VOL 12 ISSUE 4 JULY 2013 £5.50

Jewish RENAISSANCE

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF JEWISH CULTURE

THE HEART OF ITALY

Before the unification of Italy every city or region had its separate story. Emilia Romagna and Tuscany, two provinces at the heart of Italy suffered less from the oppression of the Papacy than Rome and their often tiny communities managed to preserve their heritage through periods of oppression; through the decimation of the deportations and murders of World War II. Now there is new interest in opening the history to the world; conserving ancient buildings; memorialising the Holocaust and giving new expression to ancient traditions.

TIMELINE

MIGRATION AND IMMIGRATION

From 61 BCE Jews arrive from Jerusalem as traders or slaves. Small colonies are established in different parts of Italy.

312 CE Constantine makes Christianity the official religion and discrimination against the Jews begins.

From 455 Barbarian invasions bring chaos and make life more difficult. Many Jews emigrate to the Arab- and Norman-controlled south, particularly Sicily.

12th century First significant documentary evidence of Jewish settlement in the heart of Italy.

Late 1300s Jews come from northern Europe, fleeing accusations of having caused the Black Death.

1400s Jews arrive from elsewhere in Italy to Parma, where they become important money-lenders, and to Ferrara, Modena, Reggio Emilia and Florence, attracted by the liberal attitudes of the Estes and Medicis (see box).

1416 Bologna, governed by the Pepoli family and already well-known for its university, is selected for a meeting of Italian rabbis.

From 1492 Jewish numbers are boosted by those expelled from Spain or fleeing Spanish influence in the south.

1504 Bologna becomes part of the Papal States.

ASSIGNED TO THE GHETTO

The Counter-Reformation and the desire to combat Protestantism brings a new level of intolerance by the Papacy.

1553 Convinced that the Talmud attacks Christianity, Pope Julius III burns thousands of volumes.

1555 Pope Paul IV requires all Jews to live in separate neighbourhoods sealed off by gates, wear distinctive markings, engage in no commercial activities other than trading in rags, and have no relations with Christians.

1566 Ghetto set up in Bologna (which had 11 synagogues, more than Rome), but resisted for some years by the Medicis in Florence and the Estes in Ferrara.

1569 Over 800 Jews are expelled from Bologna but later return.

1593 In order to develop the new city of Livorno by attracting Jews and entrepreneurs, the Medici family guarantees full rights to its Jews (see page 28).

Second expulsion of Jews from Bologna, who find refuge in the Este-governed cities of Ferrara, Modena and Cento.

1598 Ferrara is annexed to the Papal States. Many Jews follow the Este family to Modena, which becomes a centre for kabbalah. Nine synagogues are opened 1638-1721.

EMANCIPATION WON, LOST AND WON AGAIN

1796-1798 French troops led by Napoleon liberate many Italian ghettos.

June 1799 19 Jews are murdered in Siena by 'Viva Maria' gangs from Arezzo supporting the House of Lorraine against Napoleon. (This is commemorated by an annual fast.)

1799 Old rulers in Italy are restored. Some reimpose the ghetto and former restrictions in Ferrara.

1808 Under Napoleon Jews are freed from the Florence ghetto when Tuscany is annexed to France.

1815 Jews are forced back into

CULTURED PROTECTORS

MEDICIS

The Medici family, rising to prominence through the wool industry and banking, become unofficial heads of the Florentine Republic. In 1437 **Cosimo de Medici, the Elder** grants the first formal charter to the Jews of Florence for money lending. In 1464 **Lorenzo Il Magnifico**, becomes their protector, supporting Jewish scholarship, Talmudic studies and medicine, and guaranteeing favourable living conditions. He oversees the 'Golden Age of Florence', in which there is much interaction between Christians and Jews. The Jews are expelled when the Medicis fall from power in 1492 but return with them in 1513. This (1513-1534) is the period of Medici Popes Leo X and Clement VII and a generally lenient attitude towards the Jews.

Cosimo I of Florence (1537-74), ushers in an era of renewed prosperity, issuing a charter to attract Sephardic Jewish merchants from the Balkans to their rich court as well as to fight their wars with Venice. They take in Jews from the Spanish peninsula after 1492, including the famous Dona Grazia Mendes Ha Nassi, and, around 1532, Ashkenazi Jews from Eastern Europe.

Pisa. However on receiving the title of Grand Duke of Tuscany, in 1570 he bowed to pressure from the Pope to create a ghetto in Florence.

ESTES

The Estes, appointed to the duke-dom of Ferrara by Pope Paul II in 1471, are patrons of the arts and need Jewish support to maintain

Under Este rule Jews follow a variety of commercial and professional activities. They can study medicine and indeed become the most esteemed doctors through their ability to read texts in Arabic and Judeo-Spanish.

In 1597 **Alphonso I** dies with no male heirs and Ferrara reverts to the Papacy. Jewish rights are curtailed and many follow the Este family to Modena. Finally, in 1627 the ghetto is established.

MALATESTAS

The Malatestas are the lords of Rimini and the surrounding area. Galeotto Roberto Maletesta, head of the house in the early 15th century, asks the Pope to allow him to require the Jews to wear yellow hats. His successor in 1432, his half-brother **Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta**, as well as a famed military leader, is a poet and patron of the arts and has a good relationship with the Jewish community. Under his rule Jews build the first of three synagogues. Later Pope Pius II excommunicates Malatesta, seen as conspiring against Papal territorial interests. On his death in 1468 Rimini comes under the control of the Papal States.

the Florence ghetto with the restoration of the House of Lorraine.

1848 The lost rights are regained in Tuscany.

1858 Edgardo, son of Momolo Mortara of Reggio Emilia, is kidnapped and then kept by the Pope in the Vatican (see box).

1859 Rights lost are regained in Modena and Romagna.

UNIFICATION

1861 With the unification of Italy Florence becomes the first capital. The Jews are emancipated and all remaining ghettos abolished – except Rome. Jews begin leaving Modena and smaller towns for Milan.

1874-82 The Moorish Revival Synagogue is built in Florence using the entire estate of David Levy, who wished for a temple worthy of the city. King Umberto I visits in 1887 and Vittorio Emanuele III in 1911.

1890 The ghetto of Florence is demolished, allowing reconstruction of the town centre, now the Piazza della Repubblica.

1897 The Jews of Ferrara become the most ardent Italian supporters of Theodore Herzl's Zionist dream.

1899 The Italian Rabbinical College moves from Rome to Florence under the direction of Samuel Hirsch Margulies. Through him and his pupils Florence becomes the centre of an intellectual and spiritual Italian Jewish Renaissance in the early 20th century.

THE RISE OF FASCISM

1931 2,730 Jews in Florence, 535 in Pisa.

1933-1939 5,000 Jews, out of a total of 304,000 emigrants from Germany, flee to Italy.

1934 Collaboration begins between Italian Fascists and revisionist Zionists, based on their ideological differences with Great Britain.

1938 Mussolini's racial laws exclude Jews from public office, schools and work. The communities create elementary and middle schools of their own offering a high level of education.

1940 Italy invades France and Greece. The Jewish community and its synagogues fall victim to vandalism and raids. There is a high level of Jewish participation in resistance to Fascism.

8 September 1943 Italy switches her allegiance in the war, declaring an armistice with the Allies; Allied forces enter Italy from the south; North Italy is under German control and Jews flee southward.

Nazis raid Pitigliano and deport all the Jews; 243 people are deported from Florence, and the synagogue is looted and desecrated; 114 are deported from Bologna, 110 from Ferrara, 90 from Livorno, 70 from Modena, 17 from Siena.

1 August 1944 Pisa. Philanthropist and president of the community Pardo-Roques, together with six Jews, is murdered by Nazis.

March 1945 The Jewish Brigade, under the command of General Ernest Benjamin, goes into action in North Italy as part of the British Eighth Army.

April: Benito Mussolini is caught and killed by Italian partisans.

HELPING TO FREE ITALY

SUSAN KIKOLER

In the main cemetery of Parma nestles a tiny Jewish walled cemetery. Among the tombstones is an obelisk, the final resting-place of **Eugenio Ravà**, born in Reggio Emilia 1 May 1840, died Parma 11 July 1901, a military officer who, the tombstone proudly proclaims, fought alongside General Ulysses S Grant in the American Civil War and accompanied Giuseppe Garibaldi in the campaign to create a united Italy, freed from foreign yoke, first as one of Garibaldi's 1,000 Redshirts and later as one of his Vosgi combatants at the battle of Menton . . . Not your usual tombstone, nor your usual life.

The Jews of Italy played a remarkable and pivotal role in the Risorgimento. It has been said that after Italy freed its Jews, its Jews helped to free Italy, giving financial, moral and political support and sacrificing their lives for the nation.

Emilia-Romagna was the birthplace of many of these remarkable patriots, who seized the opportunities afforded by their new civil status to forge a trajectory that was not just a credit to their Jewish identity but to their homeland too.

Another such figure was **Cesare Rovighi**. Born around 1820 to a religious family in Modena, he first studied at the rabbinical college in Padua, then at Parma University, before becoming increasingly involved in politics. He created Italy's first Jewish monthly magazine *Rivista Israelitica*, 1845-47, with both Jewish and non-Jewish contributors, designed to encourage Jews, especially women as educators of children, to take their place in the new world now open to them.

Rovighi was involved in the 1848 revolts. As a military officer he was awarded the medal of valour for his role in the battle of San Martino (Solferino) in 1859 and ended his career as an aide to the Italian King Vittorio Emanuele II.

POST-WAR

1962 A new synagogue is dedicated in Livorno, to replace the one destroyed in WWII.

1967 A few hundred Libyan Jews settle in Livorno.

1969 Communities are shrinking through emigration to Israel and larger Italian cities (Milan, Turin).

1973 Museum of the Deportees created in Carpi near the Fossoli Internment Camp, where from 1944 deportees and Jews were held en route to concentration camps. (See page 22)

1987 The Union of Italian Jewish Communities and the Italian government sign an agreement that the community will no longer be a public body controlled by the state. However, contributions to the community can be deducted from taxes, up to a maximum of 10% of personal income, and Jews can observe the Sabbath and holidays wherever employed and can obtain kosher food in public institutions.

2006 The Italian parliament votes to establish a Museum of Jewish Life in Ferrara.

2010 The first Jewish Book Festival is held in Ferrara.

2012 Florence's Cardinal Della Costa declared Righteous among the Nations for creating a network to save Jews in WWII.

2013 Odoardo de Focherini of Carpi is beatified by the Pope for his efforts in saving 100 Jews.

There are approximately 900 Jews in Florence; Livorno: 600; Pisa, including Viareggio and Lucca: 100; Bologna: 100; Ferrara: 70, Siena: 60.

Florence synagogue launches its first cultural programme, open to all.

Main Sources: *Jewish Tours in Emilia Romagna* and *Tuscany Jewish Itineraries*
Consultant: Susan Kikoler, Honorary Director of the British-Italian Society

EDGARDO MORTARA
KIDNAP ITALIAN STYLE

ELI ABT

When the papal police called at the home of the Mortara family in the Bologna ghetto on 23 June 1858 to abduct their six-year-old son Edgardo on the orders of the Inquisition, no-one could have foretold the seismic consequences for Italy and its Jewish communities.

The pretext for the Church's action under the then Pope Pius IX, an inveterate reactionary, was simple. The Mortaras' Catholic maid had, it was claimed, administered 'emergency' baptism to Edgardo when he was seriously ill at one year old. Church law forbade Jews to raise a Christian child. Edgardo was now 'a Roman Catholic and had to be 'saved' by wrenching him from his family.

Whereas such abductions from distraught Jewish parents had happened before (and would happen again) this time the Church could not have anticipated the public outcry, vividly depicted in *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara* by David Kertzer (Picador 1997).

For the first time European and American Jews united to protest the Papal States' institutionalised suppression of their kinsmen. In France they formed the first Jewish international defence organisation, the Alliance Israelite Universelle. Sir Moses Montefiore went to intercede with the Pope's Secretary of State in Rome. The Rothschilds got involved. *The New York Times* published editorials attacking the medieval obscurantism of the Church. The kidnapping exasperated no less than Emperor Franz Josef I of Austria and, above all, Napoleon III of France, whose troops were guarding the Papal States.

Pius IX, unyielding and deaf to all entreaties, enraged Napoleon sufficiently to conspire with Count Cavour about Italian unity. Thus French support sparked the Second War of Italian Independence including the liberation of Bologna and led to the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy in 1860. As Kertzer shows, universal revulsion against the fate of a little Jewish boy helped profoundly to change the face of Europe.

Alas, Edgardo's story was to remain a Jewish tragedy. Indoctrinated since early childhood he rejected his faith when free to return to it at age 19 in 1870 when the capture of Rome ended Jewish disabilities. He joined the Augustinian Order and, like most converts, became an ardent spokesman for Catholicism.

Ironically, 88-year-old Father Pio Mortara died in a Belgian monastery in March 1940, two months before the Germans invaded, thereby sparing him the fate of his kinsmen. His riveting story is told in the play *Edgardo Mine* by Alfred Uhry, well-known for the screenplay of *Driving Miss Daisy* and for the musical *Parade*.

WHEN ITALIAN JEWS GET TOGETHER...

CLIVE LAWTON was at a conference in April 2013

When Italian Jews get together, as they did for a weekend of socialising and discussion, brought together by the Union of Italian Jewish communities (UCEI) in the seaside resort of Milano Maritima at the end of April, there's much to catch the eye of a British Jew.

First of all, the quality of the food tends to be better than at similar UK gatherings. For example, where the programme said 'Fast Lunch', that meant it would be over in 75 – 90 minutes and there were still two or three courses.

Secondly, British Jews tend to organise themselves into denominational groups and synagogues. Not in Italy. There even the tiniest community has a board on which serve representatives and usually, especially in the bigger communities, there will be a religious and a non-religious bloc. (Reform and other varieties have not impacted much on most of Italy yet and the general consensus, Sephardi style (though Heaven forfend that you should think them Sephardi), is that religion is 'traditional' (Italian) and if you don't like that you can avoid religion altogether. So this Union is, like the Board of Deputies, non-religious, but each geographical, town-based community has its own little Board of Deputies representing the range of affiliating Jews. Each community also has its chief rabbi – who may of course also be the only rabbi in town. The laws governing the constitution of the community boards – and the Union as a whole – are set down in meticulous statute.

Charedim have not really yet arrived, except for a fairly small but challenging group of Lubavitch. They're challenging because even the religious authorities don't really know what to do with them. Their Ashkenazi, Chasidic views and approaches are entirely alien to Italian Jewry and they are not really integrated into the Jewish structures that exist.

Many Jews I met live in communities that we'd probably think in the UK are too small to survive. A few families hold together perhaps a synagogue and a bit of a religion school. The larger communities have far more than that, but I didn't detect the same trend as we have in the UK for Jews to gravitate towards the larger Jewish centres. Like all Italians, Jews feel their regional identity far more solidly than we do in the UK and so if you live in Ferrara or Padua or Siena or somewhere, the fact that the Jews there might be numbered in tens or at most a few hundred doesn't seem to be reason for leaving. If anything, it seems to be reason for those there to redouble their efforts to ensure that their community survives into the future.

I'm going back to Italy in September for the four-day festival in Milan sponsored by the Milan Jewish community and the City authorities – the topic of which is Shabbat. Can you imagine communities in the UK, only a few thousand strong, unapologetically organising so Jewish an event? We probably wouldn't even try it in London!

IN SEARCH OF THE FINZI-CONTINIS

LUCY RAITZ

I went to Ferrara, as many do, to find the garden, and its owners of course, the Finzi-Continis. *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*, by Giorgio Bassani, is a novel that many people love, and was made into a film that perhaps even more have seen and enjoyed, although it is not entirely faithful to the book. Bassani set almost all his fiction in Ferrara, and I was curious to see the town where his characters – friends? relations? – and he played out their loves and friendships in the growing shadow of fascism and persecution.

Very briefly, the novel concerns a young man, the narrator, from a middle-class Jewish family, who is drawn into the orbit of a much grander Jewish family, the Finzi-Continis. They have hitherto kept themselves to themselves but have been led by circumstance to reach out to their co-religionists, the circumstance being the rise of Fascism (it is 1938), the introduction of the racial laws and the ejection of the Jewish members from Ferrara's tennis club. The young narrator falls in love with the daughter of the family, Micòl, but his feelings are not reciprocated and the story ends with his sad realisation of this, and discovery that Micòl is probably having an affair with her brother's best friend, a Gentile. The story – much of which takes place in the beautiful garden of the title – is framed by an introduction and conclusion that tell us of the fate of Micòl and her family, all deported to Germany never to return, with the exception of her brother, Alberto, who has died of Hodgkin's disease.

Once read, never forgotten, *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* joins those other stories of doomed young love, bitter-sweet and compelling in the rawness of the feelings evoked: Turgenev's *First Love*, Alain-Fournier's *Le Grand Meaulnes*, E L Carr's *A Month in the Country*. But with one important difference: while we accept the others as fiction, the Finzi-Continis are too rooted in harsh reality to escape our conviction that they have to be real. Ferrara is a real place and we can book an Easyjet to Bologna and be there in a few hours.

Still, just like the lost domain in *Le Grand Meaulnes*, the garden itself turned out to be elusive, and perhaps not the point after all.

Ferrara is a very pleasant town: not too grand in spite of its imposing architecture,

Giorgio Bassani

full of sedate Ferrarese on bikes, who were courteous and kind, sorry that the August holidays had closed the cycle-hire shops and stopped us from joining them, and regretful that the synagogue had been put out of action by the earthquake but not unduly concerned. No, there wasn't anyone we could speak to, there were no tours of Jewish Ferrara and the only place we would find Jewish Ferrara would be the cemetery. The cemetery seemed an ironic place to start a search, but after all, Bassani's novel begins in this very graveyard, as he remembers it one afternoon many years later, prompted by an excursion which he makes with friends from Rome to some Etruscan tombs.

And my heart was wrenched as never before by the thought that in the tomb, which seemed to have been set up to guarantee the everlasting repose of its first customer – his, and that of his descendants – only one of the Finzi-Continis I had known and loved in fact achieved that everlasting repose. The only one actually buried there was Alberto, the elder child, who died in 1942 of lymphogranuloma. But where Micòl, the second child, and professor Ermanno, the father, and signora Olga, the mother, and signora Regina, signora Olga's very old paralysed mother, all deported to Germany in the autumn of '43, found their burial place is anyone's guess.

The cemetery was just as he described it. We wandered around in the burning heat and soon found our first Continis; it was a name that came up again and again, clearly a big clan. It took us longer to find Finzis, but they were there too, and even a Finzi-Contini or two. We didn't find Bassani at first, and wondered if he was buried in Rome, where he lived for most of his life after the war.

We went back to the office, where the friendly custodian, a sixtyish lady in slippers with the pale soft skin and dyed red hair of a Muscovite, told us where to look for Bassani, among the family he wrote about, and whose names he had changed for his story. In 'real life', she said, they were not Finzi-Continis but Finzi-Magrini, and Alberto, Micòl's brother who died of Hodgkin's disease, was buried here as Uberto. Micòl? Nobody knew who she was.

We trudged back to the very end of the grounds. Others had made this same pilgrimage. Bassani's tomb had many little stones on it. The family whose names he had changed lay nearby: Uberto, who rested beneath the earth, and his parents, Silvio Finzi Magrini and Albertina Finzi-Magrini (nata Bassani), deported to Auschwitz in February 1944. Many others, Magrinis, Continis, Finzis and Bassanis lay nearby,

including Nino and Laura Contini – remember them? The parents of little Anna. Well, he hadn't changed the names very much. Enough for people to recognise themselves or a relative, suspect a resemblance, guess at an identity, but too little for anyone to really call it fiction. Albertina had even been a Bassani before her marriage – so much for the 'aristocratic' Finzi-Continis!

Why change so little? Perhaps for the same reason so many of us take part in this search: because it's all too true, so much of the story, and the ones who lie in these graves are the lucky ones – those born too early or too late to board that train that left Ferrara station on 19 October 1943, or others, who, with the help of chance or cunning, managed to hide or escape. Of course we wouldn't find Micòl or her family here. They were ghosts, and the smoke of autumn bonfires was their truest and most benign memorial.

The walls of Ferrara remember the Jews who were taken away. The plaques on the walls of the station, the pleasant twisty streets of the ghetto, the school where Bassani taught, the synagogue where they were assembled for their deportation. Apparently, the town is proud of Bassani, its famous son. A Bassani festival honoured him in 2010.

On our first night in our dark but very comfortable hotel we asked for a restaurant recommendation. The charming proprietor suggested amongst others the Osteria del Ghetto, and there of course we went. It was the usual small warm interior, with a row of tables outside, and we were lucky to secure the last of these on a hot August night. We ate a delicious dish of guinea fowl cooked with cinnamon and pears, apparently a Jewish speciality. The rest of the menu was less parochial, with pork cooked in milk particularly recommended, and pasta with vongole (clams) also claimed for Jewish cuisine! Well, unless these things offend you, you will like the Osteria del Ghetto. The wine list is good, and so are the desserts.

The young Finzi-Continis and their friends would have eaten here happily; they ate everything, with Micòl taking particular care to choose the ham rolls from the lavish spread offered at the tennis parties. And generally, Italian Jews have been very assimilated, happy to share in the delicious food of their adopted country, to play their civic role with pride, to enjoy their emancipation. That is surely why they were so surprised at the turn of events. In some ways, the novel is about assimilation. We suspect that behind Micòl's refusal to consider marrying the narrator is her fury that she should be compelled to marry among her own people, however ready she might have been to do so were it not for the racial laws. The narrator's father has been a keen member of the Fascist party; how can they be returning his card like that? The narrator has been the mainstay of the library as well as the tennis club – his account of being asked to leave, and the humiliation of his exit witnessed and unchallenged by his fellow readers, his fellow citizens, is a tiny, but terrible and memorable episode in the novel. In the end, as we have always known, this is the worst part of any truthful Holocaust story, because the saddest and hardest to pardon: not the sensational evil of the invaders, which we will never forgive on behalf of the dead, but the turning away of those they thought were their friends or at least benign acquaintances. Bassani's writing is full of these small betrayals.

Ferrara is a wonderful town. Everyone is kind and helpful; sitting in the Piazza Municipio in the evening, sipping cold white wine and gazing at the magnificent staircase of the Town Hall is a delight. Next time, we'll make sure not to come during the hottest days, the August holidays. We'll hire bikes and ride, not walk, to where I expect the garden to be, according to the narrator's instructions: along the Wall of the Angels, in the neighbourhood of corso Ercole I d'Este, then down the lane from Porta San Giovanni but stopping before Porta San Benedetto and the railway station. There we'll find, as we did this time – nothing. But the trees are back, those trees that were cut down during the worst days of the war.

I stopped under a tree: one of those old trees – limes, elms, plane trees, chestnuts – which a dozen years later, in the freezing winter of Stalingrad, were to be sacrificed for firewood, but which in 1929 still raised their great leafy umbrellas high above the city walls.

There was no Great House, no walled mysterious garden. They say Bassani took as his inspiration a garden in Rome. And Micòl? Bassani dedicated the book to her, Micòl with her fair hair, her love of milky Venetian glass, her French poetry, her refusal to acknowledge a future whose full horror she seems to foresee. Who is Micòl? Nobody knows. And that is as it should be.

Sources: Guido Fink: 'Growing up Jewish in Ferrara: The Fiction of Giorgio Bassani; a personal recollection', *Judaism* (Summer-Fall 2004) gives the background to Bassani's life in Ferrara and confirmed that many people in Ferrara were displeased at the resemblances they detected with themselves and their relatives in *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*, or discontented at not finding more of these! Judith Roumani, 'Searching for the Garden of the Finzi-Continis: Finding the Courtyard of the Finzi-Magrinis', *Sephardic Horizons*, vol. 1 issue 2.

The Bologna ghetto

With our guide at Fossoli

Ferrara castello, with Hotel Ferrara behind it

EMILIA ROMAGNA APRIL 2013

The tourist authority of Emilia Romagna has decided to make the rich Jewish culture of the province better known. *Jewish Renaissance* was among the publications and tour operators invited to experience for themselves and spread the word. We stayed in the comfortable Hotel Ferrara, so close to the walls of its picturesque castle that we could easily take ourselves back to the times of the Este family, who were so supportive of the Jewish community. We were taken to Jewish heritage sites in the city and beyond. We were served food of exceptional quality. Cuisine is Emilia Romagna's pride. And we saw for ourselves the strong interest in Jewish culture expressed in the city's Jewish Book Festival and the first few rooms of what will be an impressive new national museum of Jewish life.

The ark in the Oratorio Fanese

WE GO TO SHUL IN FERRARA

The 2012 earthquake damaged Ferrara's synagogues but not the enthusiasm of its community

It was a packed and lively congregation we met at shul in Ferrara on Shabbat. On this last weekend of April attendance had been boosted by those who had come to the city for the Jewish book festival – including Baruch and Shemuel Lampronti, brothers who now live in Turin but who return to their native Ferrara to contribute their wonderful singing voices on festivals and special occasions. Also with a powerful vocal contribution is Enrico Fink: "I live in Florence but my heart is in Ferrara". The rest of the congregation joined in with enthusiasm.

The building donated in the 15th century by a member of the community, once home to three synagogues, Italian, Tedesca (Ashkenazi) and Fanese, is right in the heart of the old city, a stone's throw from its magnificent castle, in cobbled Via Mazzini, cheek by jowel with trendy boutiques and cafes. The Tedesco has become the community synagogue, but as it has yet to be repaired after the earthquake of 2012 everyone squeezed into the small but very attractive Oratorio Fanese.

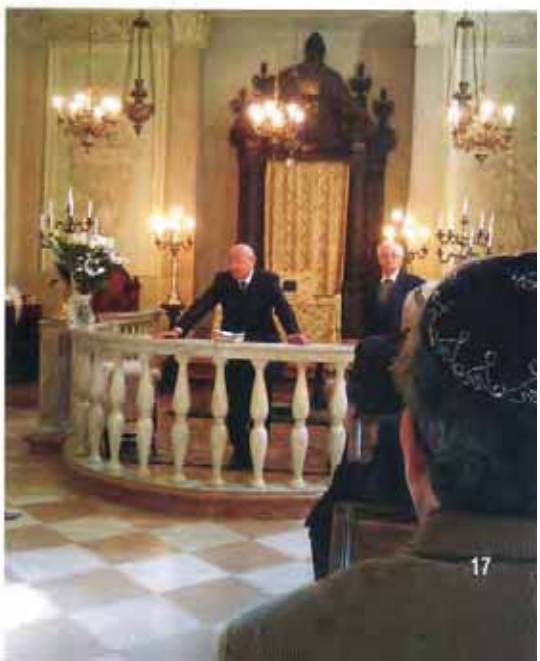
The community has only 70 members, many of them living in towns outside Ferrara. There were 760 before the war, already much depleted from the high of 2,000 in the 16th century. Ferrara has suffered not only from the Holocaust but also from the economic decline of the region. Rabbi Luciano Caro lives in Turin and comes to serve the community from Thursday to Sunday, taking Shabbat services and study sessions. We do not understand his explanation of the Torah portion in Italian, but it is evidently delivered with humour and warmth and it is easy to see why a relatively large percentage of the community come regularly to shul.

After the service we talked to Rabbi Caro together with the president of the synagogue Michele Sacerdoti and vice-president Eileen Carton. Like most of the congregation, none of them have roots in Ferrara. (Bruna Lampronti and Oriela Calegari, who we see kindly ushered to their seats by Eileen, are exceptions. They survived the war in hiding in the city). Michele Sacerdoti came to the city from the larger congregation of Venice when he was offered a Chair of Mineralogy at Ferrara University. One of his sons still lives in Ferrara; the other has a large family and an ultra-Orthodox lifestyle in Israel. The ebullient Eileen arrived 35 years ago. A New Yorker with a Reform background, she came on holiday; met and married an Italian and now lives with him on a small farm some way from the city.

We learn that there is often not a minyan for services, "which at least means that they are shorter," laughs Eileen. She tells us that she has not persuaded the rabbi to count women – who are, surprisingly, in the majority amongst the worshippers. Perhaps the lack of mechitza in this Orthodox Italian-rite congregation has an influence. Though we see a good mix of ages in the boosted congregation, there are few children, we are told, and the only recent marriage was of a Ferrara-born woman who now lives in Israel. "It is a problem," says Eileen. "Even if one of our young men found a partner in Turin or Milan, would she agree to live in Ferrara?"

Concerns of the community now focus on getting through the bureaucracy involving the repair of its priceless buildings: the Tedesca synagogue, the Italian synagogue, now used as a hall for functions and its museum, as well as the community-owned apartments that, up to the time of the earthquake, provided much of its income.

The synagogue welcomes donations to its restoration fund. If you can help, email eileen.carton@gmail.com.



Rabbi Caro speaking at the Tempio Tedesco on the occasion of his 20th anniversary with the synagogue in 2009. Michele Sacerdoti is to his right.

FERRARA TO TELL ITALY'S JEWISH STORY

NATIONAL MUSEUM TO HAVE FERRARA AS ITS HOME

One of our visits in Ferrara was to what will become the National Museum of Italian Jewry and the Shoah (MEIS). To date most of it is still a forbidding brick building, a former prison, only a huge tarpaulin with the words of the Shema indicating the life to which it will be reborn.

Otherwise, demolition and construction had not started, though there is a programme of changing temporary exhibitions in one of the buildings on the site. On view when we were there was the collection of Judaica and rare books and documents donated by scholar Gianfranco Moscati, which will form part of the permanent collection.

In 2006 a law was passed in the Italian Parliament sanctioning the establishment of such a museum and allocating 15 million euro for this purpose. Its mission: "broad dissemination of Italian Jewish history, thought and culture" as well as "themes of peace and brotherhood among peoples and the meeting of diverse cultures and religions." Why Ferrara rather than Rome? Apparently, as well as having a strong Jewish history, Ferrara was the home of an influential politician.

A foundation was made up of representatives of national Jewish organisations, the national Ministry of Culture and the Ferrara Council; the 10,000 square metre site of the jail chosen and a competition held for its design that attracted 56 entries. The winners were a team of four young architects from the Bologna-based Arco, their consultant in Jewish culture, Ariel Toaff, a reader in history at Bar Ilan University, son of the much-loved former chief rabbi of Rome. The design is striking, cleverly using one of the existing buildings as a stark reminder of the ghetto but otherwise achieving "lightness and transparency", with structures that "hover above the ground, allowing views through to the gardens" and reflective pools at ground level, reflecting the importance of the nearby Ferrara river port.

In an interview with Danielle Gross in *Pagine Ebraiche* in March 2011 Toaff talks of telling the history of Italian Jewry, not shrinking from those aspects which are controversial: "there were anti-fascist rabbis and pro-fascist rabbis, it won't be comfortable but we have to settle our accounts with history"; of explaining what is unique about Italian Jewry in terms of tradition and ritual; of detailing the Jewish contribution to society, philosophical thought and mysticism.

Of course the Holocaust will be an important part of the exhibition, he explains, but: "We are not going to end with the persecution and decimation of the Holocaust but the strengthening of the Zionist movement, which offered new hope for the reconstruction of the Jewish state in the land of Israel and in this sense the extraordinary transformation of the language of the Bible into a modern Jewish language."

He hopes that "through this dense cultural drama, which recognises the suffering of the Jewish people but also its positive contribution, visitors will understand that Judaism is not summed up by the day of memory of the Shoah but is a living part of Italian history."

I asked Enrico Fink of Florence whether there were concerns about the exclusion of the activities of the current Italian community from the planned content. He told me that he was concerned but that the community felt excluded from the decision-making and: "They think of it as a state museum, not ours."

It will not be until at least 2015 that visitors will have the opportunity to visit what promises to be a visually exciting, as well as informative, museum

BOOK FE

It has become part of the cultural calendar of Ferrara, a Jewish book festival not aimed at the Jewish community but at all those who have any interest in Jewish culture – and judging by the crowds we saw, there are plenty of these.

In the picturesque Chiostro di San Paolo authors introduced their new books; historians talked about significant historical figures and had discussions with Christian counterparts on subjects of common interest. We sampled food inspired by Ferrara Jewish tradition and wondered at the vast display of books on Jewish subjects in Italian.

This year tango was a theme. Many Italians emigrated to South America and this is probably the source of the love of the dance in this country. Ferrara's own Jewish tango orchestra played at the Festival; there were dance performances and workshops.

The Festival made itself felt throughout the city with daily tours of the ghetto and a series of talks on Bassani's Ferrara by writer and literature teacher Monica Pavani. So great were the crowds on Monica's hour-and-a-half walks that she and theatre director Marco Sgarbi, who read from Bassani's works, were accompanied by an amplifier on a bicycle.

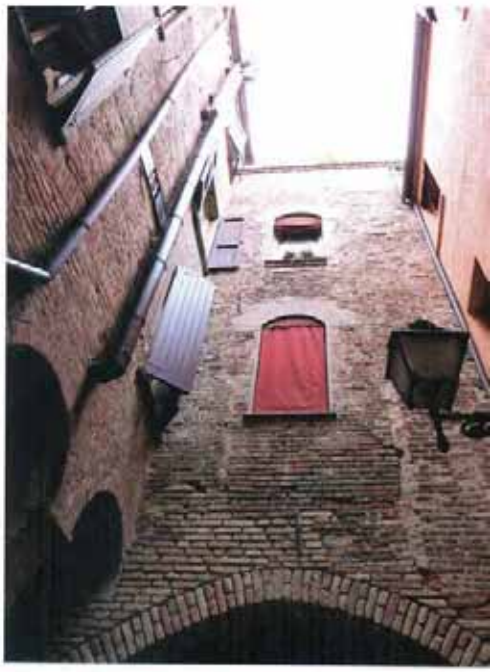
The highlight for us, and evidently for the enthusiastic audience, was the closing concert by the Jewish Italian Jazz Ensemble, who played original, and often amusing, variations on Italian synagogue melodies, beautifully sung by Enrico Fink.

JR is planning a trip to Emilia Romagna to coincide with the 2015 Jewish Book Festival, to include a tailored English-language programme. If you would like to be kept informed, contact janet@jewishrenaissance.org.uk

STIVAL BRINGS IN THE CROWDS

WHY HAVE THEY COME?

From left to right:
Volunteer: It is so interesting. I knew nothing about Jewish history. There was a rabbi here yesterday and he was showing me these old books.
Locals: We know some of the people involved in it and we always come. There is always so much to learn.
Out of towner: I have come from Rimini. I love books and I wanted to find out what is published.



FERRARA GHETTO There were many walks here night and day during the Festival

BASSANI WALKS

Left: Monica Pavani introduces a reading of Bassani's short story *A Night in 1943* next to the column which was discovered during maintenance work in 1960 to have been repaired, after a fire in 1716, with headstones removed by the Inquisition from the city's Jewish cemeteries
Right: Outside the synagogue for a reading from *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*

Finale of Ferrara Jewish Book Festival 2013. From left: Alfonso Santimone, Enrico Fink, Zeno de Rossi, Francesco Bigoni, Gabriele Coen

MUSICAL ECHOES OF THE FERRARESE SOUL

The 2013 Ferrara Jewish Book Festival was brought to a close by the rapturously received Jewish Italian Jazz Ensemble. Its leader, ENRICO FINK, explains how the innovative music they performed has its roots in Ferrara's particular synagogue traditions

In 2007 I met drummer Zeno de Rossi on Myspace, and we started talking about our love for, and approaches to, Jewish music, our feelings for a town and its history – Ferrara. We conceived 'haTzel', a musical dream about Jewish Italy, and in particular Ferrara, its memory and tradition.

We speak of 'dream' for lack of a better word: this work is not intended to be ethno-musicological research; our desire is to

Every small Jewish community throughout Italy preserved a distinctive musical tradition, handed down orally from one generation to the next

narrate, with our own musical language, the Jewish soul of a city like Ferrara – or better yet, to narrate our own feelings towards that city and its tradition, the musical tradition of a community that was once one of the most famous Jewish centres in the world. It is still connected to the Jewish world through, for example, the works of Giorgio Bassani, yet with a dwindling *kehillah* (community) and a correspondingly dwindling memory of its own past.

Italian synagogue song has an amazingly rich and complex history. The sheer dimension of the repertoire is astounding. Every small Jewish community throughout Italy preserved a distinctive musical tradition, handed down orally from one generation to the next and only rarely (and in relatively recent times) written down or notated. Often – as was the case in Ferrara – the same town would have as many as three coexisting traditions – namely Ashkenazi, Sephardi and Italian, each with its own shul, its own *minhag* (liturgy) and its own music. And the music itself reflects the long history of the Italian Jews. *Italkim*, as they are sometimes called, present in Rome since well before the destruction of the Temple, have maintained a particular tradition, neither Ashkenazi nor Sephardi, in many aspects of the liturgy (for example the Hebrew 'Kol Nedarim' sung on Yom Kippur instead of the later, but far better known, Aramaic 'Kol Nidrei'); in the pronunciation of Hebrew (for example the sounding of the usually mute ayin, similar in some respects to the Yemenite traditional pronunciation), as well as in its music. But also waves of immigration, from Spain, after the Expulsion, and from central Europe in a more erratic flow since the Middle Ages up to the 1900s, created 'German' and 'Spanish' traditions – that are best defined as Italian-Ashkenazi and Italian-Sephardi.

Much of the music we hear in Italian synagogues today was written and/or arranged in the mid-19th century, after the final disappearance of ghetto walls throughout northern and central Italy. In the age of Emancipation Italian Jews felt very Italian, started building large, cathedral-like synagogues, and decided to rewrite or restyle their centuries-old musical traditions. But the Italian Jews' love of tradition made sure that much of the new music written in the 1800s kept some memory of the older melodies and ancient origins, so that it is common to recognise resonances from the 1700s, 1600s or even 1500s and earlier. In fact, Italian synagogue song is much like a history of the Italian Jews' relationship to the surrounding Italian society, encrypted but faithfully notated in music.

The haTzel project follows long research into this fascinating world – both in situations where the tradition is very much alive and in others, like Ferrara, where looking for traditional music means a lot of delving into old choir parts, into sketches of the melodies of the nusach, and old, often amateur recordings (all, unfortunately, from after the war). Yet for this project, we leave all this some way behind us, and concentrate on totally free composition that takes from, echoes, remembers tunes from the Ferrarese synagogue repertoire.

The use of fragments from old recordings to create new patterns and new music can be heard in the recording of Enrico Fink's *A Jazz Singer's Return to Faith* and in Me'or Einayim from Zeno's *Shtik* project as well as on enrifink.interfree.it/hatzel/demo.htm

ENRICO FINK

Enrico Fink was born in Florence and lives there now but his family are from Ferrara. In his musical play *Lokshen* he tells how his Russian great-grandfather came to the city as a cantor. His father, Guido Fink, was an important figure in the Italian literary world and a friend of Bassani. Guido moved with his family to take up a position in Florence but Enrico's Jewish sensibilities were stirred by family visits to Ferrara on the festivals.

After a variety of musical experiences in groups ranging from funk-rock to contemporary music (with pauses to complete a degree in physics), he now devotes himself to new interpretations of Jewish cultural tradition.

He has written several plays with Jewish themes and also starred as Motl in the Italian production of *Fiddler on the Roof*. He has performed as musician or actor, "just about everywhere, from international pop festivals to classical concert halls, from jazz clubs to discos, from sidewalks to famous theatres". Enrico is an observant Jew and visitors to Florence or Ferrara synagogues might be lucky enough to hear him singing at the services.

He is Professor of the History of Jewish Music at the University of Jewish Sudies in Rome and lectures widely in Europe and North America. He is also responsible for cultural activities at Florence Synagogue (see page25).

A TREASURY OF HEBREW MANUSCRIPTS

SUSAN KIKOLER tells of the remarkable number of Hebrew treasures to be seen in the province of EMILIA-ROMAGNA

Passover Ceremony (Ha-Lahma) (vellum), Jewish School / Palatine Library, Photo © BEBA/AISA / The Bridgeman Art Library

PARMA ONE OF THE GREATEST COLLECTIONS

The De Rossi Collection of 1,612 Hebrew manuscripts, many sumptuously illuminated, in the Palatine Library in Parma, is considered to be one of the greatest collections of Hebrew manuscripts and *incunabula* (documents printed before 1501 in Europe) in the world, its core bought by Maria-Louise, Napoleon's wife, in 1816.

MODENA DISCOVERIES IN BOOK BINDINGS

In the 1970s scholars discovered that thousands of fragments of Hebrew manuscripts and parchments had been 'recycled' as book-binding material in the 16th and 17th centuries. While some 1,700 fragments have been found in other European countries, over 8,000 have been found in Italy (4,800 in Emilia Romagna alone), where in the 14th and 15th centuries Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews arrived, together with their manuscripts, fleeing persecution elsewhere. Other texts were those confiscated by the Inquisition and ecclesiastical authorities and then sold on when the rise of printing rendered old manuscripts of little value.

One of the biggest collections is from Nonantola, near Modena, which includes biblical manuscripts, halachic texts and excerpts from the Mishnah, Talmud, kabbalah and scientific material. In Modena itself, besides the Estense Library with more than 60 precious illuminated Hebrew manuscripts, Modena's archives are a treasure-trove, especially the Archivio Storico Comunale with 126 books containing 273 fragments. Further treasures revealed are over 350 sheets of the Babylonian Talmud and fragments of Rashi's talmudic and biblical commentaries.

BOLOGNA NEW DISCOVERY MAKES WORLD HEADLINES

Bologna made headlines recently when the oldest complete Torah scroll in the world was discovered in its university library. It was erroneously dated to the 17th century by librarian Leonello Modona in 1889. Modona, the first to catalogue the university's collection of Hebrew manuscripts, was Jewish and highly educated but he wasn't a Hebrew scholar so his dating was a guess. It was even accompanied by a question mark.

Modona had described the script as "an Italian script, rather clumsy-looking, in which certain letters . . . show uncommon and strange appendices," but when Professor Mauro Perani (right) came across the scroll last year while working on a new catalogue of the university's Hebrew manuscript collection, he immediately recognised that the script was a superb example of a Babylonian script that was in use in the 12th or 13th centuries.

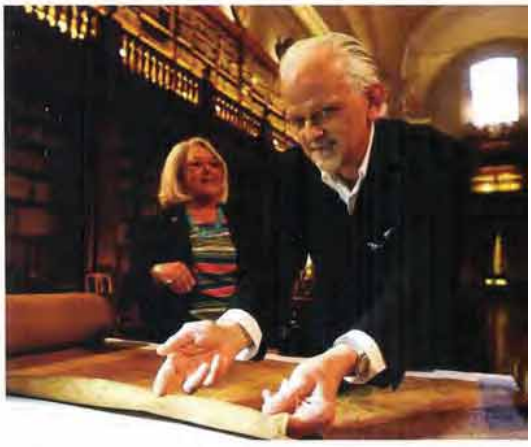
Another clue to the age of this scroll is the presence of line justifications, compressed letters and 'crowns' over certain letters prohibited in the rules on Torah copying established by the 12th-century rabbi Maimonides. Maimonides' rabbinical regulation on how scribes should copy the Torah have been followed for almost 900 years. The scribe who copied this scroll either predated Maimonides (d. 1204) or hadn't yet heard about the new standard.

This evidence of age was confirmed by two radiocarbon tests dating the scroll to between 1155 and 1225. This makes it the oldest complete extant Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible). The previous record-holder dates from the 14th century. Torahs this old are rarities because even if they survived destruction in centuries of pogroms, expulsions and the horrors of WWII, worn and damaged Torahs cannot be used for services because they are deemed to have lost their holiness. When a Torah's lifetime has run out, it is ritually buried.

The university began teaching Hebrew along with Arabic in the 15th century, but experts suggest the scroll reached the library later. There's speculation that it was part of a Dominican monastery scriptorium – in the early Middle Ages, Dominican friars were known to sometimes work with Jewish scholars on ancient texts – when it fell victim to Napoleon's invasion of Italy in 1796. Bologna became part of a French revolutionary client statelet called the Cispadane Republic, later expanded into the Cisalpine Republic. They adopted the same constitution of Directory France which came with suppression of monastic orders. The scroll could have been sent to Paris as booty and then brought back to Bologna with other spoils after Napoleon's final defeat in 1815 and given to the university library.

There will be further studies to see if the history of this remarkable Torah can be traced. Meanwhile, the scroll is on display at the university.

With thanks to www.thehistoryblog.com



Fossoli 1943

Odoardo de Focherini

Fossoli, Liberation Day, 2013

DEPORTATION REMEMBERED

"It is lucky you came in the morning. It will be crowded this afternoon." We were visiting Fossoli on 25 April, Liberation Day, marking the date in 1945 when Nazi occupation of Italy ended. Strolling round the former camp is a popular choice for the locals on this national holiday.

Fossoli was a transit camp for Jewish deportees from all over Italy but, as our guide Daniela Garutti told us, these were by no means the only inmates who had seen the inside of the half-ruined brick buildings which surrounded us. It was originally a camp for POWs, 5,000 of them, from the allied forces. After the downfall of Mussolini and Badaglio's armistice with the allies, invading German troops took over, sending the inmates to work camps in Germany. "Mussolini was still allied to Hitler and together they decided to use it as a camp for Jews. There was a manifesto that stated that every Jew in Italy had to be considered an enemy and sent to a concentration camp."

"The reponsibility was both German and Italian," Daniela stressed. Both the Italian administration and German forces helped in finding Jews and sending them to Fossoli to await deportation to Auschwitz and other extermination camps. "It was headed by a German, Karl Tito, based in Verona, but he gave orders to twelve SS men from Ukraine and also officers of Italian Social Republic [the puppet government]". Eventually there were two camps, one run by the Germans and the other by the Italians. The Italian section was levelled soon after the war, and documentation is sparse. "Not many people come and tell us that their relative came through here." In total 2,800 Jews passed through, including Primo Levi and his friends who were caught when trying to reach the partisans, and 3,000 political prisoners.

One of the prisoners was Odoardo de Focherini, in 1969 recognised as one of the Righteous at Yad Vashem, and in June 2013 beatified by the Pope. A journalist at the Catholic *L'Avennire d'Italia* of Bologna and a director of Catholic Action, he initiated a group which sought out Jewish families, gave them papers and money, and escorted them to the Swiss frontier. He was arrested in a hospital when attending to a Jewish patient. In Fossoli he managed to help his friend Olivelli avoid a massacre of political prisoners by hiding him within the camp. Both were deported on the last transport in July 1944. The remaining prisoners were transferred to the camp at Bolzano.

Now the camp shows none of its former horror, the broken-down brick buildings surrounded by greenery. It was a home to several different groups after the war. First the barracks became jails for fascists on trial and a temporary home for displaced persons. The camp was transformed in 1947 by the priest Don Zeno, who took it over for a community of Catholic orphans. The barbed wire was torn down, walls and windows put in the barracks, grass and trees planted. Harassed by local authorities and the Vatican, in 1952 Don Zeno accepted the gift of a house in Tuscany, where the home still continues. The last inhabitants were refugees from Istria who wanted to stay Italian when the province was transferred to Yugoslavia.

A competition for the transformation of the site was held in the 1980s but so far no decision has been taken on its future.

MUSEUM DESIGNED BY SURVIVORS

The Memorial Museum of Political and Racial Deportees to the Concentration Camps was opened in Castello dei Pio in Carpi in 1973 after a construction period of ten years. The competition for its design was won by the design company BBPR, Banfi, Belgiojoso, Peressutti and Rogers, which had been founded in 1932. Ernesto Nathan Rogers was forced to flee to Switzerland by the anti-racial laws; Banfi, active in the resistance, died in Mauthausen in 1945, while Belgiojoso was liberated by American troops. The company resumed after the war with the surviving members, Rogers becoming one of the leading Italian architects and editor of prestigious design magazines.

In the museum, most striking are the walls engraved with graffiti – Picasso is one of the artists – and with extracts from letters by resistance fighters condemned to death. In another room, the walls and pillars are covered from top to bottom with the names of deportees who died in the concentration camps.

From left: designers Peressutti, Belgiojoso, Rogers, Banfi, 1934

JEWISH HERITAGE AND THE ITALIAN STATE

DAVID CLARK explains why recent decades have seen new museums being opened and Jewish quarters being renovated all over Italy

Jewish heritage in Europe, in terms of buildings and cemeteries, remained largely neglected immediately after WWII. In Italy, where less than 25,000 Jews were left after the war, only outside organisations, such as the American Joint Distribution Committee, were active in helping to rebuild synagogues and communal infrastructures, as in Venice in the 1950s. Israel sought to encourage emigration to Israel and to purchase what treasures it could from Italian synagogues, including an entire synagogue building from the Veneto region, now the focal point for the Italian Jewish community in Jerusalem.

All this changed in the 1980s. The central government introduced schemes in schools focusing on the importance of local cultural history and the need to preserve the environment. More crucially, cultural heritage took on greater significance in terms of tourism promotion. Seaside resorts were in decline and cultural tourism seemed a promising alternative. In the 1980s regional and municipal authorities endeavoured to renovate their architectural heritage, as in Venice, where baroque churches and canal fronts received funding for restoration. The synagogues in the Venice ghetto also benefited from such local funding, supplemented by funding from American and German sources.

A more pressing issue was that of urban regeneration. Many of the Italian medieval and renaissance cities had city centres in dire need of rescue from the ravages of increased road traffic, land speculation and neglect. In Emilia Romagna, the regional institute for cultural heritage (Istituto per I Beni Culturali) proved particularly effective in developing plans to safeguard historic city centres in the area. The institute was given the statutory charge of mapping all cultural heritage and environmental features in the region. As part of this, it embarked on a survey of Jewish heritage in Emilia Romagna in the mid-1980s, setting the scene for the institute's active involvement in preserving Jewish heritage in the region.

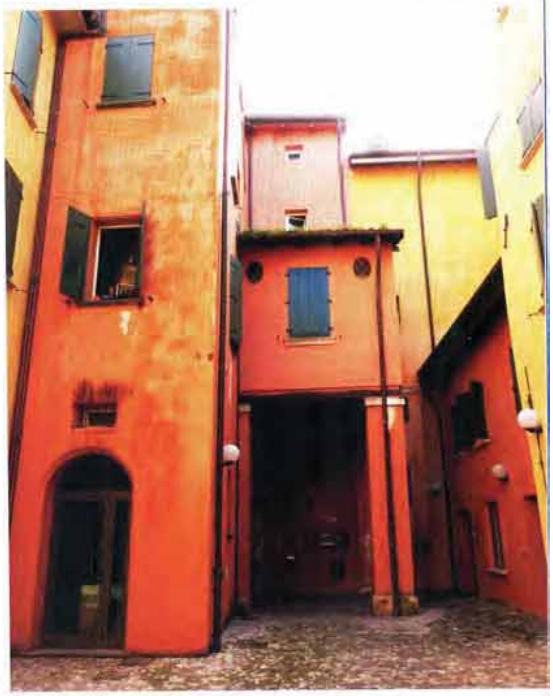
Two further developments were also crucial in encouraging such intervention; firstly, the continued dwindling of smaller Jewish communities, as the younger generation was drawn to larger urban centres. Synagogues at Asti in Piedmont, Pitigliano in Tuscany and Soragna, near Parma, are all examples of former synagogues now restored and turned into Jewish museums, since few Jews remain in such places.

Such initiatives were often undertaken with local and regional authority funding, with the active collaboration of members of the local Jewish community. This was greatly facilitated in 1987 when an agreement was signed by the Italian government and the Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane (the umbrella organisation for all Jewish communities in Italy), assigning joint responsibility for the preservation of Jewish cultural heritage to the Italian state and to the local Jewish communities most directly affected. This was enshrined in law in 1989.

The final reason is linked to the arrival in Italy, in recent decades, of migrants from north and sub-Saharan Africa, as well as refugees from war-torn areas. Education on Jewish culture and the Holocaust is seen as an object lesson on the need for greater tolerance in society. Thus, the Jewish Museum in Bologna had an educational officer initially funded by the municipal authorities to encourage school visits. Increasingly such visits are from secondary schools seeking to find out more about the Holocaust, in line with recent school curriculum changes linked to thematic issues, such as tolerance and intolerance.

David Clark completed his PhD on Jewish museums in Italy. He contributes to *Exiled Writers Ink* and *Second Generation Voices*.

Many thanks to all those in Emilia Romagna who helped us appreciate their beautiful region to the full and to Naomi Colley of Media Market who suggested we come to see for ourselves and facilitated our tour. Thanks also to Vesna Domany Hardy and Naomi Colley for their photos of the trip that have been widely used in this feature.



Above: Reconstruction of synagogue with aron hakodesh from Cento, now in Ferrara Jewish Museum. Below: The renovated ghetto in Cento

See also **A TASTE OF EMILIA ROMAGNA** pages 54 and 55

TOURIST READING

Jewish Tours in Emilia Romagna, Ines Miriam Marach, Touring Editore, *2004*
Excellent history and illustrations by town. Out of print but a few copies available from *JR* for p&p only for subscribers. Can also be found on web

An Echo of Micòl, A Walk Through the Writings of Georgio Bassani, Monica Pavani, tr Thomas Marshall, Bilingual, with map, 2011, Available from bookstands in Ferrara

JR TOUR TO EMILIA ROMAGNA APRIL 2015

Register your interest: info@jewishrenaissance.org.uk

A TASTE OF **EMILIA ROMAGNA**

SILVIA NACAMULI

Although Jews lived in several towns of Emilia Romagna throughout the centuries, including Modena, Bologna, Parma, Reggio and Finale Emilia amongst many others, the Jewish cuisine which seems to have survived or prevailed is the one of the charming city of Ferrara.

An old saying from Ferrara goes "Dell'oca non si butta via niente", which translates as "Nothing gets thrown away from a goose". Inspired by the local cold cuts of pork, the local Jews recreated similar cuts using goose, so much so that the celebrated Pellegrino Artusi called the goose in Italian cooking "the pork of the Jews".

All its parts were eaten: its fat was widely used in cooking as it was full of protein and calories and was cheap to buy. Its meat was used, especially to make 'prosciutti', literally 'ham' (but of course not real ham), or to make goose sausages or salami. For centuries the word 'sallame' (spelt with two 'l') instead of 'salame' was used within the Jewish communities in order to distinguish the goose salami from the forbidden pork one. Finally, foie gras was made from the goose liver and it was, like today, very expensive. Sometimes it was even the subject of illegal bets and smuggling.

Goose was widely used in Emilia Romagna, Veneto and Piedmont, and played an essential role in the domestic economy of Italian Judaism from the late Middle Ages until modern times, when it was replaced by turkey as its meat was tenderer, less fat and cheaper.

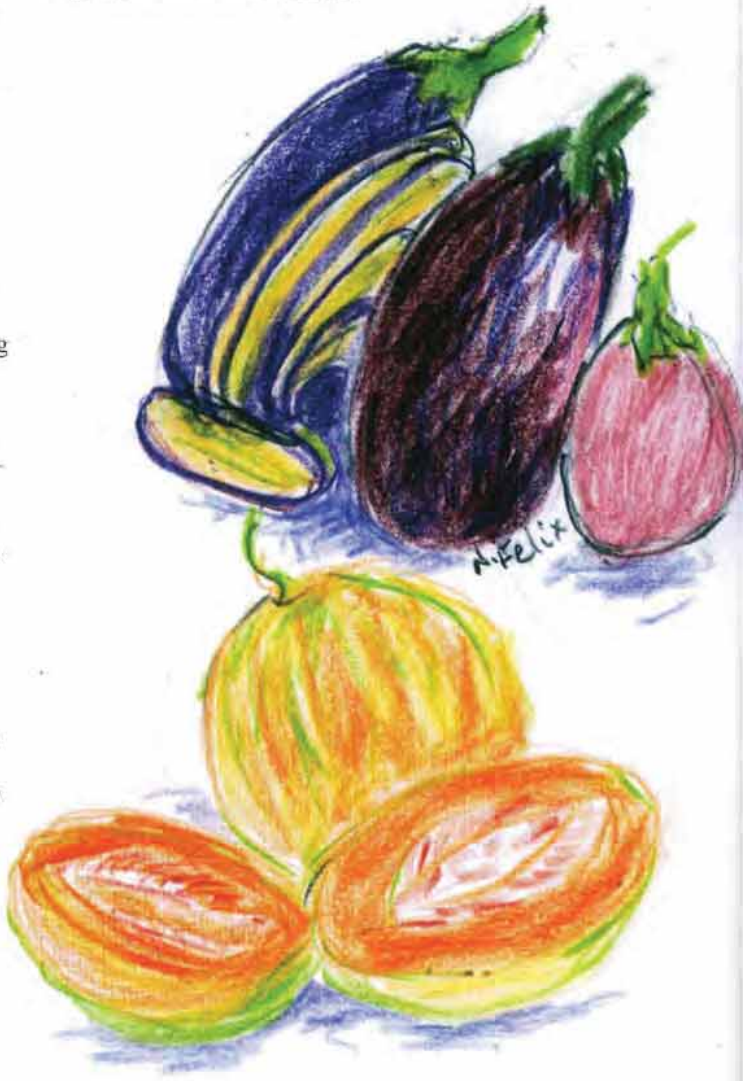
Many tasty dishes from the Jewish community of Ferrara have goose and turkey as their main ingredients, and turkey meatloaf is still a popular dish. A well-known and interesting goose dish is the ruota del faraone (Pharaoh's wheel), also called frisensal or hamin as eaten on Shabbat, in particular for Shabbat Beshalach (when the Torah portion describes God's deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt). It is made with fresh tagliatelle, goose salami and fat, pine nuts and raisins. It's very tasty even if its grisly ingredients represent the Egyptian soldiers and chariots being caught up in the waves of the closing Red Sea for chasing the Jews escaping from Egypt.

This dish, and many other old traditional recipes, are laborious and few people make them still, if at all. These include the testine di spinaci – stems of spinach – and guscetti – husk of green peas – reflecting what I call 'inventive thrift', which is using parts of food that others would throw away and making a meal out of it. These dishes were in fact created at the time of the ghettos, when living conditions were particularly poor and creativity was a necessity in the kitchen.

Although there were Ashkenazi Jews living in Emilia Romagna, Jews mostly arrived after the Inquisition in 1492 from Spain, Portugal and Southern Italy. The influence in the regional cooking is therefore mainly Sephardi, with dishes such as buricchi, which remind us of the Spanish and Portuguese empanadas and can have both sweet and savoury fillings. Jenny Bassani Liscia, sister of Giorgio Bassani (*The Garden of the Finzi Continis*) wrote a delightful recipe-memoir of her time growing up in Ferrara in the 1930s and then in Livorno after WWII. She describes the buricchi with savoury or sweet filling and the little shop in the ghetto in Ferrara which used to sell them – specifying as well that her mum used to make them much better, which charmingly reflects a true Italian Jewish mother-daughter relationship! Jenny graciously describes many other delicious dishes using popular regional ingredients such as pumpkin and fresh pasta in any possible form.

Finally, unique are the special dishes to celebrate the Jewish festivals, such as the zuccherini and montini – sweets for Purim, the scacchi ferraresi – savoury matzo bake for Pesach. Riso in brodo al limone – a warming broth for the breaking of the fast of Yom Kippur, and zucca fritta con lo zucchero – a sweet fried pumpkin, also for Yom Kippur.

And those of you looking for an easy summer recipe should try fried aubergines with cantaloupe melon, which replace the classic Parma ham and melon dish often served as a starter. The recipe, from Franca Passigli Romano, says to dice the aubergines, soak them in water for one hour. Drain them and add rock salt. Then leave them in the colander for another hour. Squeeze them well, there will be dark liquid coming out, and shallow fry them in hot oil on high flame for a few minutes until golden. Drain on kitchen paper and serve with the melon or on their own as a side vegetable dish.The aubergines are quite salty here and go very well with the sweet melon. Interesting and original, like the Jews of Ferrara.



FOOD

COTOLETTE AL LIMONE DELLO SHABBAT (LEMON SCHNITZEL)

This is a recipe of Jose Romano Levi, who lived most of her life in Ferrara, married into the long-standing Jewish Ferrarese Bonfiglioli family. This is the Bonfiglioli family recipe for cold lemon schnitzel, an ideal recipe for a summer Shabbat lunch. It is easy to make and is truly delicious. It can be made with either chicken or veal.

2-3 eggs
salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
approx. 100 gr plain breadcrumbs
approx. 100 ml mild olive/sunflower oil
6 chicken breast fillets
juice of 2 lemons
approx. 500 ml water

Break the eggs and mix in a shallow bowl with a little salt and pepper. Pour the breadcrumbs in a separate shallow bowl.

Warm up the oil in a non-stick frying pan. Coat the chicken fillets in the breadcrumb, then in the egg mixture and in the breadcrumbs again.

Shallow fry the chicken fillets, on a low-medium flame and uncovered, for 3-4 minutes on each side. Place the cooked schnitzels on paper towel to drain the extra oil.

Place them back in a large wide saucepan and add the lemon juice, the water – enough to cover them, and cover with a lid. Bring to the boil and gently simmer for 40-45 minutes, turning the fillets only once, otherwise they break.

Leave to cool down completely and serve at room temperature. The lemon sauce will become dense, of a similar consistency to a jelly.

I would like to thank my dear friend Deborah Romano Menasci, her mother Franca Passigli and her aunt Jose Romano Levi for their useful tips and warm contributions.

DISHES TO DIE FOR

The Emilia Romagna Tourist Board laid on some wonderful meals for its *Jewish Renaissance* and other guests. All the restaurants managed impressive variety without using any meat or non-kosher fish.The menu was rich even for the one member of the party who did not eat fish. The flavours were subtle and the presentation superb. Two restaurants went to particular trouble to utilise Jewish recipes. These were the menus they served us.

FERRARA

IL RISTORANTINO DI COLOMBA
Vicolo Agucchie, 15 , +39 0532 761517

Budino di zucca pumpkin/squash souffle (a traditional Ferrarese Jewish recipe)
Kamut (khorasan wheat) and rye **pappardelle** with a vegetable ragu
Ricotta stuffed ravioli with a taleggio (cheese) and walnut sauce
Platters of **grilled vegetables and cheese**
Apple tart (typical Ferrarese Jewish recipe)

CENTO

HOTEL EUROPA, Via IV novembre,16,
Tel +39 051 903319

Filets of St Peters fish wrapped in aubergine
Canaroli rice (the local speciality) **risotto with asparagus**
Ravioli stuffed with salt cod and potatoes in a creamed courgette sauce
Transparent envelopes filled with **sea bream and vegetables** served with rosemary scented roast potatoes
A tulip-shaped biscuit basket filled with **seasonal fruits** on a bed of crème patisserie

FOR OUR VEGETARIAN
Radicchio soufflé on creamed gorgonzola
Hand-made **tagliatelle with artichoke hearts**
Frittomisto Bolognese traditional Bolognese mixed deep-fried vegetables
Crema crème patissiere.