

THE BOUND MUSIC FRAGMENTS FROM *NATIONE ISRAELITICA* COLLECTION
IN FLORENCE: A PRELIMINARY SURVEY

Introduction

Nazione israelitica is one of the most important archival collections produced by the Jews of Florence during their forced residence in the ghetto. The collection consists of 72 volumes that stretch chronologically from 1620 to 1808 and contain all the documents produced by the secular Hebrew courts that operated in the Florentine ghetto. In 1593 the Jews of Pisa, and then those of Livorno, had been granted the privilege to establish independent courts that could deal only with cases of civil legal nature involving exclusively Jewish litigants. The courts, composed by the political leaders of the Jewish community (*the massari*) were also recognised the privilege to pass and enact laws – obviously as long as compatible with the state legislation – as well as to impose fine and similar penalties. Matrimonial and family law was jurisdiction of the *bate-din*, the rabbinical courts. On 31st July 1639 the same rights were granted also to the Italian Jewish community (*nazione italiana*) of the Florentine ghetto with «autorità di decidere, terminare, e por pene, che parrà loro secondo il rito, e modo ebraico in tutte le differenze che nasceranno fra un ebreo, et l'altro nel modo che è concesso alli *Massari* delli Ebrei di Pisa e Livorno» [the power to decide, judge and impose penalties, according to their customs and according to the Jewish customs in all suits between Jewish litigants, as it was granted to leaders of the Jews in Pisa and Livorno]. Officially since that year, in fact since 1620 as attested by the earliest documents of *Nazione Israelitica*, Hebrew secular courts made-up or presided by the *massari* of both the Italian

and soon after also of the Levantine (meaning Sephardic, including Ponentine Jews) Jewish nations operated inside the Ghetto of Florence. The courts of the Florentine *massari* were officially abolished in 1808, following the French occupation of Florence when the ghetto was abolished and the Jews politically fully righted.

Nazione Israelitica is one of the chronologically most comprehensive Judeo-Italian collections of juridical nature, a documentary *summa* gathering all the materials produced or taken into exam by the secular Hebrew courts that operated inside the ghetto of Florence, a unique tool for the study of Florentine Jewish life and an extraordinary source for the study of Jewish law in early-modern Italy. While the vast majority of the documents was written in local Italian vernacular (very often mixed with Hebrew terms, both in Hebrew characters and Latin transliteration), the collection comprises also materials redacted in Hebrew, most of which *teshuvot* (legal advices) by foreign experts on Jewish law (mostly rabbis) sent upon request of the Florentine judges.

In 1808, as said, the *Tribunali dei Massari* were abolished and all the documentation was transmitted to Luigi Lustrini – the *sovrintendente* (chancellor) of Archivi Riuniti, the archival institution known today as Archivi Riuniti – who grouped *Nazione Israelitica* with the documents of other tribunali soppressi. In 1853 Telemaco Del Badia, state archivist, produced the first comprehensive inventory of this newly acquired collection, summarily describing the 72 volumes making up *Nazione Israelitica* that he grouped into eight main sections, each one representing a different textual-legal typology, each one consisting of various sub-categories:¹

¹ For more information about this collection, see *Segnature diverse – Tribunale della Camera delle comunità; Conservatore delle Leggi; Regalie e Reali Possessioni; Nazione Israelitica*, Ar-

chivio di Stato di Firenze, n.p. and n.d. and the new catalogue edited by I. MARCELLI and C. MARCESCHI, *Inventario del fondo Nazione Israelitica*, Florence 2014, Archivio di Stato di Firenze.

1. Sentenze e decreti, voll. 1-27; 1652-1808
2. Comparsa, voll. 28-46; 1620-1808
3. Esecuzione delle pene, voll. 47-48; 1778-1808
4. Suppliche, voll. 49-55; 1642-1808
5. Mondualdi [or mundualdi], vol. 56; 1801-1808
6. Cause particolari, voll. 57-58; 1777-1780
7. Carte dotali, voll. 59-61; 1713-1808
8. Citazioni e atti di cancelleria, voll. 62-73; 1747-1808

As part of the general survey aiming at providing information for the electronic edition² of this collection, we examined volume n. 20 (28 according to the new catalogue), the first of the second section of *comparsa* and the oldest volume of the entire collection, containing materials that date from 1620 to 1669. As commonplace in early binding technique the *vellum* of the external cover was reinforced with heterogeneous paper materials, pressed and glued together so as to form a cartoon solid enough to support an otherwise not very thick *vellum*.

Through a series of small breeches on both sides of the *vellum*, it appeared very clearly that the reinforcing cartoon contained also some hand-written music materials, music notations of what we presumed were at least two set of music documents, instrumental and vocal music. Assuming that the volume had been produced soon after the redaction of the latter documents (1669) and that also the binding materials, including the music fragments, were more or less coeval, the volume was sent to the palaeographic laboratories of the Florentine State Archive, where it was unbound, the inner support of the *vellum* cover removed and all different parts properly separated.

The analysis revealed that the inner *vellum* cartoon consisted of three textual typologies:

- (I) some pages of a printed book
- (II) a fragment of a parish register
- (III) and some fragments of two different music scores, one for solo instrument (presumably violin or flute) and one for accompanied voices, in all likelihood, as we will see below more in detail, a dramatic form with a double text.

A more detailed analysis of these hidden documents can provide us with information about the usage and the context which they originally belonged to; as we will see in the next section, however, there is no cogent proof that these music fragments come from scores produced in the ghetto and then representing the repertoire of Florentine Jewry but also no contrary elements to discharge this hypothesis completely.

On the other hand, as underlined by Adler in his seminal work on the learned music repertoire of the Florentine Jewry, dramatic forms as oratorios and melodramas had often been practiced inside the ghetto, especially as part of the repertoire of the charitable societies that operated inside the ghetto.³

Analysis of the fragments

I. The first documentary group consists of four double-page paper folios taken from the printed edition of *Summa doctrinae christianae iussu Clementis 8. pont. max. ab illustriss. card. Bellarmino Italico idiomate conscripta. Et mandato illustriss. Cyntij Aldobrandini card. S. Georgij Armenicae nationis protect. in linguam Armenicam traductam. Ac iterum S.D.N. Gregorij 15. & Sac. congregationis de propaganda fide decreto impressa*, Rome, 1623, an important theological tractate by Cardinal Roberto Bellarmino⁴ in Latin with Armenian translation. These folios are numbered and the numeration (namely pp. 49-55 and 50-55; 61-n.a. and 62 n.a;

² The editorial is currently a work in progress and will be complete presumably by the end of 2018.

³ I. ADLER, *La pratique musicale savante dans quelques communautés juives en Europe aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècle*, Mouton, Parigi 1966, I, pp. 83-87.

⁴ The Italian Jesuit Cardinal Bellarmino (Montepulciano, 1542 - Rome, 1621) was nephew of Pope Marcellus II and rector of the Roman College. He's

known above all for his implication in the Galileo Galilei's trial. Long after his death, he was proclaimed saint and Doctor of the Church, mostly for his primary role during the Counter-Reformation period. For more in-depth references see F. MOTTA, *Bellarmino: una teologia politica della Controriforma*, Alinea, Brescia 2005.

57-64 and 58-63) suggests that they were originally part of a fascicle taken from a dis-bound volume.

It is interesting to note that the work by Bellarmino had been published only 40 years before the papers making up the volume had been produced. Bellarmino's text did not suffer any inquisitorial censorship and, as far we know, it had never been discharged or prohibited by the Catholic authorities so as to be turned, as happened for the great majority of the Hebrew texts confiscated by the Inquisition, into waste material for the binding of other volumes. It may well be that the volume had undergone physical deterioration (because of fire or flood, for instance) and that only some parts of it survived. The folios were part of two fascicles; the first including pages 49-56, the second ones pages 57-64 (see Figg. 1-8 and 9).

II. The second group consists of three fragments of what probably was a billposting sacred calendar, written in Latin and with a double-colour ink (red and black). In the recto side of the first fragment measuring 327 x 230 mm. is written *Feria Sexta in Parascena ad Matutinum*, followed by the name of Giuseppe Maria Donati, Filippo Maria Laverzari (?), Fr. Giuseppe Maria Viviani and Giuseppe Maria Cagnoli. The verso side of this fragment is blank.

The second fragment is of similar size – 325 x 230 mm. – and in the recto side is written *Feria tertia ad Missam, et ad Passionem*, together with the following names: «Giovanni Francesco Benotti, Giuseppe Maria Donati, Padre provinciale del S. Ufficio Giuseppe Maria [not readable], Domenico Maria Arnini». Benotti was a member of the Padri dell'ordine dei Servi di Maria della Basilica della SS. Annunziata and main sexton between 1732 and 1764. In 1732 Benotti completed SS. Annunziata's main book catalogue – *Bibliothecae Coenobii Divae Annunciatae de Florentia Catalogus generalis* – whose manuscript is now kept in the National Library in Florence.⁵ All this suggests that the calendar was produced around the first half of the 18th century, an *ad-quem* information according to which we can exclude the hypothesis that Giuseppe Maria Donati mentioned in the second

fragment is the well known castrato singer from Bologna mentioned in various sources and who performed at pontifical chapel in Rome and in various other cities, including Florence, since 1674. (See Figg. 10-11).

Two additional fragments (see Figg. 12-13) presumably being part of the same documents and being originally part of the margin were also found.

III. The third group of paper materials used for the binding of the volume is a set of 14 handwritten score fragments for both instrumental and vocal music, copied by two different hands (hereafter hand A-B).

Group One - Hand A. This group consists of 7 fragments originally making up two oblong music sheets, the side of each one of them containing a short but perfectly conclude music composition following the structure A-B-A.

The first folio measures 225 x 160 mm. and consists of three fragments with two short compositions, a *canzona* on the recto side and a *corrente* on the verso (Figg. 13-14).

The second sheet, also measuring 225 x 160 mm., consists of four fragments with two compositions, a *Giga* on the recto side and a *Balletto* on the verso (Figg. 15-16). The titles and the indication of solo violin (*Viol. Pri.o*, lit. "first violin") suggest that these materials were originally part of a collection or book of instrumental dances, probably a *suite*, of which only the part of the first violin has survived. While it seems more than probable that a *basso continuo* was originally included, in the light of the extant information we cannot reconstruct the original score.

Group Two - Hand B. As shown on Fig. 17, this folio originally measured circa 300 x 600 mm. and contains the incipit of a vocal composition with instrumental accompaniment (violin I and I, viola, bass) in B flat major. The blank space on the upper-left side of the recto folio was customarily used to provide information about the title of the composition or its author in patchwork compositions (in Italian called *pasticci*) both in secular and religious contexts (opera/melodrama as well as oratorios and cantatas). It may well be that this folio was part of a larger and longer set of pieces assembled to-

⁵ One of his letters is now kept at the Biblioteca Marucelliana in Florence.

gether. On the bottom-left margin of the folio is written “Capo” (i.e. “Da Capo”, meaning “repeating from the beginning”) while in the mid and upper part some fragments of the original lyrics are still clearly readable “che” and, written by a different hand, “tutti”.

The verso side of this fragment (Fig. 19) contains what from several points of view seems to be some of the most interesting features of this whole set of music fragments, namely a double set of lyrics, the first ones being certainly part of the original text, the second set, of comic character, having being added later and by another hand, probably as part of an attempt to re-use the original composition in different circumstances.

Similarly appears in the next folio (Fig. 20, f. 1r) that contains what probably was the conclusive section of the composition. In the central-bottom part of the fragment is written “Da Capo” and then a few bars “Da” which obviously combines with the word “Capo” as on Fig. 17 (f. 1r).

The hypothesis that these folios were part of a single music score unit, perhaps the fascicle of a much longer score, is supported by the analysis of the lyrics, most of which show to be subsequent and in perfect succession.

On Fig. 19, f. 1v is written *core che vinga non sa* which seems to match with *che* on Fig. 17, f. 1r. Similarly, on the recto side of Fig. 18) is written *pov* (5th voice-line from the top) and *spe* (page bottom, above the bass line) that perfectly match with *ero* and *me* on f. 2r (Fig. 19), originally reading *povero* (poor) and *speme* (hope, trust).

A comparative analysis of the two versions of text will exemplify our analysis. The second version is highlighted in **bold** characters:

f. 1v:

...nave in procella dall'onde aggettata
quest'alma...pov[ero]
...vini spumanti ondeggi il contento e va
da[?]....

f. 2r:

...[pov]ero core che vinca non sà l'inalza
la preme la...
...accresca vigor ad questa Gran Mensa
su[?]....

f. 2v:

...sa e il povero core che vinga non sa...
...[vi]gor[?] **Qui Bacco et la gioia accre-**
sca vigor...

There is a glaring difference between the first and the second set of lyrics both in terms of contents and handwriting. The first set of lyrics describe a sort of spiritual struggle where the soul is compared to a ship moving on stormy waves, while the second version, syllabically compatible with the first but clearly added by another, later by hand, celebrates the glories of Bacchus and the pleasures of material life. This suggests that the score, in all likelihood originally composed and meant to be performed as an opera seria – perhaps as part of a spiritual context, it was later re-used in a secular context and combined with a new set of lyrics, something that was absolutely common practice in 18th century Italy.

Two small fragments (Figg. 21-22) originally belonging to the same handwritten music score unit were also found. They show same palaeographic characteristics – paper, script, and ink – but probably belonged to other folios, their music notation fitting none of the extant folios.

Conclusions

The volumes of *Nazione Israelitica* represent, as said, one of the most important sources for the study of Florentine Jewry, covering a chronological spectrum of almost two centuries (from the first half of the 17th century to early 19th century, a few decades before the demolition of the old ghetto that took place in 1888 as part of the major “risanamento” urban plan aiming at rationalising and modernising what at the time were considered the most decadent and degraded parts of the old city). On 30th September 1808, following the suppression of the Tribunale dei *Massari* and attribution of all its functions to the state courts, the collection that until that time had been kept at the Cancelleria della Nazione (the administrative organ of the Jewish community) was handed to Luigi Lustrini, the superintendent of the Archivi Riuniti, nowadays the Florence state archive.

The papers making up the 72 volumes had been bound before the collection was transferred to the state archives, presumably inside the ghetto soon after the papers had been written down. The covers (mostly of *vellum*) of volumes 20-26, belonging to the section of the comparse (the chronologically highest) show a number of signs of deterioration probably derived and attributable to frequent use and consultation of

the items, as well as a series of minor and major handwritten notes ranging from the drawing of David's star and amulet-like signs, through simple names and terms to capital letters' calligraphic sketching taken probably during judicial hearing sessions.

The discovered fragments, most likely bounded in a professional Florentine bookbinding, seem to belong to two different kinds of waste materials: printed (I group) and manuscript (II group) materials considered obsolete and hence for this reason recyclable, and also musical manuscripts (III group) characterized by the presence of errors and erasures or representing a utility repertoire composed for some specific purpose, in both case for entertainment, yet not considered sufficiently valuable to be preserved, and therefore not usable.

What seems by far more plausible is that the waste materials used to bind this volume of the *Natione Israelitica* were taken from a Catholic milieu such as the papers of a parish church where music performances were integral part of spiritual life and education. It may well be that the volume we analysed, and therefore all other volumes of the *Natione Israelitica* that share common binding features were bound by a Christian craftsman, or by a Jewish binder whose supplies were taken from outside the ghetto.

It is probably not by chance that together with the music sheets the binder put together some pages of the theological work by Bellarmine and the folios of a parish register giving instructions about the celebration of the sacred services, especially – it is interesting to note – as far as the performance of liturgical music concerns. This theory, on the whole quite convincing in relation to the vocal score fragments, does not seem to

apply to the pieces of instrumental music, whose style and performing features (solo instrument playing on dancing rhythms) do not abide by the forms of church music.

In spite of the many uncertainties that persist over the authorship and kind of fruition of these musical fragments, what we got from this preliminary investigation – conducted over just one of the 72 volumes making up the *Natione Israelitica* collection, is a unique set of Western music documents and unknown sources that, we are confident, will shed further light on the vexed issue over music practice, perhaps including the one performed and listened to in the Florentine ghetto.

In conclusion, the discovery of this fragments' collection shows us how the Florentine manuscripts, especially the musical ones, were reused, when not resold or totally destroyed. Such practice, during the past centuries, has led to the loss, as regards the Florentine musical heritage, of an incalculable amount of repertoire, including the most complex dramatic forms such as opera and oratorio of which only a small part, especially concerning the latter genre, has survived. Nevertheless, the recent discovery of these fragments represents a hope of reconstructing, at least in part, the Florentine musical repertoire hitherto considered lost.

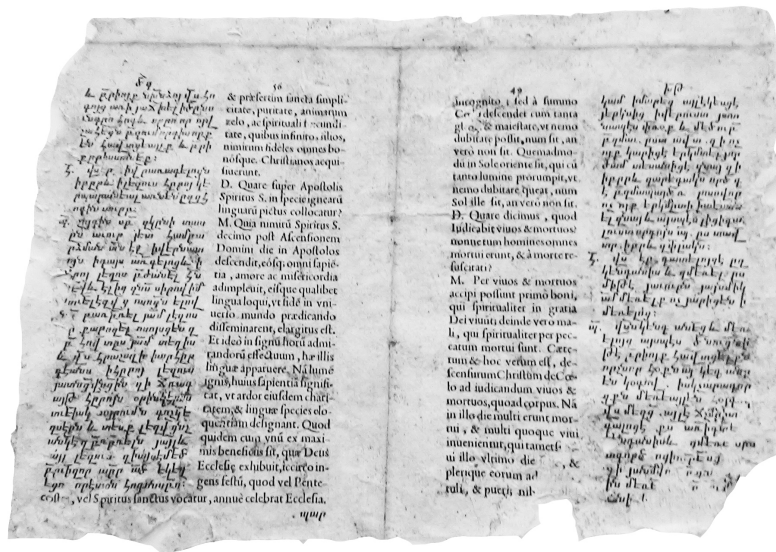
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SUMMARY

Natione Israelitica is one of the most important archival collections, consisting of 72 volumes containing judicial papers and all the documents produced by the Hebrew secular courts that operated in the ghetto of Florence between 1620 and 1808. While conducting a comprehensive survey of all the volumes in preparation of an electronic edition, inside the vellum cover of one of the earliest volumes – the twentieth one – fragments of a paper score were found. These are heterogeneous materials, ranging from some pages of what presumably was a parish register, through a bilingual theological study, to some folios of instrumental music (presumably for violin or flute) and fragments of an oratorio or melodrama.

KEYWORDS: Ghetto of Florence; Sacred music; *Natione Israelitica*.



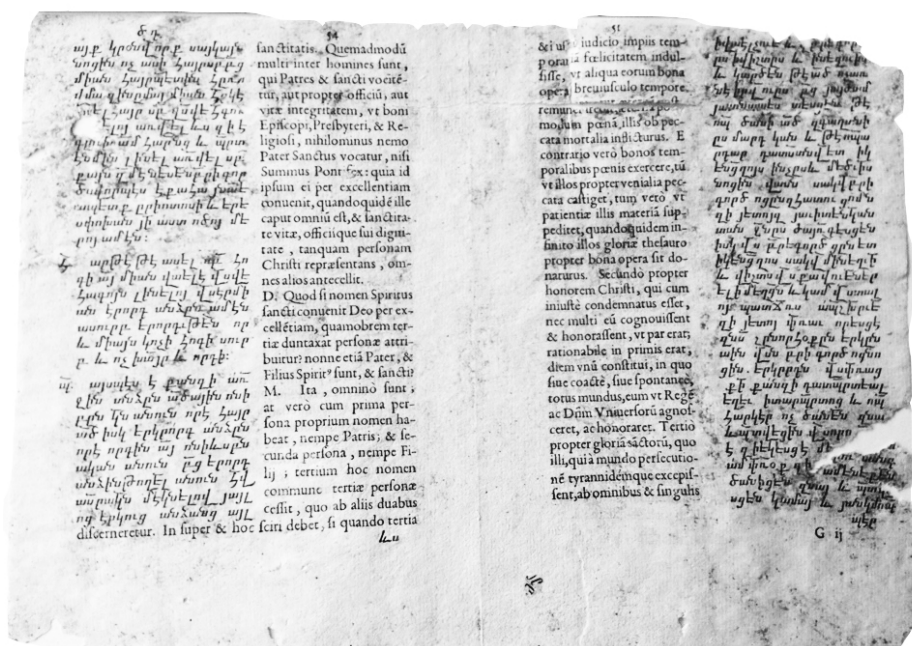
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Fig. 1 - f. lr (pp. 49-56).



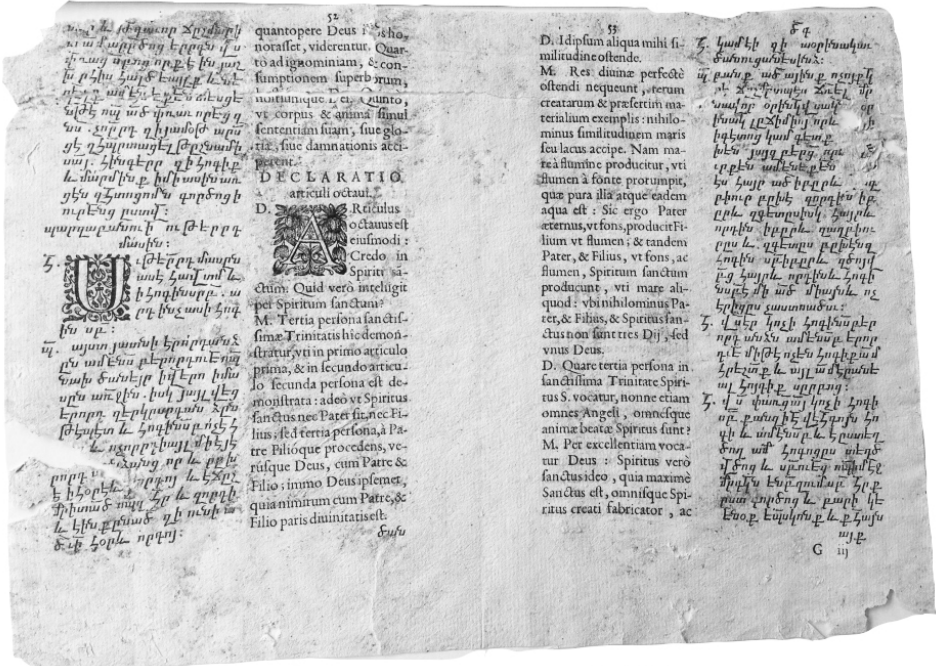
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Fig. 2 - f. lv (pp. 50-55).



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Fig. 3 - I, f. 2r (pp. 51-54).



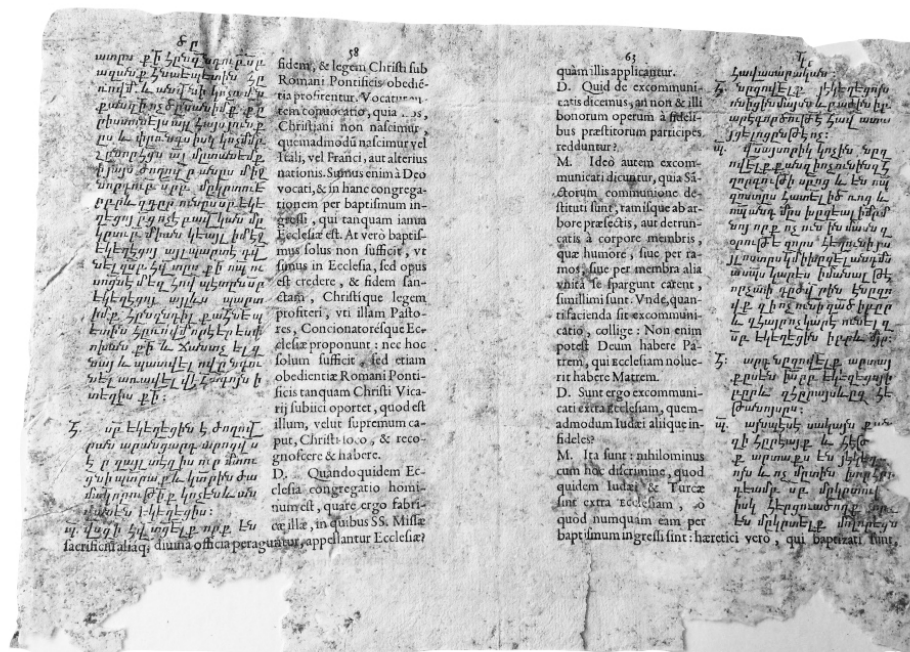
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Fig. 4 - f. 2v (pp. 52-53).



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Fig. 5 - f. 3r (pp. 57-64).



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Fig. 6 - f. 3v (pp. 58-63).

The bound music fragments from *Natione Israelitica* in Florence



Fig. 7 - f. 4r (pp. 60-61).



Fig. 8 - f. 4v (pp. 59-62).

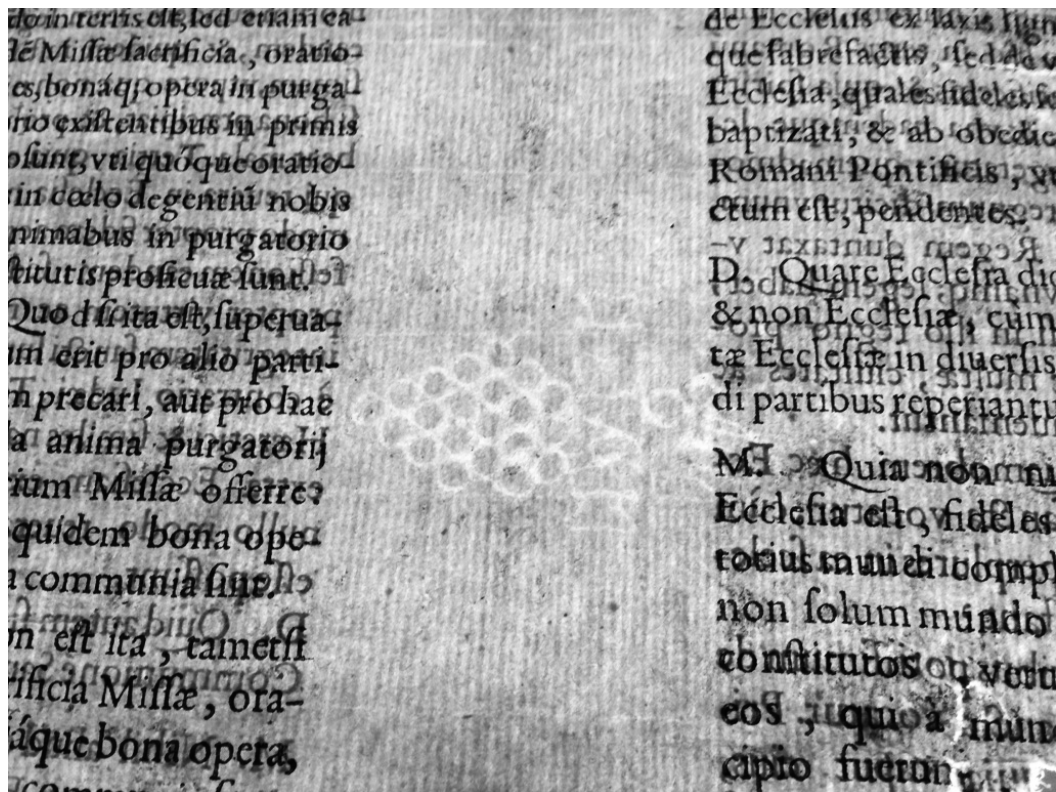
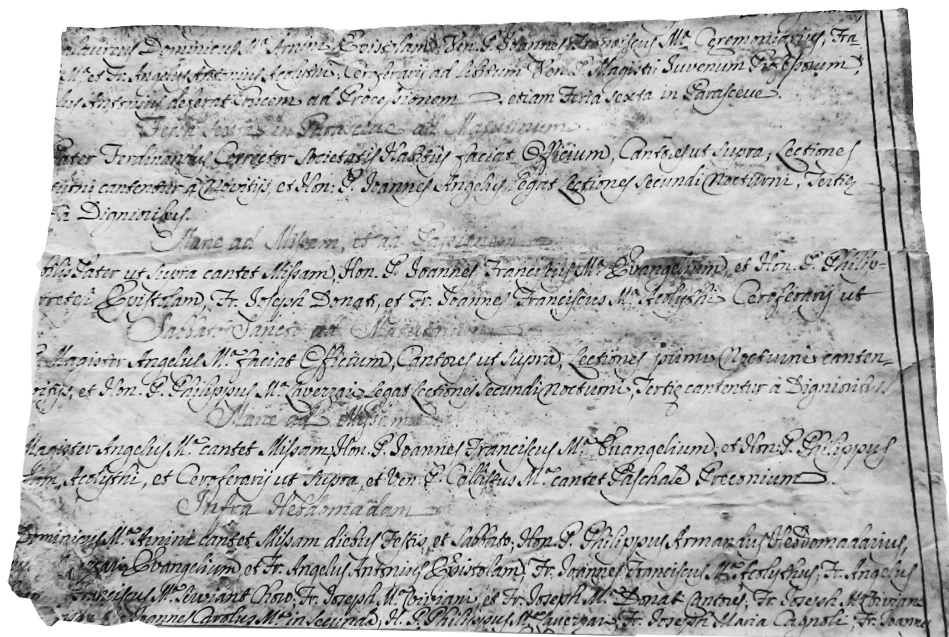
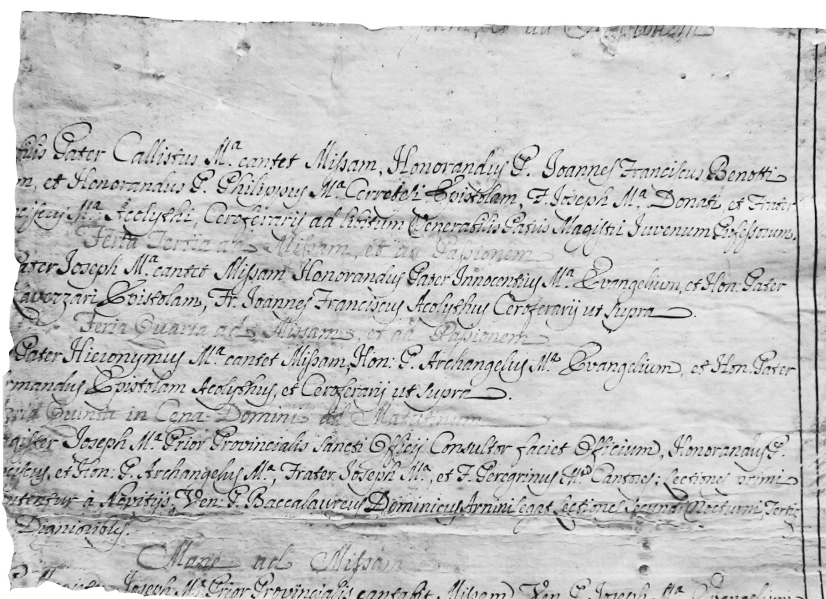


Fig. 9 - pp. 59-62, detail, watermark.



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Fig. 10 - f. lr.



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Fig. 11 - f. lv.

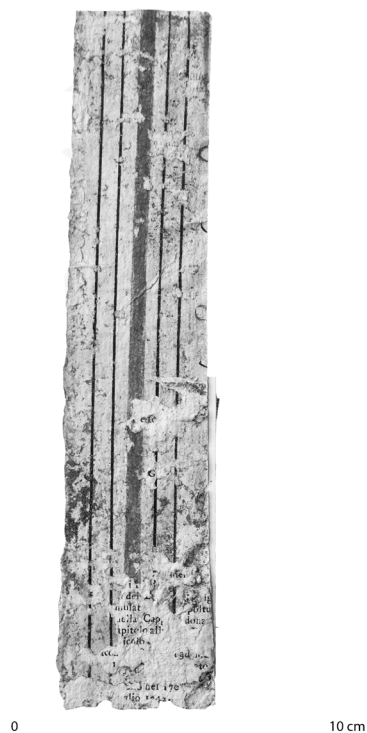


Fig. 12.



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Fig. 13 - f. lr, *Canzona* in D Major.



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Fig. 14 - f. lv, *Corrente* in F Major.



Fig. 15 - f. lr, *Giga*, in A Minor.



Fig. 16 - f. lv, *Balletto Violino Primo*, in C Major.



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Fig. 17 - f. lr, instrumental incipit.



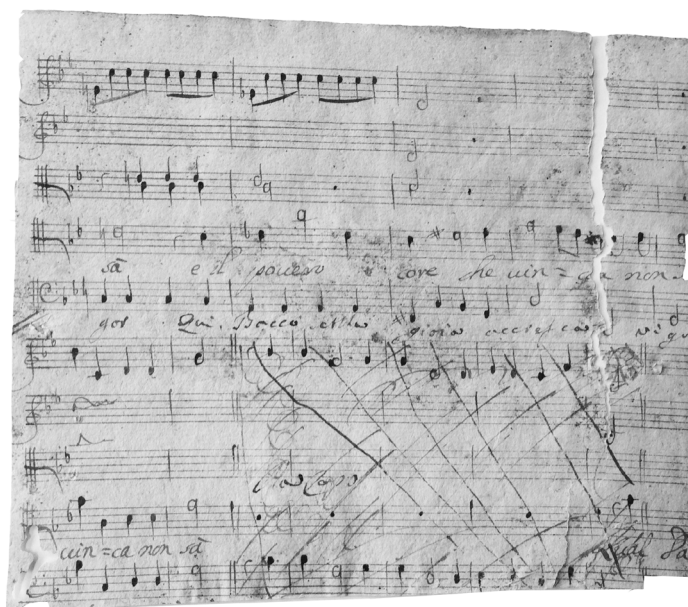
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Fig. 18 - f. lv, instrumental and vocal score, with double set of lyrics.



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Fig. 19 - f. lv.



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Fig. 20 - f. lr.



Fig. 21.



Fig. 22.