

**The Origin of the Italian Jewish Communities:  
the Onomastic as a Source for understanding the Formation of the  
Modern Italian Jewish Population and possibly the Internal Migrations**

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**Abstract**

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Italy has a very important role in Jewish history: located centrally on the Mediterranean sea Italy served as crossroad for Jewish families.

The Sixteenth century, a period of overturnings (*capovolgimenti*) for the Italian Jews, coincides broadly with the formation and the consolidation of the surnames. It simply happened that the urbanization and the closure in the Ghettos, the necessity to distinguish one family from the other led the use of this additional identification sign. This is one of the reasons why there is a large use of toponymic surnames in Italy.

The formation of the surnames is the starting point of this research and the terminus a quo for most genealogies.

**1. Select Sources.**

The research will start up from the inventory of around 1,000 collections relevant for Jews demography and genealogy. Some of the most relevant of these lists will be selected to be entered.

The criteria of the selection will consider the intersection of geographical and chronological relevance for the settlements and migrations of the Jews.

**2. A Database of Surnames - Etymologies**

I will build up a classification of the surnames and a database of etymology. The database will cross-reference the main publications on the matter (Colorni, Faiguenboim and Campagnano, Pisa, De Felice, etc.) and the findings on my own. Today the new

research tools give an extraordinary possibility to understand the denotation of unclear words and solve philologic mysteries. I myself could easily find the origin of Jewish surname that a few decades ago prominent scholars could not decipher. Among the surnames entered the toponymic will be marked.

### 3. Mapping

With the large percentage of toponymic surnames in Italy the sample is statistically meaningful. The lists of surnames by Jewish community will be integrated with a table of geo-coordinates. All this with the aim of built two kinds of maps:

a) **Static**. Namely display the origin of the Jewish population for a specific area (see examples of Roma and Siena);

b) **Dynamic maps**. This second maps will focus on pivotal areas and periods. That is period when presumably the Jewish population moved.

Pitigliano-Siena, Lazio-Roma, South Piedmont-Torino, Venezia-Padova or Verona and vice-versa, Lippiano-Firenze, etc.

### Project's importance and originality

Focusing on particular moments and places, this research aim to sketch the structure of the Italian Jewish population from an onomastic point of view.

While in the past some researchers focused on the "Jewish Italian surnames with foreign toponomastic origin" very few researched the Italian toponymics and their distribution.

The study of geographical distribution of the surnames and its visual display on maps may produce innovative results. Even the simplest and rough information can give good aftermath: frequency of surnames, languages in which the surnames are expressed (Spanish/Portuguese/Italian), geographic denotations, etc.

More deep analysis can be done such as:

- a) dispersion of surnames per area;
- b) onomastic distances between the former Italian states;
- c) space analysis among ghettos of the same state, etc.;
- d) distribution of places of origin (expressed by the toponymics) per place of residence;
- e) mapping the arrivals of the Portuguese Jews in Emilia, Veneto, Toscana or Liguria;

### Bibliography

Please see the attached file

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## **7. Academic qualifications and curriculum vitae of Nardo Bonomi**

I graduate at the "Cesare Alfieri" faculty in Firenze (Italy).

For twenty years I researched for commissioners on history of country houses, farms and family histories publishing on local journals.

In 2005-2006 I was contract researcher for the University of Venezia. My job was to research for sources for Jewish demography in Tuscany.

I am advisor for Jewishgen.org one of the most important portals on Jewish genealogy.

See: <http://www.jewishgen.org/InfoFiles/Italy/italian.htm>

## **8. Relevant publications in the last five years**

- **Un censimento degli ebrei di Siena**, "Materia Giudaica", XIV/1-2 (2009), pp. 485-492.

- **La storia familiare degli ebrei italiani: le migrazioni e l'Unit. d'Italia**, 7th International Colloquium of Genealogy: "National identity and migrations", 26th September 2011, Bologna.

- **Genealogia ebraica in Italia: Le fonti e gli strumenti**, III conferenza internazionale di Genealogia. I ricordi che ci uniscono, Aula Magna Liceo Muratori, Modena, 20th October 2012

- **Italian Jews: Sephardim, Ashkenazim and Frenchmen**, "Avotaynu. The International Review of Jewish Genealogy", vol. XXVIII, n. 3 Fall 2012.

- **Nomen Omen: The Names and Surnames of the Jews of Italy**, "Avotaynu. The International Review of Jewish Genealogy", vol. XXIX, n. 1 Spring 2013, p. 26-9.

- **Genealogia degli ebrei delle Comunit. Italiane**, Limmud Italia Day, Centro Giorgio la Pira, 1st June 2014, Firenze.

- **Le Comunit. ebraiche aperte in un mondo chiuso**, Limmud Italia Day, Eurocentres, Palazzo Guadagni, P.za S. Spirito, 31st May 2015, Firenze.