' the evening in the Jordan Valley. The surroundings of the Kinneret have been a kind of symbol of earthly beauty to us, and I am now like a man who disgorges from his heart a compliment for a woman who has a thousand lovers" (p. 191). Such snippets read as practice drawings preparing him towards immortal lines such as "Even an ancient vision has its moment of birth" (״גַּם לְמַרְאֶה נוֹשָׁן יֵשׁ רֶגַע שֶׁל הֻלֶּדֶת״) that would appear five years later in *Stars Outside* (*Kokhavim ba-hutz*, 1938), Alterman's debut and most influential book of poetry.

Correspondingly, Alterman does not hide his distaste for modern technologies of "capturing images," whether cinema or photography. Devoid of that mysterious primacy, they make landscapes banal and spectators passive. The cinema is "a dream factory that supplies its products wholesale, prevails over its viewers, showing everyone one dream, close and unattainable" (p. 195), and the cinema house is "a rambunctious bully, multicolored and noisy" (p. 263), while the theater is an intimate art that pays attention to details, movement, the gentle interplay of light and shadow and is, in short, "soul food" (p. 43). These remarks are not surprising, given that Alterman wrote for the theater during the same years. His marriage to the actress Rachel Marcus in 1935 further solidified his connection to this art form. Most of his original work for the theater, apart from translations of European plays such as *Journey's End*, consisted of light musicals and cabaret-style satire sketches (many of which ridiculed, fondly more than scornfully, the accents and eccentric behavior of the *Yekkes*).

His comments about photography, shorthanded as "Kodak," are fascinating: in a brief yet poignant sketch titled "We were photographed (inferiority complex)" from November 1933, he describes the influx of new immigrants from Germany

sweeping the streets of Tel Aviv, focusing on two *Yekke* girls whom he saw taking a photograph of him, and declares mockingly: "The photo machine swallowed us alive while we were still provincials. While we were 'Natives,' before we fulfilled the European Development Plan" (p. 179). Such observations should not interest literary scholars alone, for they provide a window into the fascinating cultural tensions of the period: as the historian Rebekka Grossmann showed, a new visual vocabulary was introduced to Mandate Palestine predominantly by German-Jewish photographers, photojournalists, and filmmakers (such as Helmar Lerski, Tim Gidal, Yaakov Rosner, Lu Landauer, and Shmuel Josef Schweig), who immigrated to Palestine from Weimar Germany. Their conscious attempt to forge their own understandings of belonging to the new country was at once also part of a larger story of "Weimar abroad."[10] Associating the camera with the German emigres, he turns both into symbols of an imported, alien, central-European over-sophistication and urban refinement. The "German gaze," accompanied by a discourse of modernization and development, runs counter to the poet's desire to experience the sublime, to surrender to a landscape in its wonderful primacy. Moreover, in an endless chain of Orientalization, including self-Orientalization, it demotes Alterman to the role of "the Native:"

> I returned home full of resentment and wrote a song in honor of the foreign photographer:
>
> Please, Frau, listen –
> The matter is quite simple
> You photographed me this morning
> In a Kodak machine.
>
> What is the reason? Is this indeed the case?
> Am I really exotic?...
> Quite you, hush...
> No, I'm not *Asiat*! (p. 179)

[10] Rebekka Grossmann, "Image Transfer and Visual Friction: Staging Palestine in the National Socialist Spectacle," *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 64, no. 1 (2019): 19-45; Id., "Negotiating Presences: Palestine and the Weimar German Gaze," *Jewish Social Studies* 23, no. 2 (2018): 137-172.

Dark clouds of war cast a shadow over the last articles in the collection, especially from October 1938 on. Reviewing the minutes of the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, UNESCO's precursor, he somberly concludes that "the world of the educated and the knowledgeable is void of reality and real force," and as an inevitable consequence, naked power rises to dominance (p. 282). They mark an end of an era: not too long ago, "it was hard to believe that it would be possible to control the masses, not for a week or a month, but for years upon years, with slogans of incitement and intoxication" (p. 297), but in the present age the poet loses his ability to stimulate empathy, to mobilize:

> The words will tell in pain, in anger, about the torture of a refugee, about the torture of tens of thousands of refugees, about a synagogue on fire, about seventy synagogues on fire, about masses who have become blind and transformed into a predatory machine [...] But everything remains mute. These days, their powers, their motives, their souls do not speak in our language (p. 296).

This pessimism provides the backdrop against which his famous debate with Leah Goldberg erupted after the latter rejected Alterman's categorical demand that, with the outbreak of yet another war in Europe, all poets should mobilize for the struggle and stop writing love songs.[11] The metamorphosis was complete: it was no longer the Alterman of "Do not give them arms" (1934), a chant for pacifism hurled at warmongers, no longer the Alterman distancing himself with disgust from grandiose political elocutions. Alterman sheds the attire of the cosmopolitan poet and shrinks himself, in the language of the book's editor, Giddon Ticotsky, to Jewish and Palestine-centric dimensions in his writing. The editing is as meticulous and conducted with as loving a hand as anything done by Ticotsky, who in recent years has curated an impressive series of collections of forgotten personal letters and popular writings in newspapers by Hebrew writers and poets. The book is supplemented with a scholarly and accessible afterword by Uri S.

[11] A debate examined in detail in Hannan Hever, *Suddenly, the Sight of War: Violence and Nationalism in Hebrew Poetry in the 1940s*, trans. Lisa Katz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).

Cohen, which provides the dramatic literary context for the articles collected in the book. This is a literary delight as well as a remarkable contribution to Israel's intellectual history, which still awaits the historian to write it.

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## Tudor Parfitt, *Hybrid Hate: Conflations of Antisemitism and Anti-Black Racism from the Renaissance to the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 290.

by *Monica Miniati*

Tudor Parfitt's volume is an exercise in erudition. Draws on an extensive documentation, it offers a detailed reconstruction of the history of racism, and more precisely, the history of racism before racism as seen against the backdrop of the long confrontation (or "struggle," as the author calls it), between polygenism and monogenism. The clash between these two opposing theories concluded with the tragic epilogue of the racist rampage that would engulf the twentieth century. The reconstruction and detailed analysis of this confrontation, develops through an historical narrative in which the wealth of cited documents does not always make for easy reading. Parfitt's analysis takes as its starting point St Augustine's assertion of a common origin of all human beings, even those monstrous creatures reported by "secular history," to which the philosopher and theologian claims there is no obligation to give credit: "Whoever is anywhere born a man, that is, a rational, mortal animal, no matter what unusual appearance he presents in color, movement, sound, nor how peculiar he is in some power, part, or quality of his nature, no Christian can doubt that he springs from that one protoplast." (*City of God*, Book XVI, Chapter 8).

With the Age of Discovery, the Augustinian model of a common origin and an equality in diversity, which is a pillar of Christian monogenism, had to face the challenges posed by polygenist theories, which emerged after the discovery of new and "strange looking" populations in Africa and the Americas. This discovery raised many questions about the origin of these populations, while the genealogical scheme of monogenism did not seem to have adequate space to accommodate the newcomers. In the sixteenth century, the debate on the origin of humanity was no longer the exclusive preserve of theology, but was joined by a scientific discourse that marked the beginning of modern racism (p. 4).

Indeed, supporters of the polygenist thesis had difficulty understanding how Adam's descendants could have reached such remote places on the globe. The only valid explanation was that those people represented a human lineage not

descended from a single generative line. Thus, Paracelsus, an early proponent of polygenism as well as a physician, alchemist and astrologer, declared a transmigration of Adam's descendants implausible. Instead, he claimed that they occupied only a small portion of the earth because God, in his desire not to leave the rest of the world empty, had created blacks, Native Americans and other strange peoples to populate it. In this perspective, Adam found himself having to share the act of creation with *another being*, and the belief in a human race defined by unity was burdened with serious doubts. Similarly, the philosopher Giordano Bruno, on the basis of his own idea of the infinity of worlds, stated the existence of "parallel Adams": the earth was home to several human species, divided by the philosopher on the basis of colour, whose origin could not be traced back to a single father. Whites, blacks and Jews had separate origins. Bruno ascribed a descent from Adam only to the Jewish race, the "sacred race," and he asserted very strongly that the "Ethiopian race" had no connection to Adam's lineage. With Bruno, black populations began to be the subject of a distinction that a few years later would be reiterated with serious and dangerous overtones by Lucilio Vanini. For him, in fact, the Ethiopians are descended from apes.

The French Calvinist theologian Isaac La Peyrère also ventured onto the same territory and as early as the seventeenth century he made no distinction between Jews and blacks, but lumped them together under their shared negative characteristics. Like Bruno, La Peyrère believed in Jews' exclusive descent from Adam but, unlike Bruno, Jews were not a "sacred race" in his view. On the contrary, despite his Jewish origins, La Peyrère showed no particular empathy towards Jews. They are black and smelly but may lose these unpleasant characteristics by embracing the Christian faith. Black skin therefore had a negative overtone, but in the case of Jews, a religious change guarantees a glowing white complexion and an intoxicating scent. On the other hand, according to Louis-Armand de Lom d'Arce, Baron La Hontan, there are no prospects of salvation for Blacks. Not only is it impossible that Native Americans and Africans, so different from each other, be children of Adam, it is also pointless to look at air quality and climatic conditions, on which the monogenist theory was based, for the causes of their diversity. Whatever the climate in which they are born, the children of a black man and a black woman will only ever be black.

Blackness is therefore a final ruling, and Enlightenment philosophical and scientific thinking does not always allow for any mitigating circumstances. In this regard, Parfitt writes: "The Enlightenment's demolition of the myth of the Garden of Eden was destined to have a number of unintended consequences and to be replaced by a number of other myths, none of them helpful for the onward march of humankind" (p. 20). Recalling the polygenist theory, Voltaire in fact denied the common origin of whites, blacks and the yellow race and established a mental hierarchy of races in which blacks occupied the lowest rung (slavery was proof of their mental inferiority). Similarly, the Scottish philosopher David Hume considered blacks to be inherently inferior to whites. The German naturalist Christoph Meiners, in his hierarchy of races, placed blacks closer to the animal kingdom than to the human one, which is dominated by the white race. The English historian and slave owner Edward Long argued that blacks had more in common with orangutans than humans.

Therefore, even the theorists of monogenism, while developing their thinking within the framework of the biblical narrative, fell into the trap of black inferiority. Carl von Linné, the father of taxonomy, although convinced of the unique genesis of humanity, accompanied his strict classification of races with subjective value judgements that in time would become racist prejudices: the white race is creative, industrious, orderly, and governed by laws, while the black race is lazy and incapable of developing an organized and civilized life. Similarly, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, also an advocate of the common origin of mankind, in pointing to the different races as degenerations of an original white strain, established the superiority of the white race. In the same manner Kant too assumed an original strain of which the various races were a variation The white race was closest to the original prototype while the black race was the furthest. As previously pointed out by George L. Mosse, and as can be seen from Parfitt's extensive treatment, the Enlightenment, with its classificatory preoccupation, began a discriminatory approach that offered racism a fundamental theoretical basis. Polygenists and monogenists, observes Parfitt, by dividing humanity into races, without ever reaching agreement on their number, generated a "confusion that was to continue until the Third Reich" (p. 24). Enlightenment thinking stigmatized blacks as an inferior race but was not generous towards Jews either, even though it recognized them as part of the white, Caucasian race. Voltaire

considered Jews to be despicable, cruel and dishonest beings. On the basis of their alleged refusal to conform to European customs, Kant judged them to be completely alien to the norms that governed civilized peoples: the Jews were noisy "social vampires," harmful to society. Jews were attributed the same negative features that characterized blacks, such as violence, exploitation, theft, lying, and a proverbial cunning in doing business. And like blacks, the Jews also sinned in their profound ignorance. Until they had freed themselves from their mistaken beliefs and rituals, they could never be a full part of Western society. "For many Enlightenment thinkers the Jews, like blacks, had nothing to offer" (p. 49).

As Parfitt shows, the radical otherness of Jews and blacks had been discussed in earlier eras, but the Enlightenment sanctioned it. From this moment on, throughout the nineteenth until the mid-twentieth century, Jews and blacks were to be the privileged subject of the study of racial differences in Europe. The definition, in particular, of the "colour of the Jews" in the nineteenth century represents another essential moment in the contest between monogenists and polygenists. The discovery in 1773 of black Jews in Ethiopia, reported by the Scotsman James Bruce, followed in 1777 by the finding of black Jews in Loango, together with the presence of an ancient community of black Jews in Cochin, with whom Claudius Buchanan, also a Scot, had come into contact on his journey to South India in 1806 and 1807, as well as the existence of black Jews in the Jordan Valley and the Sahara—had all fuelled a debate in which the blackness of Jews was far from being a mere chromatic detail.

Blackness was the field where monogenists and polygenists clashed, and both sides referred to it to claim the legitimacy of their respective theories. For monogenists, it was crucial that European Jews be considered white because the dark skin of their African, Indian, Middle Eastern and other co-religionists confirmed the thesis of climatic determinism as well as the common origin of humanity. For the polygenists, however, the blackness of the Jews stood in the way of the theory of the immutability of race. The only way to solve the problem was therefore to assert, as the Englishman Charles White had done in 1799, that all Jews, whatever the climatic conditions in which they lived, were in general of one and the same color, that is to say swarthy. This thinking would see new developments in the nineteenth century when polygenist anthropologists, in order to circumvent the obstacle of a color spectrum among Jews, established that all Jews were brown.

However, there was also at the same time another school of thought according to which Jews were everywhere black, descended from Africans, had black blood and a "negro" (original text) appearance.

Of course, this was not merely a matter of color. The assimilation of Jews into a racial group that instinctively aroused feelings of strong revulsion in European society was the most effective means of conveying the idea of Jews' eternal and immutable racial otherness: "In trying to convey the unchanging otherness of Jews, European society selected an equally immutable figure to typify Jews: the African black" (p. 158). The "Africanization" of Jews, Parfitt continues, descended from a belief, based on the medieval notion that Jews were black, that had asserted over the centuries the close link between Jews and blacks, as well as their position as peoples distinct from the rest of humanity. These old beliefs were then complemented by the new obsession with black Jews, raising the question of the color of Jews. "The conflation of Jew and negro [...] was thus the culmination of an ancient historical and racial theory and produced the fusion of two ancient streams of hate: the hatred of Jews and the hatred of blacks" (p. 158).

The Englishman Robert Knox, one of the first physical anthropologists, stated in 1850 the non-European affiliation of Jews, who were "dark, tawny and yellow-colored persons," in whose veins black blood flowed. In 1853, the Frenchman Arthur de Gobineau was fighting on the same front. The Jews' black blood was the fruit of a very ancient union between Semites and Hamites and was the cause of their cultural coarseness. From the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, the idea of a shared origin of blacks and Jews gathered an increasing number of supporters, and the obsession with color was joined by an equally compulsive search to define their somatic characteristics. Indeed, it was believed that "negroid" features were more pronounced in some Jews than in others. The French anthropologist and linguist Abel Hovelacque wrote in 1882 that Africans resembled monkeys, while the main characteristic of Jews was their goat-like profile. However, Jews with such a profile somehow constituted an elite compared to co-religionists with coarse negroid and ape-like features, such as the broad nose, fleshy lips, and wavy or frizzy hair, evidence of long-standing interbreeding with a less evolved race which was, needless to say, the blacks of Africa. A few years later he was echoed by the English anthropologist Alfred Cort Haddod, who reiterated the existence of Jews of superior and inferior types. The superior type had a

dignified and intelligent appearance; the inferior, on the other hand, being descended from lower elements, had a negroid appearance and like all negroes had a round head, an under-developed nose, thick lips and frizzy hair. In 1903, the French anti-Semite "Docteur Celticus" turned his attention to Jews' nose by distinguishing two types. The hooked nose is the prerogative of the true Jew while the snub nose is typically African, the result of crossbreeding between Jews and blacks. Combining the two main symbols of Jews and blacks, the goat and the monkey, Celticus stated that the consequence of such a blood mixture was that Jews most often looked like goats and even smelled like them, while the younger ones, like blacks, looked like monkeys. The Jews' protruding jaw, like that of blacks, was reminiscent of both the goat and the gorilla.

From the nose and the jaw we move on to the ears, another important stereotype in the spread of racist beliefs. Ears were the most visible sign of belonging to a race, as the anthropologist Arthur Keith had once argued. In the case of Jews, ears were often considered a somatic mark of their race and, like those of blacks, were compared to those of gorillas and apes. A further characteristic shared by Jews and blacks is smell, the unpleasantness of which has been debated for centuries. The peculiarity, in a negative sense, of the smell of blacks and Jews had been asserted in 1864 by Richard Burton, an English explorer and writer. Years later (1903), the anti-Semitic Docteur Celticus could not define exactly what the smell of the Jews was like, but it seemed sufficient for him to state that even the most expensive soap and perfume could never conceal the smell of rich Jewish ladies, despite their best efforts. Many years later, in 1940, the Franco-Swiss anthropologist George Montandon is sadly credited with proposing the most venomous thoughts on the subject: Jews had inherited their unpleasant smell from their black ancestors and therefore the smell of a Jew was the smell of a "nigger" (original text). Nonetheless, nose, ears, smell or other physical features did not seem to satisfy racist appetites and the ideological need to assimilate Jews with blacks and blacks with Jews. Something more substantial was needed, like great ugliness, for example. Here the Hottentots came to the rescue. The Khoi, an ethnic group from South West Africa, had been given that name by the Dutch, and the term was later adopted by other Europeans. The Hottentots were considered a monstrous race, perhaps the missing link between true humanity and the orangutan (p. 163). The first to mention them was the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama, who in 1497 described

them as small in stature and hideous-faced. Da Gama was later echoed by travelers, colonial administrators, philosophers and scientists who stigmatized them as the smallest, smelliest, most hideous and savage of the African peoples. In short, the Hottentots possessed all the characteristics to become "the paradigm of the radically extreme 'other' and 'ugly race' par excellence" (p. 163). From the seventeenth century onwards, scholars and travelers stated their Jewish descent. Parfitt cites in this connection the German scholar Peter Kolben who in 1719, after an exploration in South Africa, had stated that the customs and traditions of the Hottentots were similar to those of the Jews and that Jewish blood flowed in their veins. From this belief, also shared by other scholars, it followed that the Africans, considered the ugliest people in the world, were descended from the ugliest people in all of Europe, namely the Jews.

Parfitt then discusses a hybridization of Jews and "Negroes" that appeals to ugliness as a powerful instrument of discrimination and devaluation. Hence we find the reference to the German historian, philosopher and polygenist, Christoph Meiners who in 1785 declared beauty or ugliness the main characteristic of a race and divided humanity between the beautiful and civilized white race and the animalistic, monstrous and uncivilized black race. Jews belonged to the latter category and Jews and blacks not only shared ugliness but also degeneracy. Meiners' thinking was destined to have a long and successful career, sometimes even among Jews themselves, as Karl Marx testifies.

In 1863, in a vehement attack on the Jewish socialist leader Ferdinand Lassalle, Marx did not hesitate to add his voice to the chorus of those who thought the Jews descended from a mishmash of "niggers," lepers and Hebrews, who had gathered during the flight from Egypt. Marx contemptuously called Lassalle a "Jewish nigger:" the shape of his head, the texture of his hair, his negroid substance and his intrusive behavior were proof of this.

It was not always the case, though, that the Jews' negroid characteristics of Jews were so easy to spot. In 1861, the English polygenist John Beddoe had raised the issue of Jews' invisibility by stating that their appearance was not necessarily revealing of their nigrescence. It was true that the Jews scored one hundred per cent on the nigrescence index compiled by the eminent ethnologist, but, in possessing chameleon-like characteristics, they had a wide range of colors that allowed them to take on the same appearance as the peoples among whom they

lived and guarantee racial invisibility. In the wake of Beddoe's "discovery" of the chameleon-like faculties of Jews, Rudolf Virchow, a German pathologist and anthropologist, tried to establish in 1871 the racial composition of the newly created German Reich. He conducted a study of almost seven million German schoolchildren, using hair and eye color as the preferred instrument of investigation. The study established that German and Jewish children were racially different. The true color of an individual's skin was not necessarily what could be seen with the naked eye, and in order to determine it another scientific method was to be used in which eyes and hair played a key role. The children and teachers who participated in the investigation, consciously or unconsciously, learned that establishing the color of people was not so obvious and that Jews constituted a separate race. The persecution and annihilation of Jews was still a long way off but the die had been cast. Although unintentionally, Virchow through his study had instilled in people's minds a first dose of the poison that some twenty years later his compatriot, Theodor Fritsch, would inject in abundance by asserting that the Jews were a mongrel race with a strong negroid component.

In this sense, as Parfitt points out, Fascist and Nazi nigrophobia and anti-Semitism would receive a rich heritage accumulated over centuries by polygenist discourse. The twentieth century has handed polygenist theory the coveted laurel crown. However, it is not entirely random to ask whether, viewed through the prism of science, the success of that theory was accompanied by its failure. Polygenism wished to present itself as a scientific and rational theory, disengaged from religion, but ended up paving the way for the racial anthropology or pseudo-scientific racism that would lead humanity to inhumanity. It was a pseudo-science which, in the case of Italian fascism, had to jump through many hoops to assert the purity of the "Italian race" and its belonging to the "Aryan race," obviously ignoring history and paleontology, that boasted a long tradition of studies from which the multiple ethnic composition of Italy and Italians emerged clearly. Likewise, this pseudo-science failed to live up to the expectations of Nazi racist theorists who witnessed the failure of their attempts to delineate a complete racial profile of Jews. The Nazi regime's persecution and extermination of Europe's Jews found no certain and scientifically founded racial basis to support itself.

The volume under examination offers such a wealth of material that the author's thoughts often take second place to the sources cited. It also raises many questions

that are often not answered for the reader. Furthermore, even taking into account the author' focus on the convergence of hatred against Jews and hatred against blacks, the volume underestimates the fact that in Fascism and Nazism the main target remained the Jews. Nevertheless this study has the merit of reminding us that: "Throughout its long history, humanity has made strenuous efforts to understand the nature of things in the world and how they are intertwined, but at the same time it has also made an equally heroic effort not to understand them."[1] And for not wishing to understand them.

*Monica Miniati, Independent Scholar*

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[1] The words are from Eduardo Boncinelli, "A proposito di catastrofi: i filosofi e il sisma di Lisbona," Review of *Filosofie della catastrofe*, by Andrea Tagliapietra, ed., *La Lettura*, March 27, 2022, 5.

**Aviad Moreno, Noah Gerber, Esther Meir-Glizenstein, and Ofer Shiff, eds., *The Long History of the Mizrahim: New Directions in the Study of Jews from Muslim Countries. In tribute to Yaron Tsur* (Jerusalem: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2021), pp. 551 [in Hebrew].**

by *Emanuela Trevisan Semi*

This work is a tribute to the great scholar Yaron Tsur, the author of *Qehillah qeruah*,[1] which remains an outstanding and generous work, a proper treasure of sources, insights, analytical skills and information. Tsur is also the author of a seminal article entitled "Carnival Fears: Moroccan Immigrants and the Ethnic Problem in the Young State of Israel," and is quoted in most of the articles in this collection.[2] Tsur pioneered the study of the history of Jews from Muslim countries and defined the concept of "sectorialization" (*migzarim*) within Moroccan Jewish society, a vastly illuminating notion for anyone who has done research about the Jews of Morocco. The challenge presented by this collection is taken up by 23 scholars, among whom we find the main authorities on this subject as well as a new generation of researchers, all offering new insights into "the long history" of *mizrahim*. The "long history" in the tile hints at the aim of this text, namely to demonstrate that the current history of the *mizrahim* is a continuity of their history in the lands they left and not a rupture. By using this term, the authors challenge the narrow boundaries of current Israeli historiography.

The lengthy introduction by Aviad Moreno and Noah Gerber describes the milestones in the research on Jews in Muslim countries from the 1970s and introduces the reader to the main issues of this fascinating chapter of Jewish history and also to the core themes of this volume. After recalling how until the 1970s this story was considered completely marginal in comparison to the European narrative, they show how this trend continued for a long time. This explains the importance of this collection, and its fresh look at relations between *ashkenazim* and *mizrahim* and more generally at migrations that are explained not through the birth of the State but as signs of a wider crisis.

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[1] Yaron Tsur, *A Torn Community: The Jews of Morocco and Nationalism, 1943-1954* (Tel Aviv: 'Am 'Oved Publishing, 2001 [in Hebrew].

[2] Yaron Tsur, "Carnival Fears: Moroccan Immigrants and the Ethnic Problem in the Young State of Israel," *Journal of Israeli History* 18, no. 1 (1997): 73-103.

The introduction traces the history of *mizrahim* studies. Initially, the authors of the first studies were not interested in the *mizrahim*'s recent past and in any case thought that it was not worthy of interest. The ethos of the reunification of the diasporas (*kibbutz galuyot*) was potentially subversive because it opened the door to ethnographic cultures. However, Zionist ideology considered it necessary that the links with the diaspora be severed after emigration to Israel. This influenced research on the *mizrahim* and gave rise to disputes between historians and social scientists.

No attention was paid to sectorial social divisions within the countries from which the migrants originated. According to the introduction's authors, a change can now be perceived in the new millennium with the publication of an issue of *Pe'amim* on the topic: it includes important articles that take stock of previous research and suggested new paths of investigation.[3] In the 94/95 issue, an article by Tsur was published, that proposes a separation between Israeli historiography and research on the "ethnic question." That was the beginning of a move away from the logic of a monolithic, unitary Jewish culture that supposedly runs through the Jewish people's entire history of. Postcolonial studies (and in particular Ella Shohat) would later help influence Israeli academia by questioning "Judeocentric" categorizations, starting with that of *mizrahim*.

The fact that the debate on the encounter, in Israel, between Jews from Muslim countries and European Jews involved only social scientists precluded, according to Moreno and Gerber, an in-depth historical analysis, and contributed to a dichotomy between past and present.

An important development for the debate on these issues took place in 2011-2014 and subsequently in 2015-2017, thanks to a research-group called "Jews of the *Mizrah*, an Orientalist question and modern awareness" to which the authors of the introduction participated.

As already pointed out, Tsur was among the first to point out the problem represented by the gap between studies of Jews from Arab countries in their countries of origin and research on those Jews in Israel. Today, on the contrary, there is a whole generation of young historians who are aware of the importance of bridging this gap and many of them have contributed to this volume.

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[3] *Pe'amim: Studies in Oriental Jewry* 92 (2002)

It is impossible to review all the twenty-three articles in this volume. These are organized in three parts: the first deals with inter-ethnic relations in Israel (Harvey Goldberg and Orit Abuhav, Nissim Leon and Uri Cohen, Hila Shalem Baharad, Daniel Schroeter, Amos Noy, Malka Katz, Yuval Haruvi, Avi Picard and Almog Behar); the second with Migration as a border line (Gur Alroey, Bat-Zion Eraqi Klorman, Menashe Anzi, Zvi Zohar, Yosef Yuval Tobi and Yoram Bilu); and the third with regional and super-regional history (Ethan Katz, Jessica Marglin, David Guedji, Tsivia Tobi, Yaron Harel, Guy Bracha, Yaron Ben-Nach and Tamir Karkason), with an epilogue on the works of Yaron Tsur, written by Aviad Moreno and Noah Gerber.

I have found some articles particularly interesting or innovative compared to others. One of these is Schroeter's "Moroccan Jews and the Idea of Moroccan Exceptionality in Israel." The author, having shown that the denial of the diaspora also involved Ashkenazi Jews, argues that while it was not possible to avoid dealing with European history, it was perfectly feasible to avoid the history of Arab countries, and this is precisely what happened. Schroeter points out that, ironically, the denial of the identity of Jews from Islamic countries did not interest the establishment, which routinely celebrated the glorious Jewish past in Spain but not the immigrants who descended from that past.

In this article Schroeter tackles a well-known issue, the so called "tolerance" of Morocco compared to other countries. He argues that the idea of the uniqueness of Morocco with respect to other Arab countries is partly due to the discriminatory attitude towards Moroccan Jews in Israel: this made them think of their Jewish past in Morocco as better than their situation in Israel. According to Schroeter, this explains their great nostalgia for Morocco. He adds, however, that there are two narratives concerning the Jews of Morocco. In the first we witness sad historical memories, since the 1912 Fez *treitel* and the 1948 *Oujda* deny the uniqueness of Morocco in comparison to other Arab countries. The second narrative argues that the Alawite kingdom protected Jews even under Vichy, despite criticisms of this claim. There are, therefore, two readings, one that sees uniqueness and one that denies it. The paradox, Schroeter says, is that they are two sides of the same coin, which is to say they are both part of Moroccan Jewish identity.

To this I would add that the narrative of Moroccan Jews in Israel refers to a recent past, undoubtedly influenced by the Israeli situation but also affected by the position taken by the kings of Morocco, with—last but not least—the inclusion of Jews in the 2011 Moroccan constitution, the acceptance of the Jewish legacy as one of the components of Morocco's heritage, the recognition of citizenship for Jews who left Morocco and the preservation of the Jewish heritage.

In "From the Rehabilitated *Mizrahi* Middle Class to the Renewed Israeli Center: Rethinking Center and Periphery," Nissim Leon and Uri Cohen offer an interesting analysis of the changes in *mizrahi* middle class and its flourishing in recent decades. In particular they speak of the "creolization" of Israeli society because of the mixing of *ashkenazi* and *mizrahi* cultures: if once their conflict was viewed as a war between center and periphery, now we should speak of a war between two strong groups at the center at both a symbolic and everyday level. According to the authors of this article, *haredim* and Israeli Arabs are also interested in joining the battle at the center. Bat-Zion Klorman ("Jewish Emigration from the South Arabian Peninsula: The Broader Context of the 19th and 20th Centuries") offers new insights into the issue of emigration from Yemen. She highlights the importance of the great powers' penetration into the Red Sea basin (Great Britain in Aden in 1839, the Ottoman Empire in Yemen in 1872, and Italy in Eritrea and Ethiopia in 1885), which she presents as a major factor in the significant changes that occurred in the area. As a consequence, South Arabia became connected to the global economy and this affected the traditional Yemeni Jewish economy. Jews who lost their livelihood were driven to emigrate to Aden, East Africa, Egypt and India, but also to Palestine, that like Yemen was part of the Ottoman empire. Her analysis shows that until the creation of the State of Israel, the emigration of Jews from Yemen was unrelated to the Zionist movement, challenging the meta-Zionist narrative which makes no distinctions in the narrative of Jewish emigration from Muslim countries. It is also particularly interesting to note what she writes about the politics of the Italian colony of Eritrea, that created one legal status for the Jews from Aden, who as British citizens were considered European, and another for the Jews from Yemen, who were treated as natives. This distinction had a great impact on the lives of the two groups.

Avi Picard ("Colonialism, Nationalism and the Deep Perspective: Insights into Israeli Ethnicity in the Wake of Carnival Fears") bases his paper on two concepts defined by Yaron Tsur, the colonial order and the national order. He discusses the opposition between the Zionist order, that emphasizes what is common to Jews, and the colonial order, that underlines what divides rather than what unifies. Jessica Marglin ("Jewish Law across the Mediterranean: The Last Will and Testament of Caid Nissim Shemama, 1873-1883") provides, as usual, a fascinating article, that will be fully developed in her forthcoming book. She writes about a debate around the will of a Jew from Tunis who died in Livorno. Starting from a legal document concerning the validity of the will according Jewish law, she analyses different interpretations of Jewish law from both sides of the Mediterranean. She demonstrates that these different interpretations do not follow the classic divide of *Sephardi* versus *Ashkenazi* or Europe versus Middle East, and offers a more complex outline of a period characterized by a process of modernization. This process seeked new paths of interpretation of Jewish law and resisted traditionalist figures on both shores of the Mediterranean. Another very innovative paper is that by David Guedje ("And so our culture and languages spread throughout all the communities: the Hebrew Network in Morocco during the first half of the 20th century"). Guedje uses Niall Ferguson's, theory of networks in order to trace and illustrate, most convincingly, the construction of a Jewish network in Morocco from the early twentieth century to the mid-1950s.[4]
He considers the communities of Fes, Meknes, Sefrou and Oujda as one geographical cluster, and Casablanca, Saleh, Rabat and Ouazzane as another. Starting from the concept of the three sectors proposed by Tsur, namely the European, the native and the one that wishes to become European, he analyzes how clusters of people and institutions distant from each other attempted to establish networks in terms of a linguistic (Hebrew, Judeo-Arabic and French) and cultural affiliation, creating sector clusters. Guedje shows how cultural components reached different Jewish communities in Morocco through cultural agents.

[4] Niall Ferguson, *The Square and the Tower: Networks and Power, from the Freemasons to Facebook* (New York: Penguin Press, 2018).

He demonstrates that while at the end of the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth centuries there were only isolated cultural islands in Morocco, it is only with the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century that a significant change occurred in the creation of the cultural clusters which linked Moroccan communities and Jews in the diaspora. In that way a small Jewish world emerged in the form of a network of cultural agents, and social and cultural institutions.

To conclude, this collection contributes to the advancement of studies in this field along the lines proposed by Tsur, opening up new lines of thought and indicating a path for future research. It is hoped that it will be translated into English to allow a wider audience access to such a wealth of perspectives.

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**Federico Trocini and Davide Artico, eds., *Gli scritti giovanili di Ludwig Gumplowicz. Questione ebraica e questione nazionale in Polonia (1864-1875)* (Modena: Mucchi Editore, 2021), pp. 296.**

by *Marco Bresciani*

Ludwig Gumplowicz (1838-1909) played a pioneering role in the European sociological tradition and catalysed significant international attention between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Yet later scholarship has neglected or almost forgotten his works, and today he is still considered "extremely controversial" (p. 5). Now this book, edited by Federico Trocini and Davide Artico, aims to call attention to his figure and thought, starting from the little-known writings of his youth. In his foreword, Trocini explains why it is important to renew scientific interest in Gumplowicz's works and investigate his overall intellectual trajectory. In his afterword, Artico, translator of his yearly essays from Polish to Italian, focuses on some critical aspects of his research during "the Krakow period" (1864-1875). This refers to his time as a student in the capital city of Austrian Galicia, that ended when he moved to the University of Graz and started working on his main work, *Rassenkampf* (1883). Gumplowicz's controversial interpretation of the struggle between "races" (or better, "peoples") in Central Europe was accused of entailing a racist philosophy of history (*à la* Gobineau). A closer look, though, shows that his arguments disregarded any rigid historical or sociological determinism, let alone cultural or even biological racism, contrary to what the mainstream reading of his work might suggest.

This anthology of Gumplowicz's early works include: a brief reflection on the philosophy of history, based on the universal rule of law (*Le ultime volontà nel progresso della storia e dei saperi. Sunto di storia del diritto*, 1864); a survey of the Polish laws on Jews from Casimir III the Great to Stanisław II August (*La legislazione polacca sugli ebrei*, 1867); an inquiry into the political, social and cultural situation in the multicultural capital of the Habsburg Empire (*Otto lettere da Vienna*, 1867); an analysis of the Confederation of Bar as a significant but ultimately failed answer to the institutional paralysis of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (*La Confederazione di Bar. Corrispondenza tra Stanislao Augusto e Xavier Branicki, venator Regni nell'anno 1768*, 1872); and an analysis of

the project of Jewish reformation put forward by the last ruler of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Stanisław II August, after the first partition of 1772 (*Il progetto di riforma ebraica di Stanislao Augusto*, 1875).

History was thus the starting point of Gumplowicz's sociological research. At the core of his early writings was the centrality of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (or *Rzeczpospolita*, a Republic based on the primacy of the Polish-speaking aristocracy) in the modern European era, up to the Polish partitions of 1772-1795. All of them were conceived and written in the aftermath of the Polish uprising of 1863-1864 against the Russian Empire (the so-called January Uprising). In his mind, the institutions of the now vanished Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth were characterized by unusual freedom of thought and tolerance towards a plurality of different linguistic and religious communities, as opposed to the increasingly centralized and potentially uniform model of the nation-state in Western Europe. In this regard, Trocini rightly argues, reading Gumplowicz help us overcome "that consolidated paradigm on the basis of which the history of modern statehood has been long interpreted only in relation to the French and English models" (p. 7).

The debate about the juridical status and economic function of the Jewish communities was at the core of these reflections on the relations, tensions, and contradictions between assimilation and emancipation. The sociologist-historian saw a dynamic at play that opposed a political, inclusive understanding of the nation, cultivated by the Polish nobles, and a religious, exclusive vision, supported by the Catholic Church: only the former could then guarantee the civil and political rights of the Jews and their integration in the Polish community, by putting aside the power of the Catholic Church. The outcome was the very important project of Jewish reform elaborated by the Polish Parliament (*Sejm*) in 1764. "That project – Gumplowicz insightfully commented – anticipated by several years the French Revolution, which is usually credited with being the first to eliminate confessional discrimination in the state body. It was thus the four-year *Sejm* that was the first in Europe to have enunciated the principle of the total equality of Jews" (p. 124).

After reading these essays, it is possible to conclude that Gumplowicz questioned historical narratives on the decline and collapse of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and maintained that it formed a lively ground for institutional

and legal experiments up to its very end through the partitions. As Artico claims in his afterword, the critical problem here is to establish what the young Jewish Gumplowicz meant by "Polish," and to what extent he claimed a Polish identity for himself. His writings shed unexpected light on the complexities and ambiguities of national identification in the multilinguistic, multicultural and multireligious lands of East-Central Europe, and critically assess nationalist narratives that argued for the metahistorical existence of homogeneous national communities. As Gumplowicz explained: "In Poland, a 'nation' in the true sense of the term has never been and still is not, because a feeling of blood lineage and of caste still prevails in our society, while that of nation is only false and artificial" (p. 266).

Together, these writings, accurately translated and commented, are a valid contribution to the understanding of Gumplowicz's intellectual biography and offer new insights on the development of some apparently marginal, but actually crucial aspects of the political and legal history of modern statehood in Europe. However, it is important to specify that his intellectual trajectory was tightly intertwined with the political and cultural trends of the Habsburg Empire (more than with "Poland" and "Austria" as such, as the book sometimes seems to suggest). As a matter of fact, the "Jewish question and the national question in Poland" intersected a wider web of "questions" that concerned the whole of the Habsburg Empire, and beyond. In this regard Gumplowicz's argument can be really understood, beyond any stereotype or prejudice, through an analysis of the broader synchronic circulation of ideas, as well as of the intense transfer of academic and scientific knowledge within the entire imperial space of East-Central Europe.

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**Swen Steinberg and Anthony Grenville, eds., *Refugees from Nazi-Occupied Europe in British Overseas Territories* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), pp. 278.**

by *Liesbeth Rosen Jacobson*

This is a fascinating, ambitious and original attempt to systematically draw scholarly attention to non-Western escape destinations of (predominantly Eastern) European Jews, specifically British Overseas Territories. A relatively small group of Jews tried to flee Europe after the Nazi-regime came to power in the 1930s. This volume is the result of a conference organized by the Research Centre for German and Austrian exile studies, entitled "Emigration form Nazi-occupied Europe to British Overseas Territories," which took place at the University of London in September 2017. Although in the last couple of years more studies have appeared on the "forgotten" escape destinations of European Jews in the Far East and the West-Indies, it is still a relatively new research theme. It started with studies into mainly British overseas territories but is not limited to that area anymore: for example, the Philippines, the Dominican Republic and the former Dutch East Indies have recently received scholarly attention.[1]

All these studies share the implicit goal of bringing previously strictly separated worlds together under one research framework: the events in Europe during the Second World War are analyzed trans-nationally with events in what was still at that time the colonial world. This is epitomized by the physical movement of European Jews to this world, which brought about a clash between the categorization systems of the West (that perceived Jews as Western) and those of

[1] Liesbeth Rosen Jacobson, " 'A welcoming refuge?' The experiences of European Jewish refugees in the Dutch East Indies, set against other Asian destinations, 1933-1965," *Jewish Culture and History* 22, no. 2 (2021): 154-173; Therese M. Sunga, "The Refugee Archipelago? Political responses in the Philippines to forced migration in the twentieth century" (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 2021), full text available, accessed November 17, 2022, https://www.research.manchester.ac.uk/portal/files/194688610/FULL_TEXT.PDF; Marion A. Kaplan, *Dominican Haven: The Jewish Refugee Settlement in Sosúa, 1940-1945* (New York: Museum of Jewish Heritage-A Living Memorial to the Holocaust Press, 2008); Thomas Pegelow Kaplan, "Global Jewish Petitioning and the Reconsideration of Spatial Analysis in Holocaust Historiography: the Rescue Case of the Philippines," in *Resisting Persecution: Jews and their Petitions during the Holocaust,* eds. Thomas Pegelow Kaplan and Wolf Gruner (New York: Berghahn Books, 2020), 157-181.

the colonial East (that sometimes perceived Jews as Eastern). The exceptional phase of the Second World War put further pressure on already tense relations. How did these cultural encounters play out, how did Jews fit in the hierarchical colonial scheme and how did that scheme impact their relations with several communities in the colonial society? This Jewish quest for refuge provided for knowledge transfer of new ideas and their social and cultural translations to new places.

In this approach, not only the topic is broadened to cover more non-Western escape destinations, the research period is also extended. New research does not only establish the circumstances before the decision to flee is taken, but it also increasingly focuses on Europeans Jews' lives after their successful escape. Did they transmigrate, remigrate, or migrate to Israel when it was established in 1948? A typical course of events for many European Jewish refugees was to move from country to country until they found one where they could stay indefinitely. When their applications were rejected, after a while they usually tried the next neighboring country, moving continually and magnifying the feeling of desperation.

The book is divided into two parts: the first is more concerned with general experiences of European Jewish refugees, and in particular what kind of regulations and conditions they came across in various British Overseas Territories. This part briefly discusses the unexpected internment of German Jewish refugees as enemy aliens, and the often strict British adherence to the principle of no distinction between Jewish and non-Jewish German internees, the reason being that British authorities were in general too scared of potential fascist saboteurs among both Jewish and non-Jewish Germans. The second part covers the probably more well-known cases of literary, musical and artistic refugees. These fascinating, vividly described stories include, among others, writer Willy Haas's life in colonial India and organist Werner Baer's stay in colonial Singapore. In this part there are also two very original papers in German on the puppet theater and the special type of architecture that Austrian refugees brought to Australia, as well as the movie *Children of the World* that two Austrian movie makers shot during their exile in Shanghai. Nevertheless, these chapters display a comprehensive bias, which in my opinion should have been acknowledged more explicitly in the introduction. I wonder why so much focus is placed in this volume

on the cultural contributions European Jewish refugees made to British overseas territories. Not all European Jewish refugees were artists, and many other highly educated refugees were lawyers, journalists, engineers, among other professions. Obviously, these refugees left many written traces, because it was exactly their specific talent that gave them the permission to stay. But what happened to non-creative/artistic or less talented refugees? What was the role of Jewish organizations in that respect, for example local branches of the Joint Distribution Committee? That part of the story seems to me to be partially missing. Recently, Joanne Cho has edited a volume on musical entanglements between Germany and East Asia,[2] In that volume the research focus seems to me somewhat more structured and specific.

The chapters, especially those in the first part on conditions and regulations, lean to a considerable extent towards the "white dominions:" Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Probably, most of the primary source material is related to those territories, but it leaves the reader wondering what were the general conditions and parameters in Kenya, India and Singapore, since in the chapters on these countries those general conditions are only referred to in passing. To take the perspective of the refugees themselves is an admirable approach, but that one testimony of a Jewish Bulgarian family, at the end of the first part, which eventually chooses to go to Israel, albeit telling and fascinating, seems to me a bit randomly chosen. Covering both Asia and Africa under the same overarching framework, provides for a complete picture that can potentially show all transnational connections.

In the introduction to this volume a lot is promised and this book does indeed contain some very illuminating and innovative chapters. Unfortunately far from everything that is announced at the beginning is delivered in the rest of the volume. This is probably due to the fact that the broad, pioneering introduction is more a description of a new research agenda than a mere introduction to the volume at hand. It includes many exciting new research avenues, and new theoretical points of departure which could never be covered in only one book. To my mind, it would have been especially fruitful to adopt a more systematic and

[2] Joanne Cho, ed., *Musical Entanglements between Germany and East Asia: Transnational Affinity in the 20th and 21st Centuries* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan 2021).

balanced comparative approach to the experiences of European Jewish Refugees in the colonial world in Asia, Africa and Latin America around the beginning of the Second World War. Thus, this study (and this summary review) must be definitely taken as an encouragement and a point of departure for further research.

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## Giorgio Fabre, *Il razzismo del duce. Mussolini dal ministero dell'Interno alla Repubblica sociale italiana* (Roma: Carocci, 2021), pp. 568.

by *Michael A. Livingston*

## A Fascist and a Racist: Thoughts on Fabre's *Il razzismo del Duce*

Once an obscure academic specialty, fascism has become, as Italians might say, *di moda.* When not accusing various politicians (including some Americans) of being fascists, scholars debate the meaning of the term, its relevance to contemporary events, and even whether it should be spelled with a capital "F" (indicating a direct tie to Mussolini's regime) or a small one (indicating a more generic, broadly defined phenomenon). I myself attracted a surprising number of hits when I posted an article addressing the comeback of what I labeled "The Other F-Word," including (*inter alia*) a five-point scale for evaluating who did, and did not, qualify.[1]

One of the many debates about fascism is whether it necessarily encompasses a racist or ethnically exclusionary philosophy. In theory, it might be possible to adopt many or most of the historic features of fascism—an organic state, a charismatic leader, a totalitarian organization of political and social life—without excluding anyone on the basis of race, gender, or similar ideas. Indeed, such a claim is frequently advanced regarding Mussolini himself, who (it is said) was not especially racist or antisemitic early in his career, and became so only under the pressure of his alliance with Hitler beginning in 1938. The participation of a not insignificant number of Jews in the Fascist[2] Party, prior to that date, is often cited as evidence for this proposition. A popular book and movie,[3] which made much of some Jews' support for the Duce (notably in Ferrara), lent further credence to this theory.

Giorgio Fabre is having none of this. In a previous book he traced Mussolini's racism and antisemitism from his origins as a socialist through his rise to power in

[1] Michael A. Livingston, *"The Other F-Word: Fascism, The Rule of Law, and the Trump Era,"* SSRN Abstract No. 3272256, October 24, 2018, https://ssrn.com/abstract=3272256, accessed November 17, 2022.

[2] I use the capital spelling when referring to Italy itself.

[3] Vittorio De Sica, *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* (org. *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini*) (1970).

1922.[4] In this new, comprehensive volume he completes the story. According to Fabre, Mussolini was not only a committed and virulent antisemite: it was a defining feature of his career, a philosophy that he believed in for reasons of ideology as well as political convenience. Nor did Mussolini become an antisemite because of his exposure to Adolf Hitler: he was one before he met the latter, and—had he and his regime survived—likely would have remained one afterward, as well.

Much of this story has been told before, but there is a difference between making an offhand observation and cementing it with facts. This Fabre accomplishes with a vengeance. The book is too long (over 500 pages) to list all of the examples, but a few will suffice.

First, the book demonstrates, beyond any reasonable doubt, Mussolini's personal involvement in the drafting and application of the Race Laws, to the point of his personal "M" notation on decisions that resulted in the classification of individuals as Jews or "aryans" and (after 1943) in arrest, deportation, and death of those affected. (There was only one "M" that mattered in Fascist Italy: as if to emphasize this latter point, Mussolini used a characteristic type of pencil in characteristic colors.). To dramatize this story, Fabre devotes an entire chapter to the case of Oscar Morpurgo, in whose case Mussolini intervened on several different occasions, ranging from his original classification as Jewish to his final deportation and death.[5] Nor was this case exceptional: while omitting the same level of detail, Fabre notes numerous other cases in which the Duce made similar, often fatal interventions.

When he did not make the decisions himself, Mussolini personally chose the people and the institutions that did, frequently creating new or overhauling previously existing institutions, like the Race and Demography Office (*Demorazza*), which was responsible for administering the laws, or the so-called

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[4] Giorgio Fabre, *Mussolini Razzista. Dal socialismo al fascismo: la formazione di un antisemita* (Milano: Garzanti Libri, 2005).

[5] Giorgio Fabre, *Il Razzismo del duce. Mussolini dal ministero dell'Interno alla Repubblica sociale italiana* (Rome: Carrocci Editore, 2021), Chap. 1. Morpurgo, an industrialist from a prominent family of Fascists and military heroes, had been granted "aryan" status in 1941; this and other favorable decisions were subsequently revoked, and he was killed in Auschwitz in 1944. Ibid., 38. Accessed October 31, 2022, http://digital-library.cdec.it/cdec-web/persone/detail/person-5565/morpurgo-oscar.html

Committee of Racial Scientists, which provided the original rationale for enacting them.[6] Together with making one wonder about Mussolini's delegation and management skills, all this makes it clear that the familiar refrain in Fascist Italy ("If only the Duce knew what was happening!") was no more than self-deception: he did know, and indeed was personally involved in many of the most egregious decisions.[7]

Second, the book argues that Mussolini, even before he came to power, devoted substantial energy to racial theories in general and antisemitic notions in particular. Never one to omit detail, Fabre catalogues no fewer than eight different stages of the Duce's racial thinking, in particular his efforts to reconcile Nazi Germany's "Nordic" racism with Italy's Southern European location and historically polyglot population.[8] The ultimate resolution of this tension—a sort of "Aryan-Mediterranean" racism that left a majority of Italians on the good side but Jews, Ethiopians, and others on the bad one—is perhaps less significant than the fact that Mussolini devoted so much attention to the problem in the first place.[9] The fascination with racial theory also involved Mussolini and his close associates in a lengthy series of discussions with German racial theorists, both before and during the war: a debate that was largely resolved in the latter's favor when the Germans occupied northern Italy after September 8, 1943.

This last sentence suggests a further point about the timeline of Italian antisemitism, and the supposed difference between pre-1943 policy (said to be discrimination but not persecution) and that after the German Occupation (which indisputably involved systematic persecution, deportation and death). Consistent with prior researchers, myself included, Fabre finds this to be a less than convincing distinction. This is true for two related reasons. First, as noted above, Mussolini continued to be involved in decision-making, with regard to Jews and other matters, during the period from September 1943 until his death in April 1945,

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[6] Ibid., Chap. 14, 21.

[7] A subsequent chapter raises the question of whether Mussolini knew that deportation was, in most cases, synonymous with death. It concludes that—while his knowledge may not have been complete—he almost certainly knew the overall plan. Ibid., Chap. 24.

[8] Ibid., Chap. 9.

[9] For a systematic study of racial ideology in Fascist Italy, including the ongoing conflict between so-called Nordic and Mediterranean racism, see Aaron Gillette, *Racial Theories in Fascist Italy* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003).

when he served as the leader of the Salo' Government (*Repubblica Sociale Italiana*, *RSI*). That he shared power with the German authorities in this period does not obscure his own guilt. Second, even when the Germans and the Salo' Government went beyond preexisting policy, including the deportation and extermination of more than 7,000 Italian Jews, they did so on the basis of records and ideological commitments carried over from an earlier period. In many cases the same people and institutions were involved, sometimes using the identical stationery with the word "Royal" or "Kingdom" neatly crossed out (the King was now in the South and, at least nominally, on the Allied side.) The foremost expert on the subject, Liliana Picciotto, has estimated than more than half of the arrests of Jews after 1943 were conducted by Italian rather than German authorities.[10]

Overall, Fabre has written a major work that, together with his earlier volume, will likely become the "go to" source on the subject of Mussolini's antisemitism, particularly where the political as opposed to the legal or juridical side is concerned. I don't know if an English translation is planned: if not, it would seem that at least some kind of summary of Fabre's insights and conclusions would be worthwhile.

It is of course possible to ask if we need this level of documentation, or (more bluntly) whether the ongoing fascination with Mussolini might not be directed elsewhere. There is something a tad morbid about the endless stream of materials on the Holocaust and the Nazi and Fascist regimes, generally. But a book like this remains important for several reasons. The first, of course, is Holocaust Denial, both the stronger form (the Holocaust never actually happened) and the weaker (it happened but it wasn't such a big deal, things like that happen all the time). A book like this, in detail and using original sources, is invaluable in refuting such claims.

Another, related reason concerns Italy specifically, and the oft-heard claim (in rough paraphrase) that "Mussolini was no bargain but he wasn't nearly as bad as Hitler." This claim, parodied by a famous exchange in *Finzi-Contini*,[11] likewise

[10] The precise number of Italian Holocaust victims depends on whether the Jews of Rhodes, not Italian-speaking but then considered part of Italy, are included. Yad Vashem, the Israeli Holocaust research center, cites a figure of 7,680 Italian victims, apparently excluding Rhodes. Accessed October 31, 2022, www.yadvashem.org.

[11] See *supra* note 3. The exchange is explicit in the film and implicit in the novel by Giorgio Bassani, originally published in 1962.

does not survive Fabre's work. While Italy is surely very different from Germany—and Fascism from National Socialism—the differences are of degree rather than of kind, and do not in any sense excuse the Duce's outrages. The lack of a clear line between Italian antisemitic policy before and after the German Occupation, noted by Fabre and every other serious scholar, is another side of this same coin.

A final point relates to contemporary politics, and the growing tendency to discover historical parallels—in Italy and elsewhere—to the Fascist Era. Here, a word of caution may be advisable.

There can be no doubt that recent developments, in both Europe and the United States, bring unpleasant reminders of the 1920s and 1930s and the even worse decade that followed. Putin's Russia and Orban's Hungary are two obvious examples. Italy itself seems perpetually to be approaching some kind of democratic breakdown: that one of the principal actors is a party with a more-or-less direct historical link to Italian Fascism makes the danger even more obvious. The Trump Movement in the United States, while too ideologically incoherent to qualify as Fascist, has sufficient features (charismatic leader, nativist imagery, association with political violence) to make one uncomfortable. On an admittedly unscientific scale of my own creation, with Mussolini at 5.0 and (say) Barack Obama at 0.0, I awarded it between 3 and 4 points.[12]

Having said the above—and without in any way excusing Trump *et al.*—there is a danger of overstating these parallels. History can be used, but also abused, and made to conform to a contemporary political agenda. I am old enough to remember the argument that we had to fight in Vietnam because it would otherwise be "another Munich," and later that we could not fight our adversaries because it would be "another Vietnam." Contemporary right-wingers may have certain features in common with Fascism, but they are products of a different era and very different political needs. Frequently they result from the breakdown of democratic institutions rather than (as in Germany and Italy) failure of such institutions to take hold, in the first place. Classifying them as capital—or small—f "fascists" makes it hard to appreciate these differences and frame an effective counter-strategy.

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[12] *See Supra* note 1.

*Il razzismo del Duce* reminds us that Fascism is not a word to be tossed around whenever convenient, but a specific historical phenomenon with a specific meaning and significance. Hitler's and Mussolini's antisemitism was not a generic response to "foreigners," but a specific hatred for a specific group in a specific historical context. It succeeded for an extended period—and almost for much longer—not because of some generic human dislike for the "other," but because hatred of Jews had deep historical roots in Germany and Italy, and appeared rational or even idealistic to the people who promoted it. Much the same can be said of other features of the Nazi and Fascist regimes.

None of this is to deny that today's ultra-nationalism, racism and ethnocentrism have important features in common with the Fascist Era. Nor is it to suggest we should not study and learn from them. But we should do so with an appreciation that Fascism was a historically situated phenomena that took place in a very particular setting with very specific consequences for very specific people. Orwell wrote famously, "He who controls the present controls the past," but he wrote this as a warning, not a suggestion.

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## Deborah A. Starr, *Togo Mizrahi and the Making of Egyptian Cinema* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020), pp. 230.

by *Alon Tam*

Deborah Starr's new book is an impressive exploration—indeed, a reclamation—of a remarkable, yet forgotten and downplayed, career in film-making. Part biography, part film history, and part film analysis, it follows the career of Joseph Elie (Togo) Mizrahi (1901-1986) as a film director and producer in 1930s and 1940s Egypt, and offers an in-depth study of his cinematic idiom. By recovering Mizrahi's—a Jewish Egyptian (with Italian nationality papers)—place in Egyptian film history, this book makes a substantial contribution to several fields of study: to Jewish Studies, Middle East Studies, and Cultural Studies, and more specifically, to Egyptian and Jewish Egyptian cultural history. Indeed, the book highlights the synergies between those fields, thus adding to the growing scholarship in recent years that rethinks Jews from the Middle East and North Africa as part of the societies in which they lived. (Although Starr still uses the descriptor "Egyptian Jew," her book, in fact, makes a strong case for using "Jewish Egyptian" instead, as this review will do.)

Following an introductory chapter, in which Starr lays the requisite historical context and discusses what constitutes a national cinema, she sketches Mizrahi's professional biography as a filmmaker in Egypt, and sieves through the conflicting reports about the seemingly abrupt end of his career and his move to Italy in 1946. In the following chapters, Starr analyzes the contents of Mizrahi's major films, usually a pair in each chapter, combining a thematic and chronological approach that both represents the different phases in his film-making, and examines his original cinematic idiom. Thus, she tackles such issues as identity and belonging to the Egyptian nation, gender and queerness, race and ethnicity, social class, and notions of bourgeois morality. In the final chapter, Starr explores the enduring popularity of Mizrahi's films to this day, and celebrates their cultural legacy.

In this framework, Starr's main concern is with Jewish belonging to the Egyptian nation, before that community was dispersed in the late 1950s and 1960s. Both in the introduction and the conclusion, she convincingly argues against post-colonial, nationalist, critiques that dismissed Mizrahi's films as devoid of real

national and social value, as derivative of Hollywood and Western culture more generally, and as entertainment of little import. By contrast, Starr emphasizes Mizrahi's foundational contribution to the Egyptian film industry, not only as a *cineaste*, but also as a studio owner, a producer, and a leader in professional organizations, and she also highlights his public championing of that industry as a national one. But she mainly theorizes what she calls a "Levantine cinematic idiom" as a tool to analyze Mizrahi's films and their message: it highlights their representation of ethno-religious coexistence, their pluralistic aesthetics, and their focus on the performativity of identity (pp. 53-55). For Starr, this Levantine idiom, prevalent in the farcical films Mizrahi made in Alexandria during the 1930s, challenged nationalist ideologies that excluded non-Muslims, non-Arabs, and foreign nationals from the Egyptian nation; while the musical melodramas that he made in Cairo during the 1940s indicated Jewish anxieties about such growing exclusionary ideologies and policies, as well as about the potential of Zionism to adversely impact Jewish belonging in Egypt. The choice of the term "Levantine"—which Starr uses to replace "Cosmopolitan"—might be objected to on several grounds: it refers to a geographical area that is not Egypt; it was rarely used by Jewish (or other) Egyptians in that sense, at that time; and it carries its own heavy burden of significations. However, these objections are muted by Starr's very exact definition of what she means by Levantine, and by her consistent application of that definition throughout the book.

Starr expertly dissects the focus of that Levantine genre on identity, with its farces of mistaken identities, masquerades, and carnivalesque narratives (duly referencing Bakhtin). But she then goes a step further and uses queer theory to explore the homosexual innuendos and representations in Mizrahi's 1930s comedies, as well as his use of cross-dressing. She argues that such instances not only highlighted Jewish-Muslim coexistence, but also poked fun at bourgeois notions of proper masculinity and modernity that emerged during that period in Egypt. Moreover, she reads Mizrahi's 1940s musical films as reinforcing new ideas that prescribed love marriages and monogamy as prerequisites for modernity, and proscribed old practices of prostitution and slavery—and the sexual availability of women that they entailed—as fundamentally at odds with modernity.

There are several more aspects to Mizrahi's prolific work which Starr broaches in her comprehensive study, but still beg further exploration. A quick survey of the

other cinematic genres used in Egyptian films at the time would have enhanced our understanding of the context in which, or against which, Mizrahi's Levantine idiom was operating. In particular, a fuller consideration of the Egyptian comedic theater would better contextualize Mizrahi's oeuvre, since so much of that theatrical tradition carried over to Egyptian film, especially in its first decades, including themes, narratives, genres, stock characters, comic devices, and visual language, to the extent that some of Mizrahi's early films looked like recorded theater plays. Starr addresses this only in chapter 5, when discussing the long and successful collaboration between Mizrahi and Ali al-Kassar, a veteran star of the Egyptian comedic theater. Al-Kassar had substantial creative control over his plays and films (as did star singer Umm Kulthum, whose collaboration with Mizrahi Starr examines in chapter 7). This opens up a question about Mizrahi's creative input and how much he owed to his collaborators, but more importantly, it opens up a discussion of what he owed to the comedic theater more generally. It can be argued that Mizrahi only added a stock character of a Jewish Egyptian (Chalom) to the repertoire of various Egyptian characters created by the theatrical tradition. If so, it tones down, to an extent, the challenge that Chalom supposedly posed to Egyptian exclusionary nationalism, and instead, it emphasizes the importance of social class in understanding Mizrahi's carnivalesque farces. Starr interprets Mizrahi's use of the lower-class, local, stock character called *ibn al-balad* in Arabic, as an attempt to impart some kind of national authenticity to Chalom: that might be so, but it should be noted that the full association of *ibn al-balad* with Egyptian nationalism peaked only later, in the Nasserist period. In the interwar period, this understanding of *ibn al-balad* was still developing, while its middle-class counterpoint, the *effendi*, whom Starr discusses in later chapters of her book, was still considered the epitome of Egyptian nationalism.

As always, the question of reception looms large in such film histories. Apart from the later exclusion of Mizrahi's films from Egyptian nationalist historiography, did contemporary critics and audiences understand them the way that Starr does, as offering a vision of a more inclusive Egyptian nationalism? She only discusses how the contemporary cultural press hailed Mizrahi's professional skills and the high production quality of his films, while occasionally criticizing the bawdiness of his early comedies. We are left to wonder about the real-time impact of their Levantine—subtle—messaging, during a period when exclusionary Egyptian

nationalism gained more ground. Starr's captivating discussion of the enduring popularity of Mizrahi's films, even in the era of YouTube, in the coda of her book, is a significant addition to her other scholarly work, in which she explored the growing nostalgia in Egypt for the interwar period as an alternative vision of a pluralist society.

Finally, the extremely clear language of Starr's text, devoid of jargon even when introducing theory, is a matter of great distinction, as it makes this book accessible to a wider audience than just the expert one. Readers of all stripes would find *Togo Mizrahi and the Making of Egyptian Cinema* to be an outstanding research about the contribution of Jewish Egyptians to Egyptian modern culture, and an innovative exploration of its making.

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## Tobias Reichard, *Musik für die "Achse": Deutsch-Italienische Musikbeziehungen und Hitler und Mussolini bis 1943* (Münster-New York: Waxmann, 2020), pp. 526.

by *Ulrich Wyrwa*

With the emergence of a bourgeois musical culture in the 19th century and the social rise of the Jewish minority in large parts of Europe from an impoverished fringe group to the center of bourgeois society, Jewish musicians began to take part in all areas of musical life. Even Richard Wagner's anti-Jewish pamphlet and its reception in the antisemitic movement of the late 19th century did little to diminish the reputation of Jews in the musical world. However, the transfer of power to Adolf Hitler destroyed this fruitful interaction between Jewish and non-Jewish musicians in Germany. With the enactment of the racial laws in Fascist Italy, this country also entered into the dark chapter of European Jewish musical history.

Tobias Reichard, director of the Ben Haim Research Centre for Jewish Music Culture at the University of Music and Theatre in Munich, addresses this black chapter of European Jewish music history in his comprehensive, comparative study of music policy—Reichard's central term—of National Socialist Germany and Fascist Italy in the years of the Rome-Berlin-Axis. He defines music policy as political measures to control—or prevent, as the case may be—musical performances and state influence on public debates about music.

The focus of his interest is not the role of music in political propaganda, but the state instrumentalization of middle class musical culture. From a comparative point of view, Reichard examines the similarities and differences in the political use of music in National Socialist Germany and Fascist Italy and takes a precise look at the transfer of music-political concepts.

First, Reichard examines the politicization of musical relations between the Weimar Republic and Fascist Italy. German music critics often insisted on the superiority of German music, while the influential Italian composer and music critic Alfredo Casella argued for Italian neoclassicism. Despite the spread of prejudices and clichés, German-Italian musical relations became closely intertwined. In December 1923, for example, Mussolini received the German

music critic Adolf Weißmann (it should be added that Weißmann was Jewish), who wrote in a newspaper article that fascism met with approval and that Mussolini was very enthusiastic about music.

For the years 1933 and 1934, the subject of the following chapter, Reichard traces the cultural exchange between Fascist Italy and National Socialist Germany. In these years, according to Reichard, "the institutional foundations were laid for a planned [...] music policy on a totalitarian scale" (p. 89). Professional corporations were founded in both countries, even if in Italy the concert agency led by the composer Livio Luzzatto, among others, was able to escape state control for a long time.

With the corporations and the formation of corresponding departments in ministries, the conditions were established for the close music-political cooperation between the two countries under the sign of the "Axis-Berlin-Rome," the topic of the next chapter. Reichard examines in detail the German-Italian working meetings and their results as well as the censorship measures taken by the state authorities. Furthermore, he elaborates on the increasingly clear adaptation of musicians, composers, and music critics to the two regimes. Meanwhile, the German side pushed its antisemitic agitation in the field of music, staged with publicity effect in the exhibition "Entartete Musik," which opened in May 1938, while Italian music critics initially criticized or even rejected the National Socialist cultural policy. After 1935, however, these voices fell silent. Whereas German-Italian musical relations had previously oscillated between political rapprochement and aesthetic-cultural demarcation, soon, according to Reichard, "the emphasis on commonalities and what unites them prevailed" (p. 226).

The year 1938, the subject of the following chapter, brought the darkest episode in German-Italian musical relations. From a "foreign policy community of interest," both countries became "partners in action motivated by cultural policy and racism" (p. 227). Reichard begins by recapitulating antisemitic politics in Germany since 1933 and its consequences for musical life, before turning in detail to the development of antisemitic politics and music policy in fascist Italy. In doing so, he also points to the Jewish fascists "of the 'first hour'," such as the composer Renzo Massarani. Already for the first half of the 1930s, Reichard identifies an increasing spread of antisemitic prejudices, until in autumn 1937 an antisemitic press campaign raised accusations against "musical Jewry." The music critic

Alfredo Casella, who had clearly criticized antisemitic policies in Nazi Germany after 1933, and who was married to a Jewess and who had hosted an emigrated German-Jewish musician in his house, was defamed as a "stooge of an international Jewry" (p. 239). And yet, as Reichard notes, even Casella had occasionally adopted antisemitic prejudices since the mid 1930s (p. 236).

Even before the racial laws were enacted in Italy, a decree of September 1938 affected German Jews who had fled to Italy. The race laws proclaimed in November then massively restricted the lives of Italian Jewish musicians. Although "the number of persecuted people in Italian musical life," as Reichard notes, seems rather "marginal," he points to a number of Jewish composers, including Vittorio Rieti, Renzo Massarani or Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, who emigrated. Fascist Jews in musical life, on the other hand, tried to be exempted from persecution by means of an exemption for fascists of the first hour as well as for voluntary or distinguished participants in the First World War. These included the music critic Fernando Liuzzi, the composer Renzo Massarani, the violinist Riccardo Tagliacozzo, and the composer Alberto Fano, even though the latter was neither a member of the party nor had rendered outstanding services to the fascist movement. The fate of the composer Vittorio Rieti or the violinist Eugenio Supino, who were denied exoneration, also shows how contradictorily the exception was applied.

The department responsible for theatre and music in the Italian Ministry of Popular Culture (Ministero della Cultura Popolare) had already begun preparing antisemitic policies between 1935 and 1936 "on its own initiative," as Reichard can demonstrate in a detailed and exciting reconstruction of the use by Italian authorities of a Nazi reference work on Jews in music and its various editions. The use of this Nazi manual "by the fascist authorities" is, according to Reichard, "clear evidence of their voluntary self-adaptation in the course of German-Italian rapprochement" (p. 279).

The situation of Jewish musicians became even blacker with the beginning of the Second World War, the subject of the last chapter. "Music on all Fronts" is the title of Reichard's section on war mobilization through music, in which he now also includes light music in his investigation. Mutual guest concerts of serious music were also intended to support the "Axis" propaganda. The agitation,

however, did not work through music alone; it had to be supplemented by additional language and image propaganda.

The more difficult the war situation became for the "Axis," the more conflicts between fascist and National Socialist politicians and music promoters emerged. These became apparent—with this section Reichard concludes his study—in the production of Alban Berg's opera Wozzek in Rome in November 1942, a work that was ostracized by National Socialists as cultural bolshevism.

The darkest chapter of German-Italian relations, the German occupation of northern Italy and the satellite regime of the Republic of Saló, including the deportations of Italian Jews that now began, is only briefly dealt by Reichard in his epilogue.

Tobias Reichard has meticulously reconstructed German-Italian cultural relations in the field of music with this accurately crafted study which is based on well-founded archival research. At the same time, Reichard has thoroughly illuminated the ambivalences of musical exchange and the ambivalent effects of music policy as well as the special role of music in German-Italian cultural relations during the Axis period in all its facets. In this context he clearly identified both the qualitative differences between National Socialist and Fascist Antisemitism as well as the Italian officials' own contribution to the persecution of the Jews.

The appendix also contains a list of 84 Italian-Jewish musicians at the time of the enactment of the Race Laws, as well as a list of one hundred German-Jewish musicians who emigrated to Italy after 1933.

As Reichard emphasizes in the last paragraph, the German-Jewish musical relations had the most striking effect on these two groups. In the future, these should be studied more intensively, a task Reichard is now pursuing as director of the Ben Haim Research Centre for Jewish Music Culture in Munich.

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**Marion Kaplan, *Hitler's Jewish Refugees: Hope and Anxiety in Portugal* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2020), pp. 352.**

by *Chiara Renzo*

Within Holocaust Studies fleeing and survival are today the subjects of a growing scholarship, which analyses Jewish life in exile in precarious sanctuaries in Europe, the Americas, the Soviet Union, North Africa and Asia. This literature acknowledges that even the experiences of "the lucky ones" who abruptly left their home-countries to became refugees, "formed part of the history of the Holocaust" (p. 231). Marion Kaplan's study of Jewish refugees in Portugal during the Second World War sheds light on an under-research chapter of the Holocaust and, at the same time, sets the stage for a fresh and innovative perspective to investigate the topic of Jewish refugees.

In *Hitler's Jewish Refugees* Kaplan turns to the use of space as an analytical category for her investigation into the case of Jewish refugees in neutral Portugal. In her analysis, the author draws on the methodological approach introduced by Holocaust geographers, who suggest moving beyond the question of "where," to focus instead "on the spaces and places that people created, occupied, passed through and endured."[1] If this is today a consolidated analytical category in Holocaust historiography, the focus on emotions and refugees' voices represent the most fascinating aspect of this study. Digging into a wide array of sources, but centering the analysis especially around ego-documents (refugees' letters, diaries, memoires), Kaplan disentangles the multi-layered plot of Jews' liminal experience in Portugal.

The book contextualizes the Jews' stay in Salazar's Portugal in the framework of the refugee crisis generated by National Socialism and the failures of national governments and intergovernmental agencies to provide an efficient response to this mass escape. In contrast, it depicts the prompt reaction and often lifesaving commitment of the Jewish aid organizations, local and international, involved in assisting the refugees in their odysseys. However, as highlighted in the subtitle of the book—*Hope and Anxiety in Portugal*—what the author puts into the

[1] Alberto Giordano, Anne Kelly Knowles, and Tim Cole, eds., *Geographies of the Holocaust* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014), 2.

foreground are the "refugees' terrifying flights and their strategies of physical and emotional survival" (p. 3).

In the introduction, the author presents her work as an "emotional history of fleeing" (p. 2). The seven chapters making up the book follow the chronology and the geographical trajectories of the Jewish refugees from Central and Eastern Europe to Portugal, and beyond. Each chapter begins with an epigraph of today refugees' words, connecting refugees then and now through the focus on the emotions they were confronted with while fleeing.

Chapter one details the different waves of refugees reaching Portugal in the attempt to leave Europe: several hundreds arrived sporadically between 1933 and 1939; probably more than 70,000 fled after the fall of France in 1940; and another 10,000 appeared when Germany invaded all of France and started to deport Jews in 1942. As the war broke out and the tensions and persecutions intensified, the need to escape became more desperate and journeys more complicated and hazardous. Refugees were confronted with long lines at consulates, crowded roads, uncomfortable travels and walks, border crossings which exposed them to unpredictable dangers and turned into the " 'central emotional experiences' of flight" (p. 38). Kaplan's analysis of the refugees' accounts explains that states' policy and bureaucracy are not the only factors influencing the outcome of the flight. Health and physical stamina, luck, familial and communal networks, the availability of money and support, courage and resilience, casual acquaintances and generosity could simplify the arrival in Portugal.

With Chapters two and three the narrative moves from the "the desperate need to flee" to "the endless agony of waiting" (p. 64) in Portugal, which emerges as a liminal space, evoking contrasting feelings of anxieties and relief, frustrations and hopes, comfort and distress. Salazar's Portugal, with its changing and ambivalent politics, proved a precarious sanctuary for Jews. Officially, it offered a temporary shelter for people in transit, but as the destination countries slowed down the issuance of entry visas, the Jewish refugees' situation in Portugal worsened. The obstacles in getting ship passages overseas and the necessary documents to leave forced most of them to stay in a country unwilling to host them indefinitely. These chapters offer a nuanced picture of Jewish refugees' life in Portugal. While institutional sources document the ambivalent attitude of Salazar and the efforts of the Jewish aid organizations in helping this flow of disoriented refugees,

personal accounts are used to show how Jewish refugees dreaded Portuguese authorities and police, but shared positive memories of their encounters with the local population.

The following three chapters (4-5-6) focus on the array of Jewish refugees' emotional responses to their forced stay in Portugal. Waiting to find a way out from Portugal meant being confronted with a demoralizing routine, while mourning what had been left behind, and shaping new relationships. Jewish refugees faced daunting obstacles to secure food and accommodation and devoted all their physical and emotional efforts to gather the necessary documents to leave the country as soon as possible, threatened by imprisonment or forced residency in case of failure. Anxiety, frustration, and anguish—dominant features of the memoires and accounts on "the reality of waiting"—were amplified by the uncertainty about their future and the difficulties to get news from the loved ones under the Nazis. In the desperate attempt to find some consolation and relief, cafés became "temporary and contingent 'Jewish spaces'," serving as important hubs of information and confrontation among people going through similar losses and needs. The shortage of ships further exasperated their waiting. And, as shown in the last chapter (7) before the conclusion, even when they succeeded in obtaining a visa and boarding a ship, refugees continued to feel insecurity because of the ocean crossing and the pain of leaving their relatives and friends behind.

Throughout the book, Kaplan pays particular attention to two factors which crucially influenced the Jewish refugees' experience in traversing and enduring diverse sites of anxiety: age and gender.

Kaplan focuses especially on the "emotional dissonance" (p. 127) between older refugees experiencing an identity crisis and disempowerment and the younger ones who lived their displacement in Portugal as a time to explore and look forward. Whereas the youths recalled it as "a good time," the loss of home, homeland and status generated terrible worries in the adults and profoundly transformed their sense of self. Moreover, the author reflects on how gender expectations influenced men's self-perception when facing the lack of work, possessions, institutional and familial acknowledgment. Gender roles, however, which fluctuated significantly before fleeing (especially when women intervened with governments officials to liberate men from concentration camps), flattened during Jewish refugees' time in Portugal. Instead, cultural differences in gender

roles caused mutual misunderstanding between the Portuguese and the refugees, for instance when refugee women wore unusual beach attire or appeared in typically "male spaces" (p. 95), such as cafés.

This inspiring book encourages historians of the Holocaust to rethink Jewish refugees between the 1930s and the aftermath of the Second World War through a more inclusive perspective on their voices. Drawing extensively on ego-documents to show how feelings shaped refugees' decisions and experiences, Kaplan acknowledges the refugees as historical subjects and reminds us of the importance to consider them first of all as individuals, even today.

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## Joseph Sassoon, *The Sassoons: The Great Global Merchants and the Making of an Empire* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2022), pp. 432.

by *Marcella Simoni*

This thoroughly researched volume tells multiple histories in one: as the title states, this is first and foremost a detailed history of one branch of the Sasson family of Baghdad, that of David Sassoon, who escaped from Iraq in the late 1820s for Bushir (Persia) and later Bombay (India). As it is well known, from there the family grew into a large and successful trading firm (and later two) as it gradually moved eastwards along the routes of British colonialism, towards India, China and Singapore (and Japan), ultimately completing their trajectory in London (and in the Bahamas) in the second half of the twentieth century. This is the history of a family only in appearance. Rather, the whereabouts of its successive generations and their branching out in many directions from both a geographical and commercial point of view represent a means to explore the history of the global connections that operated within the British empire, and to see how this family and firm were able to make the most of them for commercial, social and political purposes. Although the claim might appear somewhat far-fetched—given the wealth that the Sassoon accumulated in the span of a few generations—as the Author states in the afterword to this volume this history also represents a "lesson on how refugee families contribute to the welfare of the world" (p. 306).
Rather than listing the contents of the thirteen chapters that tell the parable of the Sassoons from Baghdad to London from the late 1820s to the second half of the twentieth century, I will mention here two of the major strengths of this volume and, for reasons of space, only some of the many themes that run through it.

The first strength is the wealth of previously unexplored primary sources in different languages, including Judeo-Arabic, upon which this research is based. As befits a truly global history, sources were found in different places all over the world: in Israel (the David Sassoon Archives at the National Library of Jerusalem and at the Babylonian Jewry Heritage Centre Archives in Tel Aviv); in the UK (the British Library, British National Archives, Church of England, SOAS, Metropolitan Archives, the Rothschild Archives in London and the Brighton and

Hove Archives in Brighton); in India, at the Delhi National Archives; in Hong Kong (Kadoorie Archives); in China (Shanghai Municipal Archives); in Turkey (the Ottoman Archives in Istanbul) and in the US (the Sir Ellice Victor Elias Sassoon Papers at the Southern Methodist University in Dallas). The Author also integrated this rich material with printed sources from the local Jewish and non-Jewish press in the UK, India and China. Such a wealth of material makes it possible for multiple and differentiated voices to emerge. The second strength of this book is that—differently from previous histories of the Sassoons—the Author takes the readers all the way to the final chapters of the trajectory of this extended family, through their departure from India and China, as well as from the world of trade, banking and finance after the 1950s.

As for some of the themes that run through this volume, I will mention four. The first is the transformation of the Baghdadi Jewish identity and heritage: on the long and winding road that took this family from Baghdad to London via India, China and Japan, these underwent a transformation that impacted the family as a whole and individual members separately. In parallel, it also affected those individuals, institutions, banks, trading firms, and local Jews with whom the Sassoons came in contact. This change was evident in matters of religious observance for example, as well as in the use of language. For this orthodox Jewish family from Baghdad, who later identified as Indian, and then in part as British, religious observance declined even within the boundaries of their adherence to the Baghdadi Jewish religious tradition. As for the language they used, as many of the sources examined by the Author show, Judeo-Arabic had been the *lingua franca* within the family and a means of communication in commerce for the first, and partly the second generation, but by the third, English had taken its place. The Baghdadi identity was then flanked by a new British one, as can be seen in the anglicization of the names of several of the fourteen sons and daughters of David Sassoon (Abdallah-Albert; Shalom Sassoon-Artur; Farha-Flora etc.) More obviously it also emerged in the baronetcies that were created for them from 1890 onwards: Abdallah-Albert, son of David and head of the firm after his father's death, became the first baronet of Kensington-gore and of Eastern-terrace; in 1909 it was the turn of Edward Sassoon, David's nephew, and then, in a later generation, Philip Sassoon. The gradual predominance of the British over the Iraqi identity becomes obvious also by looking at the liaisons and friendships that the

Sassoons cultivated both in the Empire and within the UK, from the governor of Bombay to the Prince of Wales and later King Edward VII. A site where these two identities continued to co-exist appeared to be the home, whether in their legendary hospitality, receptions and parties, as the menu listed at pp. 149-50 shows, or in the (Eastern/oriental) furnishing and décor of the mansions in which they lived in the UK, in India and in China. Identity, as well as (upwards) social mobility, were moreover negotiated through marriage strategies. Marriage could take place within the Baghdadi community, whether in Iraq or elsewhere, with so-called European "Jewish aristocracy," or even outside the faith. The marriage of Abraham Shalom (Arthur) Sassoon to Eugenie Louise Perugia from Triest in 1873 opened the doors of that "Jewish aristocracy" to the second generation of the Sassoons and the following ones. Other significant marriages followed: with the Poliakovs of Moscow, the de Gunzburgs of St. Petersburg and the Rothschilds of Paris and London. Marrying gentiles on the other hand could lead to disinheritance: the most famous case was that of Sigfried Sassoon, the British anti-war poet *par excellence* who was the great-great grandson of the original patriarch from Baghdad, and who remained unaware of his family's background until the death of his father in 1921 (Alfred Ezra, who had married Theresa Thornycroft).

A second crucial aspect of this history is trade. The Sassons embraced, cultivated and defended free trade as the ideology and practice that regulated the economies of the British empire as a unified space of governance in the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth. It allowed them to take advantage of global phenomena like trade agreements and wars—for example the two Opium Wars (1839-1842 and 1856-1860) and the American Civil War (1861-1865)—to grow and consolidate their firm on a global scale through the fluctuations of the prices of opium, cotton and other commodities. Other items gradually entered their portfolio of trade and investments, but opium and cotton really determined their positioning vis-à-vis other trading families and vis-à-vis each other within the family. From Bombay David had dispatched his sons around South, East and Southeast Asia, as well as to London, to open new branches for the firm, the David Sassoon & Co., and therefore new markets. Primary sources include correspondence between siblings across continents and generations on how to trade, which commodities to buy and sell, on which markets, where to invest, what gains or losses to report to the other branches etc. The hard-working ethics of the

successive generations became more relaxed as the Sassoons entered the realms of British aristocracy and politics, but the different branches (referred to as Houses) of the family firm remained in constant contact. These questions also marked relations with other Baghdadi Jews that the Sassons employed, as well as those with other merchant partners and intermediaries, and determined how the family positioned itself in the changing economic and political global scenario in which they operated. After the death of the patriarch (1864), Elias David, the second son, who had founded the firm's House in China, established in 1867 his own firm, the E. D. Sassoon, which became the former's staunchest rival. The two firms (and their descendants) never reconciled, even though they allied strategically if it suited their mutual interests, for instance when public opinion, and later the British government, gradually shifted against opium as a legitimate trade between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, causing a fall in prices on the global market.

A third theme that recurs throughout the volume is the encounter (and ensuing complex relations) between the Sassoons and Jews of different backgrounds: for reasons of language proficiency (Judeo-Arabic) and networking, the Sassons chiefly employed Baghdadis as clerks and administrators; but they also employed Bene Israel—as well as non-Jews—in the cotton mills that they established and developed in India for example. Along their path they also encountered other Jews: Ashkenazi Jews escaping from the Czarist Empire (and later Russia) in China at the turn of the twentieth century, British Jews in the UK, and central European Jews who had found a refuge in Shanghai and Hong Kong after 1933. Of all these groups, greater emphasis is placed in this volume on the Bene Israel, with whom relations were not always easy, as they in part reproduced within a Jewish framework color and colonial prejudices. Philanthropy, though, was not necessarily limited to the local dimension or to Jewish groups; it extended also back to Baghdad and was directed at improving the education and welfare of the beneficiaries by founding professional schools, libraries, literacy, welfare and children's programs, as well as hospitals in Baghdad, Bombay, Poona, Calcutta and Shanghai. Unlike other Baghdadi families that followed their path, the Kedoories for instance, the Sassoons had little interest in using philanthropy to support Zionist projects.

The history of the Sassons could seem to be a history of men alone, as women appear only as brides and mothers, as administrators of charities endowed in their

names, or in the names of the synagogues that their husbands and sons dedicated to their memory. This was the case of the Ohel Leah synagogue, established in Hong Kong in 1902, that commemorated Leah Sassoon, the wife of Elias David; and of Ohel Rachel, that Sir Jacob Elias Sassoon built in Shanghai in memory of his wife Rachel in 1921. As this volume shows, this impression is largely correct, especially because the voices of Sassoon women are generally absent in the primary sources that the Author examined. The one exception was Farha (Flora) Sassoon, a nephew of David and the wife of her great-uncle Suleiman, who took over the management of the Bombay branch after her husband's death, only to be eventually ousted by her brothers after a few years.

Finally, a short paragraph on what appears to be two shortcomings in the volume, not in its structure or contents, but in the publishing process. The publication of the same book in 2022 with two slightly different titles—in New York by Pantheon Books (*The Sassoons: The Great Global Merchants and the Making of an Empire*) and in London by Allen Lane (*The Global Merchants: The Enterprise and Extravagance of the Sassoon Dynasty*)—is confusing and could have been acknowledged. The lack of numbered references for end-notes is a serious obstacle for the reader interested in learning about the sources, their origin and the material used for weaving the complex thread that emerges from the pages of this volume; and while this may be due to the pre-print (American) copy that was sent to this reviewer, the kindle edition of the same volume does not have end-notes references either. These two shortcomings can certainly be corrected in the next editions of this volume.

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