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An Alternative Path toward Emancipation: Jewish Merchants and Their Cross-Cultural Networks in the Eighteenth-Century Italian Ghettos*

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***In memory of Aron Leoni z"l,
A great scholar, a gentleman, and
a generous friend***

On January 10, 1774, two Jews - Moisè Beniamino Foa and Emanuele Sacerdoti - met somewhere in the ghetto of Modena – the capital city of the Este Duchy in Northern Italy - with a specific purpose. They founded the "Nuova Società Tipografica," a printing house for the publication of books in Greek and Hebrew for the Duchy and its university's faculties. It represented the ultimate confirmation of the leading role of the Foa and Sacerdoti families within Duchy Jewish society.¹ The two men were respectively the Duke's bookseller and banker. They were prominent merchants, lay leaders of the Jewish community, owners of synagogues, and mediators between the Jewish Community and the City, Church and Ducal authorities.²

In 1771 Foa had opened the first "public library" of the Duchy, together with two acculturated Jesuits.³ The printing house, the public library, and the book shop of Moisè Beniamino Foa functioned as cultural centers that circulated the main works of D'Holbach, Locke, Hobbes, La Mettrie, Boulanger, Voltaire, Rousseau, and L'*Encyclopédie* within both the Jewish and the non-Jewish societies of Modena. The decision to import into Modena the major works of the champions of the European Enlightenment can be considered a perfect expression

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¹ Archivio di Stato di Modena (ASMO), Camera Ducale, Biblioteca, Busta 7, and *ibidem*, Arti e Mestieri, Stampatori, buste 36a and 36b).

² On the history of Jews in Modena see Andrea Balletti, *Gli Ebrei e gli Estensi* (Reggio Emilia, 1913), Attilio Milano, *Storia degli ebrei in Italia* (Turin, 1963), 301-303, 343-345, Franco Bonilauri and Vincenza Maugeri eds., *Le Comunità ebraiche di Modena e Carpi*, (Florence, 1999), Federica Francesconi, *Jewish Families in Modena from the Renaissance to the Napoleonic Emancipation (1600-1810)* (diss., University of Haifa, 2007); Id., "Jewish Women in Eighteenth-Century Modena: Individual, Household and Collective Properties," in Jutta Sperling and Shona Wray eds., *Across the Religious Divide: Women's Properties in the Wider Mediterranean (ca. 1300-1800)* (New York, 2010), 191-207; Id. "From the Ghetto to Emancipation: the role of Moisè Formiggini," in Francesca Bregoli and Federica Francesconi, eds., *Tradition and Transformation in Eighteenth-Century Europe: Jewish Integration in Comparative Perspective*, *Jewish History* 24, 3-4 (2010), 330-353.

³ On the Ducal Library see Luigi Balsamo, "Editoria e biblioteche nella seconda metà del Settecento negli Stati Estensi," in Berengo and Romagnoli eds., *Reggio e i territori estensi*, vol. 2, 505-531; Id., "Gli ebrei nell'editoria in Italia nel '600 e '700," in *Italia Judaica III* (Rome, 1989), esp. 60-65; Giorgio Montecchi, *Aziende tipografiche, stampatori e librai a Modena dal Quattrocento al Settecento* (Modena, 1988), 123-140. See more in the following pages of this essay.

of the gradual and complex path toward modernity taken by the Modenese Jewish lay leaders in the late eighteenth century.⁴

If, as Kant pointed out, the eighteenth century was not an enlightened age, but an "age of enlightenment," it was in the same sense an "age of definition" for Italian Jewry, despite the scarce attention it has received from historians.⁵ During the eighteenth century, Modenese Jewish leadership's path was characterized by a commitment to local Jewish affairs and an active role in the struggle for the improvement of Jews' status, along with a vigorous involvement in the wider cultural and commercial affairs of the city, which itself lacked any real intelligentsia or ruling class.

By following merchants' commercial and cultural choices I would like to explore this pattern as something autonomous and original. At the same time, it will be considered in connection with its future *événement*—the coming of Napoleon to Italy, who promptly liberated the Italian ghettos. Moreover, by comparing Modena with the eighteenth-century Jewish merchant society of the city-port of Ancona (Central Italy), I will attempt to suggest a specific Italian gradual way to Jewish modernization in light of the close attention that recent scholarship has paid to diverse European "paths toward modernity." My approach includes a genealogical narrative that goes beyond the base of family, kin and ethnic relations to analyze more extended personal, cultural and business intra- and inter-group relations.⁶ I followed eighteenth-century Modenese and Anconitan Jews' vicissitudes analyzing corpus of archival sources that includes internal registers of Jewish communities, correspondences of Jewish, municipal, and ecclesiastical institutions, family records, private contracts (such as wills and dowries), records of rabbinical tribunals, Inquisitorial records, memoirs and correspondence among Jewish individuals from Italy, Western, and Eastern Europe.

The choice of Ancona is deliberated, determined by both similarities and differences. Ancona is one of the few cities in the Papal State (together with Rome and Avignon) from which the Jews were never expelled, a fact that in itself deserves further attention. Ancona has long been familiar to students of early modern Jewish history because of the infamous 1555 *auto-da-fè*, followed by the institution of the ghetto in 1556 and the immediate decadence of the Jewish community.⁷ It was specifically that the strong conversionary pressure enacted by the Papacy

⁴ On Moisè Beniamino Foa see Balletti, *Gli ebrei e gli Estensi*, 366-372. See four different and updated editions of *Catalogus Librorum qui Venales prostant Mutinae et Regii apud Mosem Beniaminum Foà Serenissimi Ducis Francisci III Bibliopolam* published in Modena respectively in the years 1770, 1775, 1780 and 1788, *ad vocem*.

⁵ For an overview, see Francesca Bregoli, "Jewish Modernity in Eighteenth-Century Italy. A Historiographical Survey" in *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook* 6 (2007), 67-78.

⁶ For a splendid study on Jews in the eighteenth-century based on cross-cultural commercial networks see Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers. The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early-Modern Period* (New Haven, 2010).

⁷ On the history of Jews in Ancona in the sixteenth century see the recent following contributions Ariel Toaff, "Nuova luce sui Marrani di Ancona (1556)," in *Studi sull'ebraismo italiano* (1974) 261-280; Marc Saperstein, "Martyrs, Merchants and Rabbis: Jewish Communal Conflict as Reflected in the Responsa on the Boycott of Ancona," *Jewish Social Studies* 43, 3/4 (1981) 215-228; Renata Segre, "Nuovi documenti sui marrani d'Ancona (1555-1559)," *Michael* 9 (1985) 130-233; Shlomo Simonsohn, "Marranos in Ancona under Papal Protection," *Michael* 9 (1985) 234-267; Benjamin Ravid, "A Tale of Three Cities and their 'Raison d'État': Ancona, Venice, Livorno, and the Competition for Jewish Merchants in the Sixteenth Century," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 6,2 (1991) 138-162; Bernard Dov Cooperman, "Portuguese 'conversos' in Ancona: Jewish Political Activity in Early Modern Italy," in *Iberia and Beyond* (1998) 297-352; Aron di Leone Leoni, "Alcuni esempi di quotidiana imprenditorialità tra Ferrara, Ancona e Venezia nel XVI secolo" *Zakhor* 4 (2000) 57-114; Viviana Bonazzoli, "Una identità ricostruita: i portoghesi ad Ancona

and its various practical and legal consequences constituted for Anconitan Jewry the major factor of differentiation vis-a-vis the States in Northern Italy, such as the Duchy of Modena.

Cultural historians have generally viewed the Italian Renaissance as one of the main anticipatory movements of the modern age in terms of Jewish acculturation and negotiation within the wider non-Jewish society. It is virtually assumed that the roots of modernity for Jews in Italy had already been laid down by the sixteenth century (if not earlier). Consequently, Italian Jewish acculturation between the early modern and modern age is often considered a *fait accompli* or is simply ignored.⁸ In so many areas, Jews, in fact, had always been virtually Italian (read: in language, dress, and outlook); indeed, in places like Rome, the community was ancient. Likewise, emancipation, too, is seen as something that would "come of its own," an advance that Jews so well acculturated could easily achieve once the old barriers to participation in civic society were removed, which is, of course, what happened under Napoleon.

Dealing with the newest historiography that has approached Jewish modernization, the variety of the Jewish experiences together with the political fragmentation of the States in the Italian peninsula does not allow for clear classifications.⁹ The new category of port Jews has been applied to understand better the dynamics that led to the integration through civil inclusion of Jewish merchants in the early modern period, concentrating mainly on Mediterranean and Atlantic ports, including Livorno and Trieste in Italy.¹⁰ The eighteenth-century Jewish merchant society of the free-port city of Ancona (mostly neglected by historians), with its networks in Salonica and Recife, but at the same time under the yoke of the Papal State, does not enter in this category and, rather, complicates the analytic historiographical picture.¹¹

dal 1530 al 1547," *Zakhor* 5 (2001-2002) 9-38 and Ead., *Una dinastia mercantile ebraica del secondo '600: i Costantini* (Trieste, 1998).

⁸ For an important exploration of the question see recently David Myers, "Introduction," in David Myers, et al. eds., *Acculturation and its Discontents. The Italian Jewish Experience between Exclusion and Inclusion* (Toronto, 2008), 3-15. For an important analysis of early modern patterns of modernization see Jay Berkovitz, *Rites and Passages: the Beginnings of Modern Jewish Culture in France, 1650-1860* (Philadelphia, 2004), esp. 35-58.

⁹ For a summary of the state of the field on Jewish modernization see Moshe Rosman, *How Jewish is Jewish History?* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 56-81, David Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry. A New Cultural History* (Princeton, 2010), pp. 207-226, Francesca Bregoli and Federica Francesconi "Introduction," in Bregoli and Francesconi, eds., *Tradition and Transformation*, 235-246.

¹⁰ Lois Dubin has defined participation in general civic councils and the possibility to vote –as in Mantua, Florence, Pisa, Livorno, and Trieste - as "civil inclusion" and a positive step along the path to emancipation: Lois Dubin, *The Port Jews of Habsburg Trieste: Absolutist Politics and Enlightenment Culture* (Stanford, 1999) and Id., "Subjects into Citizens. Jewish Autonomy and Inclusion in Early Modern Livorno and Trieste," in *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts* 5 (2006), 51-81. David Sorkin dealing with processes of integration and port-Jews as well has argued that "civil inclusion points to freedom from disabilities, or most disabilities, but not freedom for participation in politics or administration (that is, political inclusion)," David Sorkin, "Port Jews and Three Regions of Emancipation," in *Jewish Culture and History* 4,2 (2001), 31-46. For a reassessment of the categories of "civil inclusion" and "port Jews" taking into account the context of Livorno see the articles Francesca Bregoli, "Two Jews Walk into a Coffeehouse": The "Jewish Question," Utility, and Political Participation in Late Eighteenth-Century Livorno" and David Sorkin, "Beyond the East-West Divide: Rethinking the Narrative of the Jews' Political Status in Europe, 1600-1750" in Bregoli and Francesconi, eds., *Tradition and Transformation*, 309-329 and 247-256.

¹¹ For mentions of the participation of Anconitan Jews into international commercial networks see Anthony Molho, "Ebrei e marrani fra Italia e Oriente ottomano," in Corrado Vivanti, ed., *Gli Ebrei in Italia, II. Dall'emancipazione a oggi* (Turin, 1996), 1009-1043. On the eighteenth-century Jewish society of Ancona see Giuseppe Laras, "Una "sommossa" nel ghetto di Ancona sul finire del secolo XVIII," in Emanuele Artom, Luciano Caro, Sergio Sierra, eds., *Miscellanea di studi in onore di Dario Disegni* (Turin, 1969); Werther Angelini, "Tra cinquecento e tardo settecento: preparazione e maturità dell'attività mercantile degli ebrei ad Ancona," in Ariel Toaff and Simon Schwarfuchs, eds., *The Mediterranean and the Jews. Banking, Finance and International Trade (XVI-XVIII Centuries)* (Ramat-Gan,

Being this essay both a final report and a scholarly paper, it is organized in four sessions: 1) The Modenese Jewish Mercantile Society in the Eighteenth-Century; 2) Jewish Women in the ghetto of Modena; 3) Modenese Jews and their Meeting with Modernity; 4) Modenese Jews and Anconitan Jews: A Profitable Comparison. This structure allows both a broad exploration of genealogical sources and the insertion of the analyzed sources in a coherent historical narrative.

The Modenese Jewish Mercantile Society in the Eighteenth-Century

Sacerdoti, and Foa families, mentioned at the beginning, together with other merchants -- Modenas, Sanguinettis, Rovigos, Norsa, and Fanos-- formed and maintained their role as community leaders through business, international inter-familial alliances, culture and religion for more than two centuries.¹² Despite ghettoization, eighteenth-century Modenese Jewish leading families had developed a prominent, Italian merchant trading society -- oligarchic and male-centered--, with established commercial networks throughout the Italian peninsula. Modenese Jewish merchants were book dealers, silversmiths, printers, and silk weavers. Since the mid-eighteenth century all of the city's textile mills, which employed dozens of men and women, were owned by the Jewish merchant families, the Norsa, Usiglio, Rovigo, Sanguinetti, and Sacerdoti.¹³ These merchants avoided cultural and commercial stasis despite the weak political administration of the city and Duchy.¹⁴ The organization of the Este state was mostly feudal, with many privileged nobles or right-hand men of the Duchy in charge of administering and taxing a number of small agricultural communities.¹⁵

Modenese Jewish mercantile elites operated behind the scenes in the state's cultural and commercial life. While they participated fully in the economy, Ducal authorities kept their presence to a low profile: while Jews could work behind the scenes, they could not formally engage in civic affairs. This meant, for example, that Jews in the Este Duchy could not participate in the general councils of the city and did not have the possibility to vote, as in eighteenth-century Mantua, Livorno and Trieste. Jews had been ghettoized in many of the

1989), 11-38; Viviana Bonazzoli, "Sulla struttura familiare delle aziende ebraiche nella Ancona del '700," in Sergio Anselmi and Viviana Bonazzoli, *La presenza ebraica nelle Marche. Secoli XIII-XX* (Ancona, 1993), 139-154.

¹² Francesconi, *Jewish Families*. On the history of the Este Duchy see Luciano Chiappini *Gli Estensi* (Milan, 1967) and Lino Marini, *Lo Stato Estense*, in *I ducati padani, Trento e Trieste, Storia d'Italia*, ed. by Lino Maini, Giovanni Tocci, and Aldo Stella (Turin, 1979), vol. 17, 3-211. For an important study on the eighteenth and early-nineteenth Italian history see Stuart Woolf, "La storia politica e sociale," in *Dal primo Settecento all'Unità. Storia d'Italia*, vol. III, 5-228 (Turin, 1973).

¹³ Archivio Storico Comunale di Modena (hereafter, ASCMO), Statuti ed atti diversi delle corporazioni d'Arti e mestieri. Arte della Seta poi collegio sopra la nobile Arte della seta della città di Modena, XV; ASCMO, Camera segreta, Arte della Seta, Denunce dei mercanti, merciai, tentori, librai e tellari della città di Modena, n. 10; ASCMO, Camera Segreta, Arte della Seta, Registri del collegio 1755-1800; ASMO, Archivio per Materie, Arti e Mestieri, busta 34/b. For a useful and well researched overview on silk merchants and entrepreneurs in eighteenth-century Modena see Franco Gibellini, *Produzione e commercio della seta nel modenese nel secondo Settecento*, Tesi di Laurea, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Università degli Studi di Bologna, a. a. 1989-90. On the economy in the eighteenth-century Este Duchy, see Odoardo Rambaldi, "L'economia dei territori dei ducati estensi," in Marino Berengo and Sergio Romagnoli eds., *Reggio e i territori estensi dall'Antico regime all'età napoleonica* (Parma, 1980), vol. 1, 53-100.

¹⁴ Francesconi, *Jewish Families*, *passim*. For similarities and differences with the Christian world see David Warren Sabean and Simon Teuscher, "Kinship in Europe: A New Approach to Long Term Development", in David Warren Sabean, Simon Teuscher, and Jon Mathieur, eds., *Kinship in Europe: Approaches to Long-Term Development (1300-1900)*, (New York and Oxford, 2007), 1-32.

¹⁵ Marini, *Lo Stato Estense*, 100-114.

Duchy's cities and towns (such as Reggio Emilia, Scandiano, and Finale Emilia), but at the same time they held all of the State monopolies including those for brandy, glass, coral, diamonds, and even the Duke's library. Moreover, both major entrepreneurs and small traders could conduct their activities outside the ghetto, in the squares and streets of the city. Starting at least in 1622 they could belong to any guild (by paying a fee higher than that paid by non-Jews), and could even buy property, both in the city and its countryside. As leaders within the Modenese Jewish mercantile elite, the Rovigo, Formiggini, Sacerdoti, Norsa, Levi, and Usiglio had the responsibility of paying the annual Jewish taxes required by the Ducal Chamber. They maintained their role of communal leadership through business, international matrimonial and interfamilial alliances, and cultural and religious influence.¹⁶

The Rovigos' vicissitudes represent a perfect case of the Modenese Jewish mercantile society. The family's business had expanded via silk spinning and textile commerce in the Este Duchy and Italian peninsula, during the seventeenth century; and then by the acquisition of land in the eighteenth century.¹⁷ In 1693, Servadio Rovigo and his brothers (among them, Leone, Miriam's grandfather) declared a patrimony totaling 237,000 lira, the second highest within the Modenese ghetto after the Fano family (250,000 lira).¹⁸ In 1709 and 1711, Rovigos bought two huge farms in San Prospero, a small town near Modena. In 1754 these landed properties were totaled 19,500 and 16,400 lira, respectively.¹⁹

In addition, the Rovigo house had become one of the most interesting Jewish cultural and social centers within and outside of the Italian peninsula in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Thanks to the cultural activity of R. Abraham Rovigo (c. 1650-1713) -- one of the most celebrated kabbalists and protagonists of the messianic-heretical Sabbatean movement in Italy-- the Rovigo home was saturated with influences of Sabbateanism. Rovigo's early fervor endured even after Sabbetai Tzevi's conversion to Islam in 1666.²⁰ Within the limited ghetto space, a building with a modest façade hosted the family synagogue and the male confraternity *Hazot Laila* (midnight), which had been founded a few decades earlier by Abraham himself.²¹

¹⁶ In 1622, Jews were admitted into the Guilds of Silversmiths and Jewelers; Francesconi, *Jewish Families*, 133-34; Archivio Storico Comunale di Modena (ASCMO), Camera Segreta, XXI, Statuti delle Arti della città di Modena – Orefici, fascicoli nn. 582-592. On the admissions of Jews in the other guilds and their participation in the commercial life of the city see Francesconi, "Strategie di sopravvivenza di una minoranza in una capitale europea: Commercio, filantropia e cultura degli ebrei modenesi (secoli XVII–XVIII)," in Federica Francesconi and Luisa Levi D'Ancona, eds., *Vita e società ebraiche di Modena e Reggio Emilia durante l'età dei ghetti*, (Modena, 2007), 9–41, esp. 32-39.

¹⁷ Useful documentaion in preserved in ASMO, Archivio per Materie, Arti e Mestieri, Arte della Seta, busta 34/b. On Rovigo family, see Francesconi, "Strategie di sopravvivenza," 9–41.

¹⁸ These data have been calculated from sources located in ASMO, Archivio per Materie, Ebrei, busta n. 15, "Denunce dell'Arte dei Merciai ebrei aperte dal Magistrato al 6 febbraio 1693."

¹⁹ ASMO, Notarile, Fondo Nicolò Giannozzi, filza 5242, n. 1418, June 9, 1769. Miriam and Lazzaro sold to Giacinto Solieri two of their landed properties, located in San Prospero for 38,000 *lira*. Servadio and Leone and Raffaele and Lusto Rovigo (the future husband and the father of Miriam) were two couples of brothers.

²⁰ On the Sabbatean movement see Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi, the Mystical Messiah*, trans. by R. J. Zwi Werblowsky (Princeton, 1973). Specifically on Abraham Rovigo and his connection to Sabbateanism see Scholem, *The Dreams of Mordechai Ashkenazi, a Follower of Shabbetai Zevi* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1937); Isaiah Tishby, "R. Meir Rofe's Letters of 1675-80 to R. Abraham Rovigo," (Hebrew) *Sefunot*, 3-4 (1960), 84-90; Isaiah Sonne, "Visitors at the House of R. Abraham Rovigo," (Hebrew) *Sefunot*, 5 (1961), 275-95.

²¹ On Rovigo's house and the various activities there see also Francesconi, "Strategie di sopravvivenza," 24-26, 29-31.

In the mid-eighteenth century, the Modenese ghetto could boast nine synagogues, a renowned *yeshivah*, two schools, and twelve confraternities. The ghetto included two blocks; both overlooked a small square and faced two streets – *Contrada Coltellini* and *Contrada Blasia*. Every family had a place in the synagogue, according to the ritual they followed (Italian, Ashkenazi, and Sephardi).²² The private houses of prayer of the seventeenth century (which belonged to the Formiggini, Rovigo, Sanguinetti and Usiglio families) were open to friends and acquaintances of the owners. Facing the ghetto square was the Ashkenazi synagogue, founded by the German Society in 1646 in the home of Nacmano Nacmani. The Spanish synagogue was founded after 1638 and before the end of the century: the building is located in *Contrada Coltellini*.²³ The Formiggini synagogue, founded in c. 1650 and recognized as the "inalienable property" of the family, was situated on the fourth and highest floor of two connected apartments K 944 and K 945, which also faced the ghetto square.²⁴ The first of the relatively rare references in the Talmud and in more recent sources regarding synagogue architecture states that its position should be elevated because of the association between knowledge and ascent. On the same side, had been established the synagogues *Grande* and *Piccola* by different members of the family Modena, who settled in the city in the mid-15th century.²⁵

Always in *Contrada Coltellini*, one of the two main streets of the ghetto, was located the Spanish synagogue, whose edifice still displays its original function because of the adjoining small courtyard for the Jewish holyday of Sukkot and the doors of ancient shops inside it. The synagogue of the Sanguinetti family was founded on Contrada Blasia n. 6, on the block of the ghetto facing the main street of the city (named, the *Strada Maestra*). It had a school for the children of the ghetto and a ritual bath (*mikveh*) for women.²⁶ Usiglio's synagogue was established before the ghetto's foundation in the still existing Levi Palace at the corner between Piazza Mazzini and Via Emilia, at the end of *Contrada Blasia* (the other main street of the ghetto) at the end of the sixteenth century.²⁷

The confraternities (or *havuroth*)²⁸ were based on two main models of the sixteenth-century: some *Havuroth* such as *Rahamim* ('mercy') were charitable organizations, while other

²² Archivio della Comunità ebraica di Modena (ACEMO), busta 19 G, fascicolo 11; busta Estimo 17 E, Memoriali 1776-1777.

²³ ACEMO, buste 19 G, fascicolo 11; Istromenti e Testamenti 21 A, Memoriale del 1643; Estimo 17 E, Memoriali 1776-1777; Oratori (Sinagoga spagnola). ASMO, Ufficio centrale del Censo (1791-1803), n. 541; *ivi*, n. 141, 1805.

²⁴ ACEMO, buste 19 G, fasc. 11; Estimo 17 E, Memoriali 1776-1777; Oratori (Sinagoga Formiggini); Tempio Israelitico. ASMO, Ufficio centrale del Censo (1791-1803), n. 541; *ibidem*, n. 141, 1805. On Formiggini and their synagogue see in the next pages.

²⁵ On the "Sinagoga Grande" see ACEMO, 19 G, fascicolo 11; Estimo 17 E Memoriali 1776-1777; C 28, "Arredi e oggetti sacri". ASCMO, Atti amministrativi, anno 1869, Ornato, F. 746/1, n. 29, "Contrada Coltellini"; ASMO, Ufficio centrale del Censo (1791-1803), n. 541; *ivi*, Ufficio centrale del Censo (1805), n. 141. On the "Sinagoga Piccola" see ACEMO, buste 19 G, fascicolo 11; Estimo 17 E, Memoriali 1776-1777; Oratori. ASCMO, Filza Contratti 1903; Filza Blasia e Coltellini, fascicoli 2-4; ASMO, Ufficio centrale del Censo (1791-1803), n. 541; *ibidem*, n. 141, 1805.

²⁶ ACEMO, buste 19 G, fascicolo 11; Estimo 17 E, Memoriali 1776-1777; Oratori. ASCMO, Filza Contratti 1903; Filza Blasia e Coltellini, fascicoli 2-4; ASMO, Notarile, busta 1087, 1689, n. 58 (Testamento di Abram Modena); n. 45 (Testamento di Lelio Modena); *ivi*, Ufficio centrale del Censo (1791-1803), n. 541; *ivi*, n. 141, 1805.

²⁷ ACEMO, buste 19 G, fascicolo 11; Estimo 17 E, Memoriali 1776-1777; Oratori (Sinagoga Usiglio); Tempio Israelitico. ASMO, Ufficio centrale del Censo (1791-1803), n. 541; *ibidem*, n. 141, 1805. ASCMO, Ornato, fascicolo 425, 1924. Sui restauri del 1914 a Palazzo Levi si rimanda anche a G. Bertuzzi, *Trasformazioni edilizie*, cit., pp. 40-42.

²⁸ Along with the pre-ghetto hevrot *Ghemilut Hasadim* (1516), *Talmud Torah* (1594) and *Haverim Machshavim* (for the study of the *Kabbalah* and the recitation of poems 1614), were established *Kove'e Ittim* (those who establish the times [for the study of the Torah]) (1654), for the instruction of children and adults; *Ha-Mishmeret Ha-Boker ve Ha-Erev* for the study during the evening and night of Bible texts utilizing famous commentators such as Rashi; the *Misnaioth U-Mishmeret Ha-Kodesh* (1717) for the evening reading of the Mishnah; the *Hazot Iom* (1763) for the

confraternities such as *Hazot Laila* (midnight), focused on the study of religious texts, including kabbalistic literature, often during the night or at dawn. *Hazot Laila* was devoted to the regular recitation of a midnight rite (the *tikkun hazot*) mourning the Temple's destruction and praying for its return, a practice popularized by R. Isaac Luria (ARI) in the second half of the sixteenth century.²⁹ Abraham Rovigo's activities of prayer and study were combined with various forms of philanthropy. Scholars, emissaries from Eretz Yisrael, Sabbatean exponents, physicians and healers (one –a certain Judah from Lithuania– specialized in treating hysterical women) were frequently invited and funded by the Rovigos. In the late 1670s and early 1680s, for example, the presence of the *maggidim* (Jewish religious itinerant preachers) Ber Perlhefter and Mordecai of Eisenstadt as salaried teachers in the Rovigos' yeshivah was instrumental in shaping a new form of devotional religiosity in the Modenese ghetto which became influential far beyond the Duchy's boundaries.³⁰ In this way, Abraham Rovigo was able to combine his involvement in the Sabbatean movement with his philanthropic leanings.

Jewish Women in the ghetto of Modena

Wives, sisters and daughters of the above mentioned merchants appeared as ancillary elements of this oligarchic system. They were almost "silent" members of the Jewish community, instrumental mainly in forging important social and political alliances among the Italian Jewish merchant elite for the reallocation and transfer of estates. They did not take part in family business activities, and as widows they transferred control of their dowries to their sons. In sixteenth-century Modena, Jewish women from all of the social strata who inherited and freely disposed of property were considered unexceptional and unremarkable. But the well-to-do Jewish women of Modena receded even further from public life during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, while lower-class women remained active in society as simple workers (many were pedlars) and sometimes invested their own dowries as widows.³¹ They were the recipients of dowries and patrimonies that grew considerably over the eighteenth century. Often, however, they renounced their property in favor of their brothers and sons through the *donatio inter vivos* (an irrevocable gift), an institution with a halachic equivalent, the *mattanah gemurah*. Devora Levi Formiggini (1693–post-1777), the daughter and wife of the affluent silversmiths Benedetto Vita Levi and Laudadio Formiggini -- who joined the confraternity at its inception but declined to participate in some of the duties -- exemplifies the way women relinquished property over the course of their lives. Devora first renounced some of her property in 1718 in connection with her marriage contract. She gave up her rights to her paternal and maternal patrimonies by

evening reading and study of comments; *Hazot Laila* for the recitation of psalms at sunrise with duties of members to actively take part in it; the *Manhamadod* for the reading of Bible and Prophets; the *Kabbalat Shabbat* for the perform of special prayers, songs, psalms on Friday evening before the arrival of *Shabbat*; *Mesapperim Teillim* for the everyday perform of psalms and instruction of young people; *Malabish Harumim* (1716) to dress poor fathers of family and for the perform of psalms in the evening. Furthermore, during 18th century were established also the *Ashmoret Ha-Boker* (1700) for the distribution to the poor of clothes each Friday evening in order to honour the Shabbath; *Hevrat Rahamim* (1744), that was similar and unified to the *Ghemilut Hasadim* and that was founded 9 years earlier. Finally, *Pirkeh Shirah* (1750) for the performing of prayers, poems in Hebrew and psalms in the morning. See in addition Francesconi, "Fra 'sacro' e 'profano': spazi urbani e vita ebraica a Modena dal Rinascimento all'età moderna," *Studi della Deputazione di Storia Patria Modenese* 52 (2004): 119-45.

²⁹ On the history of *Hazot Laila* see Elliott Horowitz, "The Eve of Circumcision: A Chapter in the History of Jewish Nightlife," *Journal of Social History*, 23 (1989), 45–69 and Id., "Coffee, Coffeeshouses and the Nocturnal Rituals of Early Modern Jewry," *AJS Review* 14 (1989), 17–46.

³⁰ On the presence of Ber Perlhefter (d. after 1701) and Mordecai of Eisenstadt (1650–1729) at Rovigo's house along with other visitors see Sonne, "Visitors at the House."

³¹ See Federica Francesconi, "Jewish Women," 191-207.

accepting a dowry of 7,500 lira. When she was widowed in 1766, Devora ceded property a second time: She gave up her dotal and extradotal patrimony by making another *donatio inter vivos* in favor of her sons. In return she received an annuity from the estate of her deceased husband Laudadio (900 lira plus another monthly payment of 15 lira), together with food and accommodation for the remainder of her life in the house of her eldest child, Benedetto.³² A decade later, the octogenarian Devora faced the premature death of both her son Benedetto and his wife, Grazia Vita Levi (between 1776 and 1777). At that point, she transferred the guardianship of her five minor grandchildren to her oldest grandson, Moisé, a man who would later emerge as the leader of Italian Jews during the Napoleonic age.³³ Whether her decisions were made independently or not, Devora prevented financial trauma for her family by passing her dowry onto future generations. Her actions were typical of the majority of well-to-do Modenese Jewish women at the time.³⁴

A partial exception to this system was Miriam Rovigo (c. 1700–1778), the daughter of Lustro Rovigo who had married her uncle Raffaele Rovigo. In 1754, after the death of her husband Raffaele, her sons, Lazzaro and Leone, divided their properties. Miriam received her dotal and extradotal patrimony, which consisted of a spinning mill, three villas near Modena, a flat in the ghetto, and the spinning mill in the center of Modena. The real estate, together with livestock, facilities, machinery, seed, and credits, totaled 213,460 lira. The activities of the Rovigos included real estate, livestock, stamped leather, and a tannery in Modena, which was run on a sublease with another Modenese Jew, Abram Forti. Miriam committed herself to providing a 50,000 lira dowry for her young daughter, Sara, who married a member of the Sanguinetti family (her other daughter, Bonaventura, had already married with the same dowry).³⁵ In 1758, Miriam, to show “her passionate and maternal love” for her sons, through a *donatio inter vivos* gave them her portion of wealth in the family synagogue, silver ritual objects totaling 603 ounces, and furniture.³⁶ Miriam’s donation was not simply made for economic considerations. It symbolized Rovigo family unity and pride within the oligarchic Modenese Jewish society. Miriam managed her own business transactions but —like many other well-to-do Jewish women—she did not remarry. Both her patrimony and her day-to-day life appear to have been strongly connected to her nuclear family, and in particular, to her son Lazzaro.³⁷ Miriam Rovigo was an exceptional case because of her strong initiative and autonomy, but she nonetheless remained an ancillary element in the consolidated social system of the Modenese ghetto.

This female passivity contrasts to the growing autonomy of Italian Jewish women from the early modern through the modern era that recent studies have stressed. In other cities, Jewish

³² ASMO, Notarile, Fondo Niccolò Giannozzi, filza 5238, n. 666, June 20, 1763; Biblioteca Estense of Modena, Archivio Familiare Angelo Formiggini (AfAF), cassetta 1, fascicolo n. 31, June 20, 1763, “Obbligazione assunta per parte della Compagnia Ebraica Covegnè Gnitim a favore dell’eredità di Laudadio Formiggini.”

³³ AfAF, cassetta 1, fascicolo n. 37, July 7, 1770 (notarial act by Gaetano Radighieri). On Moisé Formiggini, see Francesconi, “Moisé Formiggini.”

³⁴ A much similar pattern has been individuated among affluent Jewish families in eighteenth-century Ancona by Viviana Bonazzoli, “Sulla struttura familiare,” esp. 146-148.

³⁵ ASMO, Notarile, Fondo Gaetano Tonani, filza 5227, n. 87, October 17, 1754; *ibid.*, n. 96.

³⁶ ASMO, Notarile, Fondo Giuseppe Antonio Cavicchioli, filza 5370, n. 59, July 4, 1768. The document reports the donation that took place on August 2, 1758.

³⁷ On the vicissitudes of Miriam see Francesconi, “Jewish Women in Eighteenth-Century.” On the importance of the nuclear family for Italian Jews, see Kenneth Stow, “Marriages Are Made in Heaven: Marriage and the Individual in the Roman Jewish Ghetto,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 48 (1995), 452-91; *Id.*, *Theater of Acculturation: The Roman Ghetto in the Sixteenth Century* (Seattle, 2001), esp. 11–12.

women invested their dowries as the financial basis for family firms. Women were named as heirs and administrators of business, women were testators, and women served as guardians of their minor children—even if widowed and remarried.³⁸ Excluded from both family businesses and ownership and not surprisingly shut out from the other Jewish confraternities in the ghetto, well-to-do Jewish women in Modena fundamentally challenged their marginalization with the creation of a female confraternity, the *Soed Holim* (‘to Benefit the Sick’). Miriam Rovigo played a fundamental role in this: she recruited a group of twenty-two well-to-do Jewish women who, inspired by the famous verse “Thou Shalt Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself,” founded *Soed Holim* in the Modenese ghetto in November, 1735.³⁹ Their aim was to “help and assist all sick women, rich and poor, in the ghetto.”⁴⁰

The *Soed Holim* membership register emphasizes Miriam’s role as the “first inspiring and inspired [woman] who took the initiative to establish Soed Holim in her house with all of the other women, aimed at performing the mitzvot [the Jewish precepts],⁴¹” according to Leone Moisè Usiglio, the confraternity’s male scribe. While Jewish women in Italy had been gathering in confraternities for at least a century, Modena’s *Soed Holim* is noteworthy for being the earliest European female Jewish confraternity with a complete *pinkas*, or register, stretching from 1735 to 1943.⁴²

Fifteen years after *Soed Holim*’s foundation, on the first of the Hebrew month of Tevet 5511 (December 29, 1750), an unusual procession of men and women paraded through the two streets of Modena’s ghetto, arriving at Miriam Rovigo’s home. The members of *Soed Holim* were making their first “public” donations of community charity: a dowry to a poor Jewish girl, and wood for the fireplaces of all the poor families in the ghetto. The confraternity wanted to honor the minor holiday of the new moon (in Hebrew *Rosh Hodesh*: literally, the “head of the month”) and to demonstrate the sanctity of their confraternity through an explicit reference to the month in which its activities began (December 22, which was the 6th of Tevet).⁴³ A public celebration in which women were the primary actors challenged the male-dominated society of an Italian ghetto, and did so from within. The founders and members of *Soed Holim*, were

³⁸ See Luciano Allegra, *Identità in bilico: Il ghetto ebraico di Torino nel Settecento* (Turin, 1996); Cristian Galasso, *Alle origini di una comunità: Ebrei ed ebrei a Livorno nel XVII secolo* (Florence, 2002); Stow, “The Jewish Woman as Social Protagonist: Jewish Women in Sixteenth Century Rome,” in Claire Honess and Verina Jones, eds., *Le Donne delle minoranze: Le ebrei e le protestanti d’Italia* (Turin, 1999), 87–100.

³⁹ The verse is from Leviticus 19:18; Archivio della Comunità ebraica di Modena (ACEMO), Archivio aggregato della *Soed Holim* (Register) [hereafter SH-Register], November 22–December 21, 1735. The archive consists of a folder of unpaginated documents written in Italian with Hebrew insertions.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ SH-Register, November 22, 1735.

⁴² It ceased functioning in 1943, as a result of the beginning of the Nazi-Fascist domination in Italy. The existence of *Soed Holim* is mentioned in B. Rivlin, *Mutual Responsibility in the Italian Ghetto: Holy Societies 1516–1789* (in Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1991), p. 52; Luisa Modena, ‘Note a margine della vita delle donne ebrei modenesi nell’epoca del ghetto’, in Bonilauri and Maugeri, eds., *Le Comunità ebraiche*, 141–60, esp. 152–53 (with some misunderstandings). Regarding early modern Italy, there is evidence of the existence of two *Compagnie delle Donne* in Venice in the 1640s and in Florence at least since 1669, both of which were devoted to the dowering of brides; unfortunately, documentation has not been preserved. See Stefanie Siegmund, *The Medici State and the Ghetto of Florence: The Construction of an Early Modern Jewish Community* (Stanford, 2005), p. 404; Carla Boccato, “Aspetti della condizione femminile nel ghetto di Venezia (secolo XVIII): i Testamenti,” *Italia* 10 (1993), 105–35, esp. 120.

⁴³ SH-Register, November 8, 1750; August 23, 1751.

wives and daughters of the most influential families in the Jewish society of Modena.⁴⁴ They had organized the *havurah*, or confraternity, with a specific female self-consciousness from its very inception. They employed women over ten years of age as assistants, servants, administrators, and representatives, and involved them in their weekly and monthly meetings. The participation of each of them varied over the years, but evidence shows that during the second half of the century 15 members of the board along with 10 servants (out of total female Jewish population of 470-480) were always more active than others in the confraternity.⁴⁵

Over the years, the women of *Soed Holim* issued loans and invested in bonds and property through their confraternity, using collective profits for a number of activities. Their sisterhood provided care for the sick and burials, as well as donations of food, wood, and money “for all of the poor families of the ghetto.”⁴⁶ Their work aided at least 75 needy families out a total Jewish population of almost 250 families and 1,220 people (6 percent of the overall Modenese population in the mid-eighteenth century).⁴⁷ The living conditions of Modenese Jewish society had worsened since the beginning of the century, with the entry of the Estense Duchy into the bloody European Succession wars, which afflicted both Jews and Christians alike for years.⁴⁸ The confraternity of *Soed Holim* worked to ease these living conditions through systematic charity provided to the most vulnerable groups in Modena’s ghetto.

Modenese Jews and their Meeting with Modernity

Confraternal activities were a vehicle for both modernization and negotiation within ghetto society. The complexity of the social negotiation and the gradual process of modernization within Modenese Jewish society in the eighteenth century is even more evident through the lens of cultural and commercial choices. Let us consider two short and complementary examples connected to acquiring books. In 1788 Moisè Beniamino Foa bought for the public library of Modena the *opera omnia* by Guillame Raynal, an author whose works were forbidden to be read in Venice and in France because of his anti-authoritarian and anti-clerical beliefs.⁴⁹ In 1791 the above mentioned *Nuova Società Tipografica* printed the *Lettere*

⁴⁴ Members included Miriam Rovigo and her mother Grazia Rovigo, Devora Formiggini, Rosa and Grazia Fano, Sara Levi, Bellina Norsa, and Buonaventura Sanguinetti,

⁴⁵ This analysis is based on SH-Register and a database I created of the Jewish population in the ghetto for the period 1766-1796 through mainly the following documentation: ASMO, Archivio per Materie, Ebrei, filza n. 15; ACEMO, 2.14 – Denunzie de poveri sussidiati al Collegio de Signori Notari; 2.15 - Denunzie delle anime all'ufficio dell'Abbondanza 1766-1796); 2,16-Distinta delle donne cristiane che di tempo in tempo prestano il loro servizio in ghetto 1760-1782.

⁴⁶ SH-Register June 20, 1756.

⁴⁷ In 1775, for example, their work aided at least 76 families needy people out a total Jewish population of 1,207 including 247 families. See footnote n. 7. for the non Jewish population see Marini, *Lo Stato Estense*, 100.

⁴⁸ For the history of Modenese Jews in the eighteenth century, see my doctoral dissertation Francesconi, *Jewish Families*, esp. 131–89.

⁴⁹ The Ducal Library was transformed into a public institution in 1767 while the University opened in 1771 thanks to the collaboration between Foa, Duke Francesco III, and the Jesuit and ducal librarian Francesco Antonio Zaccaria. It was a complex, ambiguous, and utilitarian relationship that was inspired by different ideologies and a common preference for French lay-oriented culture in the social context of Modena. The relationship between the three is paradigmatic of the Jewish condition in late eighteenth-century Modena. The daily contact and fruitful cultural exchange between Francesco III, Antonio Zaccaria and Moisè Beniamino Foa did not—this is the point—extend to intercultural and religious appreciation: their collaboration fostered and was fostered by a high level of reciprocal professional esteem, but without any substantial Jewish-Christian rapprochement. The collaboration, for example, did not have any influence on the Jewish community’s vain struggle to release the young Sara Usiglio, who was kidnapped from the ghetto after false rumors circulated about her intentions to convert, and who died incarcerated in the Holy House of the Catechumens in 1763. On the Ducal Library see Luigi Balsamo, “Editoria e biblioteche nella

piacevoli se piaceranno by Giuseppe Compagnoni, an Italian intellectual, later known as a Jacobin. This work consists of a fierce statement of the supremacy of the Jewish people over ‘other civilizations’ – considering intellectual figures such as Spinoza and Mendelssohn – as well as a polemic attack against recent anti-Jewish works by Catholic authors (such as Giambattista D’Arco).⁵⁰ Remarkably, many sections of the book were cut off by the State’ censor and accepted without polemics by Foa himself.⁵¹ Clearly, Compagnoni's pro-Jewish argument was perceived as a danger to the balanced system that regulated Jewish-Christian relations for it brought the Jewish question to public attention; on the contrary, Raynal’s beliefs were not.

Let us consider the second point of my talk, the *événement* that is the arrival of Napoleon, who promptly liberated the Italian ghettos. How did the silversmith Moisè Formiggini (1760-1810), son of the above mentioned Benedetto, perceive Napoleon's conquest of Northern Italy and the establishment of the *Cispadana Republic* in 1796? Moisè Formiggini was born to one of the most influential families of Jewish silversmiths in the city.⁵² Laudadio (1690–1765) and Benedetto Formiggini (1720–1776) expanded the family business by reinforcing their relations with the Este Dukes and the nobility (both were appointed as the Duke’s silversmiths), extending their trade to the neighboring Gonzaga Duchy and the Papal State, and, finally, via a series of strategic marriages that forged important alliances within the Italian Jewish mercantile elite, including the Olivettis of Turin, the Vitas of Lugo, and the Pintos of Livorno.⁵³ After the premature death of his parents Benedetto Formiggini and Grazia Levi (?-1777), in 1776 and 1777, Moisè became the guardian of his five siblings, Vita, Salomone, Luigi Raffaele, Consola, and Ventura. Moisè’s business strategies followed those of his father, except for an increase in the extension of credit and a reduction in the trade of jewels other than diamonds. Moisè always preferred foreign markets, causing some to accuse him of giving important commissions to

seconda metà del Settecento negli Stati Estensi,” in Berengo and Romagnoli eds., *Reggio e i territori estensi*, vol. 2, 505-531; Id, “Gli ebrei nell’editoria in Italia nel ‘600 e ‘700,” in *Italia Judaica III* (Rome, 1989), esp. 60-65; Giorgio Montecchi, *Aziende tipografiche, stampatori e librai a Modena dal Quattrocento al Settecento* (Modena, 1988), 123-140. On the vicissitudes of Sara Usiglio see Andrea Zanardo, “Catecumeni e neofiti a Modena alla fine dell’antico regime,” in Bonilauri and Maugeri eds., *Le Comunità ebraiche di Modena e Carpi*, 121–39, esp. 135.

⁵⁰ Compagnoni’s work is also important with respect what it has to tell us about political events regarding Jews that occurred in the Este Duchy during the last decade of the eighteenth-century. Compagnoni’s pro-Jewish argument was perceived as a societal danger not so much for its implicit request to change the old system regulating Jewish-Christian relations, but for the idea that this change would have been based on French ideas of natural justice and the *Rights of Man*, which consequently implied political changes in the Italian peninsula, including in the Este Duchy. Thus Compagnoni’s work was considered much more dangerous for the Este state than the *opera omnia* by Guillaume Raynal, which included the much discussed *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*, quoted in Formiggini’s talk, and was forbidden even in Venice, because of his anti-authoritarian and anti-clerical beliefs (BEMO, *α z.* 10.10, *Atti del Congresso*). On the vicissitudes of Compagnoni’s work, see Vittore Colorni, *Studi sull’ebraismo italiano* (Rome, 1974), 73-74 and Lynn Gunzberg, *Strangers at Home: Jews in the Italian Literary Imagination* (Berkeley, 1992), 24-40. Both of them emphasize the idea that Fabrizio was shifted away his loyalty from the Duke in his censorial revision of Compagnoni’s *Saggio*; rather it seems to me that Fabrizio was perfectly aligned with new ducal political attitude. See on this point Montecchi, *Aziende tipografiche*, 135-140. Furthermore, in 1792, Ercole III organized a broad transnational censorial operation aimed at stopping the influx of French books to the Italian peninsula. Moisè Beniamino Foa had bought Raynal’s works for the Ducal public Library in 1788 without protest, *Catalogus Librorum qui Venales prostant Mutinae et Regii apud Mosem Beniaminum Foà Serenissimi Ducis Francisci III Bibliopolam* (Modena, 1788), *ad vocem--*.

⁵¹ Then in 1792 Compagnoni republished his book in its complete version along with footnotes that explained the Fabrizio’s censorial interventions in Venice.

⁵² BEMO, Archivio Familiare Angelo Formiggini (hereafter, AfAF), cassetta 1, fascicolo 24.

⁵³ AfAF, Cassetta 1, Fascicolo 25; Notary Niccolò Giannozzi, August 18, 1763; *Registro dell’Archivio dell’azienda*, anni 1740-1760.

foreign silversmiths and consequently impoverishing the local silver-working economy.⁵⁴ He then married Anna Levi, daughter of David, an influential Modenese silk trader.⁵⁵ In 1784, when Formiggini's brother Salomone reached maturity, the family patrimony totaled 711,264.13.12 lira.⁵⁶ By 1791, Moisè's guidance had increased the capital to 1,052,444.5.8.⁵⁷ When the French troops arrived, Moisè was also the Duke's silversmith.⁵⁸

Growing up in a well-to-do family, Formiggini had to grapple with the difficulties of life in the ghetto, where Modenese Jews had been enclosed since 1638, yet he was, to a certain degree, able to *vivre noblement*, as was the case among some influential merchant families of the Sephardic Diaspora. He was fluent in Italian and knew French and Hebrew.⁵⁹ He owned (outright) one of the most important ghetto synagogues and could travel through all of the Italian states (including the Papal State) with carriage and pair. He and his brothers also owned a number of buildings in the city, including shops and apartments, as well as farms in the countryside near Modena.⁶⁰ Additionally, Moisè participated in the Jewish community's administration as head (*massaro*) of the *Kehillah*, as leader of the confraternity *Gemilut Hasadim ve-Rahamim* devoted to social welfare, and as a mediator between the Community and both city and ducal authorities beginning in at least 1782.⁶¹ As we have already emphasized, Modenese Jewish confraternities formed the institutional basis for the welfare of the entire Jewish society. The contributions of the community's affluent members, both through voluntary philanthropy (called "l'entrata di casella") and through confraternal duties, served the needs of the lower social strata of the ghetto.⁶² And, like the other principal affluent merchants within the Modenese Jewish mercantile elite, Formiggini was responsible for paying the taxes required of Jews to the Ducal Chamber; during the eighteenth century, these totaled 200,000 lira a year.⁶³ When Napoleon opened the doors of Modena's ghetto in September 1796, this

⁵⁴ On these vicissitudes of the Formignini, see AfAF, *Memoriali and Giornali di Cassa*, cassetta 2, fascicolo 47, September 28, 1784. On the hostility of the Guild of Silversmiths and Jewelers because of his foreign markets' preference see Giorgio Boccolari, *L'arte degli orefici a Modena (Secc. XV-XX)* (Modena, 1991), 44.

⁵⁵ AfAF, *Memoriali and Giornali di Cassa*, cassetta 2, fascicolo 47, September 28, 1784.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁷ AfAF, Cassetta 2, fascicolo 63, Scrittura di scioglimento di Società seguita tra Flaminio, Moisè e Salomon zio e nipoti Formiggini. Notary Ettore Poppi, September 21, 1791; *ibid.*, fascicolo 65, Società di commercio stabilita fra i fratelli Moisè, Salomon e Raffaele Formiggini. Notary Ettore Poppi, October 22, 1791.

⁵⁸ BEMO, Collezione Ferrari-Moreni, *Calendari per la Corte* for the years 1776-1796 and ASMO, Archivio per Materie, Ebrei, Busta 15, Regolamenti e pagamenti tasse degli ebrei.

⁵⁹ For a comparison, see Richard Menkis, "Patriarchs and Patricians: the Gradis Family of Eighteenth-Century Bordeaux," in Frances Malino and David Sorkin eds., *From East and West: Jews in a Changing Europe, 1750-1870* (Detroit, 1998), 11-43.

⁶⁰ AfAF, Cassetta 2, fascicolo 63, Scrittura di scioglimento di Società seguita tra Flaminio, Moisè e Salomon zio e nipoti Formiggini. Notary Ettore Poppi, September 21, 1791; *ibid.*, fascicolo 65, Società di commercio stabilita fra i fratelli Moisè, Salomon e Raffaele Formiggini. Notary Ettore Poppi, October 22, 1791. In 1795, Formiggini bought a huge farm in Saliceto, a small town near Modena, for 160,000 lira. AfAF, cassetta 2, fascicolo 68, *Scrittura privata colla quale Moisè Formiggini acquista delle terre in Saliceto Panaro da Aronne del fu Moisè Sanguinetti*, Notary Ettore Poppi, August 19, 1795. On the Formiggini synagogue see AfAF, cassetta 1, fascicolo 7.

⁶¹ ASMO, Archivio per Materie, Ebrei, busta 15, Atti relativi alla contabilità fra lo Stato Estense e l'Università israelitica di Modena (1780-1799); *Costituzione della Compagnia ebraica della Misericordia della Città di Modena* (Modena, 1791); *Prammatica istituita da osservarsi dalli singoli dell'Università di Modena per un triennio* (Modena, 1793)

⁶² I found the formulation used for the first time as "il sistema della casella" in ASCMO, Atti di Amministrazione Generale del Comune di Modena (1796-1853) 28 (22 ottobre – 20 novembre 1798), Fascicolo Consiglio 3 novembre 1798.

⁶³ See ASMO, Camera Ducale, *Calendari per la Corte* for the years 1775-1796 and *ibid.*, Ebrei, Busta 15, *Regolamenti e pagamenti tasse degli ebrei*.

freedom did not find him and the other 1246 Jews (who constituted a full 6% of the city's population),⁶⁴ unprepared in terms of both civic and political participation.

There was no sudden awakening, nor was there a loss of tradition. Moisè Formiggini was the first Italian Jew elected to office in the government of the Cispadana Republic that incorporated the Duchy of Modena during the Napoleonic period. Most importantly, he opened new cultural, political, and legal inroads toward Jewish integration and complete legal emancipation, which were based on the diffusion of a French-oriented lay culture, the political unification of Northern Italian Jewry, and the adoption of the Napoleonic civil Code. His cultural choices clearly reflected his political agenda; on the one hand Moisè was reading the *Encyclopédie*, and on the other hand he was reading the writings of Sephardic *philosophes* such as Isaac Pinto, Benedetto Frizzi, and Bernard Valabrègue, rather than Moses Mendelssohn and his followers.⁶⁵

Modenese Jews and Anconitan Jews: A Profitable Comparison

Let us consider how the assets of Modena's lay leadership can be useful in the assessment of whether some general -social and cultural- patterns emerged among Italian Jewish communities by means of a comparative perspective. A preliminary examination of the sources reveals the existence of a network of Italian Jewish merchant families, such as the Fermis, Morpurgos, and Coens, who forged an oligarchy that functioned to help the community after 1555, which lasted more than two centuries. Moreover, when in 1732 Moisè Fermi, a Jewish merchant and physician, brought about the election of Ancona as a free-port,⁶⁶ the decadence of the Jewish community began to wane. Italian and Sephardic merchants thrived; the Jewish population increased dramatically, from nearly one thousand at the beginning of the eighteenth century to almost 1600 (more than 10% of the total population) at the end of the century.⁶⁷ At the time, the leadership of the Fermi, Morpurgo, and Coen families was characterized by a high involvement within the organization of the Jewish community, broad commercial networks in the Mediterranean and in the New World, and finally, a certain degree of commercial cooperation with the Christian mercantile class of the city.⁶⁸

Modenese Jewish mercantile elite was mainly composed of Italian and Askenazic families arrived in the city since the fifteenth and the sixteenth century; in addition, with a group of Portuguese merchants from Livorno and Amsterdam settled in Modena in 1650s. Anconitan Jewish mercantile elite was much more variegated. It includes Italian Jews and Sephardic Jews who arrived in the city in different times, before 1550 from Spain and Portugal and in the

⁶⁴ Archivio della Comunità ebraica di Modena, 2.15 - 52. Denunzie delle anime all'ufficio dell'Abbondanza 1766-1796 (unpaginated documents).

⁶⁵ Francesconi, "From Ghetto to Emancipation," 330-353.

⁶⁶ See the important study by Alberto Caracciolo, *Le port franc d'Ancone. Croissance et impasse d'un milieu marchand au XVIIIe siècle*, (Paris 1965), 54-55.

⁶⁷ These data have been calculated by combining different sources: Central Archive for the History of Jewish People (CAJHP), IT/AN 111 Stato delle Anime degli ebrei di Ancona 1709-1818; IT/AN 47 Attività degli ebrei; IT/AN 63 Verbali 1788-1796; IT/AN III Stato delle anime e Regolamenti del ghetto; IT/AN 2 II/II Porto franco and IT/AN 17/02.

⁶⁸ Archivio di Stato di Ancona (ASAN), Archivio Notarile, L. B. Naldi, vol. 1279, F. Franchi, voll. 2388-2392, F. Silvestrini, voll. 2712, 2713, 2716, 2722, 2727, 2730-2735; CAJHP, IT/AN 111 Stato delle Anime degli ebrei di Ancona 1709-1818; IT/AN 47 Attività degli ebrei; IT/AN 63 Verbali 1788-1796; IT/AN 2 II/II Porto franco and IT/AN 17/02.

seventeenth century from Ragusa and Constantinople.⁶⁹ Moreover, in the early eighteenth century families from Northern Italy such as the Morpurgos from Gradisca who in 1717 settled in Ancona for commercial purposes.⁷⁰

Evidence shows strong ties between both Modenese and Anconitan Jewish traders in terms of marriage and commercial unions throughout the ghetto period, until the arrival of Napoleon. Both Italian and Sephardic merchants from Ancona and Modena developed an extensive network in the Italian peninsula and the Mediterranean, organized on the basis of kinship, religion, and commercial considerations. In 1767, for example, the marriage between Isotta Morpurgo from Ancona and Calmo Sanguinetti from Modena brought the union of two important families of silk merchants and the reinforcement of previous common business.⁷¹

Anconitan and Modenese Jewish merchants through business, the transfer of estates, cultural and philanthropic activities, and international interfamilial alliances developed an oligarchic and male-centered system. In a much similar way to their Modenese counterparts, wives, sisters and daughters of Anconitan Jewish merchants appeared merely instrumental mainly in forging important social and political alliances among the Italian Jewish merchant elite for the reallocation and transfer of estates. They did not take part in family business activities, and as widows they transferred control of their dowries to their sons.⁷²

Two examples will suffice, regarding, respectively, the social negotiation and cultural formation of the Jews of Ancona. In 1775 Pope Pius VI, driven by a renewed missionary zeal for the conversion of the Jews, published an edict whose goal was to undermine religious Jewish life by forbidding private teaching and imposing the requisition of Hebrew books. Remarkably, the municipality of Ancona refused to enforce the edict, and embarked on a strong defense of the right of the Jewish community to cultivate its culture and identity.⁷³ Since the 1780s, the culture of influential merchants such as Ezechia Morpurgo seems to have been oriented toward the Prussian *Haskalah* together with Italian and Latin literature. Through their commercial relations with the Jews of Trieste, the Jews of Ancona read Moses Mendelssohn, together with Christian Wilhelm Dohm and Naftali Hertz Wessely.⁷⁴

The meeting between Napoleon and Anconitan Jews is even more illuminating. In February 1797, according to a Hebrew chronicle, Ezechia Morpurgo and the other Anconitan Jews after their liberation welcomed Napoleon in the main synagogue as a messianic, even godlike personage, and I quote - "singing the Song of the Sea," "our spirits were alive and our

⁶⁹ CAJHP, IT/AN 111 Stato delle Anime degli ebrei di Ancona 1709-1818; IT/AN 47 Attività degli ebrei; IT/AN 63 Verbali 1788-1796; IT/AN III Stato delle anime e Regolamenti del ghetto; IT/AN 2 II/II Porto franco and IT/AN 17/02; ASAN, Archivio Notarile, L. B. Naldi, vol. 1279, F. Franchi, voll. 2388-2392, F. Silvestrini, voll. 2712, 2713, 2716, 2722, 2727, 2730-2735. Moreover see the following useful studies: Bonazzoli, "Struttura familiare," Caracciolo, *Le port franc d'Ancône*, Molho, "Ebrei e marrani."

⁷⁰ Bonazzoli, "Struttura familiare," 140.

⁷¹ Archivio di Stato di Ancona (ASAN), Archivio Notarile, F. Silvestrini, vol. 1921, cc. 277.

⁷² Bonazzoli, "Struttura familiare," 146-148.

⁷³ Renzo De Felice, "Gli ebrei nella repubblica romana del 1798-1799," *Rassegna storica del Risorgimento* 50/3 (1953), 35-62, esp. 37-38.

⁷⁴ ASAN, Archivio Notarile, P. Lipponi, vol. 2116, Testamento di Diamante Morpurgo (cc. 9 verso – 12 recto), February 3, 1794. See for references to Anconitan rabbis and their acceptance of Naftali Wessely's *Divrei shalom ve-emet* (1782); see Dubin, *The Port Jews*, 124-133. Useful documentation I have been able to consult is kept at Charles Y. Young Research Library at the University of California, Los Angeles, Special Collections, Rosenberg-Lewin Collection, folders 2-8.

souls, which had been dead to us, returned within us.⁷⁵ In contrast, Moisè Formiggini, as a political interlocutor, had met with Napoleon in the city hall, asking for the admission of Modenese Jews as "active citizens" into the new government. The Anconitan Jews adopted a more conventional position. Therefore, in February 1798, Ezechia Morpurgo of Ancona was the first Italian Jew to be elected as a tribune in the new Roman Republic, created by Napoleon, which incorporated the city of Ancona.⁷⁶ Despite important differences, Anconitan Jewry was similar to Modenese Jewry in that it had neither a sudden awakening, nor a loss of tradition.

Recent historiographical contributions have approached Jewish "modernization" via analysis of phenomena that are common to many European Jewries, such as cultural and social integration, economic integration political and legal emancipation, nationalism, voluntary community, enlightenment, secularization and breakdown of tradition. My decision to investigate Italian Jewry in the eighteenth-century by means of broad research themes, such as the lay leadership, goes in this direction. Whether inspired by French culture -as the case of Modena- or by the Prussian *Haskalah* -as in the case of Ancona- Italian Jewish merchant societies created their own special brand of acculturation and integration, which helped their Jewish communities adjust to ghetto life and face change and transformation. Their conduct was a definitive agent in the shift in the Italian Jewish society rather than the production of contemporary scholars. Through them, we can hear a new, fruitful and enlightening Italian voice in the European Jewish scene.

⁷⁵ The Hebrew chronicle has been published by Daniel Carpi, "Rabbi Jacob Cohen's "Sepher Ma'ase Nissim". A Hebrew Chronicle about the Jews of Ancona during the Years 1793-1797," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, XLIX (1982), pp. 123-160. For a recent and interesting discussion of this source see Ronald Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews: Representations of the Jews in France, 1715-1815* (Berkeley, 2003). 151-152.

⁷⁶ On the participation of Ezechia Morpurgo and other Anconitan Jews to politics and government in the Napoleonic period see Carmelo Trasselli, "Processi politici romani dal 1792 al 1798," *Rassegna Storica del Risorgimento* XI-XII (1938): 1-74; Maria Savini, *La repubblica anconetana (1797-1798). Documenti tolti dall'Archivio Storico di Ancona* (Florence 1907), ad vocem. More recently see De Felice, "Gli ebrei nella repubblica," 35-62; Geoffrey Symcox, "The Jews of Italy in the *Triennio Giacobino*, 1796-1799," in Myers et al. eds., *Acculturation and Its Discontents*, 148-163.