

Immobile Tremor: The Immobility of the Ghetto and the Human Vitality

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Zusammenfassung

Die Schwelle zwischen dem 15. und 16. Jahrhundert stellt eine historische Periode dar, in der sich die geopolitische Landschaft und das innere Blickfeld sowohl für Christen als auch für Juden radikal änderten. Die veränderten Gegebenheiten lösten andere Erwartungen und das Bedürfnis nach neuen historischen Interpretationen aus. In diesem Kontext kann Ferrara, wie auch andere italienische Städte, als ein paradigmatisches Beispiel angesehen werden, als ein begrenzter Raum, in dem das spirituelle und kulturelle Wiederaufleben innerhalb der jüdischen Gesellschaft Gestalt annehmen konnte. Die Durchlässigkeit zwischen der künstlerischen und kulturellen christlichen Welt und jüdisch-intellektuellen Erzeugnissen bedingte ein gedeihendes Umfeld, das zudem durch die Einführung einer jüdischen Typographie und durch wachsende Ansprüche der Juden im Herzogtum der Este bestärkt wurde. Die indirekten Einflüsse auf dieses intellektuelle Wiederaufleben wirkten sich nach der Verlegung der Hauptstadt von Ferrara nach Modena tiefgreifend auf einer sozialen Ebene aus. Sie erlauben uns, das Fortdauern wichtiger Kommunikationsmuster zwischen Christen und Juden im Alltag zu erfassen. Das Einsetzen der Inquisition bietet uns mittels juristischer Archive die wichtigsten Instrumente, um soziale Dynamiken zu verstehen. Diese erlauben uns, neue denkbare Interpretationen als Schlüssel für die Gegebenheiten im Ghetto und für die Gründe seiner Errichtung in Betracht zu ziehen. Die städtische Trennungslinie ist nichts anderes als ein weiterer Versuch, die unsichtbaren Räume der Gedankenwelten voneinander abzugrenzen. Die nachhaltige Wirksamkeit der räumlichen Trennung weist einige Schwachpunkte auf, die während der gesamten Existenzphase des Ghettos von 1638 bis 1789 bestehen blieben.

Abstract

The threshold between the XVth and the XVIth Century represents a historical period during which, both for Christians and for Jews, the geopolitical sceneries and the interior horizons radically change. The modified reality provokes new forms of expectation and the need of new historical interpretations. Ferrara, within this scenery, can be considered, as other Italian cases, as a paradigmatic example, a narrow space where phenomena of spiritual and cultural Jewish rebirth can take shape. The permeability between Christian artistic and cultural world and Jewish intellectual production determines a prosperous context, further strengthened by the introduction of Jewish typography

and by a growing claim and restoration of social elective dignity among the Jews of the Este Duchy. After the transfer of the capital city from Ferrara to Modena, the indirect effects of this intellectual resurgence are deeply transformed on a social level, and allows us to catch the persistence of important forms of communication between Christians and Jews in everyday life. The introduction of the Inquisition provides us, through the production of the judicial archive, with the most important instrument to understand social dynamics, which allows us to comprehend a new potential interpretation key for the reality of the ghetto and the choice of its erection. The urban division is nothing else but a new attempt to separate the invisible spaces of the thought. The effective efficacy of the physical separation shows several weak points, which persist during the entire life of the ghetto, since 1638 until 1789.

Introduction

The Jewish history of Modena represents a paradigmatic case for the comprehension of the phenomenon of the Jewish-Christian relations in Italy of the Modern Age.¹ The city, characterized by the simultaneous presence of several archives connoted by various natures and a specific ordaining, gives an integration of sources that enables us to restore complex sceneries, reproducing a dialectic dimension between perspectives and forms of perception and self-perception of the different social actors. Jews and Christians, in Modena of the XVIth Century, oppose themselves in a historical dimension connoted by fragmentized and contradicting tendencies. They look and try to comprehend each other, they interrogate themselves about their nature and probably find difficult to individuate the discriminating religious element that the script of the institutional history would have foreseen. Reciprocally influenced in many aspects of everyday life and intellectual dimension, both originate contaminated forms of thought and artistic manifestations whose definition is inevitably fringed and vanished by the cohabitation and the simultaneous presence, by the community of experiences.

¹ For an outline about Jewish history in Modena see Balletti, Andrea: *Gli ebrei e gli Estensi*, Reggio Emilia 1930. Biondi, Albano: *Gli Ebrei e l'Inquisizione negli Stati Estensi*, in *L'Inquisizione e gli Ebrei in Italia*, edited by Michele Luzzati, Roma-Bari 1994, pp. 265-285. *Le comunità ebraiche a Modena e Carpi, Atti del convegno di Modena e Carpi, 21-22 maggio 1997*, edited by Franco Bonilauri, Vincenza Maugeri, Firenze 1999. Francesconi, Federica: *Fra sacro e profano: spazi urbani e vita ebraica a Modena dal Rinascimento all'età moderna*. In: *Atti e Memorie. Deputazione di storia patria per le antiche province modenese*, 2004, XI, vol. XXVI, pp. 119-145. Modena Luisa, *Il dialetto del ghetto di Modena e dintorni*, Modena 2001. Modena, Luisa: *Il ghetto e la sinagoga di Modena*, Modena 2002. Papouchado, Fulvio Diego: *Viaggio in un ghetto emiliano. Storia degli ebrei a Modena dal Medioevo al secondo dopoguerra*, Modena 2007.

A comparative approach to the history of religions of XVth and XVIth Century enables us to individuate forms of common sensibility beyond the disputations that generally and simply lead to institutional processes of self-determination of the religious confessions, also if on the base of a theological differentiation of answers about the interrogatives of the age. Therefore, it is possible to individuate common elements in existential inquiries, in questions about history and its signification, in the modality of facing extraordinary events of the epoch, even though in the necessity to maintain elements of distance, markers of a confessional specificity that is perceived as an ontological uniqueness.² The research of keys of comprehension, of evidences – earthly and heavenly ones – that concur to read the scheme of the universe, the experimentation of techniques that confer human and superhuman interpretative capabilities are common processes to both Jewish and Christian religions.³ Similarly the internal reactions, the fragmentations of positions and sensibilities are common, as the birth of tensions that generate or reject philosophical orientations in favour of a trustful abandonment to an eschatologically oriented predetermination.⁴

The faith, in an universe in which the datum points fade away and the known-world-net ladders, is not able to guarantee a protected space, also if remote and internal. In front of the modification of the world forms, the rigid prejudicial categories vanish and the flat lines that seemed to distinguish in a sharp way Jews and Christians, through phenomena of mythographical production, lose their brightness.

The internal areas of shared humanity react in a similar way in front of destabilizing phenomena for the entire equilibrium of the previously existing system of thought. The world was rapidly changing on the wave of epochal events which interested large scale circumstances.

It is important to take in consideration, for example, the end of the Byzantine Empire, the fall of Granata and the Arabic stronghold in Spain, the completion of the Christian *Reconquista* and the expulsion of the Jews from

² As concerns the role of Jews within Italian context, see *Cultural Intermediaries. Jewish Intellectuals in Early Modern Italy*, edited by Giuseppe Veltri, David B. Ruderman, Leiden 2004. Since several important forms of contamination pass through translation processes, see *Hebraica veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Allison P. Coudert, Jeffrey S. Shoulson, Philadelphia 2004.

³ See Niccoli, Ottavia: *Prophecy and People in Renaissance Italy*, Princeton 1990.

⁴ A fundamental reflection about the relation between history and theological interpretation of events is presented by Yerushalmi, Yosef Hayim: *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, Seattle 1996.

the Iberian peninsula, the reconfiguration of the European and World geopolitical sceneries,⁵ the epidemics, the famines, the periodic pillages committed by means of non paid mercenaries. In front of such significant events, the intelligences and consciences toil to find the instruments to interpret and comprehend the reality in previous centuries conceptual categories.

The ferments and agitations of religious consciences are not the natural consequence of a condition of incapability of reaction, facing with an unrecognizable reality which has become uncontainable in the limits of the common thought. It is important to remember just a few intellectual and religious manifestations of the age, to realize their impact on a social and cultural level within the Christian Italian Church: the effects of the renewed Gioachimism and the roots of the Savonarolism,⁶ the consequences of the Bohemian Hussite heresy in Prague,⁷ the conciliation of Platonism and Aristotelianism accomplished by Giovanni Pico and the philosophical circles between Padua and Florence. The inner spaces lose their typicality and the original peculiarities dissolve.

The Christians discover the interpretative potentiality of cabbala,⁸ the Jews learn the value of the Christian preaching, recognizing its efficacy and regaining its own instruments.⁹ The sense of common bewilderment moves to a

⁵ As we can see both in Jewish and in Christian sensibility, the discovery of America provoked a significant conditioning in religious thought: Avraham Farissol wrote his *Iggeret Orhot Olam*, and in the same way Christopher Columbus wrote his *Libro de las profecias*, deeply influenced by the Joachite thought. Proserpi, Adriano: *America e Apocalisse. Note sulla «conquista spirituale» del Nuovo Mondo*. In: *Critica Storica*, 1976 XIII, pp. 1-61.

⁶ On the development and the incidence of Savonarolian thought on European culture, see Savonarola, Girolamo: *Compendio di rivelazioni, testo volgare e latino e Dialogus de veritate prophetica*, edited by Angela Crucitti, Roma 1974. Dall'Aglio, Stefano: *Savonarola and Savonarolism*, Toronto 2010.

⁷ The Hussite heresy holds an essential role in the Early Modern religious context, because of the delegitimization of the mediation role of the Church. See Lerner, Robert E.: *The heresy of the free spirit in the later Middle Ages*, Berkeley – Los Angeles 1972. Kaminsky, Howard: *A history of the Hussite revolution*, Berkeley – Los Angeles 1967.

⁸ See, for example, Dan, Joseph: *The Christian Kabbalah: Jewish mystical books & their Christian interpreters: a symposium*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1997 and Secret, François: *Les kabbalistes chrétiens de la Renaissance*, Paris 1985. The most famous Christian scholar engaged in Jewish cabbala is Giovanni Pico. See Wirszubski, Chaim: *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism*, Cambridge 1989. On the relation between cultural perspectives, religious reflections and linguistic turn between Hebrew and Latin, see the entire series *Kabbalistic Library of Giovanni Pico*, directed by Giulio Busi, and published by Nino Aragno editore.

⁹ On the influence of Christian anti-Jewish preaching on the society see Williamson, Clark M. and Allen, Ronald J.: *Interpreting Difficult Texts: Anti-Judaism and Christian Preaching*, London – Philadelphia 1989. On the relation between Christian Anti-Jewish Preaching and the development of a new form of Jewish Preaching, see *Preaching on he Jews, for the Jews and by the Jews*, edited by Jussi Hanska, Rome (forthcoming).

contiguity of attitudes and the constant approach of reactions determines, in the generational continuity, a progressive superposition of concepts and values.

The XVIth Century shows us how both religious reactions, even if under the shelter of propaganda and ideological tendencies of self-representation, were similar in the incapability of providing homogeneous directions of monolithic orthodoxy, as much by Christians emerged from the Reformation and Counter Reformation, so much in the Hebraism divided between mystical tendencies and rationalistic philosophical orientation of a predominating Aristotelian-Maimonidean matrix. The desire of interrogate the future and anticipate its obscure schemes manifests itself for Christians and Jews and, in both cases, we can assist to the recuperation of forms of refusal and persecution of this kind of attitude. The forms of messianic or pseudo-messianic unrest interest both confessions and in the same way will concern also the Protestants, who manifest in a similar form the charismatic tendencies of the founders. The reactions about the New World discovery will arouse expectations and eschatological interpretations both for Jews and Christians, as attested by Avraham Farissol *Iggeret Orhot Olam* and the Papal bull *Inter Coetera*, promulgated by Alexander VI.¹⁰ The problematic relationship between science, religion and pseudoscientific forms permeates the whole XVIth Century, to be protracted till the XVIIIth Century in degenerated and low-grade forms respect to the original reach of disciplines.¹¹ The Jewish thought becomes fundamental for the Christian one, as a conditioning element or term in opposition about what interrogate, such as the Christian thought – especially the Jesuitic matrixes of reflection – will deeply influence the forms of self-perception of the religiosity of the second part of the XVIth Century.

Further accomplice, in the process of the dissolution of the isolated religious origins, is the growing employment of Jewish intellectuals in the work of translation of the philosophical and religious heritage from Greek, Arabic, Syriac and Copt, deriving from the Levantine coast of the Mediterranean and

¹⁰ Issued on 3 May 1943.

¹¹ On the permeability between science, magic and religion, see Ball, Philip: *The Devil's Doctor: Paracelsus and the World of Renaissance Magic and Science*, London 2006; Copenhaver, Brian: *How to do magic, and why: philosophical prescriptions*. In: *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy*, edited by James Hankins, Cambridge 2007, pp. 137-169; Idel, Moshe, *The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretation of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance*. In: *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, edited by David B. Ruderman, New York 1992, pp. 107-170. In the same territory it could be interesting to analyse the relation of the alchemist and physician Avraham Yaghel with the society where he lived. See Ruderman, David B.: *Kabbalah, Magic, and Science, The Universe of a Sixteenth Century Jewish Physician*, Cambridge, Mass., 1989.

from the Iberian peninsula. A flow without precedent of bibliographic sources reaches on the Italian ground, and the translation work is inevitably realized thanks to the participation of Jewish intellectuals. The translation, far from being a merely linguistic operation, is first of all an intellectual exercise connected to the lexical richness, to the capability of an exact comprehension of concepts and the ability of translating them in different semantic systems.¹² In a sense, this process reflects the inner problem of Judaism about the transmission of the revelation, bringing on foreground the necessity of translating concepts in comprehensible words and images. The semantic limits, deeply rooted to every specific linguistic system, determine in every phase of translation, a phenomenon of modification of concepts, of adaptation of forms to a comprehensible system. As recited by one of the Scholastic gnoseology axioms, *Quicquid recipitur, ad modum recipientis recipitur*. The results of the traductology and the modern philosophy of language do not draw away from the very same truth, as attested by the commendable work collected in the *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies: dictionnaire des intraduisibles*,¹³ superintended by Barbara Cassin. The translation constitutes, inevitably, a process of re-adaptation of concepts, whereas they can effectively be transposed in a linguistic and cultural context different from the original one. This practice of semantic re-adaptation could not postulate in an absolute way the translator's extraneousness towards the own cultural system of reference, and between XVth and XVIth Century it determines a further action of conceptual approach, of intellectual superposition.

All of these phenomena, a little series example into a more articulated system of reciprocal contaminations and influences, determine a reduction of the effective distances between cultural systems, limiting the value of the distance to a mere ideological element. In an epoch in which the balances of the world were changing, the inner distances disperse its own markers. Vladimir Jankélévitch has remarkably expressed how the similarity, in a system of predefined differences, constitutes an element of agitation, a tension generator, a cause

¹² On translation as a form of conceptual conditioning see Zonta, Mauro: *La filosofia antica nel Medioevo ebraico: le traduzioni ebraiche medievali dei testi filosofici antichi*, Brescia 1996. Rothschild, Jean-Pierre: *Pour évaluer la place des traductions dans la littérature hébraïque du Moyen Age occidental*, in *We-z'ot Angelo: raccolta di studi giudaici in memoria di Angelo Vivian*, edited by Giulio Busi, Bologna 1993, pp. 435-460. *Hebrew to Latin, Latin to Hebrew: the mirroring of two Cultures in the Age of Humanism*, edited by Giulio Busi, Berlin-Turin 2006.

¹³ The result of the entire research is the *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies: dictionnaire des intraduisibles*, edited by Barbara Cassin, Paris 2004.

of the incapability of individuation of the pre-established dissimilarity.¹⁴ The contiguity of thought, in a reality in which differences are established a priori, brings from the “misunderstanding”, as defined by Jankélévitch, to the modification of the clash space. The difficulty of individuation of the divergence between contiguous provokes the need to mark the edge.

Certainly the XVIth Century inaugurates phenomena of repression and institutional control without precedent, but at the same time predisposes the bases for a fragile judicial system. Nevertheless, the existence of orientation lines of effectiveness, gives a structure of a scheme to a previously spontaneous system, in a certain sense as an institutionalization of a low-rate position. At the same time it represents the possibility of interaction and juridical recourse, and establishes the edges into which the institution must and can move. There is a component of economical interest that invest the Jewish communities into the Christian social system, that render them object of great attentions from the malicious eye of politics and tradesmen. The Jews were forced to live in a condition of urbanistic aggregation induced by necessities of daily order.¹⁵ Common elements to the communities of migrants and exiles, apart from the cause at the origin of the migration, are the need of familiarity, self-recognition and the recognition of same roots in the other culture. This condition determines a spontaneous phenomenon of creation of a community spatiality of an identitarian urbanistic definition.

Among the concomitant causes of the erection of a material edge between Christians and Jews, I think that we have to take in consideration also an immaterial reason. The dissolution of the inner distance establishes the necessity of achievement of an exterior limit. If thought can not be isolated, it is essential to prevent its circulation.

¹⁴ In particular I am referring to the concept of “the I-know-not-what” as a root for the misunderstanding intended as the main source of social tension, proposed by V. Jankélévitch, Vladimir: *Le je-ne-sais-quoi et le presque-rien*, Paris 1980.

¹⁵ See Zanini, Piero: *Significati del confine. I limiti naturali, storici, mentali*, Milano 1997, in particular pp. 29-54. On the alteration of spatial self-perception as a consequence of migrations, see Yerushalmi, Yosef Hayim: *From Spanish Court to the Italian Ghetto*, Seattle 1981.

Jewish Ferrara: the force of the religious rebirth and the end of the Renaissance dream

A chronological statement concerning the series of vicissitudes that are related to the context between XVIth and XVIIth Century enables us to understand how did the historical course produce social and cultural dynamics, hardly to be interpreted by a modern observer. The history of Ferrara Judaism presents numerous atypical aspects, in comparison with the rest of the Italian scene, and it is therefore difficult to use prearranged interpretative skills without taking in consideration the specific historical conditions.¹⁶ We do not lack a heritage rich in examples of the active Jewish presence ever since the XIIIth Century, but the history of Jews in Este Duchy can be considered as an ascendant journey, whose apex takes place at the same time of the magnificence of the Ferrara Court, in XVIth Century, the earth of the Renaissance. The forms of interaction and exchange existing among Jews and Christians in Ferrara and the Duchy, not sufficiently studied up to now, represent a paradigmatic case of the reciprocal capability of influence, within a historical cultural scene under construction. The simultaneous presence, in the city, of two different rooted and well-grounded forms of Judaism, Ashkenazi and Sephardic, further enlarges the range and the intensity of the potential of conditioning and development of the Jewish thought within the boundaries of the Duchy.¹⁷ The Ashkenazi communities, coming from the Northern and Central Italy ever since the XIVth Century – **within a normal migration scale, provoked by hostile Christian contexts** – increase their demographic presence in 1532, because of a considerable migratory flow from Bohemia. The Sephardic communities, occasionally arrived from the South of Italian peninsula during the XVth Century, multiply their number on the threshold between the two centuries, after the expulsion from Spain. The slow process of reception and normative local revision of the Spanish juridical dispositions by the Naples kingdom postpones the beginning of the Sephardic migrations from the Southern Italy, in spite of the interference attempts made by Isaac Abravanel, who was in good terms with the viceroy, Pedro Álvarez de Toledo. Moreover, the constant processes of reconfiguration of the geopolitical context of Northern Italy, mostly caused by

¹⁶ On Ferrara Jewish history see the volumes by the late lamented Leoni, Aron di Leone: *Nazione ebraica spagnola e portoghese di Ferrara (1492-1559)*, edited by Laura Graziani Secchieri, Firenze 2011.

¹⁷ As concerns a general study about Judaism in Este Duchy, see *Vita e cultura ebraica nello Stato Estense*, edited by Mauro Perani and Euride Fregni, Nonantola 1993.

the territorial oscillations of the Papal State, provoke a decrease of migration phenomena, that undoubtedly introduce further strengthening and enriching elements in favour of an already vibrant Judaism with intellectual life.

The territory of Bologna breaks off its centuries-old relation with the Jews in 1569, confirming this juridical distance, after a short interruption, in 1593.¹⁸ It is meaningful the fact that a short time before, in 1546, the Confraternity of the Zealous has been founded,¹⁹ as an attestation of a social and psychological stability – or perceived that way by the Jews – of the Bologna community. The official papal dispositions towards the Jews, changeable and breakable from a pope to another one, stiffen in consequence of the protestant reforms, in order to tackle an institutional, spiritual and cultural fragmentation of the Christian homogeneity of the previous Italian and European tradition. The aggravation of the law system towards Jews has to be considered as a conflicting and inconstant historical phase, dictated by the contingency and the necessity to deny the respect reserved in the near past to several Jewish mystics and intellectuals by the papal throne²⁰ Nevertheless, in this period the history quickens its progresses, and the events pass by one after the other in a sort of deformation of the centuries-old homogeneous logic of reality. In this historical horizon, events are not predictable, except from a posthumous point of view. The occurrences of the century beet the time of the decades to come, with a meaningful concentration of traumatic events of political, social and religious history of the Po Valley. In 1598 Carlo Borromeo is able to obtain the expulsion of the Jews from the Duchy of Milan,²¹ and provokes new migrations from the Jews of the capital city towards Venetia and Padua, towards Ashkenazi Central Europe, Mantua and the Este Duchy. In the same year the Faience devolution comes true, sovereign rights on Ferrara pass into papal hands and the capital city of the Este dominion has to move to Modena.

The Jews perceived, interiorized and reinterpreted these migrations, interiorizing the exteriority, within a theologized historical reading, considering

¹⁸ For a study about Bologna Jewish history see *Verso l'epilogo di una convivenza. Gli ebrei a Bologna nel XVI secolo*, edited by Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli, Firenze 1996.

¹⁹ As concerns the history of the confraternity, see *Vita religiosa ebraica a Bologna nel '500. Gli statuti della Confraternita dei Solerti*, edited by Bracha Rivlin, Mauro Perani, Firenze 2000.

²⁰ See Stow, Kenneth: *Catholic Thought and Papal Jewry Policy, 1553-1593*, New York 1977.

²¹ The entire history of Jews in Milan Duchy is characterized by the international connotation of the territories, because of the geographical position and the geopolitical dynamics. Furthermore, Milan is considered one of the most important dioceses of the Christian history in Northern Italy, connoted by the choice of bishops among the charismatic leaders of Christianity. See Simonsohn, Shlomo: *The Jews in the Duchy of Milan*, 4 vols., Jerusalem 1982-86.

the course of the history as if it was endowed with a prearranged sense, intended both as meaning and as direction. Each trauma and each scene alteration determine the onset of questions the religion has to answer to, in the development of a new configuration of the relation with the transcendence. A floating, uprooted, wandering spatiality makes the solidity of an interiorized necessary spatiality. A comparison, at a *micro-historical* level, between the evenemential history and the history of thought, can allow us to catch the connection existing between interior and exterior events, and the permeability between the visible reality and the invisible dimension of Faith, among the unexpected overlapping of consciences and the need to find the roots of self-determination, both for Jews and for Christians. To focus the perspective on the permeability between ontological dimensions, it is necessary to fix the viewpoint on the sequence of historical occurrences, and to restore the humanity of history through the individuation and the reconstruction of the intellectual and the religious reactions of Jews in face of the course of the events. To do that I take the liberty to restrict the wideness of the horizon, and to limit the field of vision to the two Este capital cities, Ferrara and Modena.

The comparison between the informations at our disposal enables us to build up a complex scenery, that puts together the intellectual history of Jewish religion in Este Duchy and the social history of Jewish communities in relation to Christian *societas*.²² The integration of the two different chronologies does not reproduce only the linearity of a historical outline, but it can sketch the possible connections existing between the events, their interiorization and their interpretation, sometimes shared with the entire community through the outcomes of the intellectual production. The visible and the invisible levels, as far as the evenemential and the transcendental ones, are superimposed, in a process of historical transversal and cross-disciplinary reconstruction. The XVIth Century, since the beginning, looks as if it was characterized by the pliability of religious orthodoxies, weakened by the plurality of intellectual instances and by the violence of historical events of the end of the previous century. For the first time the religious institutions interrogate themselves about the function and the dangerousness of the religious word, that could be used as the keystone for the interpretation of reality. The preaching, after the experience of Girolamo Savonarola, strikes fear into the ecclesiastic hierarchies, who can fully understand the risky potential of the circulation of oral word that

²² On relations between Jewish communities and Christian *societas* in Italian Renaissance, see Bonfil, Roberto: *Jewish life in Renaissance Italy*, Berkeley 1994.

can not be controlled, neither in its content nor in its form. In 1507 the Pope Julius II enter the heated debate concerning the controversy between Jewish and Christian preachers, that will have a fundamental function to intensify the exchange of sensibilities and techniques, because of the necessity of a reciprocal knowledge, and declares his opinion about the meaning of anti-Jewish preaching.²³ A few years later, the problem of preaching is discussed within the Catholic Church, till ecclesiastic hierarchies define new thematic boundaries and reserves that cannot be violated by common preachers. The session 11 of the V Lateran Council,²⁴ promulgated with the bull *Supremae Maiestatis* by Pope Leon X, discusses the problem of the legitimacy of the preacher and his role, and forbids the treatment of subjects connected with the divination and the prediction of future events. In the same period, after the migrations of the Sephardic Jews, the Jewish intellectual production in the Mediterranean has a phase of extraordinary ferment and exchange of contaminations, and allows a basic circulation of books produced by Hebrew typographies on an international scale, speeding up the trade and strengthening its importance and productiveness.²⁵ In 1522 the text *Akedat Yitzhaq* is sent to press in Salonica, from where it quickly arrives in the Italian context, where the controversy and the preaching intended as a form of intellectual *disputatio* – even if religiously connoted – acquires a vital importance for the protection of religion. The importance of the text, whose title is often listed in confiscation inventories of Modena Inquisition, is confirmed by many other editions.

The discussion therefore shifts, compared with the past, from a political and social level to an exegetic-hermeneutical level, during a century in which the entire geopolitical European balance is based on the function and the relation with the sacred text. The comprehension of the text and the capabil-

²³ See *Preaching in Judaism and Christianity: Encounters and Developments from Biblical Times to Modernity*, edited by Alexander Deeg, Walter Homolka, Heinz-Güther Schöttler, Berlin 2008, in particular Saperstein, Marc: *Medieval Jewish Preaching and Christian Homiletics*, pp. 73-88. On Jewish Italian preaching, see *Preachers of the Italian Ghetto*, edited by David B. Ruderman, Berkeley 1992.

²⁴ Issued the 19th of December 1516.

²⁵ As concerns Hebrew printing, book trade and circulation, see Heller, Marvin: *The Sixteenth Century Hebrew Book: an abridged thesaurus*, Leiden 2004. Richardson, Brian: *Printers, Writers and Readers in Renaissance Italy*, Cambridge 1999. Habermann, Abraham: *Studies in the History of Hebrew Printed Books* [in Hebrew], Jerusalem 1978. Baruchson-Arbib, Shifra: *La culture livresque des Juifs d'Italie à la fin de la Renaissance*, Paris, CNRS, 2001. Baruchson-Arbib, Shifra; Prebor, Gila: *Sefer ha-ziquq. The book's use and its influence on Hebrew Printing*. In: *La Bibliofilia*, 2007, 1, pp. 3-31. As concerns the relation between Hebrew typography and Christian authorizations, see Benayahu, Meir: *Copyright, Authorization and Imprimatur for Hebrew Books Printed in Venice* (in Hebrew), Jerusalem 1971.

ity to cross its linguistic threshold, in order to extract its hidden truth, give to Jewish translators, who are able to handle the original language of sacred text, a hermeneutical potential of Creation, that apparently could weaken the dogmatic horizon of Christian preachers. The eschatological fervour that permeates the cultural and social scene of the beginning of the XVIth Century, frequently connected with astrological reflections, gives rise to a common need of knowing the future, in a dimension of psychological emptiness easily filled by the enthusiastic messianic expectation.²⁶ This atmosphere is confirmed by the important pseudo-messianic experiences of Shlomo Molkho and David Reubeni,²⁷ but also by the common forms of foresight and foretells that covers the itineraries, the places and the markets of Italy, through the words of intellectuals and preachers. The Este Duchy, during the XVIth Century, offers a good representation of the intellectual productiveness that characterizes Italian Judaism of the period, in constant connection with the intellectual and artistic coeval Christian production. The introduction and the use of the *ottava rima* for poetic compositions in Judeo-Italian, the tendency to theateralize religious rituals,²⁸ the presence of Hebrew characters in Italian painters' work,²⁹ are nothing else but a selection, reduced to the minimum, to demonstrate the permeability between the two religions in the Ferrara Court. In the same way we have to consider the religious and intellectual vitality connected with the new physiognomy of Jewish Ferrara community, enriched by the contribution of the Jews immigrated from the rest of Italy and the entire Europe. What evidently emerges, during the course of the century, is the centrality of a sensibility tending to mysticism, of an orientation of the Ferrara Judaism that also endows the scientific research with a religious soul, which gives to history a meta-historical essence. The main medium to disseminate and influence the Jewish thought of the century is evidently the diffusion of Jewish typographies,

²⁶ On messianic tendencies and eschatological expectations within Jewish Early Modern society, see *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern Europe Culture. Jewish Messianism in the Early Modern World*, edited by Matt Goldish and Richard Henry Popkin, 2001, in particular Goldish, Matt: *Patterns in Converso Messianism*, pp. 41-63.

²⁷ See Lenowitz, Harris: *The Jewish Messiahs: From the Galilee to Crown Heights*, New York – Oxford 1998, in particular the chapter *The Messiahs of the Inquisition. David Reubeni and Shlomo Molkho*, pp. 93-122.

²⁸ As concerns the relation between theatre and religious ritualization of liturgies, see Bert, Norman A.: *Theatre Is Religion*. In: *The Journal of Religion and Theatre*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2002, pp. 1-11.

²⁹ On the connection between orality and visuality, see in particular Ben-Aryeh Debby, Nirit: *The Renaissance Pulpit: Art and Preaching in Tuscany, 1400-1550*, Turnhout 2007. Interesting examples of the presence of Hebrew characters in Italian cultural and artistic sensibilities can be found in Busi, Giulio: *L'enigma dell'ebraico nel Rinascimento*, Torino 2007.

which also for Ferrara and the Judaism of the Duchy represent the vital fulcrum for the configuration of a socio-cultural identity. The Sarfati typography, established in the Este capital city in 1551, is taken over by Samuel Usque in 1553 and in the following years sends to press several fundamental religious, scientific and juridical works.³⁰ The mysticism and the Messianism permeate Ferrara typographic production,³¹ and anticipate some of the themes, connected with redemption and repentance, that will be reformulated within the boundaries of Counter-Reformation sensibility and influenced by the Jesuit *pietas*.³²

During the century, the political events that concern the development of relations between Jews, Este Dukes and exterior interlocutors – first of all, the Papacy and the Empire – are characterized by a sort of changeable nature, even if in the shadow of an unquestionable predisposition to a tolerant system of government. The first sign of separation from the official Catholic positions can be individuated at the end of the XVth Century, when, in 1483, the dukes refused the permission to sermonize to the controversial preacher Bernardino from Feltrè, who had inflamed the anti-Semite audience of Padua in the same period. The substantial positions of the ducal policy refuse excessive anti-Semite attitudes, despite of the influence of Savonarolian preaching that provoked the temporary imposition of the recognition sign to the Jews, between 1494 and 1497. At the beginning of the XVIth Century Ferrara Judaism is composed by a rich and cultivated community, as confirmed by the presence of important personalities as rabbi Avraham Sarfati, or as Avraham Farissol, founder of the confraternity Gemilut Khasadim.³³ Starting from 1510 and until 1531 Modena remains under the papal sovereignty. In the same 1510 Emmanuel Tremellius was born, one

³⁰ The starting point for every kind of inquiry about Ferrara Hebrew typographies is the fundamental work by De' Rossi, Giuseppe Bernardo: *De Typographia Hebraeo-Ferrariensi Commentarius Historicus quo Ferrarienses Judaeorum Editiones Hebraicae, Hispanicae, Lusitanae*, Parma 1780.

³¹ I take the liberty of quoting an article by myself: *Le porte della luce. Il ruolo della mistica ebraica nella Ferrara del '500*. In: *Schifanoia. Notizie dell'Istituto di Studi Rinascimentali di Ferrara*, vol. 38-39, 2011 (forthcoming).

³² As concerns the historical relation between Jesuits and Jews, see Maryks, R. A.: *The Jesuit Order as a synagogue of Jews: Jewish Ancestry and Purity-of-Blood Laws in the Early Society of Jesus*, Leiden 2010. On the influence of Jesuit *pietas* on Jewish thought, see the example of Avraham Portaleone's repentance, in Guetta, Alessandro: *Avraham Portaleone, le scientifique repentit. Science et religion chez un savant juif entre le 16ème et le 17ème siècle*. In: *Torah et science: perspectives historiques et théoriques. Etudes offertes à Charles Touati*, edited by Gad Freudenthal, Jean-Pierre Rothschild, Gilbert Dahan, Paris 2001, pp. 213-227.

³³ See Ruderman, David: *The World of a Renaissance Jew. The Life and Thought of Avraham ben Mordecai Farissol*, Cincinnati 1981.

of the most significant figures of religious contamination of the century who converted to Christianity and afterwards to Calvinism. This context will favour his intellectual career, that strikes roots in Cambridge and in Heidelberg, where he becomes one of the most incisive Christian Hebraists of the European Protestantism.³⁴ The author, who literally crossed the transformation phenomena of the century, had studied within the Duchy, that would have demonstrated a particular attitude towards the protestant reformations, forestalling, in a certain sense, the approaches marked by intellectual Conciliarism and Irenism rooted in Modena in the XVIIIth Century.³⁵ In 1527 Rome forced the Duchy to impose the distinction sign for the Jews of the dominion, who appeal against the obligation and obtain the exemption, thanks to juridical issues of the previous century. In 1534, three years after the re-establishment of the Este dominion in Modena, all the traditional tolerance guarantees, temporarily suppressed by the papal authority, are restored. The years of the Council are so full of historical and institutional events that they can be considered as a divide between two different epochs. From a religious point of view, it is the period of the reflection of the Christian Roman Church on itself, of the reformulation of doctrinal priorities and of ecclesiological articulation.³⁶ Moreover it is the time in which rise the definition of a new doctrine, the formulation of a theory of language and a theory about the sociology of reading – using anachronistic conceptual categories – that drive to the refutation of the vernacular language and to the imposition of a rigorous control of thought and interpretation of the written word.³⁷ It is the time of the catholic refusal of the direct relation with the biblical text, and the obligation of a function of necessary role of mediation embodied by ecclesiastical hierarchies. Many occurrences of the Judaism of the Este Duchy demonstrate a particular kind of attention to the language and the importance of translation, as we can verify by the analysis of the Bibles printed by the Usque typography, and the central role as a translator of Tremellius, who translated

³⁴ On Jewish influence on Protestant thought, see the dated but still important study by Newman, Louis Israel: *Jewish Influence on Christian Reform Movements*, New York 1925.

³⁵ The consequences of this kind of attitude towards religious differences represented the bases for the intellectual Conciliarism of Ludovico Antonio Muratori, who has a constant intellectual relation with Cardinal Giovanni Maria Querini, Irenist historian of the Reformation.

³⁶ See Wright, Anthony David: *The counter-Reformation. Catholic Europe and the non Christian World*, Burlington 2005.

³⁷ See *Church, censorship and culture in early modern Italy*, edited by Gigliola Fragnito, Cambridge 2001. Fragnito, Gigliola: *La Bibbia al rogo: la censura ecclesiastica e i volgarizzamenti della scrittura 1471-1605*, Bologna 1995. Zarri, Gabriella Bruna: *Libri di spirito: editoria religiosa in volgare nei secoli XV-XVII*, Torino 2009.

in Hebrew the Calvin's *Cathechismus Religionis Christianae hebraice conscriptus* (published in Paris in 1554).³⁸

As a sort of conclusion of a physiological course of the reflection, after a long period focused on the recall to the forsaken faith, on the necessity to recover the entireness of the Sephardic Judaism and on the eschatological belief,³⁹ in Ferrara the Italian cabalist Mordekhay Dato composes his *Migdal Dawid*, and introduces steady reasons to believe in messianic expectation, using techniques established on gematria and cabalistic exegesis.⁴⁰ It is exactly the cabbala that represents the most important tendency of publishing of the Jewish typography in this century, maybe indirectly favoured by a widespread intellectual interest within among the Christian Hebraists.

Within this historical context, we can find the interpretative keys to explain the reason why in this specific scene, together with Mantua, the mystical tendencies of Jewish Italian culture are so important to establish a new international Jewish scene.⁴¹ Several conditions determine an intellectual zone where Jews can put down the bases of a reborn migrant culture: printing, trade networks, soliciting cultural contexts, tolerance.

The last years of the century are characterized by a widespread signal of imminent changing of historical sceneries and cultural dynamics. In 1583 Yosef Saralbo, a Marrano engaged to help converted Jews to judaize, is condemned by the pope to the stake, together with two more Marranos, in Campo dei Fiori, in Rome.⁴² The Este dukes, unexpectedly, concede the extradition of the condemned. The following year, in 1584, the same governors create a squad of soldiers, placed in front of the *antica scola* (the educational place) in Modena, to protect the activity and the safety of the Jews. On one hand we can see a relatively tolerance attitude of the dukes, but on the other we recognize the concession of striking manifestations of submission to the papal supremacy, probably to dissipate the tensions that continuously spring around the sub-

³⁸ On Tremellius' life, see Austin, Kenneth: *From Judaism to Calvinism: the life and writings of Immanuel Tremellius (c. 1510-1580)*, Burlington 2007.

³⁹ Eschatological expectations and theological super-interpretation of the historical events can be easily individuated in some messianic works printed by Ferrara Jewish typographers: *Ma'yenei ha-Yeshu'ah* by Yehudah Abravanel in 1551, *Consolaçam as Tribulaçoens de Israel* by Samuel Usque in 1553, *Historia de Menina e Moça* by Bernardim Ribeiro in 1554.

⁴⁰ The work, composed between 1555 and 1558, has been deeply analyzed by Jacobson, Yoram: *Along the Path of Exile and Redemption: the Doctrine of Redemption of Rabbi Mordecai Dato* (in Hebrew), Jerusalem 1986.

⁴¹ On the importance of mystic and cabbala in Mantua, see Busi, Giulio: *Catalogue of the Kabbalistic Manuscripts in the Library of the Jewish Community of Mantua*, Fiesole 2001.

⁴² See Roth, Cecil: *A history of the Marranos*, New York 1975, in particular pp. 208-210.

ject of Jews. The affirmation of the Jesuitic *pietas*, the reformation of Roman Church, the uncertainty provoked in Ferrara and in the entire duchy by the earthquake of 1570,⁴³ the religious fragility of the catholic orthodoxy in Modena put down the bases for a progressive tightening of doctrinal positions and sanctions. In the same period, in 1597, the Faience devolution establishes the shift of the capital city of the Este Duchy from Ferrara to Modena, because of hereditary reasons. In 1598, under the direction of Giovanni from Montefalcone, the Tribunal of Inquisition settles down in the new capital, and the religious and philosophical background of the Duchy radically changes.⁴⁴ It looks as if the role of Inquisition is pointing out the fears which seem to base the idea and the need of the ghetto. The ecclesiastic tribunal can theoretically impose its juridical authority only on the catholic members of the community, because it is a religious law court, and it should limit its competences to the judgement of the interiority, moving from the exterior choices of life.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, by a simple analysis of the cases discussed by the inquisitors in Modena, we can easily realize how much wider was the claim of an indirect competence, and how often non catholic people were brought to trial. The legerdemain to find the opportunity to exert an indirect religious authority is the thinness of the areas of permeability between the cultures, and the fragility of the cultural, religious, and architectural boundaries, intended both as a line of separation and as a point of contact. The control on the Jewish community of Modena is wielded through an indirect control of the cohabitation between Jews and Christians with whom the former shares everyday life.

The new capital city. Modena between the preservation of religious roots and the reinforcement of an underground cultural liveliness

In my opinion, a view on Ferrara Judaism is fundamental to understand on one hand the specific hostile papal attitude towards Jews of the Este Duchy, and on the other one the permeability existing on a social level, moving from

⁴³ Weinberg, Joanna: "The Voice of God". *Jewish and Christian Responses to the Ferrara Earthquake of November 1570*. In: *Italian Studies*, 1991 XLVI, pp. 69-81. Guidoboni, Emanuela: *Riti di calamità: Terremoti a Ferrara nel 1570-74*. In: *Quaderni Storici*, 1984, 55, n. 1, pp. 107-136.

⁴⁴ Braglia, Gianni: *L'Inquisizione a Modena nell'età moderna*, Modena 2009.

⁴⁵ On the history and the archive of the Inquisition of Modena, see *I processi del Tribunale dell'Inquisizione di Modena. Inventario generale analitico 1489-1874*, edited by Giuseppe Trenti, Modena 2003; in particular the historical and methodological introduction, pp. 1-46.

intellectual contaminations between Jews and Christians in XVIth Century, up to the sharing of all the aspects of the everyday life in Modena, after the transfer of the capital city. Nevertheless, which is the scenery of the Modena of the ghetto period? Which are its features, its connotations, its veins? At the essential date of 1598, Modena Judaism closes the century bringing to light a renewed mystical sensibility deeply rooted in Ferrara and in the entire Duchy, by the radiance of the activity of Iosef Yedidiah Carmi and the Usiglio poetical school.⁴⁶ The mystical, magical and cabbalistic traditions were attested in the area by the presence of Mordekhay Dato and Avraham Yagel, involved in the same intellectual circle, who developed a reflection aimed at the overcoming of typical monodisciplinary approaches.⁴⁷ The first decades of the XVIIth Century mark Jewish cultural religious, in the same way as it happens in several other cities in Italy, with a deep influence of Jesuit *pietas* and lurian cabbala. The relations with the Holy Land represent, since the very first period, a constant element in Modena Jewish life, as demonstrated by the transfer of the cabbalist poetical school in Jerusalem, in 1620. In the same period we can assist to the creation of the confraternities *Me'ire Shahar* and *Shomrim la-Boker*,⁴⁸ also thanks to the mystical education directed by Aharon Berekhyah from Modena.⁴⁹ The Judaism of the city, enriched and strengthened thanks to the migration of the Jews and the transfer of cultural heritage from Ferrara, reinforces its bases and finds a reborn energy and vitality. We can thus imagine the worry of the Inquisition in front of this kind of vital cultural dimension. One day after another, the forms and the instruments to control the community become more and more numerous and hard. Some Inquisitional censors who operate in Modena signed hundreds and hundreds of manuscripts, and the signatures of *fra' Luigi da Bologna* and *Camillo Iaghel* are well-known throughout the

⁴⁶ On Carmi's poetical production, see Langer, Ruth: *To Worship God Properly. Tension between Liturgical Custom and Halakhah in Judaism*, Cincinnati 1998, pp.174-175.

⁴⁷ On Avraham Yagel and his relation with Mordekhay Dato, see Ruderman, David: *Kabbalah, Magic, and Science: The Cultural Universe of a Sixteenth Century Physician*, Cambridge (MA) 1988, in particular pp. 22-25.

⁴⁸ On Jewish confraternities as an extremely active form of self-determination, religiously legitimated, see Horowitz, Elliot S.: *They Fought because they were Fighters and they Fought because they were Jews: Violence and the Construction of Modern Jewish Identity*. In: *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, 18, 2002, pp. 23-42. I think it is necessary to mark a continuity between the confraternities set in Ferrara and the new ones born in Modena. See Horowitz, Elliot S.: *Membership and its Rewards: the Emergence and Decline of Ferrara's Gemilut Hasadim Society (1515-1603)*. In: *The Mediterranean and the Jews*, 2002, pp. 27-66.

⁴⁹ See Tishby, Isaiah: *The Confrontation Between Lurianic Kabbalah and Cordoverian Kabbalah in the Writings and Life of Rabbi Aharon Berekhyah of Modena* (in Hebrew). In: *Zion*, 1974, 39, 1-2, p. 8-85.

world, impressed as a sign of the censor revision. The worst hostility forms towards Jews can, nevertheless, be led back to the action of a few people who tried in several ways to condition and reformulate the fearful efficacy of the inquisitorial machine: fra' Angelo Calbetti from Recanati, who coordinates the Inquisition between 1600 and 1607; fra' Giacomo Tinti and the Duke Alfonso II, who decides, after the widowhood, to become a Capuchin friar. Through their actions and political choices, the Inquisitions modifies its structure, and improves its operative instruments. In 1603 the libel *Contra gli abusi del conversare de' cristiani con hebrei* is sent to press, in 1626 the handbook *Errori in libris quibusdem hebraeorum* is printed, and in 1637 the official *Index librorum prohibitorum* is enriched with a local list of prohibited titles,⁵⁰ that allows us to understand in a more detailed way the peculiarity of Modena Jewish culture. Several forms of preservation of a wider tolerance towards Jews counterbalance the presence of Inquisition, and in 1635 the obligation to assist to Christian homilies is reduced to a representational familiar system, that provides the obligation for one person for each family. Nevertheless, times are changing, and in 1638, according to the decision of the Duke Francesco I, the ghetto is put up, and the Jewish status is raised to that of a spatialized social peculiarity. This kind of urban physical distinction confirms the threshold of a historical changing, that provokes the reformulation of the conditions of perception, self-perception and relation between Jews and Christians. In comparison with a process of tightening of the inquisitional positions, it seems as if new conditions of freer life emerged into the ghetto. Even if it is a way to isolate a place from the rest of the society, it becomes a zone of self-determination within a closed universe. Isolation means a new way to preserve and restore the self-consciousness through the renovation of a symbolic ritual system connected with the everyday life gestures. Inside the walls of the ghetto, we can recognize the presence of a re-emerged intellectual life of the community, participating in a new dimension of production and sharing between Jews. Avraham Graziano,⁵¹ bibliophile, collector and eclectic intellectual, represents the cultural instinct of the community who lives shut up, together with its thoughts, without the risk to dissolve the tradition in a wider cultural context. Avraham Rovigo,

⁵⁰ See Perani, Mauro: *Confisca e censura di libri ebraici a Modena tra Cinque e Seicento. In: L'Inquisizione e gli ebrei in Italia*, edited by Michele Luzzati, Roma-Bari 1994, pp. 287-320.

⁵¹ The importance of Avraham Graziano as a bibliophile and an intellectual whose activity can be used as an interpretative key for the Jewish social history is confirmed by the results of the inquiry by Zimmer, Eric: *Biographical Details concerning Italian Jewry, from Abraham Graziano's Handwritten Notes* (in Hebrew). In: *Kiryat Sefer*, 1976, 49, pp. 400-444.

disciple of the cabbalist Moshe Zacuto, confirms the tendency to nourish mystical tendencies, up to his transfer to Jerusalem, in 1702.⁵² During the XVIIth Century, after the ghetto edification, it seems as if the Jewish history slackened the pace, looking for a balance in a condition of apparent immobility. However, some events mark a Jewish vitality, even if on an underground level, also because of the Inquisition presence. In 1670 the ghetto receives new energies, and its self-grounded identity is strengthened by the concession to the Jews of the right to choose the profession, without any kind of limitation.

The XVIIIth Century takes shape as a changing epoch, certainly in connection with the international geopolitic scenery, but first of all because of the modification of the relation between religion, right and culture. On one hand we can see a Church which is modifying its self-perception, thanks to a cultural wider orientation of the Pope Benedict XIV, and two dukes, Francesco III and Ercole III, who cannot bear the inquisition interferences, whose action is hardly conditioned and reduced. On the other hand we cannot ignore the European epochal changing, the Enlightenment, the juridical, political and social reflections that drives the world to the French Revolution and the Napoleonic experience, deeply rooted in the conscience of the Modena territories, both on cultural and administrative level, thanks to the dynastic relations with the French kingdom. In this interrelation between the different historical and cultural levels, the Jewish community represents a fundamental social actor. To understand the nature of the community, in connection with the socio-historical context, it is important to sketch its profile, leading back the draft to two main historical lines: religion and culture, law and politics.

As concerns the intellectual and religious features of the community in XVIII Century, Beniamino Foà represents a meaningful example that enables us to understand the Jewish involvement in Modena social and cultural life. Well-known bibliophile and antiquarian, he is appointed superintendent of the library and typographer of the town, as a part of a long ranged project coordinated by the duke to reform the culture within his dominion. Thus he becomes a close collaborator of Francesco III, who appointed him responsible of the typography, intended as an instrument of opinion making, and furnisher of the valued collection of the Biblioteca Estense.⁵³ This process of reformula-

⁵² Y. Mann, *The settlement of the kabbalist Rabbi Abraham Rovigo and his group in Jerusalem in 1702* (in Hebrew). In: *Zion* 6 (1934).

⁵³ On Foà's activity and biography, see Balsamo, Luigi: *Gli ebrei nell'editoria e nel commercio librario in Italia nel '600 e nel '700*. In: *Italia Judaica. Gli ebrei in Italia dalla segregazione alla prima emancipazione*, Roma 1989, pp. 60-65.

tion of the cultural scene of the period introduces in the context new elements to support the self-perception and the self-representation of the changing Modena society. As regards religious history it is important to highlight the experience of Avraham Sanguinetti, who leaves Modena in 1741, and reached Jerusalem, where he joins the school of the Moroccan mystic Hayim ibn Attar. Sanguinetti, who dies in 1778, keeps up an assiduous correspondence with his father, Shlomoh Hayim, who still lives in Modena. In 1776 Samson Hayim ben Nahman Rafael presents to the community his *Toledot Shimshon*, and in 1778 the *Zera' Shimshon*, both commentaries to the Torah and the Mishnah. The mystical tendency of Modena Judaism is confirmed once again by the work *Luminario eclissato*, composed by Elishama' Meir Padovani in reply to the composition *Luminario de' ciechi*, written by the neophyte Giacomo Maria Gazzoli. As regards the juridical and political context, the XVIIIth Century can be considered as a fluid system, during which the ideologized structure of the previous epoch falls down and changes its forms. In 1724 the ghetto is widened, because of the growth of the community, and the vitality of the community in connection with the Christian society is attested by the progressive changing of juridical attitude. In 1736 a ducal decree condemns the slanderous manners against Jews, who obtain also the right of citizenship in 1750, the right to attend the ducal University in 1755, the acknowledgement of the university degree in 1779. The eighties of the century represent the real historical shifting, the threshold between the past and the modernity: in 1785, after the death of the director Giuseppe Maria Orlandi, the Inquisition is abolished by a ducal decree issued by Ercole III, and in 1789, as an apex of this modernizing process, the ghetto and the *casa dei catecumeni* draw to an end, and the physical barriers between Christian society and Jewish community fade away through the imposition of a new social conception.

The Inquisition archives as a source for a Jewish social history

The history of thought is based both on textual sources, that allow us to recognize the permeability between different cultural systems, and unintentional witnesses, whose words, scattered among the witnesses kept within the archival collections, enable us to reconstruct the history and the micro-history of spontaneous phenomena. On one hand we have the history of the high culture and intellectual production, and on the other hand we have everyday instincts that

affect the life choices and all the necessities constantly introduced by common experiences. After the edification of the ghetto, the origins of tensions among different religious roots take form outside the walls, where the real so-called dangerous nature of the Jews reveals itself among the Christians. The inquisitorial trials allow us a nearly defined profile of the crimes physiognomy. Obviously, the cases concerning the moral offences and the religious trials against Christian rituals and dogmatism are numerous and difficult to be traced back to a homogeneous model, because of the geopolitical fragmentation of the Early Modern Italy. Nevertheless I think it is possible to individuate, between the inquisitorial trials, four different main tendencies: neophytes, apostates and conversos; Hebrew book circulation; social events; professions and jobs connected with the Christian society.

As concerns the first category, the neophytes are constantly under the Inquisition surveillance, because of their tendency to preserve the relation with the Jewish original coreligionists, and undoubtedly because of the reputation of Ferrara, considered as the symbolic town for the recovery of the original Jewish faith of the *conversos*. Trials against neophytes and converted Jews can be clustered especially in the first half of the XVII Century, when the tension against Jews is particularly hard, in the period of the consolidation of the new ducal capital city. However, analyzing the Inquisition archive, we can recognize a sort of mitigation of the trend after the edification of the ghetto.⁵⁴ It is not a sharp turn in social history, but it seems as if the creation of physically separated spaces was able to weaken the problem of the superposition of different intellectual and religious domains. A second wave of trials can be individuated in the first decades of the XVIIIth Century,⁵⁵ probably in connection with the introduction of another separated structure, the *casa dei catecumeni*, whose knowledge still requests a deeper inquiry within Modena archives and libraries. The institution of the structure, in 1692, individuates a place outside the

⁵⁴ All the documents are indicated with the same abbreviation form: Archivio di Stato di Modena (ASMO), Inquisition archive, file number, individual dossier number. The most significant trials concerning neophytes and converted Jews are against Francesco Gritti in 1624 (ASMO, Inquisizione, b. 33, f. 3), fra Luigi da Milano in 1631 (ASMO, Inquisizione, b. 92, f. 7), Malcha ben Avraham in 1633 (ASMO, Inquisizione, b. 94, f. 22), Giuseppe Maria in 1634 (ASMO, Inquisizione, b. 96, f. 17), Pier Francesco Ciarlati in 1636 (ASMO, Inquisizione, b. 103, f. 1), Francesco Cocchi nel 1641 (ASMO, Inquisizione, b. 115, f. 3), Felice Antonio Filiberti in 1656 (ASMO, Inquisizione, b. 133, f. 14), Angelo Francesco Agnelli in 1667 (ASMO, Inquisizione, b. 152, f. 8).

⁵⁵ The trials are against Lelio Fano in 1701 (ASMO, Inquisizione, b. 181, f. 18), Laura Archivolti in 1712 (ASMO, Inquisizione, b. 187, f. 3), Isacco Iavè in 1723 (ASMO, Inquisizione, b. 198, f. 16), Giovanni Francesco Bignardi in 1730 (ASMO, Inquisizione, b. 205, f. 8).

ghetto where converted Jews have to be educated and guided through the different levels of the transmission of a doctrine. What we know about the trials increase against neophytes at the beginning of the century cannot allow us to formulate a theory about the relation existing between the institution and the identity religious tensions emerged inside the ghetto. Thus we do not know whether we can consider a wider analysis capability of the inquisition, or if it is a process of agitation of Jewish religious self-consciousness provoked by the house of the catechumens, which symbolizes the Jewish loss of identity. It is certainly sure that the social history never develops by chance.

As regards the trials against the possession of forbidden Hebrew books, I think it is right to distinguish two different surveys: the first one evidently concerns the procedures against those who possess books listed in the papal *indices librorum prohibitorum*, unequivocally enumerated in the lists of the forbidden cultural horizon. The need to define in a more detailed way the inventories, in connection with the local religious sceneries, enables us to hypothesize a precise fragmentation of cultural identities in comparison with the specific social context where they live, passing over the limit of the ideologized Jew model developed by the central papal documents. The second category concerns, on a wider level, all the people in contact with the circulation of Hebrew books, it is to say the people who live on the threshold between two different cultural worlds, or simply unable to identify the distinction markers. Christian and Jewish booksellers are often charged with similar imputations, that seem to be exactly the main worry of an inquisition afraid of the permeability and the similarity between the two cultural systems. We can find, in fact, several procedures against booksellers, somehow involved in a process of circulation of Hebrew books and Jewish thought among Christians.⁵⁶ An indirect reflection of this kind of phenomenon can be found in the rich series of trials against Christians charged with the imputation of heretical magic, often connected with the possession of Hebrew amulets or of the *Clavicula Salomonis*, Latin translation of the *Sefer Mafteah Shelomo*.⁵⁷

Events of social interest represent a hard horizon to be portrayed, because of the lack of historical shapes of documents, whose incapability to repro-

⁵⁶ It is a meaningful example the procedure against Leone Poggeti and Aron Sacerdoti, in 1624 (ASMO, Inquisizione, b. 69, f. 8), and against Mosè Piazza, in 1671 (b. 162, f. 16).

⁵⁷ To understand the diffusion of the treatise, we can notice that we can include the ducal librarian among the people interested in its knowledge. See Golinelli, Paolo: *Un infortunio di Bacchini bibliotecario ducale: la diffusione clandestina della Clavicola di re Salomone*. In: *Il piacere del testo. Saggi e studi per Albano Biondi*, edited by Adriano Prosperi, Roma 2001, pp. 573-585.

duce the human intimacy cannot allow us to catch their detailed features. Everyday events, thanks to the mixture of social classes and cultural matrixes, rarely present tidy particulars neither for the memory of people who directly experienced them nor for those who have to produce a description. They are, however, fundamental attestations of the trials against Jews because of their participation to balls, festivities and holidays characterized by a public ritual or a liturgical community festive celebration. In particular I would like to report the case of a collective sentence against the Jewish community of Finale Emilia, charged of the crime of the participation in a ball. An analogous phenomenon, connected with the difficulty to watch over the contacts between Christians and Jews in social contexts, is denoted by the fear of games, certainly associated with more complex relations with magic and superstition, but undoubtedly representative of the need to check all the contexts where the permeability between religions takes place.⁵⁸ The presence of Jews gives rise to many carries even in the simple case of the participation in a Christian festival. A trial against a Jewish biscuit seller seems to strengthen this theory,⁵⁹ that allows us to understand how did the Church have weakened its tendency to evangelize, in favour of a protective attitude towards Christian faith.

The last category I would like to deal with concerns the worry about the permeability existing in all the contexts connected with the everyday life administration, it is to say, in the places where Christians get in touch with Jewish traders, sellers, artisans. Also in this case, it seems evident how does the fear of the loss of identity drives the Inquisition to a continuous process of rectification and correction of the doctrinal popular knowledge, through the direct Christian participation to the trials together with Jews. Passing over the idea of the simple doctrinal disputation, it is important to highlight the frequency of accusation connected with work activities and relations, the ambiguous frequency of necessary contacts. In my opinion, we have one more example of the necessity, for the ecclesiastic tribunal, to define the interior boundaries that the ghetto has not been able to trace, determining, on the contrary, a consolidation of Jewish self-perception and of the sense of honour of belonging to the *benei Israel* community. The inquisitors' attention cannot neglect the function of

⁵⁸ It is meaningful the accusation against Davide and Cesare Norsa, of 1604 (ASMO, Inquisizione, b. 25, f. 6).

⁵⁹ I am referring in particular to the trial against Giovanna Zanotti, of 1747 (ASMO, Inquisizione, b. 216, f. 11).

Jewish sellers, because of their constant presence in everyday life of Christian society.⁶⁰

Life inside the walls. The failure of the ghetto

The contaminations that frighten the ecclesiastical authorities found their existence on the unavoidable occasions of cohabitation and on the continuous sharing of everyday events. The urban isolation, the territorial distinction between ethnos and confessions, are nothing else but a fragile solution in the Modena background, where heterodox influences constantly mark the Catholic orthodoxy, among the veins of the Lutheran roots, the popular devotion and the religious superstition. The Inquisition of Modena has been really active against the so-called “heretical propositions” of the Lutheranism, against evident or hidden forms of sorcery, against a religious devotion very close to the natural magic. Of course, it has been very active against the cultural richness of a so vivacious Jewish presence. The pope thought about Ferrara that an excessive tolerance policy and a quite pacific cohabitation between Christians and Jews was the cause of the traumatic event of the earthquake of 1570, as confirmed by the bull of the 1st December, where he ascribed the moral responsibility of the disaster to the tolerance of the duke Alfonso II. The Church authority could not tolerate more risks, and was fully conscious of its responsibility to safeguard the spiritual legitimacy of its earthly sovereignty. The progressive limitation to the Jewish circulation, the apposition of the distinction sign, the institution of the *case dei catecumeni* and of the ghettos were nothing else but the exterior attempt to limit the circulation of Jewish words and thought. The *Indices librorum prohibitorum*, the surveillance on the book circulation and the textual censorship represent efficacious instrument to control the surface of the intellectual world. The deepness of the real cultural exchange and of the religious contamination could not be controlled by the inquisitorial supervision and its collaborator networks, and the thought continued to move and circulate, taking advantage of the gaps of the meshes of the net conceived

⁶⁰ I present just a few cases as examples of the social nature of the victims of the procedures: Salomone Spagnolo, in 1633, button-manufacturer (ASMO, Inquisizione, b. 95, f. 1), Matteo Donati, in 1636, brandy-producer (ASMO, Inquisizione, b. 103, f. 8), Giuseppe Sanguinetti, in 1701, tailor (ASMO, Inquisizione, b. 180, f. 9), Mosè Tilli, in 1712, storekeeper (ASMO, Inquisizione, b. 187, f. 13), Salomone Donati, Benedetto Calmo, traders e Davide Rovighi, tobacco seller, in 1731 (ASMO, Inquisizione, b. 206, f. 4), Pellegrino Donati, in 1733, wig-manufacturer (ASMO, Inquisizione, b. 207, f. 12).

to separate the cultures. In Este dominion we cannot identify a period of effective separation between Christians and Jews, and the modifications provoked by the ghetto edification seem to provoke nothing else but changing some life attitudes. Certainly, the society changes its internal relation dynamics, but the material distance cannot change into a cultural separation. The persistence of the ecclesiastic trials confirms that the configuration of the XVIIIth Century society is connoted by the rebirth of the Jewish presence several decades before the suppression of the ghetto. I do not intend to deny the existence of discrimination attitudes and laws, and I do not want to portray the profile of a tolerant threshold that did not exist. However, what we know about the history of the ghetto in Modena – that has to mean the history of Modena society at the time of the ghetto – in a wider cultural horizon, allow us to draw an evident conclusion. The separation between Christians and Jews has not been completed, and despite the presence of anti-Jewish manifestations and witnesses, the Judaism in Modena has never been completely isolated from the rest of the society. In the Early Modern history of the new capital city of the Este duchy, the ghetto has not been able to pass over the mere physical separation, to interrupt the vital and vivacious underground permeability. In spite of the sharp edges of the Modern history, the analysis of the witnesses allows us to raise a quite a few questions, to open several new approaches. Regardless of what we can imagine, the history shows us an astonishing perspective. In Modena, the ghetto has failed.