



INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR JEWISH GENEALOGY
AND PAUL JACOBI CENTER

AT THE JEWISH NATIONAL AND UNIVERSITY LIBRARY, JERUSALEM

Title of the Project:

Crossing the Boundaries: Jewish Networks in Early-modern Italy between the Mediterranean and the New World (16th – 18th Centuries)

Researcher:

Dr. Federica Francesconi, Ph.D.
University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)

Mid-term Report - May 2009

Research activity during the first semester has been concentrated in three main phases:

- Archival research in Italy
- Archival research in Israel
- Archival research in the US

1) Archival research in Italy: Ancona and Modena (September 2008 – November 2008)

Work has been conducted in the following institutions: the State Archive of Ancona, the State Archive of Modena, and the Archive of the Jewish Community of Modena.

As for the first two institutions, I have concentrated my attention on a number of folders “Archivio per Materie, Ebrei” and the old Notarile Sections (with a specific attention to wills and dowries). In the Archive of Modena, I have worked on the folders “Corrispondenze fra diverse Comunità”. Considering the abundance of the material, I have decided to concentrate my attention on the eighteenth century. A preliminary examination of the sources reveals the existence of a network of Italian Jewish merchant families, such as the Fermis, Morpurgos, and Coens, who forged a strategy of solidarity that functioned to help the Ancona’s community after 1555 that lasted more than two centuries. Moreover, in 1732 Moisè Fermi, a Jewish merchant and physician, brought about the election of Ancona as a free-port, leading to a change for the better for the declining Jewish community. Italian and Sephardic merchants thrived, while the Jewish population increased dramatically, from nearly 1,000 souls at the beginning of the eighteenth century to 1,586 (more than 10% of the total population) at the end of the century.

At that time, the leadership of the Fermi, Morpurgo, and Coen families was characterized by a high involvement within the organization of the Jewish community, broad commercial

networks in Italy, and in the Mediterranean area. The relationship between the communities of Ancona and Modena was based on both marriages and trades. Sources document not only marriage unions of Modenese Jews with Italian but also with Levantine Jews. Moreover, Italian Jews of Ancona developed a strong political marriage connection with members of the nearby community of Senigallia throughout the whole century.

2) Archival research in Israel: Jerusalem (December 2008-March 2009)

The work at the Central Archive for the History of Jewish People at the Hebrew University (CAHJP) allowed me to study the Archive of the Jewish Community of Ancona, which generally can not be consulted because it is still not inventoried. Nevertheless, thanks to the generosity of Dr. Renato Spiegel, the archivist in charge of the material, I have studied the demographic and population registers, correspondence between the Jewish Community (“Università degli ebrei”) and the Papal State, and rabbinical tribunal’s acts. The Jewish Community of Ancona reveals a demographic and genealogical structure based on two coexistent corporate bodies: the Italian community and the Sephardic one. The two groupings mingled during the century due to marriage unions, while families, networks and intra-groups of leading Jewish Anconitan merchants remained distinct as Italian and *Sephardi* in their relations with the authorities. Moreover, in the mid-century, the *Sephardim* joined a new corporate body, “Gli Orientali,” (the Orientals), together with the Levantine non-Jewish merchants. This fact deserves in itself attention: the question is whether to note the sharing of status with not-Jewish merchants, as some scholars recently emphasized (i.e. the forthcoming book by Francesca Trivellato and her various articles); or to decide to remain with the view that the official Jewish community represents a unique status in the early-modern context.

The demographic registers, income-tax returns and exchange of goods, and the rabbinical tribunal’s acts allow a study of the genealogical structure of the Jewish community of Ancona. Moreover, it has been possible to identify the individual trade networks that Anconitan Jews established in the Mediterranean area (in particular, in Salonica, Venice, Ragusa, and Split).

Through the correspondence between the so-called Jewish Nation (“Università degli ebrei” or Jewish Community) and the Papal State, I have investigated the nature of the Jewish-Christian relations: in a nutshell, Jews of Ancona were permanently under surveillance. A comparison with the Jewish community of Modena, in an independent Italian State, shows clearly the interference of the ecclesiastical authorities in the daily-life of Anconitan Jews.

In recent historiography, the new category of port Jews has been applied to better understand the dynamics that led to the integration - through civil inclusion - of Jewish merchants in the early modern period, concentrating mainly on Mediterranean and Atlantic ports, including Livorno and Trieste in Italy. The eighteenth-century Jewish merchant society of the free-port city of Ancona with its networks in Salonica and Ragusa, but at the same time under the yoke of the Papal State, does not enter in this category and makes the analytic historiographical picture more complicated.

2) Archival research in the US: Los Angeles (April 2009)

Preserved in the Special Collection of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) is the Rosenberg-Lewin Collection: 15 folders originally from the Archive of the Jewish Community of Ancona that Hajim Rosenberg sold to UCLA. This collection is extremely rich and I am just at the beginning of my research. I have examined registers of the community and correspondence between adherents of the Sabbatian movement in Italy. I am using the former in order to focus on the demographic-genealogical structure of the community and the latter for an in-depth analysis of the culture of the Jews since late seventeenth to mid-eighteenth century. In considering the

structure of the Ancona's Jewish Community, it seems that this collection includes all of the Hebrew records with cultural and religious content – as against the archive preserved at the CAHJP which contains Italian and Latin sources having an administrative focus.
