

THE JEW IN THE SOCIETY AND IN THE SOCIAL PROCESSES BETWEEN THE MIDDLE AGES AND THE MODERN ERA: THE CASES OF FLORENCE AND LUCCA

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1. *Starting from an old discussion: the Anti-Jewish positions*

In order to discuss the perception of the Jewish presence within Luccan and Florentine society it should be kept in mind that anti-Judaism did not appear for the first time in Tuscany in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Having developed together with the affirmation of Christianity as the main religion first of the Roman empire and then, more generally, of the West,¹ between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries anti-Judaism experienced two important changes.

Firstly, it stopped being the exclusive prerogative of the clergy: also non-religious thinkers, in this case jurists, in their writings began to discuss the Jews and their place in Christian society.² Centred on the problem of usury, the *consilia* of jurists such as Pietro d'Ancarani, Alessandro Tartagni, Paolo and Angelo di Castro, as well as Alessandro Nievo,³ contain not only positions often contrary to the legitimacy of usury, but also discussions regarding the opportunity of an intervention of the Church in the economic necessities of the city – discussions which sometimes turn into debates over the possibility of tolerating a sin for the sake of the public good and the capacity of the Pope to condone sinful behaviour, upholding the *Condotte* regarding loaning.⁴ We can notice how, precisely in these debates, the idea surfaces that the religious diversity of the Jew gives a solution to the problem of sin and that this was pushed to the point of affirming that the practice of usury does not damage the Jews morally, as they are already *damnati propter perfidiam* (damned due their treachery).

Secondly, the Jews depicted in the sermons of preachers or in literary works cease to have only “generic” features and acquire the characteristics of the Jews of the period. Therefore, whereas cities often become the theatre of actual disputes,⁵ usury becomes the central theme of an anti-Jewish offensive, and the Jew, in the words of his detractors, is not only an enemy of the faith, but also an enemy of the city, which he parasitically feeds upon through his economic activity. These changes were brought about by the multiplication of bankers, now present within settlements ranging from the smallest to the largest, and the affirmation of the idea of the urban reality as a Christian *corpus*. In the polemical writings against the Jews, that seem to have at least doubled between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries,

¹ For an *excursus* on the long history of anti-Judaism see G. GARDENAL, *L'antigiudaismo nella letteratura cristiana antica e medievale*, Morcelliana, Brescia 2001; U. FORTIS (ed.), *L'antigiudaismo antico e moderno*. Vol. I: *dall'antigiudaismo all'antisemitismo*, Zamorani, Torino 2004; P. STEFANI, *L'antigiudaismo. Storia di un'idea*, Laterza, Bari 2004.

² We have to remember that jurists like Bartolo da Sassoferrato, Federico Petrucci and Giovanni da Imola were involved, more in general, in discussing the problem of the poverty of the Mendicant Orders: see G. DI RENZO VILLATA, *Diritto canonico, ricchezza e... povertà nell'opera di Felino Sandei*, in D.V. MAYENBURG, O. CONDORELLI, F. ROUMY, M. SCHMOECKEL (eds), *Der Einfluss der Kanonik auf die europäische Rechtskultur*, Bd. 5: *Das Recht der Wirtschaft*, Böhlau, Wien 2016, pp. 145-171.

³ In order to study the controversy between Alessandro Nievo and Angelo di Castro, a good starting point is H. ANGIOLINI, *Polemica antiusuraria e propaganda antiebraica nel Quattrocento*, «Il Pensiero politico» 19, 3 (1986), pp. 311-318.

⁴ DI RENZO VILLATA, *Diritto canonico, ricchezza*, pp. 160-163.

⁵ G. FIORAVANTI, *Polemiche antigiudaiche nell'Italia del quattrocento: un tentativo di interpretazione globale*, «Quaderni Storici», n.s. 64 (1987), pp. 19-37.

with a large increase around the middle of the fifteenth, we see the signs of disputes and of individuals. Inscribed within the wider tendency towards public debate, the disputes saw the voluntary and active participation of the Jews and, differently from the Spanish precedents, seem not to have been coercive or motivated by accusations pressed by converts.

One should not think that usury was the sole foundation of this anti-Semitism: it went in another two directions. On the one hand (that of the disputes) there was the systematic confutation of the Jewish religion based on logical reasoning, which sought to underline once and for good their error and favour their conversion. On the other hand (most of the preaching) there was a litany of terrible *exempla*⁶ proving the wickedness of the Jews, full of name-calling and insults directed to a Christian audience which had to be convinced of the danger of a coexistence eventually turning into familiarity.⁷

An example of this can be seen precisely in the Florentine environment, where we encounter the arguments of Giovanni Dominici, who preached in the city between 1400 and 1406, centred on the concept of society as a mystical body in which the Jews – both dangerous and wicked – cannot find place, and strong appeals against usury launched around the middle of the century by Marco da Bologna and Michele Carcano: the introduction in the city of the usurious banks in 1437 certainly stimulated this change. If, furthermore, around the end of the fourteenth century there still was no closure towards the Jews, as Michele Luzzati shows well,⁸ one can hypothesise that the influence behind the law of 1406 began with the preaching of Dominici which forbade the Jews to loan in Florence or its territory, naming them as «inimici crucis, Domini Nostri Yhesu Christi et omnium christianorum» («enemies of the Holy Cross, of Jesus Christ and all Christians»). It is important to note that, later, every time that a *Condotta* was signed, it would be done as a derogation from this law. Certainly, the preaching of Dominici was pervasive, even on the level of civil society, suffice it to think of examples such as Marco Datini who, in a letter to Lapo Mazzei, qualified the Jews as slanderers of our Lord («calunniatori di Nostro Signore»): having been able to listen to the preacher directly, he underlined that Dominici was so eloquent in his polemic against the Jews that he seemed to be a Saint Francis redivivus (in reality Dominici was a Dominican, but evidently anti-Jewish fervour was now associated with the Franciscans).⁹

We should not forget, furthermore, that in a session of the ecumenical council of Florence in 1442 it was proclaimed, repeating very closely the positions of Fulgenzio da Ruspe (fifth century), that «The holy Roman Church [...] strongly believes, declares and preaches that no one outside of the Catholic Church, neither pagans nor Jews nor heretics nor schismatics, can become partakers of eternal life; but they will go to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, unless before the end of their lives they are joined to it».¹⁰

2. *The Condotta of 1471: the first signs of a debate*

Before we begin to consider the ways in which the Jewish presence was perceived, we must underline various changes in the relationships between Christians and Jews, which begin to appear with greater

⁶ Ritual murder, desecration of the Host, offense to Christian religion in the Talmud: these are the accusations (originated by Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum historiale* or Alfonso de Espina's *Fortalitium fidei*) that are updated and reused.

⁷ See, for example Giacomo Ongarelli, *Contra perfidiam modernorum Judeorum*, Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. XX, cod. 52.

⁸ M. LUZZATI, *Florence against the Jews or the Jews against Florence*, in S. PUGLIESE (ed.), *The most ancient of minorities. The Jews of Italy*, Praeger, New York 2002, pp. 59-66.

⁹ D. NIRIT BEN-ARYEH, *Jews and Judaism in the rhetoric of popular preachers: The Florentine sermons of Giovanni Dominici (1356-1419) and Bernardino da Siena (1380-1444)*, «Jewish History» 14 (2000), pp. 175-200.

¹⁰ Council of Basilea-Ferrara-Florence-Rome, Session XI, February 4, 1442. See CENTRE "TRADITIO LITTERARUM OCCIDENTALIUM", *Concilium Ferrariense - Florentinum - Romanum a. 1438 - 1445 / Concilia oecumenica et generalia Ecclesiae catholicae (medii aevi)*, Brepols, Turnhout 2010. Unless otherwise specified, all translations are mine.

force precisely in one of the most important moments of contact between the two groups: the stipulation of loaning *Condotte*. This will also be useful in outlining the historical context in which to place the ideas and inspiration originating from preaching, theatre, and literature we will return to later.

A debate on the opportunity of a Jewish presence in Florence was started a few decades before the end of the fifteenth century. On 11 June 1471 a *Provvisione* again authorised the practice of loaning in the city for a further ten years: this regulation was the result of a long discussion that came about within the Florentine governmental organs, which had seen, between 1469 (year of the earlier expired *Condotta*) and the aforementioned one of 1471, an oscillation between negative votes (initially the great majority) and positive ones in the *Consiglio del Popolo*, the *Consiglio del Comune*, and the *Consiglio dei Cento*.¹¹ The aggressive anti-usury preaching in the city, the precursor of anti-Medici sentiments,¹² had created a certain amount of apprehension amongst the authorities in terms of public order and did not fail to influence public opinion. Not even the ratification of a *Condotta* brought an end to the offensive of the *Osservanti* against the Jews and in favour of the *Monte di Pietà*: Fortunato Coppoli and Jacopo da Cagli stirred the people and in 1473 there was the idea of the creation of a Christian loaning institution which certain scholars, such as Riccardo Fubini, hypothesise would have been complementary to the Jewish activity.¹³

Again in 1477 a problem of coexistence came to the surface, linked to the slaughtering of animals, which brought about the legislation of a ruling on the basis of which it was established that the Jews, called «*generatione perfida et exosa a' cristiani*» («evil people, dangerous for Christians»), should now have their own particular butcher because, when going to the Florentine butcheries they would insert their hand, or even their arm, into the animal to see if this had its lungs attached to its ribs:¹⁴ the need was felt to officially separate the food touched by Jews from that which arrived on the tables of Christians.

If the loaning *Capitoli* of 1481 sanctioned new advantages for the Jews, among which a monopoly on loaning and a *de facto* exemption from its distinctive symbol, and the foundation of the *Monte di Pietà* was not reached, at the moment of the renewal of the same accords in 1491 the uncertainties regarding the lawfulness of loans must have come to the surface given that the ambassador to Rome Piero Alamanni assured himself that the citizens involved in the accords would benefit from the absolution of Innocent VIII. The *Condotta* of 1491 was promulgated for twenty-five years, a sign that nobody thought of eliminating the Jews from the city in the near future, while, obviously, no one expected the foundation of the *Monte* in 1496.

In the meantime, as in other Italian centres, a group which was “different among the different” had arrived, that is, the Jews expelled from Spain in 1492 and often perceived as strangers even by their Italian coreligionists. In 1493 Parenti expressed the opinion that the Sephardic Jews had brought

¹¹ U. CASSUTO, *Gli ebrei a Firenze nell'età del Rinascimento*, Galletti e Cocci, Firenze 1918, pp. 141-144.

¹² S. STALLINI, *Du religieux au politique: la Sacra Rappresentazione chez Antonia et Bernardo Pulci*, «Arzanà. Cahiers de littérature médiévale italienne» 11 (2005), pp. 327-376.

¹³ R. FUBINI, *Prestito ebraico e Monte di Pietà a Firenze (1471-1473)*, in D. LISCIA, I. ZATELLI (eds), *La cultura ebraica all'epoca di Lorenzo il Magnifico: celebrazioni del V Centenario della Morte di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, Olschki, Firenze 1998, pp. 101-155.

¹⁴ CASSUTO, *Gli ebrei a Firenze*, pp. 420-21. The text of the *Provvisione* says: «che i giudei [...] non vadino brancicando e infracando le carni che sono di poi dateci mangiare, che si intende vanno a' beccai et mettono le braccia dentro e' castroni et vitelle scorticate innanzi si squartino, per vedere se hanno appiccicati i polmoni alle costole o no, che non gli vogliono poi se sono appiccicati et non comperano se non dinanzi, et quello che avanza [...] dassi indifferentemente a ciascuno; et ancora si dice per esperienza si vede che [...] le carni trassinate in decto modo dagli hebrei infracidono che è un obbrobrio a' cristiani [...] et a loro dovrebbe bastare havere le carni buone et al pregio dei cristiani» («It must be forbidden to Jews to go around touching and ruining the same meat that we have to eat; in fact, they go to the butchers and put their arms inside cows and veals before being severed, to know if the animals have the lungs attached to the ribs or not: in the first case Jews do not want to buy them and whatever left [...] is sold to everyone else. We also know [...] that meat, scrambled this way by Jews, rots and this is a pity for Christians [...] Jews must be happy to have good meat at the same price than Christians.»)

the plague to Italy¹⁵ and, the same year, in Florence the young Bartolomeo Cases was accused of having disfigured the image of the Virgin and was lynched and torn to pieces by the crowd with incredible fury.¹⁶

3. Florence between the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth

With the beginning of the Republic, inspired by Girolamo Savonarola, the institution of the *Monte di Pietà* and the expulsion of the Jews became central topics in the reform of the State. The proposal for the Mount brought about, between 26 and 28 December 1495, the decision to proceed with the revocation of all the Jewish *Condotte*, stipulated, both in the city and in every other locality, in 1491, as well as with the expulsion of the lenders. It should be kept in mind that in the discussions on the funding of the *Monte* in that year, in which a chorus repeating that the Jews sucked the blood of Christians rang out, one hypothesis was to finance the new foundation with an annual tax paid by the Jews: this shows that the idea was not to expel all the Jews, but only the usurers.¹⁷

According to what was ratified by the *Provvisione* of December 1495, which focused on the election of the committee charged with writing the statutes of the *Monte*, the closure of the banks and the expulsion of the Jewish loaners would come about only on the day that the statutes themselves would be approved. This happened on 21 April 1496 and the Jews, again on the basis of the *Provvisione* of 1495, would have to close their banks again and be authorised to stay in the city at the most another year in order to complete operations which had already been initiated. From 21 April 1497 the ban on their residence in Florence and its territories would however become effective, and would entail the loss of their right to «habitare, in decta ciptà o dominio, familiarmente, o in quella acquistare o tenere beni immobili, o alcuno altro exercitio esercitare» («living in this city or in the Florentine State with their families, or buy houses, or have any kind of business activities»): from now on only their «transito» («travel») would be allowed, and this only for a period of less than twenty days. In the meantime, though, it seems that the Jews were involved together with Christians in a forced loan of 100,000 florins. We know with certainty that on 13 November 1496 the government, influenced by Girolamo Savonarola, forced the Jews to loan to the Republic, apart from 3000 gold florins already given, a further large sum of 6000 gold florins, without interest, receiving in exchange the authorisation to remain within the State (obviously with the prohibition of reopening the banks) until the restitution.

It is also interesting to note how, certainly pushed by necessity and common sense, the tone of the debate had changed: now it was said that the Jews were «tollerati e potessino abitare nel dominio fiorentino» («*Jews were tolerated and they can live in the Florentine State*») and it was added that this was not against the Christian religion, since a coexistence would have favoured a future conversion. The period of time necessary to extinguish the debt had been calculated in three years, to which six months were added in order to complete any further business. But this deadline would be completely ignored, and the Jews found themselves in the condition to be able to remain in Florence *sine die*, going even beyond the year 1501, that is, the date of expiry of the *Condotta* of 1491.

Moreover, already in April 1498 – in part because of the imperfect functioning of the *Monte* – a proposal was presented to the *Consiglio degli Ottanta* to re-establish the license to loan: from that moment, and between April and November, there were in this organ and in the *Consiglio Maggiore* various votes in quick succession (on 9 May there was even, within the *Consiglio degli Ottanta*, a huge victory in favour). If the consultations ended with a negative outcome, they showed that, in fact, at least certain

¹⁵ P. PARENTI, *Storia fiorentina*, Olschki, Firenze 2005, vol. I, p. 57.

¹⁶ J.M. RIVIERE, *Les juifs florentins dans l'espace politique republicain (1494-1496)*, «Italianistica Ultraiecitina» 2012) 7), p. 15.

¹⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 17 for texts and proposals. Luzzati himself writes that, at the beginning, Savonarola was specifically concerned with destroying usury: the expulsion of the Jews (but only the bankers, not all the Jews) was a logic consequence of the foundation of the Monte. See M. LUZZATI, C. GALASSO, *Primi appunti su Girolamo Savonarola e gli ebrei dello stato fiorentino*, in G.C. GARFAGNINI (ed.), *Studi Savonaroliani. Verso il V centenario. Atti del primo seminario di studi (Firenze, 14-15 gennaio 1995)*, Galluzzo, Firenze 1996, pp. 35-40.

parts of the citizenship viewed the problem of the coexistence between Jews and Christians above all from the economic perspective of the State, perhaps taking into account the fact that, in other localities under Florentine rule, the *Monte* and the Jewish banks had coexisted for decades. There were many who were contrary «per timore di offendere Dio» («because of their fear of God»), and to reassure them, in July 1498, in the middle of the consultations, the ambassador to Rome Francesco Gualtierotti was asked to obtain the Pope's blessing on the reopening of the discussions.

In July 1499 the economic crisis of the State continued and Giorgio Piaccio da Cremona and Michele di Scipione da Piacenza placed before the *Signoria* their project to falsely accuse the Jews in order to raise 200,000 ducats: this literal fraud, our documents tell us, had already been attempted by the same two five years earlier, but in that case Piero de' Medici and others linked to him had warned the Jews, foiling the plan.¹⁸

The return of the Medici guaranteed the Jews the possibility of returning to their activity: we will not consider, for brevity's sake, which and how many of the prestigious families of bankers returned to Florence to do business, but it is important to underline that with the second expulsion in 1527 one of the first measures adopted was a prohibition on Jewish loaning for «la salute dell'anima e l'ordine del bene vivere» («for the health of souls and the common good»). It appears clear that the association Medici-Jews was by now perceived by all as too strong to be severed, as further demonstrated by the authorisation to stay granted by the former to the latter after they had returned within the city walls.¹⁹

4. Savonarola

For Savonarola, the institution of the *Monte di Pietà* was a fundamental moment in the reform of Florence. In view of this it is not surprising that he, without ceasing to condemn usury, had, in his Sermon on Amos (*Predica sopra Amos*) of 8 March 1496, justified the reception on the part of the *Monte* of a sort of interest «per la fatica dei ministri» («for the labour of ministers»), contradicting his previous positions and, more generally, the beliefs of the Dominicans. It must be highlighted, for what concerns us here, how in his preaching there appeared no *a priori* judgements against the Jews, nor references to their activity aimed at despoiling the citizenship, and that no hint can be traced in it that the Jews should not “in principle” live amongst Christians. In the thought of Savonarola there seems rather to be a division between the figure of the usurer and the figure of the Jew as such, a distinction which allowed him, amongst other things, to exemplify in his writings the election of the people of Florence through the election of the Jews.

Given the Thomist pragmatism which seems to have inspired the political actions of Savonarola, the plea addressed to the city to expel the Jews from “your land” («levar via e' Giudei dalla tua terra») in 1496 was motivated, firstly, by the steadfast desire to eliminate the terrible sin of usury, and secondly, it may be surmised, by the desire to create a real and definitive rupture with the previous politics of the Medici, as well as to put into effect a last attempt to maintain unity in his movement by pleasing the more extremist groups.²⁰

As proof to the lack of anti-Jewish prejudice *tout court* in the thought of Fra' Girolamo, I conducted myself a linguistic research on the *Lettere* (1475-1497), the *Prediche sui Salmi e su Aggeo* (November-December 1494), the *Prediche su Amos e Zaccaria, sui Salmi di David e sui Vangeli* (Lent 1495), *Il Trionfo della Croce* and *Del reggimento degli Stati*. Synthesising, one can affirm that the term «ebreo» is used in both a negative sense and, sometimes, a positive one (for example, «ebrea santissima»,

¹⁸ CASSUTO, *Gli ebrei a Firenze*, pp. 381-382.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 383-384.

²⁰ This aspect is particularly pointed out in RIVIERE, *Les juifs florentins*, p. 19. About Savonarola's pragmatic thought see also D. WEINSTEIN, *Savonarola and Florence. Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ 1970.

sacred Jewish woman, used in the letter written to his mother from Florence in 1485),²¹ whereas the term «giudeo» is used in a negative sense, if referred to the usurers or to those, blind («ciechi») and lame («zoppi»), who haven't recognised the truth, or with a neutral connotation when it refers to characters and episodes in the Scriptures. In *Il Trionfo della Croce* Savonarola affirms, for example, that Jesus of Nazareth is «nato de' Giudei» («born of Jews») and, while he does not deny that the Jews crucified Christ and speaks of Jewish treachery, he does so using the term “treachery” with a connotation of unbelief and stubbornness rather than wickedness.²²

5. *Domenico Cecchi: other orientations within the Savonarolian movement*

«Si mandino via e' giudei [...] in però e sono e inimici di Cristo e di noi christiani [...] non stieno qui a popare el sangue de' cristiani [...] se Dio ci dà delle traverse e ne son chausa loro, tanti sono e pechati chommessi mediante e' loro stare tra christiani» («The Jews should be sent away [...] they are the enemies of Christ and of us Christians [...] they shouldn't stay here and suck the blood of us Christians [...] if God gives us problems is because of them and the many sins committed by them living next to Christians»). These statements, contained within the *Nota de' giudei* of the *Riforma sancta e pretiosa* (1497) of Domenico di Ruberto Cecchi, show with great clarity the strong difference between the positions of the former (and the aforementioned extremist currents in the movement) and those of Savonarola. The ideas of Ruberto Cecchi were close to the opinions of those who had wanted to insert in the foundational deliberation of the *Monte di Pietà* of 1495 a reference «alla perfida et di Dio inimica secta ebraica» («evil sect of God's enemies»), or those who had felt the need, in 1494, to reprint in Florence the *Tavola della salute* of Marco di Montegallo (which appeared for the first time in Venice in 1486) which denounced through a calculation the hyperbolic profits of the Jewish bankers.

6. *Bernardino da Feltre: the weight on public opinion of a crucial figure*

Bernardino da Feltre preached various times in Florence from the beginning of the fifteenth century and his work, tirelessly hostile towards the Jews and in favour of the *Monte di Pietà*, should not be remembered only for the episode of the assault of the population against the Jewish banks in 1488: in fact, Bernardino – friend of Bishop Hinderbach and present in Trent during Lent of 1475 – may have been one of the intermediaries for the arrival in Florence of the news of the court case against the local Jews for the supposed ritual murder of the little boy Simonino.²³

It should be noted that Bernardino was particularly involved in the anti-Jewish message spread by the trial of Trento, also due to a singular coincidence: according to his biographer Guslino, almost simultaneously with the outbreak of the case, in one of his sermons the preacher had prophesied that «non passerebbe l'anno, nè forse anco venirà la Pasqua, che il Signor Iddio mostrerà alcun segno dell'opere non passerebbe l'anno, nè forse anco venirà la Pasqua, che il Signor Iddio mostrerà alcun segno dell'opere triste ch'essi hebrei, ch'è eran già quasi divenuti compadri et fratelli d'essi christiani, di

²¹ The letter says: «Vorria che tanto fosse la vostra fede, che senza lacrime li potissi vedere morire e essere martirizzati, come vide quella ebrea santissima, denanzi a la quale forno morti e cruciati sette figlioli santi, che mai non pianse, anzi li confortava a la morte» («I wish your faith were strong enough to let you, dry-eyed, watch them die and be martyred, as that holiest Jewish mother did, who saw her seven saintly children being murdered and crucified, but never shed a tear, and comforted them instead»). Savonarola refers to Maccabees, II, 7, 1-37.

²² On this specific meaning of *perfidia*, typically medieval, see W.P. ECKERT, *Motivi superstiziosi nel processo agli ebrei a Trento*, in I. ROGGER, M. BELLABARBA (eds), *Il principe vescovo Johannes Hinderbach (1465-1486) fra tardo Medioevo e Umanesimo*, EDB, Bologna 1992, p. 387.

²³ On the involvement of Bernardino da Feltre in the trial, and his friendship with Johannes Hinderbach, see M. MELCHIORRE, *A un cenno del suo dito. Fra Bernardino da Feltre (1439-1494) e gli ebrei*, Unicopli, Milano 2012 pp. 166-172.

che ne riportavan essi gran biasmo» («in less than a year, even before Easter, God will give some signs of the wickedness of the Jews, who had become like companions and brothers of the Christians, a blame-worthy fact»²⁴).

As in many other areas of the peninsula, the echo of the whole affair arrived here, too: it is not coincidental, in fact, that in 1482, when the Florentine banker Abramo di Isacco da Fano invented from thin air a dispute between himself, a rabbi and a preacher, he added amongst the conclusions that preachers – treacherously – affirm that the Jews kill Christian boys and drink their blood.²⁵ The influence that Bernardino had on various segments of the population was undeniable: following the already mentioned events of 1488, in 1493 the *Otto di Guardia* and *Balia* expressed genuine fear that with a simple hand gesture («a un cenno del suo dito»)²⁶ the population would revolt and, warning of the risk of an epidemic, they prohibited public meetings during the Holy Week, blocking all the preachers present. It is interesting to note that, according to what can be read in the *Storia* of Parenti, Bernardino da Feltre was able to preach anyway during the month of May of that year, but only after promising not to mention the Jews or the *Monte di Pietà*.²⁷ After all, Florence was not the only city to prove particularly responsive to the warnings of Bernardino: suffice it to note that in 1491 his preaching brought about the composition on the part of Giovanni Barozzi of *Mons Euganeus*, a short poem which, while promoting the *Monte di Pietà*, did not hesitate to affirm that the Jewish usurer should suffer and die.²⁸ But, in conclusion, what was the image of the Jew that emerged from the preaching of Bernardino da Feltre? One thing is certain: it was not a univocal figure. Bernardino, in fact, distinguished between the Jews of the Old Testament, like Abraham and Moses, certainly destined to hell, but essentially innocent, and the indistinct Jewish riffraff living after the coming of Christ.²⁹

7. Another important figure: Michele Carcano

Michele Carcano, who preached in Santa Croce between 1461-1462 and in 1466, compared the Jews to the heretics from whom San Zanobi had defended Christians in Florence, and, having been charged by the Pope to promote a crusade against the Turks, he asserted that they were kept in slavery and were hated even by the Moors. While expressing himself in favour of the institution of the *Monte di Pietà*, he did not hesitate to hold that stipulating *Condotte* with the Jews was a mortal sin, worthy of excommunication, and that the Church had the right to castigate the Jews, even with physical punishment, denying that, unlike Christian citizens, they were subject to Roman law. Furthermore, it cannot be excluded that Carcano was in fact the unidentified *osservante* Milanese friar who preached in Florence in 1458, inciting the sacking of Jewish houses and being therefore expelled. We know for certain that the Tuscan city saw him opposing the Augustinians of Santo Spirito in a controversy which, initiated in 1459

²⁴ See M.G. MUZZARELLI, *Monti di Pietà e banchi ebraici nella predicazione osservante: il caso di Bernardino da Feltre*, «Studi Francescani» 110 (2013), pp. 327-343, p. 335; EAD., *Bernardino da Feltre e il “caso” di Simonino da Trento. Un’antica leggenda, profezie che si avverano, masse emotivamente coinvolte: cronache dal XV secolo*, in D. PRIMERANO, D. CATTOI, L. LIANDRU, V. PERINI (eds), *L’invenzione del colpevole. Il “caso” di Simonino da Trento dalla propaganda alla storia*, Temi, Trento 2019, pp. 103-113.

²⁵ Archivio di Stato di Firenze, *Otto di Guardia e Balia della Repubblica*, n. 61 (1482), c. 34r. We have to remember that the trial was well known in all the Peninsula, not only for the seriousness of the accusations, but also for a *querelle* started by Giovanni Battista dei Giudici: see D. QUAGLIONI, *Propaganda antiebraica e polemiche di Curia*, in M. MIGLIO, F. NIUTTA, D. QUAGLIONI, C. RANIERI (eds), *Un pontificato ed una città. Sisto IV (1471-1484)*, Scuola Vaticana di Paleografia, Roma 1986, pp. 243-266; ID. (ed.), *Apologia Iudaeorum. Invectiva contra Platinam*, Roma nel Rinascimento, Roma 1987.

²⁶ MELCHIORRE, *A un cenno del suo dito*, p. 219.

²⁷ PARENTI, *Storia fiorentina*, p. 49.

²⁸ V. MENEGHIN (ed.), *Il “Mons Euganeus” di Giovanni Barozzi: poemetto sull’erezione del Monte di Pietà a Padova (1491)*, Istituto per la storia ecclesiastica padovana, Padova 1969.

²⁹ MELCHIORRE, *A un cenno del suo dito*, pp. 157-166.

by their accepting funds from a tax imposed on the Jews in order to finance their church, continued for several years in the eyes of the public opinion. The long controversy, which saw the Augustinians accuse of cruelty Christians who expelled Jews, ended only in 1469 with the admission, whether spontaneous or not, on the part of the observant friar that the coexistence of Jews and Christians should be permitted.³⁰

A strenuous supporter of the cult of Simonino da Trento, which he strove to spread after the specific solicitation of Johannes Hinderbach, Michele Carcano was a friend of Bernardino da Feltre, whom he met on various occasions, namely in 1477 in Venice, where, having only recently dealt with the events of Trent, Carcano handed over to him the manuscripts of the sermons he was preaching.³¹

8. *The Jew and the Sacra Rappresentazione*

Beyond preaching and public disputes, which as we saw multiplied in Italy during the fifteenth century, one of the moments in which the idea that people had of the Jews was made clear to all was during the *Sacra Rappresentazione*, which reached in Florence its highest level of expressiveness and pervasiveness.³² It must also be specified that a univocal way of representing the Jews does not emerge from it for the period we are dealing with. On the contrary, various tendencies, even opposed to each other, coexist or alternate in close connection with the contemporary political climate and the important events the city was involved in: thus, the Jews are depicted, alternately, as faithful citizens, *convertendi*, corruptors of the powerful, enemies of the true faith, or as a troublesome presence which needs to be removed.³³ Let us examine a few examples.

The echoes of the debates between those in favour of, and those contrary to the renewal of the loaning *Condotta* of 1469-1471, as well as between Franciscans and Dominicans on the legitimacy of a form of interest in favour of a possible *Monte di Pietà* – which was then in the course of being founded – were still in the air when a Florentine company brought to stage in Rome, for the wedding of Catherine of Aragon, the *Rappresentazione d'uno miracolo del Corpo di Cristo* (1473) (see Plate 3).³⁴ Centred on the “Eucharistic miracle of Paris”, already known to the Florentine population thanks to the *Nuova Cronica* of Giovanni Villani, the spectacle represented the «peccato stolto» («foolish sin») of the profanation of the host, often chiding the Jews, «ribaldi nimici di Cristo» («Christ’s villainous enemies»), with the epithet of «cani» («dogs»). The great arrogance and hatred of the Jewish lender towards the world as God’s creation, and the Christians clearly appear from exclamations such as «S’ella l’arrecà [l’ostia], con questa coltella /poi di forarlo non sarò contento, / e proprio l’arderò colle mie mani / in dispetto del mondo e de’ Cristiani» («if she brings me [the Host], not only will I stab it with a knife, but I will burn it with my own hands, in contempt of the world and every Christian»).³⁵ It is no coincidence that the pro-

³⁰ On Carcano’s Florentine preaching and on the controversy with the Augustinians of Santo Spirito see R.M. DESSÌ, *Usura, Caritas e Monti di Pietà. Le prediche antiusuarie e antiebraiche di Marco da Bologna e Michele Carcano*, in *I frati osservanti e la società in Italia nel secolo XV*, CISAM, Spoleto 2013, pp. 189-200. We also have to remember that in 1461 Marco da Bologna preached in Florence, saying that the Talmud itself forbids usury: he refers to the Jews as heretics and profaners, thus showing his partial closeness to Duns Scotus’ positions, which did not allow coexistence.

³¹ MELCHIORRE, *A un cenno del suo dito*, p. 174.

³² The *Sacre Rappresentazioni*, as is well known, had pedagogic functions. P. VENTRONE, *Politica e attualità nella sacra rappresentazione fiorentina del quattrocento*, «Annali di Storia moderna e contemporanea» 14 (2008), pp. 319-348.

³³ P. DELCORNO, *The Roles of Jews in the Florentine Sacre Rappresentazioni. Loyal Citizens, People to be Converted, Enemies of the Faith*, in J. ADAMS, J. HANSKA (eds), *Preaching on the Jews, for the Jews, and by the Jews*, Routledge, New York 2015, pp. 253-281.

³⁴ See *ibid.* See also E. GIACCHERINI, *L’“Ebreo” nella letteratura inglese medievale*, Pisa University Press, Pisa 2016, pp. 79-123, 130-131.

³⁵ N. NEWBIGIN, *Dieci sacre rappresentazioni inedite fra Quattro e Cinquecento*, «Letteratura italiana antica» 10 (2009), pp. 21-397, p. 83.

tagonist is called *Manuello* and also that a certain *Manovellino* is also mentioned: these names must have been very familiar in Florence, where during this period one of the most important and richest bankers was Emanuele da Camerino, also called Manuellino.³⁶

Furthermore, the image of the Jews as faithful and loyal towards power (differently from that of its political opponents) proposed by the *Rappresentazione della Regina Ester* (1478)³⁷ seems to have been influenced by the Pazzi conspiracy: the close connection of the Medici with the Jewish presence, often remarked on by historians, here finds an explicit affirmation. The contrast between the bad behaviour of Amman, who, with his slanders, harms the State and the Jews, faithful and useful to the public good, is reflected in the contrast between Amman's words «Signore, io ho nel tuo regno trovato / un popol maladetto e micidiale, / nimico sempre e ribello al tuo stato, / e ogni loro studio e di far male. / E' fu già di Giudea prigion menato / e fa gran danno al regno» («My Lord, I have found in your Kingdom a damned and deadly people, enemy and rebellious, always intent on doing evil. / Those people are prisoners from Judea and they damage the Kingdom») Assuero's good minister's words «[Amman] ha messo il regno in gran confusione, / e ha data in tuo nome una sentenza / che morta sia l'ebraica nazione / contro l'onore e util del tuo stato, / che inver quel e pur popol costumato» («[Amman] makes trouble in the Kingdom / and sentenced the Jewish nation to death in your name / against your honor and endangering the State, / because Jews are in fact good people»)³⁸.

Between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, at the height of the debate on the banks, on the *Monte di Pietà* and during the height of the Savonarolian experience, the *Storie della vera Croce* (a legendary cycle, often characterized by a strong anti-Jewish bias, created after the Edict of Milan of 313)³⁹ had a great success in Florence. In the *Sacre Rappresentazioni* the traditionally negative representations of the Jews were again accentuated: they are presented as irreducibly greedy and in need of conversion (*Festa di Agnolo hebreo che si baptezò per miracolo di nostra Donna*, composed between 1488 and 1496, and the *Rappresentazione di due hebrei che si convertirono*, 1495),⁴⁰ as astute corruptors of the powerful (*Rappresentazione di due hebrei che si convertirono*, 1495) and, after 1497, as a bothersome entity to be expelled like the "obsolete" Piagnoni (*Rappresentazione del figliuol prodigo* of Castellani, 1497).⁴¹ Following the opening of the Monte di Pietà, furthermore, what was highlighted, beyond the already underlined necessity of conversion, were the comical aspects of the Jewish character, which inspired the *giudiate*: one gets the impression that, once the objective has been reached, the tension diminishes and that, being no longer indispensable morally to discredit the loaner, it is sufficient to ridicule those who are different.

A last demonstration of the strict correspondence between the oscillations in the judgements expressed in the *Sacre Rappresentazioni* and the political climate can be seen in the *Devota Rappresentazione di Judit ebrea* (1519):⁴² at the height of the return of the Medici (with the consequent reopening of the banks) there is even a reevaluation of Old Testament Judaism, now chronologically contextualized

³⁶ See M. TONIAZZI, *I da Camerino: una famiglia ebraica italiana fra Trecento e cinquecento*, Palumbi, Ascoli Piceno 2015, pp. 131-138. Emanuele da Camerino was so famous that he was cited also in the *Festa di Agnolo hebreo che si baptezò per miracolo di nostra Donna*: here we can find the name *Manovellino*, and a reference to the assault at the Emanuele's bank in 1488 (see also CASSUTO, *Gli ebrei a Firenze*, p. 60).

³⁷ DELCORNO, *The Roles of Jews*, pp. 253-281.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

³⁹ See G. CICALI, *L'inventio crucis nel teatro rinascimentale fiorentino. Una leggenda tra spettacolo, antisemitismo e propaganda*, Società editrice fiorentina, Firenze 2012.

⁴⁰ P. DELCORNO, *Corruzione e conversione in una sacra rappresentazione fiorentina: la rappresentazione di dua hebrei che si convertirono (c. 1495)*, «Cheiron» 57-58 (2012), pp. 273-310 and P. VENTRONE, *La sacra rappresentazione fiorentina, ovvero la predicazione in forma di teatro*, in G. AUZZAS, G. BAFFETTI, C. DELCORNO (eds), *Letteratura in forma di sermone. I rapporti tra predicazione e letteratura nei secoli XIII-XVI*, Bologna, 15-17 novembre 2001: Atti del convegno, Olschki, Firenze 2003, pp. 255-280.

⁴¹ VENTRONE, *Politica e attualità*, pp. 319-348.

⁴² NEWBIGIN, *Dieci sacre rappresentazioni inedite*, pp. 21-397.

and consequently pointed out as the only true faith of its time. In this perspective, the protagonist, who repeatedly raises praise to the Lord with the language of a pious woman, is no longer outlined as a treacherous enemy: the typical Jewish shrewdness, devoted to evil, now becomes the intelligence and the shrewdness of a «*donna beata, dal Signore eletta*» («blessed woman, elected by God»).⁴³

9. Books and literary references

The public dimension of anti-Judaism, expressed at least by some of the *Sacre Rappresentazioni*, was not the only way to influence the thought of the Florentine populace. It is, therefore, useful to re-search the presence about the mid-fifteenth century of expressly anti-Jewish books not only in convent libraries, but also in private collections. In this way we can discover that before the significant and well known Florentine edition of the *Tavola della salute* of Marco da Montegallo in 1494,⁴⁴ the inventories of the library of Santa Maria Novella of 1479 and 1489 enumerate the possession of a *Victoria contra perfidiam iudaycam* of Porchetto de' Salvatici,⁴⁵ or a *Petrus Alphonsus contra perfidiam iudaycam et postilla Nicholai de Lira super epistolam ad hebreos*, and of a *Capistrum Judeorum* (identifiable with the *Pugio Fidei* of Ramon Martí).⁴⁶ Particularly interesting is the use of the word *perfidiam*, absent in the original titles of the works of Porchetto (*Victoria Porcheti adversus impios Hebreos*) and Petrus Alphonsi (*Dialogus contra iudeos*), but perhaps recurrent in the mind of the compilers after the circulation and success in Italy, starting from the 1430s, of *Contra Judeorum perfidiam et Talmuth* by Girolamo da Santa Fè.⁴⁷

As we have underlined, even secular libraries contained anti-Jewish texts: one can mention the presence of an unidentified *Contro e giudei bestie* annotated in the inventory of a certain Spinello di Alemanno di Luca Castellani, redacted by the *Ufficiali dei Pupilli* in 1479.⁴⁸

Again in the first half of the sixteenth century in the inventory of the personal books of Lorenzo del Forbiciato, canon of the basilica of San Lorenzo in Florence (d. 1527), there was present a copy in *quarto folio* of *Contra iudeos* by Alessandro Nievo.⁴⁹

From the point of view of literary references, it is not possible here to go into great detail, let alone to be exhaustive, but it may be noted that, before the study and the reuse of Hebrew and of Jewish culture by humanists, the “everyday” Jew, perhaps a usurer, did not fail to appear with his mottos and negative stereotypes in vernacular poetry. One can think of Burchiello, who, on the one hand, in his sonnets of 1449 speaks of «*ebrei spiriti perversi*» («Jews with pervert souls»),⁵⁰ while, on the other hand, dedicates an entire composition, *Qui non bisogna or più banchi d'ebrei* to the problem of illegal profits on the part of Christians.⁵¹ Moreover, at *facezia* no. 50 of the *Motti e facezie del piovano Arlotto* dating to 1478, a traveller, having been mocked by his companions who have hidden faeces in his boots, is mistaken for a Jew because of his «*tristo isguardo*» («sad face») and bad smell. Even in the humour,

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 389.

⁴⁴ Published for the first time in Venice in 1486, it denounced, through a pretentious calculation, the hyperbolic earnings of Jewish bankers, and, clearly, had now been reissued in support of the opening of the *Monte*.

⁴⁵ G. POMARO, *Censimenti dei manoscritti della biblioteca di santa Maria Novella, Parte II: secolo XV-XVI*, «*Memorie domenicane*» n.s. 13 (1982), p. 337, no. 683. This book is present in the inventory of 1489 as well.

⁴⁶ S. ORLANDI, *La biblioteca di S. Maria Novella in Firenze dal sec. XIV al sec. XIX*, Rosario, Firenze 1952, pp. 28, 31, 64.

⁴⁷ We know for sure that in Florence the *Contra Judeorum perfidiam et Talmuth*, connected to the dispute of Tortosa (1413-14), was known at least to Giannozzo Manetti. See FIORAVANTI, *Polemiche antigiudaiche*, p. 23.

⁴⁸ A. VERDE, *Libri tra le pareti domestiche. Una Necessaria Appendice a “Lo Studio Fiorentino 1473-1503”*, «*Memorie domenicane Nuova Serie*» 18 (1987), p. 79.

⁴⁹ S. CAROTI, *I libri di un copista del Poliziano: Lorenzo del Forbiciato*, «*La Bibliofilia*» 81 (1979), p. 221.

⁵⁰ Sonnet 37.

⁵¹ Sonnet 308.

certainly less heavy, of the *Detti piacevoli*, attributed to Poliziano and dating back to the middle of the fifteenth century, one can find at least one negative judgment, if saying no. 5 is taken into account in which it is written that: «il medesimo [that is the Gonfaloniere di Giustizia Bernardo Gherardi] a Papa Pio [III] che voleva fare il nipote arcivescovo di Firenze et allegava, che a Roma era stato vescovo San Piero, il quale era forestieri et ebreo, rispose: E però vi fu egli crucifisso» («The same [Gonfaloniere di Giustizia Bernardo Gherardi] speaking to Pope Pius [III], who wanted to make his nephew archbishop of Florence and held that Saint Peter, who was both a foreigner and a Jew, had been Bishop of Rome, answered: And yet there he was crucified»).

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, right in the midst of the closure of the Florentine banks, the Jews were, furthermore, amongst the protagonists of the *Canti* by Giovanbattista dell’Ottonaio, where, in a typical carnivalesque reversal, they would give advice to Christians about loans on pawn now prohibited to them (*Canzona de’ Giudei*), and exalted the beauty and security of life within the walls of Florence after their conversion (*Canzona de’ Giudei battezzati*).⁵²

Finally, an interesting way of understanding the perception of the Jewish presence is from a particular kind of literary production: the *libro di ricordanze* (memoirs). The one speaking is the canon Marco di Matteo Strozzi, who in *Vita scritta da me stesso*⁵³ talks about the following: for over twenty years (we are in 1494) the Jews lived in his neighbourhood, *San Miniato tra le torri*, but now this has become unsustainable because they had transferred the synagogue, which before was in an old house, into a «domum novam, altam et nobilem» («new, big, noble palace»). As if this were not enough, the new site was at a distance of less than six Florentine «braccia» (roughly 3.5 meters) from two churches and the value of the property was over four times the preceding one. On 20 August 1494⁵⁴ Strozzi went to the *Otto di Guardia* and *Balia* with a petition for the removal of the synagogue and the expulsion of the Jewish prostitute Sarina, accused of sleeping also with Christians.⁵⁵ Siding, together with others to the cry «exsurge Domine et iudicam causam tuam» («rise up Lord and judge your cause»), against the enemies of the faith and of Christ and in favour of the *Monte di Pietà*, they did not fail to turn to Rome and to Cardinal Giovanni de’ Medici, lamenting the presence in Florence of *fautores* of the Jews who were obstructing justice. Medici answered, through the *doctor* Giovan Battista de’ Bonciani,⁵⁶ that the secular authorities should be consulted considering that he was responsible for spiritual matters only. Strozzi, therefore, turned to the *Quattro Vessilliferi di Giustizia* (probably on 5 August 1495) and, finally, on 31 December 1495 he was able to celebrate the expulsion of the Jews and the creation of the *Otto Ufficiali del Monte*.

An important aspect of the idea of coexistence entertained by some citizens emerges from the Florentine account: it was tolerable as long as the Jews maintained a “low profile”, as long as they didn’t show off their economic prosperity, and above all, as long as their dissimilar religion was not overly evident. The position of Cardinal Medici was profoundly different and clearly shows that he did not see any problem or spiritual/moral threat in the closeness of Christians and Jews.

10. The Luccan case

As a demonstration of how the Florentine debate was inserted into a more general need to “rethink” the coexistence between Christians and Jews, it is also interesting to analyse what was happening in Lucca in the same period. Here the *Monte di Pietà* and the lending bank of Davide di Dattilo da Tivoli had

⁵² C. SINGLETON, *Canti Carnascialeschi del Rinascimento*, Laterza, Bari 1936, pp. 293-295.

⁵³ Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Carte Stroziane, Serie III, c. 48r/v.

⁵⁴ Strozzi underlines, perhaps not surprisingly, that it was St. Bernard’s day: as we know, Bernardino of Siena and Bernardino of Feltre were two of the most popular anti-Jewish preachers.

⁵⁵ She probably was the prostitute Sara, studied by Michele Luzzati in his *Lo scudo della giustizia dei “gentili”*. *Nascite illegittime e prostituzione nel mondo ebraico toscano del Quattrocento*, «Quaderni storici» 39 (2004), pp. 195-216.

⁵⁶ Bishop of Caserta in 1513.

both coexisted since 1489, but in 1493 Fra' (Friar) Timoteo began preaching violently against usury and the Jews, calling for their immediate expulsion. The success of the friar within the city, which created problems for public order and security, was favoured by the fact that he belonged to the higher echelons of Luccan society into which his family, the Medici di Moncingoli, were well established.

Here it must be remembered that Giovan Marco de' Medici, brother of Timoteo, not only was a member of the Citizens' Council, but that already between 1471 and 1472 he had been involved in a "fake" court case against a local banker, Guglielmo di Dattilo da Fano, who was accused of sodomy and then acquitted, then accused again, this time for blasphemy.⁵⁷

Therefore, while the preaching of Timoteo obtained the favour of the masses, on a political level it brought to light the Jewish problem and divided the Councils, and in the immediate future brought about a pretextual court case (begun with the charge of offence to the Christian religion and continued, seeing that no evidence was found, with one of tax fraud) against Davide di Dattilo da Tivoli.⁵⁸ The trial documents are very interesting because, through witnesses' depositions, they reveal what the opinion of the people was regarding the coexistence with the Jews, and how at least some Christians not only had no preconceived negative attitudes, but entertained friendly relations with them and declared that they were not sure whether the Jews were actually enemies of the faith.⁵⁹ The contemporary discussions in the *Colloqui cittadini*⁶⁰ in which Timoteo was aided by his brother Giovan Marco, and by those who considered themselves «coscientiati» («conscientious») signalled a certain hesitation in expelling the bankers. This was based in the first place on the practical difficulty of having to compensate for the economic contribution of the Jews, and their role in providing for the citizenry (the *Monte* having essentially failed), but also on the idea that the *Condotta*, and therefore the «fides» («trust») established with «cives» («citizens»), should be respected even when the counterpart were non-Christians.

Furthermore, the *consilia*⁶¹ asked of Giovanni Gigli, Felino Sandei, Giovan Battista Caccialupi and Giovanni Vannugli «super puncto an possit teneri ebreus fenerator in civitate» («on the matter if it is possible to have a Jewish moneylender into the city») were not unanimously negative: if the last three answered no, the first was of a different opinion. It must also be remembered that Sandei gave his *consilium* only after much insistence because he himself had admitted that it was a particularly difficult problem.

In this context Girolamo Savonarola was asked if it was right, in general, to allow Jews to live amongst Christians and he answered – in a letter – that it was not possible to prohibit the free movement of Jews in the cities on the presumption that they would all practice lending and usury, just as it was not right to forbid women from entering the city on the assumption that they would practice prostitution.

The choice to ask Savonarola should not surprise us: if on the one hand we must consider the great success in Lucca of Dominicans and *Gesuati*, who had solid connections with the convent of San Marco in Florence,⁶² on the other hand we must not overlook the great favour enjoyed by Savonarola's own preaching. The opinion on the possible coexistence between Christians and Jews seems to have been the only point of dissent between the preacher and Lucca.

In the end, the plan to expel the Jews (but, in practice, only the Jews involved in lending money) from Lucca was successful and, as we have hypothesised for Florence, it cannot be excluded that this act may have been thought of as a political gesture meant to signify a radical break with the old way of

⁵⁷ M. LUZZATI, "Satis est quod tecum dormivit". Vero, verosimile e falso nelle incriminazioni di ebrei: un caso di presunta sodomia (Lucca, 1471-1472), in M. PERANI (ed.), *Una manna buona per Mantova. Man tov le-Man Tovah. Studi in onore di Vittore Colorni per il suo 92° compleanno*, Giuntina, Firenze 2004, pp. 261-280.

⁵⁸ For the historical context, for the trial's development and, more in general, about Davide di Dattilo da Tivoli and his world, see C. COHEN SKALLI, M. LUZZATI, *Lucca 1493: un sequestro di lettere ebraiche. Edizione e commento storico*, Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale", Napoli 2014.

⁵⁹ Archivio di Stato di Lucca, Podestà di Lucca, Inquisizioni, no. 5362.

⁶⁰ Archivio di Stato di Lucca, Comune, Colloqui, nos 1, 2.

⁶¹ Archivio di Stato di Lucca, Offizio sopra la giurisdizione, no. 57, ins. 5.

⁶² See I. GAGLIARDI, *Li trofei della croce. L'esperienza gesuata e la società lucchese tra medioevo ed età moderna*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma 2005, pp. 77-89.

doing things and as a new course inspired by religious motivations. In Lucca, in fact, there was a connection between the clergy and the ruling class that was absent in Florence, where the Jewish question was reflected in the “conflict” between *popolani* and the Medici, especially after the death of Lorenzo. The attitude of the people of Lucca could be seen as one of the moments of political distancing between Lucca and Florence (after initial periods of interpenetration) and testifies to the desire of Lucca to remain an independent enclave within the Florentine State.

11. Conclusions

In the second half of the fifteenth century the attitude towards the Jews of both laypeople and the clergy seems to be still somewhat blurred: the population apparently remember that the Jews are enemies only in proximity of Christian festivities or when inflamed by sermons. At the same time, there are some who consider each Jew individually and not as a group which is “evil by birth”, given that no clear concept of “race and blood” yet exists (witness, for example, the testimonies of the court case in Lucca, the opinion of Savonarola and texts such as the *Rappresentazione di due hebrei*, in which the newly converted are called blessed brothers, «fratelli benedicti»).

A distinction is then made between the (known) individual and the group and, in the case of Jewish thinkers, between their importance as scholars and intellectuals and the fact of their being Jewish.⁶³ On the other hand it cannot be denied that certain expressions and attitudes, whose history is rooted in late antiquity, return now with renewed strength thanks to the preaching, the public discussions, and at least in part, the *Sacre Rappresentazioni*.

What had changed? Certainly, a different attitude towards the Jews corresponded to a period of political, economic, and religious change on a level that was not merely local. The new majesty of the Church, which propagandised itself as the sole guardian of the divine message, gained strength from a redefinition of its relationship with the Jewish tradition, seen once again, thus renewing the polemics from the patristic era, as a step in the history of salvation, now made obsolete by divine Providence.

Furthermore, regarding a greater influence of the Church on lay society, in my view the opening of the *Monte di Pietà* did not have only the declared goal of helping the poor and eliminating the terrible problem of usury, but also that of allowing the Church to gain control over the economy of the city. Another important role was undoubtedly played by the expulsion of the Jews from Spain: the large numbers that poured into Florence contributed to strengthening in the inhabitants (including their Jewish coreligionists) the sense of an “alien” presence within the city.

Ultimately, one cannot ignore the fact that the changing economic dimension of the national states as well as of the Italian different realities tended to make obsolete the Jewish activity of local loans as it had been practiced until then: evidence of this is the fact that by the middle of the sixteenth century only those families who reinvented themselves in commerce – often maintaining the network of personal ties and investments created in the past – were able to retain, at least to some extent, an influential role within local society.

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⁶³ See David Ruderman on Abraham Farissol: «In spite of the many indications of tolerance and mutual respect demonstrated to Farissol as a human being, as a Jew he was still invariably obliged to justify his own identity and to defend the basic tenets of his faith» (D. Ruderman, *The World of a Renaissance Jew. The Life and Thought of Abraham ben Mordecai Farissol*, Hebrew Union Press, Cincinnati 1981, p. 146).

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SUMMARY

The coexistence of Jews and Christians in Northern and Central Italy between the Medieval and Modern Eras was often peaceful, based more on habit and the running of everyday life than on religious principles. Florence and its State present a perfect case study because of its banking system and the deeply rooted Jewish presence.

In the second half of the fifteenth century, it can be seen that the perception of Jews is not clearly defined: people seem to remember that the Jews are enemies only in proximity to events linked to the Christian religion or preaching. At the same time, there are those who consider each Jew individually and not as a group which is “evil by birth” since there is not yet a clear concept of “race and blood”.

KEYWORDS: Jews and Society; Alterity; Florence and Lucca.