I GHETTI NELL'ITALIA MODERNA

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INTRODUCTION
The Relationship between Jews and Christians.
Toward a Redefinition of the Ghettos

For the past two decades in Italy, Jewish history has emerged as a central research preoccupation – even as it lags behind the historiography of other countries in this regard. This increased interest is due to the thematic, theoretical, and methodological renewal related to the interrelationship with historiographic developments more generally. Unlike the common practices of international universities, Italy has never – and still does not – have a specific academic disciplinary division known as Jewish Studies. Yet it is certainly true that the momentum of research in this area has contributed to the creation of a disciplinary field in its own right in our country, which can no longer be ignored or considered, as it has been for far too long, as closed, marginal, or generally unnecessary for non-Jews and for the study of general history; or, ultimately, considered only as "the history of the Jews". From the standpoint of the relations between ghettoized people and the "ghettoist" Christians – the inventors of the ghetto – new researchs centered on the early modern period and on the moment of reclusion and confinement (16th-19th centuries) represent a case of a major interest and historiographical innovation. These are amply cited in the notes of the works that we present here, and to which we have hitherto referred. On the basis of thorough documentary surveys carried out in archives that have been neglected so far in this area and for this period, it is possible to look at the history of the Jewish minority from a new perspective. Indeed, unexpected results emerge to challenge the most common, but incorrect, interpretive paradigm of Jewish separation and insularity. In Italy, the lack of communication between the history of the Jews and general history has meant that the latter have long been nearly "invisible" in terms of general history. The disappearance of the Jews from the major historiographic debate, however, has resulted in a general neglect of the valuable insight that the analysis of the institutions, norms, and behaviors of a minority group – or relative to this group – can offer for the overall historical reconstruction of "Christian" society, both national and, more widely, European, with its ongoing cultural, social and political transformations. On the contrary, research on Jews enriches the historical understanding of new information that in turn makes historians better equipped to address a specific problem or a specific historical phenomenon – as the institutions, norms and practices of Jews interact with the transformations and institutions of the

majority, and often to the very point of conditioning them. In fact, the conditioning were reciprocal and not unilateral.

Today, however, we are witnessing a different trajectory that could be defined as "reversal or historical revision", which instead aims to oppose the suppression of Jewish history in national historical narratives. Models that were previously considered to be fixed or static have been questioned and researchers have started to examine Jewish history beyond its supposed isolation, which was considered to be turned inward, and finally to study it in relation to more general social changes, including the implementation of laws or civil and ecclesiastical institutions, as well as the mechanisms that they sought to normalize.

For example, surveys that recognize the role of Jews in the history of finance and the economy, or in the history of labour, are a key component in the historiographic debate, and productively renew traditional interpretations and models. The range of Jewish activities, considerably broader than that generally reduced by historians and economists to moneylending, is now increasingly taken into account in order to contribute to a comprehensive study of the economic dynamics that profoundly influenced the wider European reality. The dismantling of the most enduring stereotypes in connection with the economic activities almost universally practiced by Jews has had multiple impacts, including the demonstration of the crucial role of networks of internal and external relations, as well as national and transnational; the reaffirmation of the interweaving of Jewish and Christian activities and initiatives; and the analysis of the ongoing negotiation with institutional powers. These new research directions have led to the emergence of a wide range of activities and strategies that deconstruct the widespread stereotype of Jewish passivity and their voluntary submission to the rules, laws, and prohibitions imposed by the world of the majority.

Such observations are valid not only for economic history but also for social and cultural investigations, in both internal and external terms. For example, these analyses contradict the common assumption that represents the social body of these communities as a cohesive and compact unit. Jewish Italian communities, which were already distinct both ethnically and linguistically, were not egalitarian. For centuries, there had been broadly differentiating social configurations that opposed more affluent families – which often held political and administrative roles – to poorer or more modest families. There is still much to be studied and deepened in terms of the social and economic stratifications of the Italian Jewish world, as well as the conflicts that arose from it. This work has recently been undertaken for several urban centres, including Venice and Rome.

However, it would be necessary not to limit research to the angle relating to the Jews who left the ghetto, but rather to direct attention to the Christians within the ghetto itself as well as the daily life within it. The comparative approach must of course include the wider Christian society in which the ghettos were contained, and from which the dynamics that contributed to

shaping the internal structure of the ghetto itself were derived. For example, it would be simplistic and ineffective to examine the history of the Roman Jews without comprehensive references to the history of the city more generally, its institutions and its normative systems, while taking into account the history of the Church and papal power. On the contrary, it would be essential to ask how Christians, with their institutions and laws, were disruptive to the reality of the ghetto through imposing adaptations, transformations, and negotiations on the Jews. At the same time, it is essential to ask how a series of exchanges and interactions conditioned relations between the two worlds, as well as influenced the political and social reality as a whole: for example, the use of notaries and Christian lawyers by Jews to defend and resolve their questions – and not just internal ones – to the high consideration in which some sovereigns and pontiffs held the most influential members of the Jewish community, and actively sought rabbinical opinions for specific theological questions, as we shall see in this collection of works on the delicate issue of marriage.

Of course, these relations must not obscure situations of confrontation and tension, as well as the processes of control, discrimination, persecution, and repression that increased over time between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. The cross-analysis of data held in administrative, notarial, criminal, and inquisitorial sources, observed in parallel with the themes developed by standardization and treaties, makes it possible to completely integrate Jewish history into the general history of Europe and its major processes of transformation. The history of the Jews is an integral part in phenomena of general historical interest (the definition of heresy, for example, and the circulation, consumption and censorship of books, practices of magic and witchcraft, emotional and sexual exchanges, international and intercultural influences, the construction of a "lexicon of prejudice" and discrimination, well before any discourse on rights and citizenship, etc.)

To emerge from the paradigm of insularity and unscalable walls – which the ghetto symbolizes well – allows us to identify the system of exchanges, interactions, and reciprocal influences on shared spaces, whether physical or cultural. Above all, it gives us the opportunity to escape from the historiographical ghetto, which has prevented us from effectively interconnecting general European and world history with the history of the Jews. Although the ghetto walls have never succeeded in creating a total division, in the historical narrative the idea and reality of the ghetto have come to dominate and bury all other perspectives. The history of the Jews and their historical relationship with Christians is, in this sense, a central chapter in a more general history, which is today more present than ever, in the challenges of coexistence among different religions and cultures, and antagonizations related to relationships with minorities. From these new perspectives, it is not a question of creating an idyllic representation of these three centuries of ghettoization, but rather constructing a more accurate portrait of these three hundred years, in which it would be possible to shine a light on the chiaroscu-

ro of everyday life that flowed through the walls, overcoming both negative and positive stereotypes. No tears or dreams, but simply a plausible reconstruction of its complexity.

The five hundredth anniversary of the Venice ghetto (1516) offers an opportunity to resume the discussion of the Italian ghettos in the light of a new historiographical chapter. In recent years, several studies have opened up new issues and perspectives on these themes. The word "ghetto," often used inappropriately and applied to various contemporary realities – the Nazi ghettos, the American black ghettos, immigrant ghettos – offers a point of reflection about its potential usage which could produce misinformation and error by invoking a biased historical projection. It is necessary to refuse the sociological and ahistorical use of the word "ghetto" as a global metaphor, charged with an intrinsically negative meaning in time and space, thus erasing the specificity of what a ghetto is. Moreover, the chronology of the ghettos is subject to revision and must be inserted into the broader political, social, economic and cultural processes of this long era, demonstrating how ghettoization, from its origins, has been a multifaceted process that is impossible to summarize by dates, much less by definitions and paradigmatic models. What determined the success of the "ghetto system" in central and northern Italy for more than three centuries was more the passage of the 1555's pontifical support than the Venetian model of 1516 (followed in 1546 by a second ghetto at Ragusa, as we shall see). It is also important to note that through seventeenth century and into part of the eighteenth, new ghettos were created with distinct characteristics and varied geopolitical and institutional situations. Notwithstanding some local variations in both internal and external standardization and enforcement, the organization of the *claustri* was based on a series of generally shared procedures: opening doors only during daytime hours, discriminatory signs for the Jews, the prohibition of medical practice on Christian patients and of having Christian servants, and restrictions on economic activity – if not already reduced to simple moneylending.

Conversion remained the primary objective, but while waiting for this to be prioritized, and in order to facilitate its actualization, Jews were granted a form of hospitality that was full of ambiguities and contradictions. It is precisely because there were no two ghettos exactly similar that the plurality of this history should be emphasized. Recent research has clearly demonstrated how internal and administrative mechanisms, economic and social structures, professional options, the matrimonial market, means of exchange with foreign countries, and the proclamation of rules along with their practical application varied significantly from place to place, from state to state, and from time to time. The history of Italy, with its political fragmentation, played an important role in solidifying these distinctions. Residing beyond the ghettos, illicit relations of any kind among Jews and Christians, travel, movement, large-scale trade, and the circulation of suspicious and prohibited books were all made possible by the distinct methods of conduct of the state's institutions in the territories through which they exercised jurisdiction and

where Jews resided. In the same way, the discrepancies reported by the Roman Inquisition, local ecclesiastical authorities, and states have contributed to widening the range of options open to several issues, with as result that cases that one only quickly look over could be severely punished by someone else. Consequently, beyond a history of the ghettos and Italian Jewish culture, we must speak of Jewish ghettos and cultures as a plurality, additionally considering that many of these ghettos were inserted within a history wider than the local or national – that is, global and worldwide. Thus the Italian ghettos were quite different from each other: arising or being suppressed at different times and in various historico-political contexts and phases, characterized by complex structures and institutions – not only economic in nature – as well as by the regulated relationships with state and local institutions. Rome, Venice, Florence, and Turin present incomparable characteristics; in the same way, Livorno, the city without a ghetto, would rather have been a ghetto of its own, as shown by one of the contributions to this monograph.

Diversity and specificity, however, do not mean that it is impossible to make a comparison among the communities – and the ghettos – as long as the organization of the *enclosures*, also in terms of urbanism and occupation of space, was shaped by a series of generally shared rules. However, this comparison must take into account that both the standard and its actual application vary significantly from one locality to another, and often also vary within the same locality over time. Again, it is Italian history in its complexity, with its political and institutional fragmentation, which is jeopardized by the will to undertake a new and complex history of the ghettos, articulated geographically and chronologically. The need to rethink and redefine the Ghetto/ghettoization paradigm on the basis of diversity and to question the classical historiographic model, which describes ghettoization as a marginal space of separation and isolation, makes it possible to fully incorporate Jews into the general course of the events of Italy, as a vital part of the Italian history of the early modern era. At the same time, however, the circulation of people, objects, and books (and, therefore, ideas), maintained constant flow of communication among the Jews of Italy and others (whether Christian or Jewish). From their houses in the ghettos, or from the fairs, markets, and ports of the Italian peninsula, they built relationships with each other and took leading roles in the major international networks of Sephardic diasporas, in the east as in the west. In this sense, the phenomenon takes on a national character, which deserves to be recognized beyond the fragmentation of pre-unitary states. Although specific variations existed, as local research has shown, it must be remembered that the Jewish population generally confronted segregation by finding themselves at the centre of conflicts that spread well beyond the city walls. Despite being in an early stage of research, works about the creation of Jewish libraries, and on intercultural trade in the Mediterranean and beyond, including intellectual production, mobility, movement, and travel, and research surrounding the Universities of Padua and Ferrara, which welcomed Jewish students from all over Europe (and thus

also from ghettos on the peninsula), all reveal the profile of a Jewish Italy that can not be reduced to a local scale.

Looking ahead to a comprehensive study that explores the dynamics of ghettoization and the problems associated with its definition – a work that the editors of this volume will publish shortly – this monographic issue proposes an inquiry into the variety of experiences in ghettos according to a comparative reading perspective, taking into account the diversity of legal, social, cultural, and institutional situations as well as the variability of internal and external processes. Through the presentation of a series of case studies, with an extended chronological arc (from the 16th to the 19th century and beyond), we propose to reconstruct the phenomenon of the ghetto by exploring several of its many facets. In particular, the intention of this work is to "get out of the ghetto," by analyzing the relationships between the internal and the external through the system of relations with Christian society and reciprocal representations, while simultaneously "entering the ghetto" by revealing how Christian normativity conditioned Jewish practices and strategies. For example, this happened when the uncertainties of the process of legal and civil equalization began at the end of the eighteenth century, it appeared to force Jews to re-enter the ghetto's enclosure, even after emancipation.

This theme compels us to reflect on the crucial question of citizenship, which is often defined without an adequate consideration of how this status was closely connected to the exercise of loan and its consequences. Above all, it is important to note that the passage of time and the worsening of the condition of the Jews, together with the supposed "nature" of the "infidel" (as those considered to be incapable of a true faith), led to the complete rejection of membership in the *civitas* for those to whose behavior by nature was considered impossible to give respect, in economic terms or otherwise, based on trust, credibility and reliability. Certainly the Jews did not belong to the group of those who could be included in the genuine and legitimate society of those who operated for the "common good". Theirs was a membership that was well defined as "imperfect."

On the other hand, trust and reliability are terms which refer to *fides*, a notion to which *infideles* or *perfidi* were necessarily alien, which essentially evoked the category to which the Jews were seen as belonging, and which therefore indicated their incapacity to find true faith through their blind obstinacy and perseverance in error. Thus, the lexicon of the *fides* and of trust, slipping from the theological and religious meanings to the economic and political, constructed the idea of the market as a system of credit and bonds of trust in which only a few groups could be involved, and by the same token, decreed the non-credibility and exclusion of other subjects who were not worthy of the faith because they were deprived of it, and who were reputed to be of bad reputation. Moreover, in the political sphere, this same language of faith established the criteria for social inclusion and the right to citizenship from which those of bad reputation or who were deemed unreliable were excluded, since they were viewed as intrinsically not capable – just like the

Jews because of their religious obstinacy (*perfidia*) – of partaking in the rules of *civitas*. Theology and canon law constituted the essential points from which to move toward a solution for the controversial issue of Jewish citizenship. Indeed, a solution took shape in the fact that ultimately there was no common rule, since concessions and privileges were contracted with authorities and varied by time and place. But the issue of citizenship remained open until, with the emancipation and equalization of civil and political rights in the nineteenth century, the wealthiest Jews sought to integrate themselves in a stable way within the majority by assuming their rites, distinctions, and symbols – as we shall see.

External relations, internal networks, mobility, and relationships with institutions are some of the focal points of the investigations that we offer here. In this perspective, Giuseppe Veltri's work deals with Jewish culture in Italian ghettos, and interconnections with contemporary Christian intellectuals, through an unprecedented exploration of the presence and participation of educated Jews in Academy. This research is followed by the analysis of Serena di Nepi, who reconstructs a controversy that took place in Ancona in the mid-sixteenth century regarding an annulled betrothal, and questions the relations that were activated in terms of legal competencies between the rabbinical authorities of different Italian communities and the highest pontifical magistrates dealing with the important question of matrimony. Next, Benedetto Ligorio rebuilds the process of creating a ghetto, referring to the Ragusa precinct, which until now was only known in terms of commerce. He creates a useful comparison between the official documents for the establishment of Jewish enclosure in Venice (1516), Ragusa (1546), and Rome (1555), revealing similarities as well as ideological and cultural distinctions. Nourit Melcer-Padon then examines the link between the urban development of Livorno, the free port and the city without a ghetto, and the status of Jews as citizens. On the basis of original research, this work questions the multiform relationships between discrimination, conversion, and integration. Finally, Paolo Pellegrini sheds light on the long-term measures, on the part of both Jews and Christians, of a mentality of "separation" still present in the process of emancipation and assimilation through the opening of the ghetto during the nineteenth century, which indicates the resistance of both Catholics and Jews to the modern phenomenon of integration.

Assembled together, these studies reveal hitherto unknown or underdeveloped information that contributes to a broader reconceptualization and a historiographical redefinition—finally free of predefined models—of the question of the "ghetto".

(Translation by Isabel Harvey)