ALTRI STUDI

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JEWISH ITALY: THE MELTING POT OF MEDITERRANEAN JEWS*

Migration and Population Movements

Jewish Italy warrants the title of this paper for many reasons: the geographical position of the Apennine Peninsula, a variety of political and other events in the country itself and in some of those along the Mediterranean littoral, economic developments and some other factors. On another occasion, years ago, I dwelt at length on the "Mediterranean – the Cradle of Civilization", meaning of course Western civilization. I singled out Italy which probably consists nowadays of only a fraction of the direct descendants of aboriginal peoples and Romans.[1] In many ways these criteria apply also to Mediaeval Italian Jewry. While the Mediterranean was never a Jewish Mare Nostrum, it was the centre of Jewish life from Antiquity to the end of the Middle Ages. At its core there was Italy. Leaving aside legend, a substantial Jewish presence there is attested during the last days of the Roman Republic. That grew substantially after the Destruction of the Jewish State, when Judaean Prisoners of War were sold on the markets of Rome and elsewhere in Italy, to be reinforced by refugees and other immigrants from Palestine.[2] Although the Jewish population in Italy diminished along with that of the rest of the country following the Fall of the Roman Empire, it remained continuous throughout the Middle Ages right down to our days. This is true in particular of Rome herself. First Rome was the seat of the government that ruled the entire Mediterranean and attracted many non-Romans including Jews. Later it became the hub of Western Christianity and the seat of the papacy, which often played a pivotal role in determining the fate of the Jews in the Middle Ages.

At first the Orient was the main source of Jewish immigration to Italy. In due course the trend changed direction, at least partially, and Italian Jews began to travel East, often, albeit not always, for religious reasons, to visit the Holy Places and at times to settle in the Holy Land. Later Italian Jews began to travel North, across the Alps, to Germany (and eventually beyond), France and other countries. At the same time Jews from many Mediterranean countries, Spain, North Africa, Greece and so forth came to Italy, permanently and as a stop-over on their way to yet other countries. Some of the latter remained in Italy by default, particularly in the wake of shipwreck along the Italian coast. While the story of the Four Captives related by Abraham Ibn Daud is chiefly legendary, and is based on earlier similar stories, there is a factual core to it, linked to historical events. One should note the widespread custom of selling captives

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[1] The Mediterranean, Cradle of our Civilization, Convegno *Il Mediterraneo un mare da salvare*, Giardini Naxos 1986.

[2] There is no documentary support for the alleged settlement or attempts at proselytization in Rome of members of a Hasmonean delegation in the second century B.C. On all this see, H.J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, Philadelphia 1960, pp. 3f., who reports the relevant references. They point to the first century B.C. as the first documented settlement in Rome. What factual value is to be attributed to Cicero's speech in defence of Lucius Valerius Flaccus (59 B.C.), when he described the Jews as «a large group», influential in Roman politics, remains an open question. Anyway, by then the number of Jews in Rome appears to have been on the increase, to reach its peak in the first century C.E. Even before the destruction of Jerusalem Tiberius is reported to have banished 4,000 Jews to Sardinia (19 C.E.). Though a round figure, and hence unreliable, it may serve an indication of the dimensions of the Roman community. See *op. cit.*, pp. 18f. [See my *The Jews in Italy: Antiquity*, Leiden-Boston 2014, *passim*].

and prisoners of war, irrespective of nation and religion, into slavery, the Jewish religious duty of redeeming them, piracy on the seas and kidnapping on land which affected many a mediaeval Jew, who often ended up in foreign parts, far away from his or her homeland. Evidently, Italy was a major player, evidenced by the societies for the redemption of captives which sprang up in Venice and elsewhere early in Modern Times, continuing a millennial Jewish tradition. These, and of course others, were some of the elements which made up the mobility of Jews in and out of Italy and within its borders.[3]

After the Arab conquest of much of the Mediterranean littoral, some Italian Jews, particularly those in Sicily, became part of Arabic speaking Jewry and were orientated towards North Africa, Egypt, Moslem Spain and the Orient. Commercial ties and in their wake two-way migration intensified as portrayed in the Geniza correspondence, particularly in the 10th and 11th centuries. Military forays "exported"Jews from Italy abroad and "imported" foreign Jews into Italy. To cite only two instances: the Arab raid on southern Italy which resulted in the capture (among others) of Ṣabbatai Donnolo and that of his family, and the sale of the latter into slavery abroad; and the military incursion of the Norman King Roger II in the Peloponnese and the bringing away of Jews to his Sicilian kingdom. Also regime changes resulted in Jewish migratory movements, such as those which took place following the Norman conquest of Sicily.[4]

Further north there is evidence of Jews migrating across the Alps into Germany, though most of the time that may have been no more than a trickle. Lucca was one point of departure, shortly before the Crusades, though in all likelihood not the only one. That population movement went the opposite way after the persecutions of the Crusades and those in their wake, and was joined by refugees from France. The Germans settled mainly in north-eastern Italy, and the French in the North-West of the country. On their way south in Italy they met a wave of migrants from Central Italy. While the immigrants from Germany and France were motivated mainly by the search for security from persecution and expulsion, the move of the Jews from Rome and surroundings was the result of economic incentives, offered the migrants by rulers and communes in return for the supply of credit. The immigrants from across the Alps too were received with open arms by the powers that be for the same economic reason. This brings us to the end of the Middle Ages.[5]

[3] A. Ibn Daud, *The Book of Tradition*, edited and translated with notes and introduction by G.D. Cohen, Philadelphia 1967, pp. 63f.; G.D. Cohen, *The Story of the Four Captives*, in *Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research* 29 (1960/1), pp. 55f. Cohen suggested that Ibn Daud modelled his story on the legend of the three helmless ships which Vespasian/Titus were alleged to have put to sea with Jewish prisoners from Judaea on board. The vicissitudes of the passengers, the suicide/*Qidduṣ ha-Ṣem* of the women and the landing of the men in different ports (including Italy), reported in the several versions of the legend were the central motifs of the story. Rabbenu Ḥanan'el, who is said to have ended up in Qayrawān, was probably an Italian. The legend also served mediaeval scholars to explain the origins of the *We-Hu Raḥum* prayer. See also the detailed references reported by Cohen, esp. A. Neubauer, *The Early Settlement of the Jews in Southern Italy*, in «JQR» OS 4 (1892), pp. 606f.; H. Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, 4th ed., 10 vols., Leipzig 1909, vol. 5, note 21.

[4] For Donnolo and his family, see Ṣ. Donnolo, *Introduction to Sepher Ḥakhmuni*, in A. Geiger, *Melo Ḥofnayyim*, Berlin 1840, Hebr. Sect. pp. 29f. And see there the listing of ten rabbinical scholars killed in the Arab raid in 925. For the English version, see my *Jews in Sicily*, 18 vols., Leiden-New York-Köln 1997-2010, I, Doc. 25. The entire opus has recently been re-edited by P. Mancuso, Florence 2009. See also, G. Lacerenza (ed.), *Sabbetay Donnolo, Scienza e cultura ebraica nell'Italia del secolo X*, Naples 2004; S. Muntner, *Rabbi Shabtai Donnolo 913-985*, 2 vols., Jerusalem 1949 [in Hebrew]; V. Putzu, *Shabbetai Donnolo*, Cassano delle Murge 2004. For the raid of Roger II, see *Annales Cavenses*, G.H. Pertz (ed.), MGH SS III, Hannover 1839, p. 192; and my *Jews in Sicily*, cit., Doc. 174; R. Straus, *Die Juden im Königreich Sizilien unter Normannen und Staufern*, Heidelberg 1910, p. 99. See also M. Amari, *Storia dei musulmani di Sicilia*, 3 vols., Catania 1935-37, III, p. 441; my *Between Scylla and Charybdis: The Jews in Sicily*, Leiden-Boston 2011, pp. 32f.; J. Starr, *The Jews in the Byzantine Empire*, Athens 1939, p. 223.

[5] V. Colorni, *Prestito ebraico e comunità ebrai-*

At this point in time a demographic revolution affecting the Jews of Italy took place. Whereas throughout the Middle Ages, in fact since Antiquity, the majority of Italian Jews lived in the south, from Rome downward, and only few Jews lived in the north of the country, the ethnic cleansing of the Jews in Sicily and the Kingdom of Naples and the growth of the central and northern Italian Jewish communities, totally changed the map of Jewish Italy. Until 1500 or so the Jews of the south numbered some 40,000 and those further north less than 10,000. In fact there never lived more than 50-60,000 Jews in Italy at any time.[6] In the sixteenth century that figure diminished appreciably. Only by the end of the ghetto period, i.e. the "First Emancipation", Italian Jewry recouped most of their numerical losses. By then the *italiani*, *tedeschi* and *francesi*, had been reinforced by *Levantini*, *Ponentini*, etc., who were either refugees from the Iberian Peninsula, or former New Christians from Spain and Portugal, who had found refuge in the Ottoman Empire. Many of them came to Italy at the invitation of the authorities, to Ancona by that of the Apostolic See, to Venice by that of the *Serenissima*, to Ferrara by that of the Este, and to Leghorn, by that of the Medici. The centre of the *francesi* was Piedmont, that of the Germans the Veneto and Lombardy, while that of the *italiani* was Rome and the centre of the country. The Sephardis had no distinct geographical zone to call their own, but made up the majority in one or two places, such as in Leghorn. In most ethnic "centres" there was always also at least a sprinkling of other groups. Large communities, such as Venice and Rome, had separate congregations and synagogues for more than one group.[7]

Even in those last few centuries before Emancipation population movements among the Jews of Italy did not cease. While most refugees from the south eventually ended up in the Ottoman Empire, some remained in the country further north. In addition to the Sephardi influx immigration from across the Alps never stopped altogether. So in the end also in Jewish Italy there were only remnants of "original" Italian Jews, "headed" by the four famous Roman Jewish families: The Min Ha-Seqenim (del Vecchio), Min Ha-Tapuḥim (de' Pomis), Min Ha-Adumim (de' Rossi) and Min Ha-Anavim o Anav (degli Piatelli, Mansi), who claimed to have been brought to Italy by Titus.[8] To what extent and for how long new immigrants preserved their customs and cultural heritage, language and ritual, traditions and habits and so forth in their new en-

che nell'Italia centrale e settentrionale con particulare riguardo alla comunità ebraica di Mantova, in «Rivista di Storia del Diritto Italiano» VIII (1935), pp. 3f.; My *International Trade and Italian Jews at the Turn of the Middle Ages*, *Proceedings of the Italia Judaica Jubilee Conference*, *Tel Aviv 3-5 January 2010*, Leiden-Boston 2013, pp. 223f.

[6] For Sicily and its approximately 25,000 Jews at the time of the expulsion as well as migration to and from Sicily, see my *Between Scylla and Charybdis*, cit., pp. 267f., 276f.; Cesare Colafemmina estimated the Jewish population of southern Italy at this juncture at around 10-15,000 (verbal communication). As for Rome, the census of 1526-1527 put the number of Jews in the town at 1750. See D. Gnoli (ed.), *Decriptio urbis o censimento della popolazione di Roma avanti il sacco borbonico*, in «Archivio della Società Romana di Storia Patria» XVII (1894), pp. 375f.; E. Lee (ed.), *Descriptio urbis: The Roman Census of 1527*, Rome 1985. As a result of the Sack of Rome the population, including Jews, shrank, but eventually grew beyond its pre-war dimensions, especially following *Cum nimis absurdum*. By 1500 numerous new Jewish settlements had sprung up north of Rome, increasing the mediaeval settlements manifold. With a few exceptions they were tiny, more often than not numbering no more than a family or two, usually of moneylenders. Even large areas, such as the Duchy of Milan, covering most of Lombardy, had then no more than 500 Jews (wild guesses to the contrary notwithstanding). See my *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Milan*, 4 vols., Jerusalem 1982-1986, I, p. XLVIII. And see S. Della Pergola, *La popolazione ebraica in Italia nel contesto ebraico globale*, in C. Vivanti (ed.), *Storia d'Italia*, *Annali 11. Gli ebrei in Italia*, 2 vols., Torino 1997, II, pp. 897f. On Italy in general, including Jews, see K.J. Beloch, *Bevölkerungsgeschichte Italiens*, 3 vols., Berlin-Leipzig 1937-1961.

[7] C. Roth, *Venice*, Phildadelphia 1930, pp. 138f.; A. Milano, *Il ghetto di Roma*, Rome 1964, pp. 209f.

[8] The names of the families vary. Some put Min Ha-Ne'arim instead of Min Ha-Tapuḥim, and so forth. No mention of the story before the sixteenth century has so far come to light. So it may be linked to the growing interest in Antiquity popular among

vironment, and what influence they exercised on the native population of Jews among which they settled, is, of course, difficult to qualify and quantify.[9]

The Languages and Dialects: Greek, Latin and Hebrew

Having said that, we shall try all the same to take a look at some of these topics, time and space permitting. We shall start with the languages of Italian Jews. The main source for the languages of Italian Jews in Antiquity and Late-Antiquity are epitaphs and other surviving inscriptions. To what extent sacral texts, such as those in use in cemeteries, are indicative of other uses of the language is, of course, debatable. Frey, Lifshitz and Noy together list some 900 inscriptions from Rome and the rest of Italy, probably most if not all dating back to Antiquity or late Antiquity.[10] The vast majority are Greek, a minority Latin, and there are only very few Hebrew inscriptions, mostly single words or phrases. Scholars have been unable to agree whether the predominance of Greek means that this was the language of the Jews of Italy, although the majority nowadays appears to think that culturally most Italian Jews were Hellenized. However, it should be noted that most of the names found in the catacombs of Rome are Latin. As for the other sacral use of language, namely that employed in the synagogue and in the home that need not necessarily follow that of the epitaphs. The same applies to the languages spoken or written by the Jews of ancient Italy. It is probably fair to say that there was no uniformity. If in fact Italian Jews in Roman times were Hellenized, as one tends to believe, that did not apply to all of them without distinction, although Greek was apparently predominant. Yet some were Romanized and some, albeit few in number, called themselves Hebrews, as was indeed the name of one of the Roman congregations. However, whether that had anything to do with their language and culture is controversial. At least one scholar suggested that the Jews of Rome/Italy spoke Latin, i.e. the vernacular, from the second generation after immigration. Greek was used in the cemetery, but perhaps not in daily life. Therefore, the language and culture of Italian Jews in Antiquity are probably best described as Graeco-Roman.[11]

Justinian's Novella 146 of 553 reflects a new situation, which had developed in the East, probably in some of those areas (including Palestine) where Aramaic/Hebrew had been significant, though perhaps not as predominant as some have thought, and spreading from there westwards, arriving also in Italy in or about the sixth century. Sometime before the publication of the law, the Jews of the Byzantine Empire began to reject the Graeco-Roman languages and all that went with them, and replaced them by Hebrew. The centre of the Hebraic revolution appears to have been the Palestinian Academy

Jews and Christians in Italy at that time.

[9] For the internal mobility of Italian Jews in the Late Middle Ages and Early Modern Times, see M. Luzzati, *New Reflections on the Mobility of Italian Jews between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, in *Proceedings of the Italia Judaica Conference*, cit., pp. 97f. Recently Jewish mobility has been attracting growing attention. See, for instance, S. Menache (ed.), *Communication in the Jewish Diaspora: the Pre-Modern World*, Leiden 1996.

[10] J.B. Frey, *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum*, 2 vols., Città del Vaticano 1936-1952; and the revised edition by B. Lifshitz, with *Prolegomenon*, New York 1975; D. Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe*, Cambridge 1993. [Id., *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe. Addenda et Corrigenda*, in G. Lacerenza (ed.), *Hebraica hereditas. Studi in onore di Cesare Colafemmina*, Napoli 2005, pp. 123f.]. Unfortunately many inscriptions have no date and their dating is often problematical.

[11] Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, cit., pp. 75f. On the use of Greek and Hebrew (particularly) in the liturgy at the times of Emperor Justinian, see V. Colorni, *L'Uso del greco nella liturgia del giudaismo ellenistico e la Novella 146 di Giustiniano*, «Annali di storia del diritto italiano» VIII (1964), pp. 19f. (repr. «Iudaica Minora» [1983], pp. 1f.). Colorni is positive as to the use of Greek in synagogue liturgy in the Hellenistic Diaspora from the third century B.C. on. He includes Italy in the Greek zone and points to Greek also as the spoken language of these Jews. He lists the views of scholars on this topic from the 17th century on. See also J. Juster, *Les juifs dans l'empire romain*, 2 vols., Paris 1914, I, p. 365. For a treatment of the literature of Greek speaking Jews in the Diaspora, see E. Schürer,

in Tiberias. Some Graeco-Roman Jews did not bend to the new trend. They appealed to the emperor, who allowed the reading of the Bible in the synagogue in Greek, Latin or any other language, probably also for Christological reasons. Since scholars have been unable to agree on the dimensions of the use of Greek versus Hebrew/Aramaic even in Palestine, the magnitude and background of the change there is still being debated. However, it was in the days of Justinian that the clash between Hebrew and Greek came to a head. So far as the Jews of the Diaspora, including Italy, were concerned, where the predominance of Greek/Latin is not being questioned, the replacement of these two languages by Hebrew was fundamental. At the same time it should be kept in mind that there is no strict correlation between the language spoken by Jews and the sacral one employed by them. Furthermore, Jews have been known to retain for centuries a language adopted in an earlier environment, while in other cases almost immediate linguistic assimilation has occurred. Therefore one cannot exclude the possibility that eventually, after it had mostly ceased to be spoken, Greek had assumed characteristics of a sacral language as it were in the ritual of the synagogue and the epitaphs in the cemetery. There is reason to believe that Greek was retained by Jews even outside the Byzantine sphere of influence, i.e. in Spain and Gaul, until the sixth and seventh centuries.[12]

So far as the Jews of Italy were concerned, and at this point in time that meant southern Italy, the shock waves of the developments in Palestine, centred in Tiberias, began to make themselves felt when some of the emissaries sent out by Palestinian Jewry went abroad. Some of the emissaries went east, to Arabia, and some west, to Italy. Other countries, such as Egypt, were also involved. In due course, the emissaries took over where the *apostoli* of the Palestinian patriarchs had left off, when this office was abolished at the beginning of the fifth century. Hebrew culture, its language and liturgy, rabbinical literature and so forth were flourishing, notwithstanding Byzantine persecutions. Then, when Palestine was conquered from the Byzanti-

Geschichte des Jüdischen Volkes in Zeitalter Jesu Christi, 4th ed., 3 (4) vols., Leipzig 1907-11, III, pp. 420f. and see below. On the *Vetus Latina*, said to have been in use also in Italy, see D.S. Blondheim, *Les parlers judeo-romans et la Vetus Latina*, Paris 1925, esp. pp. 9f.; U. Cassuto, *La Vetus Latina e le traduzioni giudaiche medievali della Bibbia*, in «Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni» II (1926), pp. 145f.; Id., *The Jewish Translation of the Bible into Latin and its Importance for the Research of Greek and Aramaic Translations*, in *J. Levy Memorial Volume*, Jerusalem 1949, pp. 161f. [in Hebrew]. This translation was based on the Greek Septuagint. For an epitaph which does not conform to the majority, see that of Samuel-Aurelius and his wife Lasie Erine in Catania, dated 383. Most of it is in Latin, but there is a line of Hebrew; the husband had a double Latin-Hebrew name and the wife a Greek one. Samuel invoked the protection of the Almighty and of the Palestinian patriarch and gives as the date the era of the ruling Roman consuls. See my *Jews in Sicily*, Doc. 1, and the references cited there. The epitaph is one of six surviving epitaphs in Catania going back to Antiquity; the other five are in Greek.

[12] For the text of the Novella, see Corpus Iuris Civilis III, *Novellae* [R. Schoell - R. Kroll (eds.), Berlin 1899], pp. 714f. (English: J. Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue*, Philadelphia 1961, pp. 392f.). See my *The Hebrew Revival Among Early Mediaeval European Jews*, *Salo W. Baron Jubilee Volume*, 3 vols., Jerusalem 1975, II, pp. 831f., and the extensive literature cited there, particularly that of S. Lieberman, *Greek and Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, Jerusalem 1962 [in Hebrew]; Alon's review «Kiryath Sepher» 20 (1943), pp. 76f.; J.N. Sevenster, *Do You Know Greek*, Leiden 1968; and Lifshitz's review *Beiträge zur palästinischen Epigraphik*, in «Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina Vereins» 78 (1962), pp. 75f. The Christological use made of the Septuagint by the Fathers of the Church no doubt was a factor contributing to the Jewish rejection of Greek, particularly in the service in the synagogue, but not the only one. Nor was the opposition of the rabbis to Greek universal. It would seem that the main factor which contributed to the rabbis' growing opposition to Greek was Byzantine-Christian oppression and persecution. We are not concerned here with the situation further east, Mesopotamia and Persia, where Greek never penetrated the Jewish world. Also we shall not concern ourselves with such theories as the one arguing for the existence of a Judaeo-Greek dialect. And see the observations in my paper cited supra on this and related subjects.

nes, first by the Persians and then by the Arabs, new energy was infused into the Palestinian efforts to stake a claim in the Jewish communities along the Mediterranean littoral and to compete with Babylonia over hegemony in the Jewish world.[13]

The tombal inscriptions at Venosa are a major source, perhaps the chief one, for events in southern Italy in late Antiquity and early Middle Ages, discovered in local catacombs and on tombstones of a cemetery at ground level. The vast majority of the catacomb epitaphs are in Greek, and they are the oldest. Only relatively few are in Hebrew or Latin, whereas those on the tombstones are all in Hebrew. The Greek inscriptions are followed by a few Hebrew and Latin ones. Those in the open-air cemetery, all in Hebrew, are the most recent. The latter are all dated to the first half of the ninth century. Most scholars assign the intermediate group to between the fifth and the sixth centuries.[14]

The most significant inscription is that found on the arcosolium of Faustina who died in Venosa at the age of 14. She was lamented by two *apostoli* and two *rebbites*. The *apostoli* are probably the emissaries of the academy in Tiberias to southern Italy, contemporaries of those sent by that academy to southern Arabia. They are mentioned in the Faustina epitaph along with two rabbis. The inscription is still mostly in Latin and so are the names of Faustina and her relatives. There are, however, two lines in Hebrew. As I suggested elsewhere, the Faustina epitaph is probably of the sixth century and belongs to the last generations before European tombal inscriptions became exclusively Hebrew.

[13] On the mission of the Jews in Tiberias to those in Himyara, see J. Guidi, *La lettera di Simeone vescovo di Beth Arsam*, *Atti della R. Accademia dei Lincei*, S. 3, 7 (1881), pp. 14f.; A. Moberg (ed.), *The Book of the Himyarites*, Lund 1924, pp. 7a, CV. For a discussion of the events in Palestine in the sixth century and the interpretation of disparaging Babylonian remarks about conditions in Palestine, see my *Hebrew Revival*, cit., pp. 843f., and the references cited there, esp. M. Margulies, *The Differences between Babylonian and Palestinian Jews*, Jerusalem 1938 [in Hebrew]. More recent treatment of the subject has not introduced substantial changes to the debate over conditions in Jewish Palestine under Byzantine rule. See M. Gil, *A History of Palestine 634-1099*, Cambridge 1992, pp. 1f. I shall not deal here with the ongoing debate over the rivalry between the Palestine and Babylonia in conjunction with their influence on the emerging Jewish communities in Europe. See, among others, R. Bonfil, *Tra due mondi*, *Prospettive di ricerca sulla storia culturale degli ebrei nell'Italia meridionale nell'Alto Medioevo*, *Italia Judaica*, *Atti del I convegno internazionale*, Bari 18-22 maggio 1981, Rome 1983, pp. 135f. Ripr. in *Tra due Mondi*, Napoli 1996, pp. 65f.; (anche in «Shalem» 5 (1987), pp. 1f. [in Hebrew]); Id., *History and Folklore in a Medieval Jewish Chronicle*, Leiden-Boston 2009. The recent discussion of this topic has been over the date when Palestinian influence on Italy waned and Babylonian influence grew. Some placed the change in the ninth century, while others postponed it to the tenth and eleventh centuries. Furthermore, it has been argued that in addition to the immigration of Italian scholars to Germany there took place a parallel move from Spain. That is plausible, but needs further study. Whatever the outcome, that is not detracting from the weight of influence, exclusive or not, of the Palestinian centre on southern Italy and its being instrumental in bringing about the Hebrew revival there in or about 600, or from the traditions and other references recording the passage of Italian scholars, such as those from Lucca, to the Rhine communities.

[14] L. Levi, *Ricerche di epigrafia ebraica nell'Italia meridionale*, in «La Rassegna Mensile di Israel» 28 (1962), pp. 232f.; Id., *Le iscrizioni della catacomba nuova di Venosa*, in «La Rassegna Mensile di Israel» 31 (1965), pp. 358f.; B. Lifshitz, *Les juifs a Venosa*, in «Rivista di Filologia e di Istruzione Classica», NS, 40 (1962), pp. 367f. Recent discoveries in Venosa were described by C. Colafemmina, *Nuove iscrizioni ebraiche a Venosa*, in *Studi in memoria di Adiuto Putignani*, Cassano delle Murge 1975, pp. 41f.; Id., *Un'iscrizione venosina inedita dell'822*, in «La Rassegna Mensile di Israel» 43 (1977), pp. 261f.; Id., *Nuove scoperte nella catacomba ebraica di Venosa*, in «Vetera Christianorum» 15 (1978), pp. 369f.; Id., *Tre iscrizioni ebraiche inedite di Venosa e Potenza*, in «Vetera Christianorum» 20 (1983), pp. 193f.; Id., *Una nuova iscrizione ebraica a Venosa*, in «Vetera Christianorum» 21 (1984), pp. 197f.; Id., *Tre nuove iscrizioni ebraiche a Venosa*, in «Vetera Christianorum» 24 (1987), pp. 201f.; Id., *Epigraphica Hebraica Venusina*, in «Vetera Christianorum» 30 (1993), pp. 411f.

That process lasted for a couple of centuries and was completed sometime in the eighth century.[15]

The Hebrew revival in Italy is portrayed in the tombal inscriptions dating (with certainty) to the beginning of the ninth century. The epitaphs were discovered mainly in southern Italy, in Bari, Brindisi, Lavello, Matera and Venosa, etc., and a few in Gaul and Spain. Most are dated, and all are written in pure biblical Hebrew and a little Aramaic. Most names are also biblical and the style is distinctly that of the *piyyutim*, the religious poetry of Palestine. The earliest date inscribed on one of them is 808, though some may be earlier. However, the situation they reflect precedes that date by some 80 years and it brings us back to the first half of the eighth century. The reason for this assertion is that the names of the fathers of the deceased are also nearly all biblical ones.[16]

Hebrew superseded all other languages and reigned supreme throughout the Middle Ages and beyond. It was employed in the synagogue and the cemetery, in secular and religious literature, in correspondence and business. The disparaging remarks of Abraham Ibn Ezra on Jewish scholars in Christian lands in the middle of the twelfth century notwithstanding, the Hebrew of Italian Jews was often of high quality and full of innovations and adaptations to changing times. Admittedly, the writers of the Golden Age of Spain were unsurpassed, but that did not justify the sarcasm of a disgruntled foreigner. However, Hebrew was not then spoken in Italy, except by a few scholars. Only a few centuries later even spoken Hebrew was in vogue among some Jews in Italy. Hebrew was taught to the young along with the vernacular, but it is unlikely that gifted youngsters like Leone da Modena spoke Hebrew with the members of their families or fellow children, although he claims to have recited the haphtarah in the synagogue at the age of two an a half. For the next millennium or so Hebrew was taught to all Jewish children in Italy, privately in the home and in private and public schools in the communities. Italian Jews contributed to Hebrew as a language, as well as to its grammar, lexicography, literature in all its forms and so forth right down to the Emancipation.[17]

Dialects

All the same, Hebrew did not have it all to itself. In addition to the Judaeo-Italian dialect in its variegated forms, which of course was a local product, Jewish immigrants to Italy imported several dialects which endured for centuries and left their imprint on the Jewish melting

[15] The epitaph was first published by O. Hirschfeld, *Le catacombe degli ebrei a Venosa*, in «Bullettino dell'Instituto di Corrispondenza Aracheologica» (1867), pp. 148f. and republished numerous times sometimes with valid corrections. For a listing see Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe*, cit., pp. 115f. Not all scholars ascribe Faustina's death to the sixth/seventh century. And see Levi, *Ricerche di epigrafia ebraica nell'Italia meridionale*, cit., pp. 132f.; Id., *Le iscrizioni della catacomba nuova di Venosa*, in «La Rassegna Mensile di Israel» 31 (1965), pp. 358f.

[16] See the references in notes 59f., in my *Hebrew Revival*, cit. and my calculation of the approximate birth year (744) of Daniel, father of David (who died in 824 at the age of 60). So gradually, between the seventh and eighth centuries, southern Italy was "hebraized". That would fit in with the chronology to be culled from the Chronicle of Aḥima'az, which contains many an historical fact, though on the whole is based on myth and oral family traditions.

[17] ובאדום אין הדר לכל חכם הוא דר באדמת בן קדר ועלינו שורקים. ואלו בא חגב יוני בא שגב ורכב על כל גב ונחשב כענקים [In Christian lands there is no glory for a wise man from Arab lands and they don't care for us. When [however] a Greek locust appears, it is exalted, rides on everybody's back and is considered a giant]. D. Cahana (ed.), *Abraham Ibn Ezra, Collected Works*, Warsaw 1894, [in Hebrew], p. 22. Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, cit., Vol. 6, Note 8. Graetz suggests that the "Greek locust" was R. Isaac - B. Malkhizedeq of Siponto in Salerno, and that the Jewish community there was not interested in Hebrew grammar and exegesis. He cites in support a contemporary of Ibn Ezra, Shlomo Parḥon. See also M. Güdemann, *Geschichte des Erziehungswesens und der Cultur der abendländischen Juden*, 3 vols., Vienna 1884-1888, II (Italien), pp. 303f. Leone da Modena made his claim in his autobiography, D. Carpi (ed.), *Hayye Yehuda*, Tel Aviv 1985, p. 34. Men like Archivolti and Bonaiuto de' Rossi evidently spoke Hebrew themselves. An example of lingui-

pot, often for generations. First, chronologically speaking, there was Judaeo-Arabic. It has been described as "semi-literary" Arabic, or Judaeo-Arabic dialect, interspersed with a little Hebrew, written in Hebrew characters. That was the language of the Jews in Sicily when that island was dominated by Arabs, chiefly that of the merchants mentioned in the correspondence of the Cairo Geniza. Although the rule of Islam in Sicily came to an end in the eleventh century, when the Normans conquered the island, and the use of Arabic waned and eventually stopped nearly altogether, a segment of the Jews on the island continued to employ Judaeo-Arabic at least for some generations. That was due, in addition to the usual Jewish conservative tendencies, which often imbued an "ancient" language with religious connotations, to continuous links to Arabic speaking countries, chiefly North Africa. Immigration to Sicily never stopped totally right down to the expulsion of 1492. According to Abraham Abulafia, in the second half of the thirteenth century, «…the great miracle [is] what happened to the Jews in all of Sicily. They do not only speak the vernacular and Greek, as the languages of the natives and the Greek among whom they live. They also preserved Arabic, which they learned in earlier times when the Ishmaelites lived there». It should be borne in mind that at the end of the Middle Ages the Jews of Sicily accounted for over half the Jewish population of Italy and that following the expulsion many of them found refuge in other parts of the peninsula, at least for a while.[18]

This brings us to the other end of Italy, the North-East, and to yet another Jewish language import into Italy: Judaeo-German. Jews from German speaking countries began to arrive in Italy towards the end of the Middle Ages, impelled to emigrate by the anti-Jewish climate in their homeland and attracted by the economic advantages, chiefly in banking and commerce, offered them in their new host country. Eventually they set up communities of their own, or when they met with immigrants from further south, they joined them in a federated or unified community, as for instance in Venice, or in Mantua, but with their own separate synagogue and other institutions, such as the Ashkenazi yeshiva in Mantua, the *scola tedesca* in Venice and the like. They probably spoke Judaeo-German among themselves, but for how many generations we do not know. Their attachment to their dialect weakened with the passage of time and by the end of the seventeenth century it seems to have disappeared altogether. But until then, even after Judaeo-German had ceased to be a spoken language among the immigrants to Italy from across the Alps, it was still employed in one form or another, though on the wane, unless in

stic conservatism is the clinging of modern ultra orthodox Jews to Judaeo-German (along with the garb the former speakers of the dialect wore in long-away Germany, in time and in place).

[18] A. Abulafia, *Oar 'Eden Ganuz*, (G. Gross, ed.), Jerusalem 2000 [in Hebrew], p. 313. For Judaeo-Arabic and the Jews of Sicily, see my *Between Scylla and Charybdis*, cit., pp. 376f. Even in the 14th and 15th centuries some immigrants to Sicily from Arabic-speaking countries signed contracts in Judaeo-Arabic, and occasionally had deeds or part of them drawn up in that language, at times interspersed with terms in the Sicilian vernacular. And see A. Nef, *La langue écrite de juifs de Sicilie au XVe siècle*, in H. Bresc et C. Veauvy (eds.), *Mutations d'identités en Méditerranée*, Paris 2000, pp. 85f.; Id., *Gli ebrei di Sicilia: ebrei di lingua araba dal XII al XV secolo*, in N. Bucaria (ed.), *Ebrei e Sicilia*, Palermo 2002, pp. 169f. However, the description of the Jews in Sicily as «Jews by religion, Arabs by language» (H. Bresc, *Arabi per lingua ebrei per religione*, Palermo 2001) during the last centuries of the Jewish presence in Sicily right down to 1492 is over-enthusiastic. For more details, see M. Perani, *Le firme in giudeo-arabo degli ebrei di Sicilia in atti notarili di Caltabellotta, Polizzi e Sciacca*, in G. Lacerenza (ed.), *Hebraica hereditas. Studi in onore di Cesare Colafemmina*, Napoli 2005, pp. 143f.; B. Rocco, *Le tre lingue usate dagli ebrei in Sicilia dal sec. XII al sec. XV*, in *Gli ebrei in Sicilia sino all'espulsione del 1492, Atti del V Convegno internazionale Italia Judaica*, Palermo 1992, Roma 1995, pp. 355f.; Id., *Il giudeo-arabo e il siciliano nei secoli XII-XV: influssi reciproci*, in *Atti de XXI Congresso internazionale di linguistica e filologia romanza*, Palermo 1995, Tübingen 1998, pp. 539f. On Arabic script and language used by the Jews in Arabic speaking countries, including Sicily, see S.D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, 5 vols., Berkeley and Los Angeles 1967-1988, I, pp. 14f.

use by recent newcomers. Like other Jewish dialects, Judaeo-German in Italy, was also used in correspondence.[19]

Although most Piedmontese Jews came from French speaking zones, no reliable references to Judaeo-Provencal have so far surfaced in Piedmont. However, elements of Judaeo-Provencal are thought to have made up the components of Judaeo-Piedmontese.[20]

The last foreign languages imported into Italy by Jewish immigrants were Spanish and Portuguese. The newcomers were Spanish-Portuguese Jews, who had come to Italy directly from the Iberian Peninsula, or via the Balkans, North Africa, etc. Only in few communities were they the sole ethnic element, such as in Leghorn and Pisa, elsewhere, such as in Venice, Rome, Ferrara and Verona, they were a minority, but retained distinct communal institutions, in particular synagogues. Some of their records were written in those languages, or rather in the Jewish dialect based on them. In Livorno that dialect endured well into the nineteenth century. Also other Sephardi settlements in Italy at that time used Spanish and Portuguese in their records, such as for instance in Rome. Some va-

[19] We prefer Judaeo-German to Yiddish, which we find more appropriate. The term Yiddisch was coined in the US in the nineteenth century and is now commonly employed, but is an anachronism if applied to earlier periods. That inappropriateness is not improved by the use of such terms as Western Yiddish and the like to describe the dialect in Germany or in Italy. The documentation on the language spoken by the Jews of Germany during the Middle Ages goes back to the thirteenth century or thereabouts, but it is probably older. The mediaeval references use such terms as לשוננו (our language), לשון אשכנז (German), and טייטש (Teutsch). The Jews of Germany continued to make use of this dialect right down to the nineteenth century and there it contained only Germanic and Hebrew elements, no Slavonic, or other local ones. On Mantua, see my *History of the Jews in Mantua*, Jerusalem 1977, Index, s.v. yeshiva. The book lists which the Jews in Mantua and the Mantovano presented to the censors in 1595 and 1605 contained a number of books and manuscripts in Judaeo-German, some of them not known from other sources. See *op. cit.*, pp. 685f.; and my *Books and Libraries of the Jews of Mantua 1595*, in «Kiryat Sepher» 37 (1962), pp. 103f.[in Hebrew]. See also C. Schmeruk, *The Beginning of Narrative Prose in Yiddish and its Centre in Italy*, in *Scritti in Memoria di Sally Mayer*, Gerusalemme 1967, Hebr. Sect., pp. 118f., based on my lists. He also listed some 35 printed publications in Judaeo-German in Italy between 1545 and 1663. See his *Yiddish prints in Italy*, Italia 3 (1982), Hebr. Sect., pp. 112f. The literature on Judaeo-German has been growing in recent years. See E. Timm, *Graphische und phonische Struktur des Westjiddischen*, Tübingen 1987; C. Turniansky, *La letteratura Yiddish nell'Italia del Cinquecento*, in «La Rassegna Mensile di Israel» 62 (1996), pp. 61f. On Judaeo-German prints and manuscripts in Italy, see C. Turniansky and E. Timm, with the collaboration of C. Rosenzweig, *Yiddish in Italia: Yiddish Manuscripts and Printed Books from the 15th Century to the 17th Century*, Milan 2003. For the curious case of the cleric Paolo da Novara, who was accused of having acted as courier for the Jews charged with ritual murder in Trent, see A.S. Trento, Arch. Principesco Vescovile, sez. Lat., capsa 69, # 68. Paolo had been a copyist of the court records at the trial of the alleged murderers of the boy Simonino, and was suspected of having acted for the papal commissioner, the bishop of Ventimiglia. He was put on trial and tortured. Among the evidence produced in court were copies of letters which he was alleged to have smuggled out of the prison were the accused were being kept. They are fragments of letters in Hebrew and Judaeo-German and have only indirect bearing on the trial. The poor devil of a priest was found guilty of having supported the "Jewish conspiracy" against the blood libel trial, and for having conspired to assassinate the podestà, captain of justice and bishop of Trento. Manno son of Aberlino of Vicenzo, prominent banker in Pavia, is alleged to have undertaken to finance the plot. For a summary, see G. Divina, *Storia del beato Simone di Trento*, 2 vols., Trento 1902, pp. 142f.; W. Treue, *Der Trienter Judenprocess. Voraussetzungen – Abläufe – Auswirkungen (1475-1588)*, Hannover 1996, pp. 114f.; [B. Kotlerman, *Since I have learned of the Evil Tidings I have been Heartsick and I am Unable to Sleep. The Old Yiddish and Hebrew Letters from 1476 in the Shadow of Blood Libels in Northern Italy and Germany*, in «The Jewish Quarterly Review» 102 (2012), pp. 1f.].

[20] On the languages of the Jews on France, see M. Bannit, *Une langue fantôme; le judéo français*, in «Revue de linguistique romane» 27 (1963), pp. 245f. The author shows that in France too there is no sin-

nished sooner or later, though the ethnic synagogues endured for centuries.[21]

As if Greek, Latin, Judaeo-Arabic, Judaeo German, and Judaeo-Spanish/Portuguese were not enough, there existed yet another ingredient of the Italian-Jewish linguistic potpourri: the Judaeo-Italian dialect. There was no single uniform dialect by that name which covered all of Italy, but rather local variants, based on the vernacular of the region concerned, with a portion of Jewish additions: Hebrew, the foreign language or dialect (if any) imported from abroad, antiquated dialectal forms and expressions no longer in use by Christians and the like; elements which also made up other Jewish dialects. The obsolete element became even more pronounced in the ghetto period, when the ghetto dwellers became separated from their surroundings not only in the physical sense. So one has to speak of Judaeo-Italian of Sicily, southern Italy, Rome, Tuscany, Emilia Romagna, including Mantua, Liguria, Venice, Piedmont and so forth. Some ceased to exist when the Jewish presence in an area came to end, others survived down to our days. These dialects too served Jews in daily life: conversation, business and the like, and in sacral and profane literary texts. To this should be added Hebrew translated from Italian, or viceversa, which had its origin in the spoken dialect or the other way round. All these components were often similar or merged to some extent, so that we find much that is common to all, but, of course, not totally so.[22]

As stated in the summary at the end of this paper, this is the first chapter of an attempt to evaluate the impact on the Jews of Italy of conti-

gle dialect that deserves to be called Judaeo-French.

[21] The only abundant surviving communal records (so far) of Judaeo-Spanish and Portuguese are those which have come to us from Pisa and Leghorn. G. Sonnino, *Il Talmud Torà di Livorno*, in «La Rassegna Mensile di Israel» 10 (1935), pp. 183f. coined the term «dialetto ispano-portoghese che fino ai primi decenni dell'800 costitui il linguaggio familiare di quasi tutti i componenti della comunità [livornese]». The Jewish presses in Leghorn continued to print in Spanish and Portuguese right down to the nineteenth century. Some such records have survived also elsewhere, for example in Rome, Venice, Ferrara, Ancona, etc. See, A. Esposito, *Gli ebrei a Roma tra Quattro e Cinquecento*, in «Quaderni Storici» 54 (1983), pp. 818f. Cf. Stow, on the language of Italian Jews of Spanish origin; and see L. Minervini, Llevaron de acá nuestra lengua. *Gli usi linguistici degli ebrei spagnoli in Italia*, in «Medioevo Romanzo» 19 (1994), pp. 133f. and the references cited there. On the ethnic synagogues in Venice, Rome, etc., see there and the monographs on these communities. [The Spanish immigration to the Kingdom of Naples was a short-lived affair and left no linguistic trace worth mentioning].

[22] We are describing Judaeo-Italian and the others as dialects, evading the thorny question what constitutes a language, a dialect, a jargon and the like, although aware of the view that one is not supposed to describe as dialect a language based on one spoken outside its geographic borders. Of course, other terms are also used. The Roman dialect, for instance, is described as *parlata giudaica-romanesca*, were, however, *romanesca* stands for the Roman vernacular. See Milano, *Il ghetto di Roma*, cit., pp. 435f. Definitions vary. See L. Cuomo, *Il giudeo-italiano e le vicende linguistiche degli ebrei d'Italia*, *Italia Judaica, Atti del I convegno internazionale*, Bari 18-22 maggio 1981, Rome 1983, pp. 427f.; G. Massariello Merzagora, *Giudeo-italiano: dialetti italiani parlati dagli ebrei d'Italia*, Pisa 1977; M. Mayer Modena, *Le parlate giudeo-italiane*, in C. Vivanti (cur.), *Storia d'Italia. Gli ebrei in Italia*, II, pp. 937f., also for the various regions and their dialects; G. Sermoneta, *Considerazioni frammentarie sul giudeo-italiano*, Italia, 1 (1976), pp. 1f.; Id., *La traduzione siciliana dell'Alfabetin di Pentecoste e la prova dell'esistenza di un dialetto siciliano*, *Italia Judaica, Atti del V convegno internazionale*, Palermo. 15-19 giugno 1995, Rome 1995, pp. 341f. On Mantua. see V. Colorni, *La parlata degli ebrei mantovani*, in «La Rasssegna Mensile di Israel» 36 (1970), pp. 149f. («Judaica Minora», Milano 1938, pp. 579f.), containing many references to regional dialects (notes: 5-7). On other regions see, B. Terracini, *Residui di parlate giudeo-italiane raccolti a Pitigliano*, Roma, Ferrara, in «La Rassegna Mensile di Israel» 17 (1951), pp. 3f.; E.S. Artom, *On the Spoken Language of the Jews in Piedmont*, in «Eretz Israel» 3 (1954), pp. 261f. [in Hebrew]; M. Mayer Modena, *The Spoken Languages of the Jews of Italy: How Far Back*, *The Jews of Italy. Memory and Identity*, edited by B.D. Cooperman and B. Garvin, Bethesda 2000. While literary texts in Judaeo-Italian are fairly numerous, relatively fewer surviving examples of the spoken language have so

nuous migration to and from the peninsula and the consequent Italian melting pot. It deals with the languages of the Jews in Italy from Antiquity to the present (or nearly so). The mobility of the Jews, in particular in the countries of the Mediterranean littoral, introduced to Italy many languages while Italian Jewry itself made its contribution in the form of dialects, spoken and written. I shall come back to the Jewish Italian melting pot in due course.

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SUMMARY

This paper is the first part of an attempt to look at the history of the Jews of Italy from a new vantage point: the melting pot of Mediterranean Jews. It is a preliminary and partial investigation of the problem, which examines one of the relevant elements: the languages employed by the Jews of Italy throughout the ages. I am planning to deal with other factors in the future.

KEYWORDS: Italian Melting Pot.

far come to light. One such example is the transcript of the evidence given by Jews in the Pretorian Court of Palermo. See my *Between Scylla and Charybdis* cit., p. 378, n. 8; another is the evidence given at the trial of a Jewish sicarian in Modica (1471), see G. Modica Scala, *Le comunità ebraiche nella contea di Modica*, Modica 1978, pp. 451f.