

commitments to social, political, and economic issues. They were often involved in religious questions and, despite their various paths to secularization, they contributed to a discussion that is often overlooked by historians: the construction of a modern world where the place of religion and tradition was debated. In pursuing their practical goals they acted as though they belonged to real and imagined communities, to recall Benedict Anderson’s famous notion.²⁸ However, it must be noted that the “imagined communities” they all contributed to creating were multiple, as they lived in the world they meant to change. Moreover, one should stress that their belonging to or criticism of any community implied emotional attachment to it: when translating Judaism into a modern language, working towards the implementation of religious tolerance in other European countries, or collecting financial aid to resettle Jews elsewhere, they all confronted their own Jewish identity, whatever it meant or implied. Our six *authors* offer historians a possible way to look at the history of modern Italian Jewry, combining individual agency with general issues of national and transnational history. A more complex and nuanced historical portrait emerges, as biographical trajectories convey more than a reproduction of social structure or a unique possible historical experience. They offer historians new questions and challenges in interpreting the past, and in this case they invite reflection on how the history of minorities contributes to a different understanding of historical phenomena.

Why biographies?

by *Tullia Catalan*

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In order to analyse some of the issues fundamental to the history of Jews in Italy, from the emancipation of 1848, to the Fascist period of the 1930s, the essays in this edition of *Quest* adopt a biographical approach. This decision is motivated by the fact that, following the Italian Jews’ acquisition of civil and political rights, their route towards integration in the majority society is composed of thousands of unique, individual experiences, rather than a single, monolithic vision. Our decision to adopt biography as methodological approach permits the non-Italian speaker to identify, through the stories of the intellectual, political and even family lives of the people discussed here, some of the issues common to all

²⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

of the Jewish middle class in this period, both within Italy and further afield. It also allows the reader to understand the peculiarities of the Italian Jewish experience during the “creation” of the State: first through their active participation in the *Risorgimento* process, and later in the shaping of the national and therefore of the new Italian identity, which for some Jews, was smoothly linked to the traditional Jewish one.²⁹

A biographical reconstruction of the figures analysed in these essays helps us bring to light the coexistence of various different identities, linked in varying degrees to their shared Jewish origins, but permeated by religious, cultural and political stimuli from the wider society during the nineteenth- and twentieth-century.

Useful information on sentimental, intellectual, friendship and business links which characterised the lives of these six individuals emerges from the profiles. This biographical approach allows us analyse the networks of national and transnational relationships of them all. Indeed, we cannot fully appreciate Elena Raffalovich Comparetti’s interest in Froebelian pedagogy without understanding her wide range of contacts throughout Europe; and Asher Salah’s essay on Raffalovich Comparetti highlights the importance of this approach, revealing her links with Protestants, alongside whom Elena promoted Froebelian pedagogy in Italy. Elena received mixed responses across Italy, since the Catholic clergy were opposed to the Froebelian method. Laura Cantoni Orvieto, like other women belonging to the Jewish middle class in Italy and across Europe, also dedicated herself passionately to pedagogical issues. She was a follower of the educational method devised by Maria Montessori, and devoted part of her life to the education of infants, writing several books for children. As Ruth Natterman discusses, Orvieto took part in the process of women’s emancipation in Italy: she often wrote for the Florentine journal ‘Il Marzocco’, and for other pro-emancipation journals of the period. There was a sort of process of double emancipation for Jewish women in Italy at that time: they were rising up against the traditional role Judaism held for them, as well as from the role which society

²⁹ See, *Ebrei, minoranze, Risorgimento. Storia, cultura letteratura*, eds. Marina Beer Anna Foa (Roma: Viella, 2013); Carlotta Ferrara degli Uberti, *Fare gli ebrei italiani: autorappresentazioni di una minoranza (1861-1918)*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011); “Un’identità in bilico: l’ebraismo italiano tra liberalismo, fascismo e democrazia (1861-2011),” ed. Mario Toscano, *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel*, LXXVI/1-2 (2011); Tullia Catalan, “Ebrei e nazione dall’emancipazione alla crisi di fine secolo,” in *Storia della Shoah in Italia. Vicende, memorie, rappresentazioni*, vol.1, *Le premesse, le persecuzioni, lo sterminio*, eds. Marcello Flores, Simon Levis Sullam, Marie-Anne Bonucci, Enzo Traverso (Turin: UTET, 2010), 13-34.

reserved for all women in general.³⁰

The social group represented in these six biographies is that of the upper middle class, and the “financial aristocracy,” this latter is characterised by Elena Raffalovich, who was originally from Odessa, the great Russian city on the Black Sea. Odessa was an important community of port-Jews³¹ commercially connected with other significant port cities of the period, including Trieste - another port city with an important Jewish community.³² Trieste also promoted the Froebelian kindergarten, which were already employing Jewish teachers from the 1870s. Elena is an example of just one of the many Jewish Russian women living in Italy during this period, and about whom there remains much to say, especially in a prosopographical perspective. Salah’s essay explores the importance of this group, whose level of education and independence belies the stereotypical assumption that Jewish women in Western Europe were largely uneducated, though of course the women discussed here belonged to the middle class, and not to the lower classes. Salah also discusses Anna Kuliscioff, Angelica Balabanoff and Julia Schucht, who were actively involved in the Socialist or Communist movements: Kuliscioff and Balabanoff were also engaged in the fight for the rights of women, especially female workers.

Most of the people discussed here were the children of bankers and merchants (Laura Cantoni Orvieto; Elena Raffalovich Comparetti; David Levi), of self-employed individuals or landowners, like Tullo Massarani, whose father was a lawyer. The particular case of Giacobbe and his son Tullo Massarani, discussed here by Maurizio Bertolotti through a dialogue between the two generations, explores the important role of landowners and modernisers in the development of new agricultural techniques by some Jewish Italian families, who lived also in Friulis and in Veneto during this period.³³

Only two of the figures discussed here came from modest families, closely linked

³⁰ See, Monica Miniati, *Les ‘Emancipées.’ Les femmes juives italiennes aux XIX et XX siècles, 1848-1924*, (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2003); *Donne nella storia degli ebrei d’Italia. Atti del 9° Convegno Internazionale Italia Judaica. Lucca 6-9 giugno 2005*, eds. Michele Luzzati Cristina Galasso, (Florence: Giuntina, 2007).

³¹ See Asher Salah in this issue.

³² See Lois Dubin, *The Port Jews of Habsburg Trieste. Absolutist Politics and Enlightenment Culture*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Tullia Catalan, “The Ambivalence of a Port-City. The Jews of Trieste from the 19th to the 20th Century” in *Modernity and the City of the Jews*, ed. Cristiana Facchini, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC*, 2 (2011), 69-98, url: www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=232

³³ See Tullia Catalan, “Notabilato friulano e triestino (1866-1914): due realtà a confronto,” in *Notabili e storia d’Italia. Caratteri e geografia del notabilato italiano (1861-1922)*, eds. Renato Camurri and Luigi Musella (Florence: Le Monnier, forthcoming).

to the Jewish communities to which they belonged: Bernardo Dessau and Alfonso Pacifici, both of whom were actively involved in Zionism, though in very different ways.³⁴

Retracing the lives of these six Jews living in Italy, from the dawn of the *Risorgimento* to the advent of Fascism, allows us to better understand the social, institutional, and above all the cultural contexts of the Liberal and later Fascist Italy in which these individuals interacted. We must, however, always remember the difficulties entailed in the biographical approach of emphasising the originality of the experience on the one hand, and on the other hand sympathising too much with the object of study.³⁵

The authors of the essays published here confronted themselves with the various thematic and methodological approaches required for a modern biographical study.³⁶ The essays demonstrate these different approaches by addressing topics such as: education within a civil and political emancipatory context, and its diverse reception amongst men and women; family links across generations, marriage strategies and networks; the relationship with the traditional Jewish faith in a secularised society like Italy, and the fascination of conversion demonstrated by the generations studied here. The essays also discuss the revisited cultural significance of cosmopolitanism; types of political engagement, and different modes of expressing patriotism; the central topic of women emancipation; the transformation of the traditional Jewish solidarity into a more general notion of philanthropy, aimed at society in general and not just the Jewish community.

What emerges is a general picture of an Italian Jewish presence which was very flexible: linked to the traditions of its region of origin on the one hand, as can be seen by the relations between Tullo Massarani and the Mantuan notables, but intellectually able to overcome every boundary due to a cosmopolitan education and, in the majority of cases, a keen awareness of one's Jewish origins. This Jewishness was proudly proclaimed even during the Fascist period, as Ruth Natterman demonstrates in her discussion of Laura Orvieto's refusal, in 1929, to

³⁴ See Gabriele Turi, "La biografia: un 'genere' della specie 'storia'" in *La biografia: un genere storiografico in trasformazione*, eds. Cristina Cassina and Francesca Traniello, *Contemporanea*, II /2 (1999): 300.

³⁵ Giovanni Levi, "Les usages de la biographie" in *Annales. Économie, Sociétés, Civilisation*, 6 (1989): 1331. Regina Pozzi, "Genere minore o impresa da maestri?" in *La biografia: un genere storiografico*, 290; Gabriele Turi, "La biografia: un 'genere' della specie 'storia,'" 302.

³⁶ See Lois W. Banner, "Biography as History" in *The American Historical Review*, 3 (2009): 581-583.

comply with her Jewish editor Bemporad's request that her work be censored in accordance with Fascist views.

The six essays collected here span three generations of Jewish men and women in Italy who lived during a period of great change which challenged the traditional world of Jewish communities and, as a consequence, the institution of the family. The civil and political emancipation granted by the House of Savoy in the Piedmont and Sardinia to Protestants, Waldesians and Jews with the Albertine Statute of 1848 was the true turning point for Italian Jews.

The life of David Levi, as outlined by Alessandro Grazi, moves from the very beginning of the process of Italian unification, discussing Levi's involvement with the Masonry and with Grand Orient of Italy, of which he was a founding member, an involvement shared by Tullo Massarani and by many other Italian Jews engaged in the political life of the country.³⁷ The lodge was in fact a place where people could meet without religious barriers, and it was a leveller for the liberal middle class of the period.³⁸

After the struggle for the Unification of Italy, the Jewish middle class was largely moved by a profound patriotism, linked particularly to the figure of the King and to the House of Savoy, and Jews were largely well integrated in the fundamental elements of the State: the army, education—Parliament and bureaucracy.³⁹ David Levi and Tullo Massarani were worthy examples of the politically engaged, integrated, progressive Jew, and they were engaged on both a local administrative level and a national political level. The authors of these two profiles, Grazi and Bertolotti, have both chosen to focus on Levi and Massarani's process of formation and intellectual orientation, omitting the development of their political activities in Parliament. Given the wide experiences of these two figures, it would be impossible to do justice to all areas of their lives in such a brief space, especially when one considers that both men were also writers, poets and well-known journalists.

During the second half of the nineteenth-century, Jews were really active in Italy: they were closely linked to liberal politics, motivated by loyal patriotism, faithful to the ideas of progress and reassured by the anti-clerical stance of the Italian State. This climate, which was so idyllic when compared to the situations of other Jews in Europe, who were troubled by the enduring presence of anti-Semitism, suffered its first setback as a result of the first echoes of the Dreyfus

³⁷ See Fulvio Conti, *Storia della massoneria italiana. Dal Risorgimento al fascismo*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006) (2° ed.).

³⁸ Jacob Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe. 1723-1939* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970).

³⁹ See Catalan, "Ebrei e nazione dall'emancipazione alla crisi di fine secolo."

case in France and the birth of political anti-Semitism. This setback was first felt by the more forward-thinking Italian Jews, including David Levi, who gave an important, though never published, interview to young Jewish students from Turin for the “Vessillo Israelitico,” the Italian Jewish newspaper,⁴⁰ in which he expressed strong concerns about the campaign of anti-Jewish political propaganda. Political anti-Semitism reached Italy in 1911, as a result of the war in Libya.⁴¹

The years before the First World War were unsettling for Italian Jews, and full of cultural and political changes. In place of David Levi and Tullo Massarani’s generation came a new one, more tormented by their intellectual and political choices, since they were the children of such tempestuous years. Alfonso Pacifici, whose life during precisely these tumultuous years is discussed by Sara Airoidi; and Bernardo Dessau, whose life is presented by Marco Bencich – two young historians not by chance fascinated by the lives of these outsiders – allow us to cast our gaze over the small, but complex world of Italian Zionism, and its journalistic production. Internally divided into various currents, but predominantly favouring a philanthropic bond to the national Jewish movement, this was however an important place of exchange for young Jews, who, thanks to the Florentine group led by the Rabbi Margulies, to which Alfonso Pacifici also belonged, created discussion and exchange groups which promoted the rediscovery of Jewish language and culture.⁴² The Rosselli brothers also belonged to this young circle in Florence, and their mother Amalia Pincherle Rosselli-was great friend of Laura Orvieto, as Natterman discusses in her article.

There is, however, one final aspect on which I would like to focus the reader’s attention while concluding this short introduction: I believe it is useful to underline the desire for self-representation demonstrated by some of the people analysed here. David Levi, Tullo Massarani and Laura Orvieto all wrote autobiographical works,⁴³ which reveal their desire of auto-representation, and

⁴⁰ See Il Comitato, “Ai lettori”, in *XXIX marzo. Numero unico a ricordo della Emancipazione Israelitica*, eds. Comitato di studenti, Turin, March 29, 1898.

⁴¹ Mario Toscano, *Ebraismo e antisemitismo in Italia. Dal 1848 alla guerra dei sei giorni*, (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2003), 41-47.

⁴² See Toscano, *Ebraismo e antisemitismo in Italia*, 71-89.

⁴³ See, David Levi, *Vita di pensiero-ricordi e liriche*, (Milan: Battezzati, 1875); ID., *Ausonia, vita d'azione (dal 1840 al 1870)*, (Turin: Loescher, 1882); Tullo Massarani, *Illustri e cari estinti. Commemorazioni ed epigrafi*, ed. Raffaello Barbiera, “Edizione postuma delle opere,” Gruppo IV, “Ricordi,” I (Florence: Successori Le Monnier, 1907); ID., *Una nobile vita. Carteggio inedito di T. M. Scelto, ordinato e postillato da Raffaello Barbiera*, “Edizione postuma delle opere,” Gruppo IV, “Ricordi,” VI (Florence: Successori Le Monnier, 1909), I (1851-1885); ID., *Ricordi*

by the first person narrator, their firm intention to transmit the most significant moments and reflections of their lives.⁴⁴ And this in itself: autobiography's use amongst the Jews of liberal Italy, could be an area for future studies stimulated by these essays.

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While in the final stages of the preparation of this eighth issue of the journal, we were reached by the saddening news of David Cesarani's premature passing on October 25.

His career developed through posts at the University of Leeds, Queen Mary University of London, and the Wiener Library. Later he was professor of modern Jewish history at the University of Southampton from 2000 to 2004, and finally research professor in history at Royal Holloway College - London since 2004.

David was a brilliant and prolific scholar: his scholarship on the Holocaust and its memorialization, as well as his contributions to Jewish history – especially on Anglo-Jewry as well as on the peculiar phenomenon of port-Jews – had significant impact on the evolution of international historiography. His contributions to scholarship and the influence of his research will certainly deserve to be discussed more in depth in the near future. His research is known to all in the field, but his notoriety was by no means limited to specialists alone. His intense and passionate public engagement – from newspaper columns, to advisory roles for governmental agencies, to the work done for some very successful televised documentaries – made him a prominent public intellectual in the UK and beyond.

David was one of the first colleagues and friends to whom we illustrated the idea of creating an online journal devoted to the history of Jews and anti-Semitism in the modern world. As we discussed our project he proved, once more, to be perceptive and insightful. He was then an active member of our Editorial Advisory Board since the first issue of 'Quest', and repeatedly offered us his invaluable support, his discernment and his constructive criticism.

His generosity, his vibrant intellectual curiosity and his irony will be missed.

The Editors

cittadini e patriottici, ed. Raffaello Barbiera, (Florence: Successori Le Monnier, 1908); Laura Orvieto, *Storia di Angiolo e Laura*, ed. Caterina Del Vivo, (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2001).

⁴⁴ The debate about the use of autobiography in history is really large. For an overview on Italian case in XIXth century see, *Scritture di desiderio e di ricordo. Autobiografie, diari, memorie tra Settecento e Novecento*, eds. Luisa Betri, Daniela Maldini Chiarito (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2002); Luisa Tasca, *Le vite e la storia. Autobiografia nell'Italia dell'Ottocento*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2010).