

**From Rabbi to Reviser:
Once More on Giovanni Antonio Costanzi (1702-1786),
a Convert in the Service of the Holy Office ***

by *Miriam Benfatto*

Abstract

This paper focuses on Giovanni Antonio Costanzi, a converted Jew in the service of the Holy Office. Primary sources, including his writings and documents related to his service in the Roman Inquisition, form the foundation of our study, supplemented by secondary sources from ecclesiastical archives. These materials allow us to reconstruct aspects of Costanzi's life, comprehend his involvement with the Holy Office, and explore his potential contributions to Anna del Monte's Diary. Building upon previous research, the aim is to present new data, establishing a revised chronology for Costanzi and shedding light on his role within a broader historical context. As individuals straddling two worlds, converts occupied a precarious position, continually striving to demonstrate their loyalty to Christianity. The paper includes an appendix that details Costanzi's direct involvement in the conversion of Jews, revealing the intricate dynamics of this period.

Introduction

“Rinacqui colle acque Battesimali” (I Was Reborn in Those Baptismal Waters): An Overview of Giovanni Antonio Costanzi's Biography

“Trattasi della distruzione dell'antica Sinagoga” (On the Destruction of the Ancient Synagogue): The Polemical Anti-Jewish Literature

“Il veleno talmudico che ne libri Ebraici si nascondeva” (The Talmudic Poison Hidden in Hebrew Books): The Role of the Holy Office Interpreter of Hebrew Books

* I would like to express my gratitude to the two anonymous reviewers who have read my manuscript very carefully and suggested changes, some of them quite radical. Their invaluable input not only enhanced the text's readability but also bolstered its scientific rigor. This research was made possible by the support of the Rothschild Foundation Hanadiv Europe.

Conclusion

Appendix

Introduction

The term conversion is generally used to indicate a change in religion. It can refer to a range of important sociocultural scenarios that come under various guises. For example, conversion can be forced or false, or it can be for convenience. A conversion can involve individuals or groups. The conversion from Judaism to Christianity is not the only form of conversion,¹ but it is one with specific characteristics, due to the close historical and cultural links between the two religions.² In Italy, there has been much pressure on Jews to convert, especially from the mid-sixteenth century onwards. The Church's attitude to Jews in the Papal States can be seen, for example, in the establishment of the ghetto and the Casa dei Catecumeni (the House of Catechumens), the onslaught against Hebrew

¹ For studies on the complexity and varied guises of conversion, see Anna Foa and Lucetta Scaraffia, eds., "Conversioni nel Mediterraneo (Atti del convegno – Roma, 25-27 Marzo 1996)," *Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica* 2 (1996); Mercedes García-Arenal and Yonatan Glazer-Eytan, eds., *Forced Conversion in Christianity, Judaism and Islam: Coercion and Faith in Premodern Iberia and Beyond* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

² Kenneth Stow, "Church, Conversion, and Tradition: The Problem of Jewish Conversion in Sixteenth Century Italy," in "Conversioni nel Mediterraneo," eds. Foa and Scaraffia: 25-34; Kenneth Stow, "Favor et Odium Fidei: Conversion invitis parentibus in Historical Perspective," *Archivio italiano per la storia della pietà* 25 (2012): 55-86; Adriano Prosperi, Danilo Zardin, Jacques Le Brun, and Pietro Stella, "Convertirsi e convertire. Itinerari del messaggio religioso in età moderna," *Ricerche per la storia religiosa di Roma* 10 (1998): 17-73; Elisheva Carlebach, *Divided souls: Converts from Judaism in Germany, 1500-1750* (New Haven - London: Yale University Press, 2001); Tamar Herzog, *A Convert's Tale: Art, Crime, and Jewish Apostasy in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019); Pawel Maciejko and Theodor Dunkelgrün, eds., *Bastards and Believers: Jewish Converts and Conversion from the Bible to the Present* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020).

books and the Talmud, and the beginning of forced preaching.³ Jews converted to Christianity often occupied a significant role during the roll-out and implementation of these harsh arrangements.⁴ Reconstructing the biography of a figure central to the control of Hebrew books helps shed light on the extent to and the means by which converts were involved in the Church’s practices, where the intention was to convert Jews.⁵

To paint a fully comprehensive picture of a Jew converted to Christianity is a challenge, especially given the often limited information available on his life prior to conversion. For one thing, baptism is often considered the most important event in the life of a convert, to the extent that it is considered a second birth—or rather, a rebirth—overshadowing any former life.⁶ In fact, in the example explored here, Costanzi’s Jewish past is recalled only through obscure hints that serve to highlight his new state.⁷ That former life is clearly considered undignified. Despite these difficulties, it is possible to trace his life story by pursuing certain evidence and thus to try to establish a clear outline of it. It is impossible to avoid gaps in the documentation. My efforts at reconstruction at times proceed by

³ Kenneth Stow, “The Burning of the Talmud in 1553, in the Light of Sixteenth Century Catholic Attitudes toward the Talmud,” *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance* 34, no. 3 (1972): 435-459; Kenneth Stow, *Catholic Thought and Papal Jewry Policy 1555-1593* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1977); Kenneth Stow, *Il ghetto di Roma nel Cinquecento. Storia di un’acculturazione* (Rome: Viella, 2014) (ed. or. *Theater of Acculturation. The Roman Ghetto in the Sixteenth Century*, Seattle - London: University of Washington Press, 2001).

⁴ As we shall see later on, converts were active opponents of their former fellow worshippers. See also how sermons were translated into Hebrew: Kenneth Stow, “Conversion, Christian Hebraism, and Hebrew Prayer in the Sixteenth Century,” *Hebrew College Annual* 47 (1976): 217-236.

⁵ When referring to the control of Hebrew books, I am addressing the surveillance and authority exerted by the Church, through its various means, over Hebrew books found within households and frequented locations.

⁶ For more on this, see Adriano Prosperi, “Battesimo e identità cristiana nella prima età moderna,” in *Salvezza delle anime, disciplina dei corpi. Un seminario sulla storia del battesimo*, ed. Adriano Prosperi (Pisa: Scuola Normale Superiore, 2006), 1-65; Herzig, *A Convert’s Tale*, 70-71. For a reflection on the difficulties of using accounts concerning conversions as a historical source, see Pawel Maciejko and Theodor Dunkelgrün, Introduction to Maciejko and Dunkelgrün, *Bastards and Believers*, 10-14.

⁷ Giovanni Antonio Costanzi refers to his Jewish past as “tenebre del Giudaismo” (the dark times of Judaism). Giovanni Antonio Costanzi, *La verità della Cristiana Religione contro le vane lusinghe de’ moderni ebrei* (Rome: Giovanni Maria Salvioni, 1749), xii. As we will see later, Costanzi speaks of his past as a Jew and a rabbi only to extol his knowledge of Hebrew and of Jewish subjects.

means of conjecture and hypotheses, comparisons and derived dates. This attempt is intended as a starting point and will inevitably lead to some problems being left unsolved.

The affairs of Giovanni Antonio Costanzi, the focus of this paper, have left traces from which we can uncover first- and second-hand information. The primary sources are texts he wrote himself. The secondary ones are those that can be found through his relations with the Holy Office of the Inquisition (henceforth, Holy Office or Roman Inquisition) and with institutions close to the Church. Indeed, I used both his written work—including controversial material and documents relating to his role in the Roman Inquisition—and archival documents drawn up for practical reasons and in connection with the Roman Inquisition.⁸ These sources form the basis of my work, but other documentation will also be used. Cross-analyzing these materials will allow me to reconstruct part of his biography and also some matters concerning his relations with the Holy Office.

Costanzi has been the subject of significant studies. Abraham Berliner's early research served as the basis for William Popper's studies of his involvement in the history of Jewish book censorship and on accounts of his work for the Holy Office.⁹ Ariel Toaff delved into some of the events related to his biography and his role as a reviser in eighteenth-century Rome;¹⁰ meanwhile, Fausto Parente critically studied Costanzi's polemical writing entitled *La verità della cristiana religione contro le vane lusinghe de' moderni ebrei* and has framed the book within the literature produced by converts.¹¹ More recently, it was Maria Caffiero who provided a more comprehensive picture of Costanzi's life and role in the affair

⁸ Specifically, I consulted archival materials kept at the Archive of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (henceforth, ACDF). Most of the information comes from documents in the *Privilegia Sancti Officii Urbi* (Priv. S.O. Priv. S.O.) series, which compiles letters relating to the governance of the Holy Office. The series contains everything concerning the skills, obligations, authority, privileges and pledges handed out in the Holy Office, as well as anything that generally concerns life within it and its staff.

⁹ Abraham Berliner, *Censur und Confiscation hebräischer Bücher im Kirchenstaate* (Frankfurt am Main: J. Kauffmann, 1891); William Popper, *The Censorship of Hebrew Books* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1969) (red.: New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1899).

¹⁰ Ariel Toaff, "Giovanni Antonio Costanzi. Ultimo censore di libri ebraici a Roma (1745-1756 c.)," *La Rassegna Mensile d'Israël* 67, no. 1-2 (2001): 203-214.

¹¹ Fausto Parente, "Di uno scritto antiebraico della metà del XVIII Secolo: «La verità della cristiana religione contro le vane lusinghe de' moderni ebrei» di Giovanni Antonio Costanzi (1705 c.-1785)," *Italia* 13-15 (2001): 357-395.

concerning the books of the Jews and their relationship with the Holy Office,¹² especially in regard to the *Norme per la revisione dei libri ebraici* he produced.¹³ Recognizing the importance of previous studies and building on them, the aim is to present data that can help construct a new timeline for Costanzi's life, frame some of the events in which he was involved and provide information on the role he may have played in Anna del Monte's *Diary*. From a broader perspective, this paper can help shed light on the cultural and polemical-religious role that converts played in the conversion policies the Church enacted against the Jews, on the complexity of the operations for the control of Hebrew books, on the relationships between converts and authorities within Church, and on their economic and social status. As individuals who could be described as liminal, converts aroused suspicion from both the community they were leaving and the one they were joining.¹⁴ This status, sitting astride the two social and religious worlds, made converts a very particular case: to one side they were traitors, while to the other they had to constantly prove themselves good Christians, to stave off suspicions of apostasy. It is at least true of Costanzi that he strove in various instances to prove his servitude to the Christian doctrine. One such means of doing so was to convince other Jews to convert. This is why I have chosen to furnish this paper with an appendix containing details on the events in which Costanzi himself played a first-hand role in the conversion of Jews who would once have been his peers.

¹² Marina Caffiero, *Legami pericolosi. Ebrei e cristiani tra eresia, libri proibiti e stregoneria* (Turin: Einaudi, 2012), *ad indicem*.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 44-71.

¹⁴ For studies on the relationship between converts and their former fellow worshippers, see Kenneth Stow, "A Tale of Uncertainties: Converts in the Roman Ghetto," in *Shlomo Simonsohn Jubilee Volume: Studies on the History of the Jews in the Middle Ages*, eds. Moshe Gil, Daniel Carpi, and Yosef Gorni (Jerusalem: Tel Aviv University Press, 1993), 257-281; Giuseppe Sermoneta, "Il mestiere del neofita nella Roma del Settecento," in *Ibid.*, 213-243.

“Rinacqui colle acque Battesimali” (I Was Reborn in Those Baptismal Waters): An Overview of Giovanni Antonio Costanzi’s Biography

The biographical details of Giovanni Antonio Costanzi’s life have not, until now, been known.¹⁵ He was born in Constantinople around 1702 and died in 1786¹⁶, presumably in Rome. Costanzi himself named his place of birth,¹⁷ but his original Jewish name has not been recorded. He converted to Christianity at some time around 1730¹⁸ and was baptized—as he himself reported—in Herbipoli (Würzburg) on March 4, 1731,¹⁹ probably around the age of 29. Before his conversion and his new life as a Christian, Costanzi was a rabbi for eight years in Split and in other Dalmatian cities.²⁰ He moved to Rome in 1733 and immediately began working with the Roman tribunal of the Holy Office.²¹ In a request Costanzi submitted asking for financial support, he in fact declared that “fin dall’anno 1733 diede diversi lumi al Tribunale della Sagra Inquisizione circa le materie spettanti alla [Santa] Fede Cattolica, con interpretare alcuni libri ebraici, e

¹⁵ As mentioned, important attempts to reconstruct Costanzi’s biography can be found in Parente, “Di uno scritto antiebraico”; Toaff, “Giovanni Antonio Costanzi.”

¹⁶ A petition from his son Vincenzo Alessandro Costanzi, dated 1786, reports that his father died at the age of 84. His date of birth might therefore be calculated by subtracting his age from the date of his death, which probably took place in the year Vincenzo Alessandro wrote his letter (1786). ACDF, Priv. S.O. Priv. S.O. 1786-1778, 54.

¹⁷ See the authorization of Costanzi’s book written by Dominican Raimondo Maria Berolati, in Costanzi, *La verità della Cristiana Religione*, xi. Costanzi himself recalls this in his written request to be appointed as Reviser of Hebrew books: ACDF, Priv. S.O. Priv. S.O. 1743-1749, 49.

¹⁸ The date is taken from reading a request from Costanzi himself for appropriate financial support. In 1747 he declares himself to have already been a convert for 17 years, ACDF, Priv. S.O. Priv. S.O. 1743-1749, 117.

¹⁹ Costanzi, on the subject of his baptism, writes: “rinacqui colle acque Battesimali” (I was reborn in those Baptismal waters). Costanzi, *La verità della Cristiana Religione*, xii.

²⁰ Ibid. xiv. This is stated many times. Even Francesco Rovira Bonet, in his monumental *L’armatura de’ Forti, ovvero memorie spettanti agl’infedeli ebrei che siano, o turchi utili alli catecumeni, alli neofiti, ed altri cristiani* (Rome: Paolo Giunchi, 1794), writes of Costanzi: “Già Rabbino in Levante, e nel Dominio Veneto” (previously a rabbi in the Levant and in the Venetian dominion), Ibid., 381.

²¹ ACDF, Priv. S.O. Priv. S.O. 1743-1749, 117. This is also confirmed by Dominican Domenico Teoli signing off the *censure* prepared for the Holy Office in 1733, in which Costanzi’s name also appears. It comes from ACDF, St. St. NN3-1, c. 182r and is given by Margherita Palumbo, “«Pensando che facilmente in S. Officio possan esservi Libri ebraici e rabbinici...». Gli hebraici del Sant’Uffizio, oggi in Biblioteca Casanatense,” *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 76, no. 3 (2010): 201-219, 203-204, and n10. For more on Domenico Teoli see below.

chiarificare diverse materie [oc]culte de perfidi Ebrei insidiatori della nostra S. Fede” (from 1733, he, in various ways, helped the Tribunal of the Holy Inquisition understand matters relating to the [Holy] Catholic Faith, by interpreting various Hebrew books and shedding light on the various occult subjects of the perfidious Jewish infidels of our Holy Faith).²² It can be supposed that in 1736 his son, Vincenzo Alessandro Costanzi, was born. He would go on to help his father with his duties in later life.²³ Costanzi was particularly well known for his efforts as an interpreter and reviser of Hebrew books for the Holy Office.²⁴ That role would lead to his being one of the key players in the Church’s search operations concerning Hebrew books in the Papal States in the eighteenth century.

On May 6, 1745 he was appointed as “Interprete de’ Libri Ebraici presso il Sant’Uffizio (Interpreter of Hebrew Books at the Holy Office),”²⁵ after a petition addressed directly to the incumbent pope, Benedict XIV. In that request he declared he knew “tutti li caratteri ebraici sì antichi, che moderni, tanto orientali come Italiani e Tedeschi, ed ancora di Libri Talmudici, Rabbinici e Caldaici” (all the Hebrew alphabets, ancient and modern, Eastern as well as Italian and German,

²² ACDF, Priv. S.O. Priv. S.O. 1743-1749, 117. It is unlikely, in light of the timeline given here, that he was already involved just months after his conversion, as reported in Popper, *The Censorship of Hebrew Books*, 118-122.

²³ In a petition in 1786, Vincenzo Alessandro Costanzi requests to succeed his father in the role of Reviser of Hebrew books: ACDF, Priv S.O. Priv S.O. 1786-1778, 54. When he writes his petition, he speaks of being 50 years old and already a priest. His ordination took place after the death of his wife. See Filippo Maria Renazzi, *Storia dell’università degli studj di Roma, detta la Sapienza*, vol. IV (Rome: Stamperia Pagliarini, 1806), 376-377. He is presumed to have died in the first years of the 19th century. Vincenzo Alessandro is permitted to read rabbinic books in 1755. That privilege is reconfirmed in 1758 and 1764, as one can read in the rescripts attached to the petition.

²⁴ Marina Caffiero, “I libri degli ebrei. Censura e norme della revisione in una fonte inedita,” in *Censura ecclesiastica e cultura politica in Italia tra Cinquecento e Seicento. VI giornata Luigi Firpo. Atti del Convegno, 5 marzo 1999*, ed. Cristina Stango (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2001), 203-223; Caffiero, *Legami pericolosi*, 44-77. On the term “reviser” see: Richard Gottheil, Nathan Porges, Herman Rosenthal, M. Zametkin, and Joseph Jacobs, “Censorship of Hebrew books,” in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, eds. Cyrus Adler and Isidore Singe, vol. 3, (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1903), 642-652; 643-644.

²⁵ ACDF, Priv. S.O. Priv. S.O. 1743-1749, 49. This is cited elsewhere, too: ACDF, Priv. S.O. 1743-1749, 117: “si degnò la S.V. con suo speciale rescritto sotto li 6 maggio 1745 concedere all’ O.re l’officio di interprete de libri ebraici nel suddetto tribunale, con condizione che dovesse servire gratis” (he favored His Excellency with a special request on May 6, 1745 to grant the *Oratore* the office of interpreter of Hebrew books for the aforementioned tribunal, provided that he would perform it without remuneration).

and also the Talmudic, Rabbinic and Chaldean Books) as could already be seen from the license granted to him by the Inquisition to read books considered “proibiti talmudici” (forbidden Talmudic books).²⁶ In support of his request, he declared that he had also worked with two Dominican preachers to the Jews of Rome—Lorenzo Filippo Virgulti (1683-1735)²⁷ and Antonino Teoli (fl. mid-eighteenth century)²⁸—on some matters concerning the “materie occulte delli perfidi insidiatori [ebrei]” (occult subjects of the perfidious infidels [Jews]),²⁹ and that he convinced some of them to convert to Catholicism, as documented in writing.³⁰ Recalling that the Inquisition had always employed converted rabbis—as shown by the examples Costanzi himself gave (Domenico Gerosolomitano (c.

²⁶ ACDF, Priv. S.O. Priv. S.O. 1743-1749, 49.

²⁷ Lorenzo Filippo Virgulti, whom Benedict XIII appointed as preacher to the Jews, also authored various anti-Jewish works: *L'Ebreo catecumeno istruito ne' principali Misterij della Santa Fede Cristiana* (Rome: Girolamo Mainardi, 1726); *La vera idea del Messia* (Rome: Giovanni Battista de Caporali, 1730); *Risposta alla lettera di un Rabbino* (Rome: Giovanni Battista de Caporali, 1735). For more on Virgulti's polemical writings, see Fausto Parente, “Il confronto ideologico tra l'ebraismo e la Chiesa in Italia,” *Italia Judaica. Atti del convegno internazionale: Bari 18-22 maggio 1981* (1983): 303-381; 362-365, in which Parente also attributes Virgulti with having written *L'Ebreo convinto dei suoi errori* (Rovereto: Pierantonio Berno, 1729); Moritz Steinschneider instead claims the author is anonymous. See Moritz Steinschneider, “Letteratura antiggiudaica in lingua italiana,” *Vessillo Israelitico*, 31, (Settembre 1883): 275-277; 276. For more on Virgulti, see Caffiero, *Legami pericolosi*, 40-42; Marina Caffiero, *Il grande mediatore. Tranquillo Vita Corcos, un rabbino nella Roma dei papi* (Rome: Carocci, 2019), 35-38, 69-72, and 80-82; Margherita Palumbo, “Il fondo ebraico della Biblioteca Casanatense,” *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 82, no. 2-3 (2016): 37-52; 41-42.

²⁸ There is little biographical data for Antonino Teoli. He also assisted in censoring various Hebrew books for the Holy Office, as can be inferred from the documents in ACDF, St. St. Bb-3-r. See Palumbo, *Il fondo ebraico*, 42-44; Caffiero, *Legami pericolosi*, 15, nota 33; 32, nota 64; 76; 79; 83-86. Teoli published the successful *Storia della vita, e del culto di S. Vincenzo Ferrerio* (Rome: Giovanni Battista de Caporali, 1735), of which various editions were published over the course of the 18th and 19th centuries.

²⁹ ACDF, Priv. S.O. Priv. S.O. 1743-1749, 49. His work with Antonino Teoli is also recorded in his text Costanzi, *La verità della Cristiana religione*, xiii.

³⁰ Costanzi states several times that he has written evidence of having converted Jews: *Ibid.*, xii-xiii. ACDF, Priv. S.O. Priv. S.O. 1743-1749, 49.

1555-1621)³¹ and Giovanni de Borghesi (fl. eighteenth century.)³²—Costanzi wrote a petition to Benedict XIV asking him to order the *assessore* of the Holy Office to appoint him in the role³³, which he would occupy until his death. The request was accepted on the “condizione che dovesse servire gratis” (provided that he would perform it without remuneration).³⁴ That arrangement continued for some years, until Costanzi was given remuneration. It was not, however, paid regularly, and he was forced to submit several requests to be paid his dues.³⁵

³¹ Domenico Gerosolimitano drew up an expurgatory index that was widely used for the correction of Hebrew books, both by Jews and Christians. For more on his work, see Gila Prebor, “Domenico Yerushalmi: his life, writings and work as a censor,” *Materia Giudaica* 15-16, (2010-2011): 467-481; Pier Cesare Ioly Zorattini, “Domenico Gerosolimitano a Venezia,” in *Sefarad: Revista de Estudios Hebraicos y Sefardíes* 58, no. 1 (1998): 107-116.

³² Giovanni de Borghesi, whose Hebrew name was Johann Weyr, worked as a reviser of Hebrew books with the Holy Office and with the Casanatense Library on matters relating to those books. In his 1735 petition to Clement XII requesting a grant, Borghesi says he is moving to Rome with his wife and two children after having been a rabbi in Pitigliano, Tuscany. ACDF, Priv. S.O. Priv. S.O. 1728-1735, 151. In 1737, he asks to be appointed to the role of *scriptor hebraicus* at the Vatican Library. Palumbo, *Il fondo ebraico*, 42-43.

³³ ACDF, Priv. S.O. Priv. S.O. 1743-1749, 49. The *assessore* is a secretary of sorts, working within the Holy Office and serving the Inquisition cardinals. Andrea Del Col, “Assessore,” in *Dizionario storico dell’Inquisizione*, eds. Adriano Prosperi, Vincenzo Lavenia, and John Tedeschi, vol. I, (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2010), 107.

³⁴ ACDF, Priv. S.O. Priv. S.O. 1743-1749, 117.

³⁵ Payment requests are found in various letters in the ACDF. ACDF, Priv. S.O. Priv. S.O. 1743-1749, 117, reads: “Implora perciò l’O.re dalla Paterna Clemenza della S.V. un qualche tenue soccorso o con fargli ottenere un assegnamento dal S. Officio per la Carica ch’esercita, o con quel mezzo ch’alla S.V. sembrerà più spedito, acciò possa sostenere la sua povera famiglia, affidato sull’esempio di tanti Neofiti Rabini, i quali abbracciata ch’ebbero la S. Fede al solo riflesso ch’erano stati Rabini la S. Fede non mancò mai di soccorrerli” (the *Oratore* thus requests from His Holiness’s paternal clemency a meagre support or appointment at the Holy Office for the Duties he is performing, or by whichever means His Holiness deems most expedient, so that he might support his poor family, the trusted example to so many neophyte rabbis who, having embraced the Holy Faith, only for their having been rabbis the Holy Faith has never failed to support them). A list of names follows: “Camillo Jaghel,” “Domenico Gerosolimitano,” “Gio. Batt.a Jona,” “Giulio Morosini,” “Agostino Pipia.” Costanzi adds that thus the danger of “essere deriso dagli ebrei” (being mocked by Jews) who berated him for his poverty, is exposed, decrying it “un evidente castigo per l’abbandonato Ebraismo e per aver convertito alla S. Fede diverse famiglie Ebreo” (a clear punishment for having abandoned Judaism and for converting many Jewish families to the Holy Faith). Other requests can be found in: ACDF, Priv. S.O. 1750-1754, 132; ACDF, Priv. S.O. 1755-1759, 88. For a study on the socio-economic status of neophytes in the 18th-century Roman ghetto, see Sermoneta, “Il mestiere del neofito nella Roma del Settecento.”

Just months after his appointment as interpreter of Hebrew books, Costanzi appeared as the recipient of a payment for having produced a text described in no greater detail than “Indice de libri ebraici” (An Index of Hebrew Books). This can be found in a list of payments by the Holy Office *Maestro di Casa* to copyists and the related receipt dated September 1745.³⁶ It is likely that this fell under the preparatory work for a much larger project on which Costanzi had begun regular work from the mid-eighteenth century: compiling an index of Hebrew books and writing the rules for correcting them. We will delve into more detail on this work later on, but he was likely working on it well into the final years of his life.

Costanzi also worked with the Church on matters concerning other areas of Jewish life. Specifically, he wrote a memorial for Pope Benedict XIV regarding “l’abuso del Libello del Repudio che costumano concedere in Roma, e in altri luoghi i Neofiti alle loro mogli rimaste nell’Ebraismo” (the abuse of the Libello del Repudio [sc. divorce] that neophytes in Rome, and elsewhere, often grant their wives who have remained Jewish).³⁷ After having consulted Costanzi on his opinion, Benedict XIV condemned the practice in his papal bull *Apostolici ministerii munus*, dated 16 September 1747. In it, he reaffirmed the ban on newly converted husbands granting their Jewish wives divorce, impeding them from remarrying.³⁸ This attitude likely arose from a desire to win the wife over to Christianity. In fact, if the Jewish wife of a convert refused to follow her husband in converting to the new religion, their marriage would be dissolved. The

³⁶ ACDF, ASV 062, 1745, 42. The payment’s authorization is dated September 1745. On another occasion, Costanzi recalls having “essersi affaticato fin dal mese di Agosto 1745 per mostrare alla S. Inquisizione certi Indici de libri permessi ad uso degli ebrei, fra i quali ve ne sono molti contro la S. Fede Cattolica, e pieni di superstizioni” (striven from the month of August 1745 to show the Holy Inquisition certain Indices of books Jews were permitted to use, including many that contradicted the Holy Catholic faith and were full of superstitions). ACDF, Priv S.O. Priv. S.O. 1743-1749, 117. The *Maestro di Casa* took care of the general governance of the establishment in which they worked, including administrative work and often bookkeeping.

³⁷ ACDF, Priv. S.O. Priv. S.O. 1743-1749, 117. Costanzi is also consulted on matters concerning the baptism of Jews and parental authority. Marina Caffiero, *Battesimi forzati. Storie di ebrei, cristiani e convertiti nella Roma dei papi* (Rome: Viella, 2004), 117.

³⁸ Kenneth Stow, *Anna and Tranquillo: Catholic Anxiety and Jewish Protest in the Age of Revolutions* (New Haven - London: Yale University Press, 2016), 128-129.

neophyte could remarry with a Christian, while the ex-wife could not remarry. This was due to the absence of the *ghet*, the document of divorce.³⁹ Benedict XIV likely also sought Costanzi's advice on a previous occasion, when the former was still Bishop of Ancona (1727-1731). I am referring to the matters handled in the bull *Postremo mense*, dated February 28, 1747, on the legitimacy of baptizing Jewish children.⁴⁰ In the bull, Benedict XIV reported that to write it he had sought the opinion of “alcuni Ebrei, uno de' quali è a Noi ben cognito, essendoci convenuto il trattare più volte con lui, quando eravamo Vescovo d'Ancona” (some Jews, one of whom is well known to us, having worked with him several times when we were Bishop of Ancona).⁴¹ If the consulted Jew was Costanzi, who had connections to Ancona,⁴² he could also be identified as the neophyte “che pareva uno stregone” ([who] looked to me like a *stregone* [sc. a male witch]),⁴³ who Anna del Monte met in the Casa dei Catecumeni during her

³⁹ For a study on the granting of the *ghet*, see Caffiero, *Battesimi forzati*, 94-95; Caffiero, *Il grande mediatore*, 85-108.

⁴⁰ Caffiero, *Battesimi forzati*, passim.

⁴¹ Cited from the version translated into Italian and published as a letter: *Lettera della Santità di Nostro Signore Benedetto Papa XIV. Sopra il Battesimo degli Ebrei o infanti o adulti*, 72. Also see Benedictus XIV, “De Baptismo Judaeorum. Sive Infantium, sive Adultorum,” in *De Lambertinis Bullarium*, vol. 2 (Prati: In typographia Aldina, 1846), 170-191.

⁴² Costanzi had various connections with Ancona, as can be inferred from his participation in the raids begun in the Papal State's ghettos in 1753. See Berliner, *Censur und Confiscation*, 32; Popper, *The Censorship of Hebrew Books*, 125; Palumbo, “Il fondo ebraico,” 47; Luca. Andreoni, *Una nazione in commercio. Ebrei di Ancona, traffici adriatici e pratiche mercantili in età moderna* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2019), 162-163.

⁴³ The description in the *Diario/ Diary* is as follows: “mi comparve [...] un certo Neofito, a me incognito, che pareva uno stregone, che poi con il suo parlare si fece conoscere che era stato non solo nella Religione Ebraica, ma che predicava ogni Sabato nella Scuola d'Ancona [...] E così cominciò la sua predica alla presenza di altri due Preti” (a neophyte I did not know entered. He looked to me like a *stregone* [sc. a male witch], and he let me know that not only was he originally a Jew, but that he had preached to the Jews every Sabbath in the synagogue in Ancona. [...] He then began to preach, accompanied by two other priests). Cited from Giuseppe Sermoneta, ed., *Ratto della Signora Anna del Monte trattenuta a' catecumeni tredici giorni dalli 6 fino alli 19 maggio anno 1749* (Rome: Carucci editore, 1989), 57 and, in translation, from Stow, *Anna and Tranquillo*, 22. It must be noted, however, that here the neophyte is accompanied by “altri due Preti” (two *other* priests). Costanzi was not a priest; but we cannot exclude the possibility that whoever wrote the *Diario* did not know that. In fact, those giving sermons often were priests. Also see the annotated edition of Stow, *Anna and Tranquillo*, 22. The *Diario* in Italian, based on the edition by Giuseppe Sermoneta, can be found in Marina Caffiero, ed., *Rubare le anime. Diario di Anna del Monte ebrea romana* (Rome: Viella, 2008).

imprisonment there.⁴⁴ The person named and described in the famous *Diario* or *Diary* could be the Jew who had helped Prospero Lambertini, latterly Pope Benedict XIV but at that point Bishop of Ancona.⁴⁵

The *Diario*'s protagonist, a Jewish girl from the Roman ghetto, is taken from her family in May 1749 to the Casa dei Catecumeni after she is reported by convert Sabbato Coen who claimed to be her betrothed. The Casa dei Catecumeni was founded in 1543, during the papacy of Paul III (1534-1549), to house Jews, Muslims and others considered *infedeli* (infidels), with the aim of increasing the number of conversions to Christianity.⁴⁶ Papal law required those held there to be "illuminated" and therefore converted during their imprisonment, which could happen after someone reported them. Anna del Monte did not convert and her memories were preserved in the *Diario*, which reached us in a copy compiled by her brother Tranquillo del Monte from the memories she left behind.⁴⁷ The *Diario* describes Anna del Monte's time in the *Casa* and the isolation and segregation she suffered, but also the meetings between her and the various people that tried—unsuccessfully—to convert her to Catholicism.

⁴⁴ Ariel Toaff is convinced of this and identifies Costanzi as both the so-called "stregone" and as the "preacher," a central figure in the *Diario*, on the basis of reading Sermoneta, *Ratto della Signora Anna del Monte*, 29-30. Toaff, "Giovanni Antonio Costanzi," 212-214. It is not clear whether the two people are actually one and the same. Giuseppe Sermoneta rules this out in Sermoneta, *Ratto della Signora Anna del Monte*, 18-19. Ariel Toaff does not explain his reasoning for identifying him as such. The topics of the two characters' sermons are indeed similar, but here I have decided only to refer to the "stregone" out of caution. Furthermore, similarity in the subject matter of sermons is a given, due to the content typically found in sermons.

⁴⁵ That is the convincing argument in Stow, *Anna and Tranquillo*, 22, note 37, which says: "Was this fellow the same Jew – now *neofito* – whom Benedict XIV mentions, as we shall see, in his bull *Postremo mense*? Very possibly." *Ibid.*, 147.

⁴⁶ Potential converts were held in the Casa dei Catecumeni, generally for a period of 12-40 days, with the expectation that they would eventually convert and then be baptized. For general information on the establishment and role of the Casa dei Catecumeni, see Domenico Rociolo, "Documenti sui catecumeni e neofiti a Roma nel Seicento e Settecento," *Ricerche per la storia religiosa di Roma* 10 (1998): 391-452; Domenico Rociolo, "Catecumeni e neofiti a Roma tra '500 e '800. Provenienza, condizioni sociali e 'padrini illustri,'" in *Popolazione e società a Roma dal Medioevo all'Età contemporanea*, ed. Eugenio Sonnino (Rome: Il Calamo, 1998), 711-724; Caffiero, *Battesimi forzati*, 21-29; Marina Caffiero, "Tra due fuochi. Ebrei, Inquisizione e Case dei catecumeni," in *L'Inquisizione e gli ebrei. Nuove ricerche*, ed. Marina Caffiero (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2021), 83-110. For further information on the Casa dei Catecumeni and its links to the Church's campaign to convert Jews, an effort that greatly intensified in the second half of the 18th century, see Stow, *Anna and Tranquillo*, 91-112.

⁴⁷ For information on the role of Tranquillo del Monte, see Stow, *Anna and Tranquillo*.

If Costanzi was the Jew in *Postremo mense* and if that Jew was the convert whom Anna del Monte met in the Casa dei Catecumeni, Benedict XIV would have met Costanzi before his conversion (in around 1730),⁴⁸ between 1727 and 1730, while still Bishop of Ancona (1727-1731).

In 1749, the year of Anna del Monte's abduction, Costanzi had already been working for the Holy Office for four years and could have visited the Casa dei Catecumeni where she was held. It was not unusual for converts to visit the *Domus Conversorum*, as also shown by the presence there of Giacomo Cavalli (1678-1758), convert and reviser of Hebrew books,⁴⁹ who is mentioned in the *Diario*.⁵⁰ The Casa dei Catecumeni could be seen as a training ground for converts, where their abilities to convert were put to the test, something the neophytes boasted of in conversation with their former fellow worshippers.⁵¹ On many occasions Costanzi says he convinced some Jews to convert and, as we have seen, he worked with the preachers to the Jews of Rome, Dominicans Lorenzo Filippo Virgulti and Antonino Teoli.

These observations could support the theory that Costanzi might be the Jew that bishop Prospero Lambertini consulted in Ancona who, after converting, would meet Anna del Monte in the Casa dei Catecumeni and who Lambertini, after becoming Pope Benedict XIV, would consult again in the preparation of his 1747 bull, *Apostolici ministerii munus*.

As already hinted, Costanzi's role as Holy Office interpreter and reviser meant he played an important role in the overall process of controlling Hebrew books and their dissemination. But that is not all: he maintained relationships of other kinds with Jews—always as part of his role at the Holy Office—both with the Università degli ebrei in Rome and with individuals.⁵² The task of analyzing the memorial of the Università degli ebrei, which dates back to as early as 1756 and which reached the Holy Office through *consultore* Giuseppe Simone Assemani (1687-1768), was

⁴⁸ This theory is feasible if Costanzi was not already in Würzburg where he was baptized in 1731.

⁴⁹ For more on Giacomo Cavalli, see Sermoneta, *Ratto della Signora Anna del Monte*, 27-30.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 79; Stow, *Anna and Tranquillo*, 35-36.

⁵¹ Costanzi, for example, says he convinced various Jewish families to convert, both by means of private conversations and of letters: ACDF Priv. S.O. 1743-1749, 117. For more on his actions relating to converting other Jews, see appendix.

⁵² Costanzi wrote various replies to letters in which ghetto inhabitants ask that the books be returned to them. Caffiero, *Legami pericolosi*, 73-77.

entrusted to Costanzi.⁵³ In it a request is put forward for some books to be restored that had been sequestered in the raid that took place across the Papal States, when entire libraries in the ghettos had been looted.⁵⁴

In addition to the duties he performed with the Holy Office, Costanzi was *Scriptor* of Hebrew at the Vatican Library from 1765/6 to 1786 and Lector of Hebrew at the Pontifical Urban College for the Propagation of the Faith, probably between 1743 and 1754.⁵⁵ His partnership with the Vatican Library could however date back to some years prior to this: Moritz Steinschneider says that Costanzi was considered the actual author of the *Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae Codicum Manuscriptorum Catalogus*, the Vatican's first catalogue of Hebrew books dated

⁵³ The text is found in Lat. 8111, ff. 12r-13v. The memorial is not dated, but we can take 1756—the year in which Giuseppe Simone Assemani was appointed *consultore*—as a *terminus post quem*. A copy of the memorial (ff. 2r-11v, 14rv) is appended to this text. It was sent to the Holy Office after the 1731 raid of the ghettos of the Papal States, seven years after which the texts were returned. That text could therefore date back to around 1738. In the memorial entrusted to Costanzi, the Jews also ask for the restoration of the texts, on the basis of what had happened previously. For more on this, see Giancarlo Spizzichino, “L’Università degli ebrei di Roma tra controllo e repressione (1731-1741),” in *Gli abitanti del ghetto di Roma. La Descriptio hebreorum del 1733*, ed. Angela Groppi (Rome: Viella, 2014), 117-152, and 122, note 11 in particular. Caffiero, *Legami pericolosi*, 34-39, for an alternative dating. For general information on ms Vat. Lat. 8111, see Berliner, *Censur und Confiscation*, passim; Fausto Parente, “La Chiesa e il «Talmud»: l’atteggiamento della Chiesa e del mondo cristiano nei confronti del «Talmud» e degli altri scritti rabbinici con particolare riguardo all’Italia tra XV e XVI secolo,” in *Storia d’Italia, Annali 16/1, Gli ebrei in Italia*, ed. Corrado Vivanti (Turin: Einaudi, 1996), 521-643; 618-620. The *consultore* is a consultant to the Holy Office cardinals.

⁵⁴ Abraham Berliner, *Geschichte der Juden in Rom von der ältesten Zeit bis zur Gegenwart, Band II* (Frankfurt am Main.: J Kauffmann, 1893); Berliner, *Censur Und Confiscation*, 10-11; Popper, *The Censorship of Hebrew Books*, 121-125; Attilio Milano, *Storia degli ebrei in Italia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1992), 295 (ed. or.: Turin: Einaudi, 1963).

⁵⁵ Jeanne Bignami Odier, *La Bibliothèque de Sixte IV à Pie XI: Recherches sur l’histoire des collections de manuscrits* (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1973), 169 n111, which says that Costanzi was *Scriptor* of Hebrew at the Biblioteca Vaticana from 1765, but he occupied those roles from 1766 to 1786, the year in which his son Vincenzo Alessandro Costanzi replaced him, after his death. Also see Rovina Bonet, *L’Armatura de’ forti*, 381, which says that he was Lector of Hebrew at the Urban College in Rome. Hints at some of his Hebrew lectures for the College can be found in the information provided in a request from Costanzi, in which it is specified that the lectures were entrusted to Costanzi by Pietro Girolamo Guglielmi (1694-1773), Holy Office *assessore* (1743-1753): ACDF, Priv. S.O. Priv. S.O. 1755-1759, 88. Costanzi, in his *Relazione Istorica* (Historic Report) on the 1753/4 raids, likely published around 1754, signs off as “Gio. Antonio Costanzi lettore di lingua ebraica nel Colleg. di Propag. Fide” (Gio. Antonio Costanzi lector of Hebrew at the Urban College for the Propagation of the Faith). ACDF, St. St. CC2 a.

1756,⁵⁶ which, however, has two named authors, Stefano Evodio Assemani (1707-1782) and Giuseppe Simone Assemani.⁵⁷ Furthermore, Costanzi collated the Vatican’s Hebrew Bible manuscripts for the notable biblical scholar Benjamin Kennicott (1718-1783)⁵⁸ and worked with the Casanatense Library. Over a period of 30 years, beginning at least as early as 1738, he brought in various Hebrew books which today form part of the Casanatense Library’s Jewish collection.⁵⁹ The history of the Library’s Jewish collection is thus linked to the confiscations that took place in the Papal States and to Costanzi’s work, he being an active Hebrew book merchant. In this case, we are talking about hundreds of texts—manuscripts and published editions—with titles translated into Latin and notes on each piece’s author and content.⁶⁰

Costanzi strove against his old religion in many circumstances and in many different ways. In fact, as we will see, he claims to have brought “alla S. Fede diverse famiglie Ebreë” (many Jewish families to the Holy Faith) on many occasions.⁶¹ Furthermore, he was also involved in producing two anti-Jewish works: the first was published in 1749 with the title *La verità della cristiana religione contro le vane lusinghe de’ moderni ebrei* (The Truth of the Christian Faith Over the Futile Temptations of Modern Jews); the second seems to have remained unpublished. There is little information on his personal life, but we can deduce that he had a large family and faced various financial difficulties,⁶² worsened further by his

⁵⁶ Moritz Steinschneider, *Vorlesungen über die Kunde hebräischer handschriften, deren sammlungen und verzeichnisse* (Leipzig: O. Harrassowitz, 1897), 71. This date is also given in Benjamin Richler, *Guide to Hebrew Manuscript Collections* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of sciences and humanities, 1994), 192-193.

⁵⁷ For more on Giuseppe Simone Assemani see above. For more on Stefano Evodio Assemani, Giuseppe’s grandson, see Giorgio Levi della Vida, “Stefano Evodio Assemani,” in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani, ad vocem*.

⁵⁸ Theodor Dunkelgrün, “The Kennicott Collection,” in *Jewish Treasures from Oxford Libraries*, eds. Rebecca Abrams and César Merchán-Hamann (Oxford: The Bodleian Library, 2020), 115-157; 153-154.

⁵⁹ This was also paid work. See Palumbo, “«Pensando che facilmente in S. Officio possan esservi Libri ebraici e rabbinici...»,” 201-219.

⁶⁰ Palumbo, *Il fondo ebraico*, 37-52.

⁶¹ In support of his request for financial support for his role as interpreter of Hebrew books, Costanzi also attaches a list of Jews who converted thanks to him. They would have been convinced to convert through sermons and letters. ACDF, Priv. S.O. Priv. S.O. 1743-1749, 117. See the transcription in the *Appendix*.

⁶² ACDF, Priv. S.O. Priv. S.O. 1743-1749, 117.

wife's ill health. In November 1753, Maria Teresa Costanzi's illness worsened and Giovanni Antonio was forced to make this known, by appending a medical certificate attesting to her terminal illness in his 1754 petition, in which he asks to be paid his dues.⁶³

“Trattasi della distruzione dell'antica Sinagoga” (On the Destruction of the Ancient Synagogue): The Polemical Anti-Jewish Literature

There were many ways in which Costanzi took action against the religion he had left, as was typical of converts, and he produced two polemical anti-Jewish works.⁶⁴ The first appeared in 1749, as we have seen, with the title *La verità della cristiana religione contro le vane lusinghe de' moderni ebrei*. That remains the only known work published by Costanzi.⁶⁵ The second, written by 1753, remained unpublished, though we know of its existence due to the mention he himself makes of it in a request in 1758.⁶⁶

⁶³ ACDF, Priv. S.O. Priv. S.O. 1750-1754, 132.

⁶⁴ With regard to Italian anti-Jewish literature, renowned scholar Moritz Steinschneider writes: “erano spesso i nati Ebrei che scrivevano dopo l'apostasia contro la nazione e religione abbandonate [...] lo scrivere contro il Giudaismo era anche per l'orgoglio clericale una specie di trionfo” (it was often those born Jewish who wrote in opposition to the nation and religion they had left, after their apostasy [...] written opposition to Judaism was also a sort of triumph for clerical pride). Taken from Moritz Steinschneider, “Letteratura Antigiudaica in lingua italiana,” *Vessillo Israelitico* 29, (Giugno 1881): 165-167; 165-166; Parente, *Il confronto ideologico*.

⁶⁵ Costanzi, *La verità della cristiana religione*; Parente, *Di uno scritto antiebraico della metà del XVIII Secolo*. Together with a small number of other documents, this remained the only written text from which it was possible to glean biographical information on Costanzi. It was included in the monumental work by Rovira Bonet, *L'armatura de forti*, 381: “Gio. Antonio Costanzi [...] fece stampare in Roma nel 1749 *La verità della cristiana religione, contro le vane lusinghe de' moderni Ebrei*; e la dedicò al Pontefice Benedetto XIV. Gli Ebrei vollero rispondere a quest'Operetta, con una Lettera, la di cui confutazione, fa il Corpo di quest'Opera” (Gio. Antonio Costanzi [...] had *la verità della Religione Cristiana, contro le vane Lusinghe de' moderni Ebrei* printed in Rome in 1749, and dedicated it to Pope Benedict XIV. The Jews wanted to respond to it, by letter; this work is the confutation thereof). Moritz Steinschneider, “Letteratura antigiudaica in lingua italiana,” *Vessillo Israelitico* 31, (Ottobre 1883): 313-315; 313.

⁶⁶ ACDF, Priv. S.O. Priv. S.O. 1755-1759, 88.

La verità della cristiana religione is dedicated to Pope Benedict XIV (Pope 1740-1758) and was approved by Antonio Martinetti (fl. eighteenth century),⁶⁷ Domenico Teoli, lector of Hebrew at the Sapienza University, and Raimondo Maria Berolati (fl. eighteenth century), Dominican preacher to the Jews of Rome. The text was written on the basis of a request from Roman Jews who had asked to be provided with the transcription of an oral sermon,⁶⁸ so that they might be able to give their response. It contains a summary of the sermon given by Costanzi, arranged in four short sections,⁶⁹ the Jews' response,⁷⁰ and Costanzi's objection to it, entitled *Risposta a ciascheduno de' motivi espressi nella Scrittura antecedente* (A Response to Whomever Gave the Reasoning Expressed in the Previous Text) and arranged in 16 sections.⁷¹ Costanzi claimed his intent was to take care of the "destruzione dell'antica Sinagoga [...] la vanità della superstizione giudaica" (destruction of the ancient synagogue [...] the vanity of Jewish superstition); the intention to convert was explicit.⁷² Costanzi claimed he wanted to make use of the only Hebrew Bible and other texts, whose authority was recognized by Jews. In fact, he writes: "La regola da me tenuta nel confutare le opposizioni degli Ebrei [...] altra non è stata, che riandare le Divine Scritture, e prender qualche

⁶⁷ He had already died by 1758, as stated in a request made by Costanzi found in ACDF, Priv. S.O. Priv. S.O. 1755-1759, 88: "dal defunto Abb.te Antonio Martinetti" (by the deceased Abbot Antonio Martinetti). In the authorization of Costanzi's work is written: "Antonio Martinetti Benefiziato della Basilica Vaticana," in Costanzi, *La verità della cristiana religione*, x.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 1: "L'avermi Voi richiesto di porre in iscritto tutto ciò che [...] per solo zelo della vostra salute vi rappresentai in voce" (you having requested that I put in writing all that [...] purely for the sake of your health I told you orally). Costanzi was not a priest, as the preachers to the Jews often were, but as we have seen he worked with Virgulti and Teoli, both preachers to the Jews. The example of converted Jew Andrea de Monte (16th century) also leads us to believe that preaching to the Jews was not reserved exclusively for priests. Parente, *Il confronto ideologico*, 315-316, 324. Furthermore, Antonino Teoli—also a Holy Office reviser of Hebrew books—was a preacher to the Jews of Rome. For more on Teoli, see above. Furthermore, Costanzi claims to have converted some Roman families and to have kept "un attestato autentico [...] fatto per gloria di Dio, e per contestare la verità dal fu P. da Antonino Teoli, allorché era in questa Città medesima Predicatore agli Ebrei" (certified evidence [...] made for the glory of God, and to have communicated the truth of the late Antonino Teoli, when he was in [Rome] as a preacher to the Jews), in Costanzi, *La verità della cristiana religione*, xii-xiii. For more on his work relating to attempts to convert Jews, see above.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 1-16.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 17-21.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 22-157. This is the longest section of the work (135 pages).

⁷² (Dedication to Benedict XIV), in *ibid.*, vi-vii.

Argomento anche dalla dottrina, e sentenze de' Rabbini, e del Talmudde" (the rule upheld by me in refusing the Jews' objections [...] was nothing more than a reiteration of Divine Scripture and the extraction of some topics from the doctrine, and statements from the rabbis and from the Talmud).⁷³ The topics addressed are the classic issues in the converts' anti-Jewish polemic. They concern Jesus's status as Messiah, the denial of Israel, the accusation of deicide and the consequent enslavement of the Jewish people in exile.⁷⁴

⁷³ Ibid., xv. For example, he cites the tractates *Sanhedrin*, *Shabbat*, *Yoma* and *Nedarim*. Ibid., 148-151.

⁷⁴ George Foot Moore, "Christian Writers on Judaism," *The Harvard Theological Review* 14, no. 3 (1921): 197-254; Federico Steinhaus, "Predicatori e scrittori antiebraici nella Spagna del Quattrocento," *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 35, no. 1 (1969): 30-35; Fausto Parente, "La controversia tra ebrei e cristiani in Francia e in Spagna dal VI al IX secolo," in *Gli ebrei nell'alto medioevo. Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo* 26, no. 2 (1980): 529-639; Hyam Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial: Jewish-Christian Disputation in the Middle Ages* (London - Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1982); Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (London: Cornell University Press, 1982); Moshe Idel and Mauro Perani, eds., *Nahmanide esegeta e cabbalista. Studi e testi* (Florence: Giuntina, 1998); Robert Chazan, *Daggers of Faith: Thirteenth-Century Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Carlebach, *Divided Souls*, 170-199; Giuseppe Veltri, *Renaissance Philosophy in Jewish Garb, Foundations and Challenges in Judaism on the Eve of Modernity* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 169-194; Piero Capelli, "Jewish Converts in Jewish-Christian Intellectual Polemics in the Middle Ages," in *Intricate Interfaith Networks: Quotidian Jewish-Christian Contacts in the Middle Ages*, ed. Ephraim Shoham Steiner (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), 33-83. For some studies on Italian anti-Jewish literature, see Meir Benayahu, "R. Shimshon Morpurgo's Polemic against Benetelli," *Alei Sefer: Studies in Bibliography and in the History of the Printed and the Digital Hebrew Book* 8 (1979-1980): 87-94 [Hebrew]; Benjamin Ravid, "Contra Judaeos in Seventeenth-Century Italy: Two Responses to the Discorso of Simone Luzzatto by Melchiorre Palontrotti and Giulio Morosini," *AJS Review – The Journal of the Association for Jewish Studies* 7, (1982): 301-351; Parente, *Il confronto ideologico*; Giulio Busi, "La Breve raccolta (Venice, 1649) del polemista antiggiudaico Melchiorre Palontrotti," *Annali di Ca' Foscari* 24, no. 3 (1985): 1-19; Gianfranco Fioravanti, "Polemiche antiggiudaiche nell'Italia del Quattrocento: un tentativo di interpretazione globale," *Quaderni Storici* 22, no. 64 (1987): 19-37; Asher Salah, *La République des Lettres: Rabbins, écrivains et médecins juifs en Italie au XVIIIe siècle* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Martina Mampieri, "'The Jews and Their Doubts': Anti-Jewish Polemics in the Fascicolo delle vanità giudaiche (1583) by Antonino Stabili," in *Yearbook of the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies*, ed. Giuseppe Veltri (Berlin - Boston: De Gruyter, 2016), 59-75; Martina Mampieri, "When the Rabbi's Soul Entered a Pig: Melchiorre Palontrotti and His Giudiata against the Jews of Rome," *Jewish History* 33, no. 3-4 (2020): 351-375; Michela Andreatta, *The Persuasive Path: Giulio Morosini's Derekh Emunah as a Conversion Narrative*, in *Bastards and Believers*, eds. Dunkelgrün and Maciejko, 156-181.

The second anti-Jewish text was never published, despite having been approved in 1753. This was due to the intense duties Costanzi undertook during the raids that had taken place in Rome and in other ghettos in the Papal States from 1753.⁷⁵ In fact, in a 1758 request for his dues to be paid, Costanzi states that he has not managed to finish an anti-Jewish piece written with the clear aim of convincing Jews to convert by disputing 13 clauses “sopra de quali si regge al presente la superstizione giudaica” (upon which Jewish superstition currently rests).⁷⁶ No title is given for this text. It had, however, been authorized by Giorgi Agostiniano (1711-1797),⁷⁷ preacher to the Jews of Rome and Antonio Martinetti,⁷⁸ who had also approved Costanzi’s previous work.

⁷⁵ Book requisitions could take place at any time and without warning, as decreed by Benedict XIV in 1751. For more on the raids in Rome, see Berliner, *Censur Und Confiscation*, 10-11; 25-43; Parente, “La Chiesa e il «Talmud»,” 619-620; Milano, *Storia degli ebrei in Italia*, 295. See also Costanzi’s “Relazione della perquisizione de’ libri Ebraici fatta nelli Ghetti di Roma, e di tutto lo Stato Ecclesiastico, colla maniera di correggere li permissibili, e ritenersi l’incorreggibili” (Report on the Hebrew book raids in the Roman Ghetto and in all the Papal States, including the method for correcting permitted books, and books deemed incorrigible) kept at the Vatican Apostolic Library (*Vat. Lat.* 8111, ff. 29-151). The cities of Urbino, Ancona, Senigallia, Pesaro, Lugo, Ferrara, Avignone, Cavallione (Cavailon) and Lilla are also included in the report.

⁷⁶ ACDF, Priv. S.O. Priv. S.O. 1755-1759, 88: “stimano gli uomini eruditi che [l’opera] possa conferire alla conversione degli ebrei non meno dell’altra dal med.[esimo] O.[rato]re tempo fa’ composta, e presentata alla Santa mem.[oria] di Benedetto XIV” (scholarly men offer praise that [the work] may—no less than that other work composed some time ago by the same *Oratore* and presented in Holy Memory of Benedict XIV—lead Jews to conversion). For more on the topic of Jewish superstitions reproached by Christians, see Marina Caffiero, “Il rabbino, il convertito e la superstizione ebraica. La polemica a distanza fra Tranquillo Vita Corcos e Paolo Sebastiano Medici,” in *Prescritto e proscritto. Religione e società nell’Italia moderna (secc. XVI-XIX)*, eds. Andrea Cicerchia, Guido Dall’Olio and Matteo Duni (Rome: Carocci, 2015), 127-150; Caffiero, *Legami pericolosi*.

⁷⁷ Giorgi Agostiniano (Agostino Antonio Giorgi) taught *Sacre Scritture* at the *Archiginnasio della Sapienza* (1746-1762). He was director of the *Biblioteca Angelica* from 1753 and Holy Office *consultore* from 1772. See Guido Gregorio Fagioli Vercellone, “Agostino Antonio Giorgi,” in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani, ad vocem*.

⁷⁸ ACDF, Priv. S.O. Priv. S.O. 1755-1759, 88.

“Il veleno talmudico che ne libri Ebraici si nascondeva” (The Talmudic Poison Hidden in Hebrew Books): The Role of the Holy Office Interpreter of Hebrew Books

Giovanni Antonio Costanzi worked with the Holy Office and above all on matters relating to Hebrew books for over 50 years. It was under Benedict XIV that he was officially appointed *Interprete dei libri ebraici* (Interpreter of Hebrew Books) in 1745, as already mentioned. From that time, Costanzi also strove to bring to light “il veleno talmudico che ne libri Ebraici si nascondeva” (the Talmudic poison hidden in Hebrew books).⁷⁹ It was also during Benedict XIV’s papacy that Costanzi began devoting himself to editing a text known as the *Norme per la revisione dei libri ebraici* (Rules for Revising Hebrew Books). The creation of and updates to this text should be considered within the context of the raid ordered by Pope Benedict across all the ghettos of the Papal States from 1753.

The *Norme per la revisione dei libri ebraici* was one of Costanzi’s most significant and well-known works.⁸⁰ It was probably not intended for immediate publication as a definitive edition. It underwent various updates over a period of 30 years. It is likely that the preparatory work was begun in 1745 and very likely by 1747,⁸¹ but it

⁷⁹ ACDF, Priv. S.O. Priv. S.O. 1743-1749, 117.

⁸⁰ This is a document containing an introduction to the regulations, including some general rules, and two indices listing the Hebrew books permitted with corrections and those not permitted. For more on this important document, see Caffiero, *I libri degli ebrei*; Caffiero, *Legami pericolosi*, 44-71. Marina Caffiero believes that the text must be considered in relation to the compilation of Benedict XIV’s Index, published in 1758, and the requisition of Hebrew books ordered by the Holy Office in 1753 (Ibid. 46). The document was introduced by Daniel Ponziani, in his contribution to Alejandro Cifres and Marco Pizzo, eds., *Rari e preziosi. Documenti dell’età moderna e contemporanea dall’archivio del Sant’Uffizio (Catalogo della mostra. Roma, Museo Centrale del Risorgimento febbraio-marzo 2008)* (Rome: Gangemi Editore, 2009), 66 and 84. Costanzi makes use of some earlier (16th century) rules and indices. For more on these texts, which Jews often used for making the corrections themselves, see Parente, “La Chiesa e il «Talmud»,” 618-619; Isaiah Sonne, *Expurgation of Hebrew Books. The Work of Jewish Scholars: A Contribution to the History of the Censorship of Hebrew Books in Italy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: New York Public Library, 1943); Caffiero, *I libri degli ebrei*, 211; Caffiero, *Legami pericolosi*, 53-54; Luca Andreoni and Martina Mampieri, “«Tutta l’arte de rabini». Un caso di confisca di libri ebraici ad Ancona: controllo e conflitto (1728),” in *L’Inquisizione e gli ebrei*, ed. Caffiero, 51-55.

⁸¹ I am here referring to the aforementioned payment in the *Lista de’ pagamenti fatti da Giacinto Cassima, Maestro di Casa del’ S. Offizio* (List of payments made to Giacinto Cassima, Holy Office *Maestro di Casa*), made to copyists in 1745. In it we find a payment to Giovanni Costanzi for a copy of something described in no further detail than as “Indice de libri ebraici.” ACDF, ASV 062, 1745,

was amended and expanded until at least the 1780s.⁸² It is reasonable to suppose that in 1758, 10 years after the work was begun, Costanzi's work had still not reached a state of satisfactory completion. This can be inferred from reading a 1758 document entitled *Istruzione sopra I Libri Rabbinici, e sopra la maniera da osservarsi nel Correggerli, ed espurgarli* (Instructions for Rabbinic Books, and Specifically the Methods to Follow when Correcting and Expurgating Them). It was written by Costanzi and addressed to Holy Office *consultore* Giuseppe Assemani.⁸³ In it, Costanzi reports that “dalli 30 novembre 1747 si è addossato la cura d'incominciare ad illustrare, ad ampliare le Regole del Zikuk, ed a registrare alcuni Libri Rabbinici in esso non compresi” (from November 30, 1747, he took it upon himself to begin illustrating, to widen the scope of the Zikuk Rules and to record some Rabbinic books not included therein),⁸⁴ but the work was unfinished

n. 42. Furthermore, in a 1747 request he recalls the strife of having, “fin dal mese di Agosto 1745 per mostrare alla S. Inquisizione certi Indici de ‘ libri permessi ad uso degli ebrei, fra i quali ve ne sono molti contro la S. Fede Cattolica, e pieni di superstizioni” (from the month of August 1745, to show the Holy Inquisition certain Indices of books Jews were permitted to use, including many that contradicted the Holy Catholic faith and were full of superstitions). ACDF Priv. S.O. Priv. S.O. 1743-1749, 117. The manuscript Vat. Lat. 8111 ff. *Istruzione sopra I Libri Rabbinici, e sopra la maniera da osservarsi nel Correggerli, ed espurgarli* composed by Costanzi and signed off by Giuseppe Simone Assemani reads: “Gio. Antonio Costanzi destinato revisore dei libri ebraici, e rabbinici dalla suprema Inquisizione di Roma con l’oracolo della S: Mem: di Benedetto XIV. Sino dalli 30 novembre 1747, si è addossato la cura d'incominciare ad illustrare, ad ampliare le Regole del Zikuk, ed a registrare alcuni Libri Rabbinici in esso non compresi” (Gio. Antonio Costanzi, appointed reviser of Hebrew and Rabbinic books by the Supreme Inquisition of Rome with the divine authority of Benedict XIV. From November 30, 1747, he took it upon himself to begin illustrating, to widen the scope of the Zikuk Rules and to record some Rabbinic books not included therein), 18r. In a 1758 request we read of a payment made precisely on November 30, 1747: “li 30 novembre 1747 fu assegnato scudi tre il mese che puntualmente li sono stati pagati” (On November 30, 1747 he was assigned three *scudi* the month and they were punctually paid). And then in 1751 “in occasione di avere fatto un Indice e Istruzione sopra i Libri ebraici Monsig. Assessore le fece avere nel mese di Marzo 1751 tre zecchini effettivi di ricognizione” (having created an Index and Instructions on Hebrew books, *Monsignore Assessore* granted him as recognition three *zecchini* in March 1751). ACDF, Priv. S.O. Priv. S.O. 1755-1759, 88.

⁸² A 1782 copy can be found in ACDF, St. St. CC2 -a, 2.

⁸³ The manuscript can be found in the Vatican Apostolic Library: Vat. Lat. 8111, ff. 151-19v. On the manuscript, see Berliner, *Censur und Confiscation*. The same collection of manuscripts contains various texts relating to the requisition of Hebrew books in the Papal States.

⁸⁴ *Istruzione*, Vat. Lat. 8111, 18r. The term “regole del Zikuk” probably refers to the *Sefer ha-ziquq*, an expurgatory index used to correct Hebrew books. Popper, *The Censorship of Hebrew Books*, 77-89; Parente, “La Chiesa e il «Talmud»,” 598-612. For more on the correction of Hebrew books and related practices, see Sonne, “Expurgation of Hebrew Books. The Work of Jewish

and Costanzi lamented the absence of a “competente Onorario” (appropriate remuneration).⁸⁵ Costanzi showed his initial drafts to Pietro Girolamo Guglielmi (1694-1773), Holy Office *assessore* from 1743 to 1753, and also to Ludovico Valenti (1695-1763), Guglielmi’s successor who occupied the role from 1753/4 to 1759.⁸⁶ In addition to the work redacting and updating the *Norme* and the related indices, various copies of the same document would be needed to assist and govern the work of revisers and inquisitors located throughout the Papal States.⁸⁷ The stark difficulties of the general raid of 1753, as well as the enormous quantity of sequestered books to be examined, likely slowed operations.⁸⁸ Furthermore, for books permitted with corrections, revisers would have to provide “le pagine, le linee, con le parole in Ebraico o Rabbinico, tradotte in Italiano, che debbono cancellarsi o correggersi” (the pages and lines, and the words in Hebrew or Rabbinic, translated into Italian, that needed to be deleted or corrected),⁸⁹ to assist the local revisers in their task and to ensure that the practice of correcting Hebrew books was consistent. Costanzi’s role in the mid-eighteenth century operations to

Scholars”; Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, *The Censor, the Editor, and the Text: The Catholic Church and the Shaping of the Jewish Canon in the Sixteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 120-174; Gustavo Sacerdote, “Deux index expurgatoires des livres hébreux,” *Revue des Études Juives* 30 (1895): 257-283; Nathan Porges, “Der Hebräische Index Expurgatorius’ in *Festschrift zum 70. Geburtstag A. Berliner’s*,” eds. Aron Freimann and Meier Hildesheimer (Frankfurt: Kauffmann, 1903), 273-295; Mauro Perani, “Confisca e censura di libri ebraici a Modena fra Cinque e Seicento,” in *L’Inquisizione e gli ebrei in Italia*, ed. Michele Luzzati (Rome - Bari: Laterza, 1994), 287-320; Shifra Baruchson-Arbib and Gila Prebor, “Sefer Ha-Ziquq: An Index of forbidden Hebrew books: The Book’s use and its influence on Hebrew Printing,” *La Bibliofilia* 109, no. 1 (2007): 3-31; Federica Francesconi, “Illustrious Rabbis Facing the Italian Inquisition: Accommodating Censorship in Seventeenth-Century Italy,” in *Jewish Books and their Reader: Aspects of the Intellectual Life of Christians and Jews in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Scott Mandelbrote and Joanna Weinberg (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 100-121; Piet Van Boxel, “Hebrew Books and Censorship in Sixteenth-Century Italy,” in *Ibid.*, 75-99; Federica Francesconi, “La censura dei libri ebraici «infetti et perniziosi» nella Modena del Seicento: processi, negoziazioni e discussioni di ebrei e cristiani nei fori dell’Inquisizione,” *Archivio italiano per la storia della pietà* 26, (2013): 387-412; 395-396.

⁸⁵ *Istruzione*, Vat. Lat. 8111, 19v.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 18r-v.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 19r-v.

⁸⁸ For more on these issues, see the study by Caffiero, *Legami pericolosi*, 44-77.

⁸⁹ This citation comes from the text of the *Norme* itself, as recorded in Caffiero, *I libri degli ebrei*, 211.

confiscate Hebrew books⁹⁰ was divided into various tasks and continued for a long time after the requisitions had ended, especially in matters relating to the examination of books taken from Jews.⁹¹ The texts sequestered—even those permitted—had to be signed off and therefore scrutinized by the local revisers,⁹² who had hundreds and hundreds of books to check. The quantity of Hebrew books taken can be understood from Costanzi's *Relazioni*, the reports he wrote on the raids.⁹³ These accounts are presented as reports on the actions taken in the raids and on the resulting confiscations. They give details on the methods used, the timelines of the raids and any problems encountered. The lists annexed to the *Relazioni* are of particular interest as they can be considered veritable bibliographies of Hebrew books, often accompanied by a short but thorough note from the reviser explaining the reviser's motives and the seriousness of the

⁹⁰ For more on the raids in those years, see Berliner, *Censur Und Confiscation*; Popper, *The Censorship of Hebrew Books*; Parente, "La Chiesa e il «Talmud»," 619-620; Caffiero, *Legami pericolosi*, 44-77.

⁹¹ For an example of a text corrected by Costanzi, see Nachmanide's commentary on the Pentateuch, in manuscript format, digitalized by the University of Manchester: Hebrew MS 8 (XV sec.) and available in <https://www.digitalcollections.manchester.ac.uk/view/MS-HEBREW-00008/1> (Accessed December 22, 2023). Costanzi's annotation is found in f254a: "Rivisto, et corretto da me s.tto, questo Libro di Biur al- / Htora, seu Expositio Legii, autore R. Mose Bar / Nachman, in compendio, detto Haramban - / scritto in Membrana, carattere Rabbinico - / q.to di 16 Agosto 1769 - / - Gio An.to Costanzi -" (Reviewed and corrected by me, the undersigned, this Book Biur al- / Htora, seu Expositio Legii. Author R. Mose Bar / Nachman, in compendio, aka Haramban - / written on Membrane, Rabbinic alphabet - / 16 August 1769 - / - Gio An.to Costanzi -). The corrections (deletions) are found in ff 65b-66a, 67a, 92a, 173a, 198b, 200a-201a, 241b-242a. Other texts signed off and corrected by Costanzi were included in the *Fondo Zelada* (Cattedrale di Toledo-Biblioteca Nazionale di Madrid), as reported in Cesare Colafemmina ed., *Ahima'az Ben Paltiel. Sefer Yuhasin. Libro delle discendenze. Vicende di una famiglia ebraica di Ora nei secoli IX-XI* (Cassano delle Murge: Messaggi, 2001), 10-11.

⁹² *Istruzione*, Vat. Lat. 8111, 18v.

⁹³ See the previously cited *Relazione della perquisizione de' libri Ebraici fatta nelli Ghetti di Roma, e di tutto lo Stato Ecclesiastico, colla maniera di correggere li permissibili, e ritenersi l'incorreggibili* (A Report on the Hebrew Book Raids in the Roman Ghetto and in All the Papal States, Including the Method for Correcting Permitted Books, and Books Deemed Incorrigible) by Costanzi in *Vat. Lat.* 8111, ff. 29-151. Other interesting texts are held in the archives of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in the Stanza Storica collection. These documents can give us important evidence about the size of Hebrew book collections in the Papal States in the 18th century. For specifics on Ancona (1728): Andreoni and Mampieri, "«Tutta l'arte de rabini». Un caso di confisca di libri ebraici ad Ancona," 49-81.

judgment given to each Hebrew book, as well as some indications on the edition and its format.

It was also Costanzi who prepared various *censure* (censorship notes) between the 1760s and 1780s,⁹⁴ presented as a qualitative and analytical annotation to the sequestered books. *Censura* here does not refer to the complex Ecclesiastical control mechanism, but to one tool within it.⁹⁵ From reading contemporaneous documents, we can surmise that the term *censura* is intended in its Latin etymological sense, which includes examination and judgment. These documents speak of the reviser's careful examination of each book and the expurgatory action to be taken. The *censure* generally give the title of the book examined, a short introduction to the author of the book, a description of the edition examined, and some extracts from the text, accompanied by analytical observations explaining what the issue with the book is and indicating any other editions. They were prepared in response to requests submitted by Jews asking for their books to be returned to them, with the aim of explaining in detail the reasons for withholding and often outlawing the books.⁹⁶ They included the *Tiqqune shabbat* (Sabbath Prayers) by Isaac ben Solomon Luria (1534-1572), containing mystical poems for the Sabbath; *Shene luhot ha-berit* (Two Tablets of the Covenant) by Isaiah Horowitz (c.1555-1630), an encyclopedic compilation of Jewish rituals, ethics and mysticism; *Sefer ha-'iqqarim* (A Book of Principles) by Joseph Albo (c. 1380-1444), setting out the dogma of Judaism; *Yalqut Re'ubeni* (A Compilation of Reuben) by Reuben hak-Kohen Hoschke (?-1673), a collection of *midrashim*; *En Israel* (or *En Ya'aqob*, The Well of Jacob) by Jacob ibn Habib (c. 1460-1516) on the Aggadic material in the Talmud; *Yalqut Shim'oni* (A Compilation of Simeon)—it is unclear who the author is, but it likely dates back to the thirteenth century and it handles the Aggadic materials in the Jewish Bible. Costanzi runs a sort of

⁹⁴ The *censure* are found in various folders held in the archives of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: ACDF, st. st. cc2-a.

⁹⁵ For observations on this term: Mario Infelise, *I padroni dei libri. Il controllo sulla stampa nella prima età moderna* (Rome - Bari: Laterza, 2019), 20 (ed. or.: 2014); Vittorio Frajese, *Nascita dell'Indice. La censura ecclesiastica dal Rinascimento alla Controriforma* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2008), 9 (ed. or.: 2006). On the complexity of *censura* and its definition: Robert Darnton, *I censori all'opera. Come gli Stati hanno plasmato la letteratura* (Milan: Adelphi, 2017), 25-41 and 255-272 (ed. or. *Censors at Work: How States Shaped Literature*, New York: W. W. Norton, 2014).

⁹⁶ For more on the requests for books to be returned: Caffiero, *Legami pericolosi*, 73-77.

comparison of the different editions of texts he examines, indicating the number of pages in the various editions found and checked, as is the case in his censorship of the *Tiqqune shabbat* and *Shene luhot ha-berit*.

Conclusion

For the most part, Giovanni Antonio Costanzi's life story can be reconstructed through the duties he carried out for the Holy Office. To understand Catholic concerns over Hebrew books it is necessary to provide an outline of the context in which Costanzi's work also fell. The Holy Office's policy concerning Jews was part of a hostile Catholic position that intensified and changed shape in the eighteenth century. During this period, modern challenges driven by ideas connected to the Enlightenment upset the stability the Church had enjoyed internally and externally. This crisis had many faces: the decline of the Catholic evangelization mission, the changing political framework in Europe and the encroachment of intellectual thought linked to the Enlightenment.⁹⁷ Ecclesiastical policy saw the number of decrees against the Jewish minority intensify—and the raids on the communities in the Papal States were a consequence.⁹⁸ Among the decrees were measures for controlling Hebrew books. The Ecclesiastical body in charge of controlling Hebrew books was the Holy Office rather than the Congregation of the Index, which was specifically in charge of controlling books.⁹⁹ The role of the

⁹⁷ For general information on these points: Vincenzo Lavenia, *Storia della Chiesa. 3. L'età moderna* (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, 2020), 267-295. See the important reflections found in Stow, *Anna and Tranquillo*, 79-90. For a specific study on the Jewish *côté* and the impact of the context of the Enlightenment and governmental reforms: Francesca Bregoli, *Mediterranean Enlightenment: Livornese Jews, Tuscan Culture, and Eighteenth-Century Reform* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

⁹⁸ For the correlation between the upswing in uncompromising policies towards Jews and the Church's attitude towards the Enlightenment: Mario Rosa, "La Santa Sede e gli ebrei nel Settecento," in *Storia d'Italia, Annali 16/2, Gli ebrei in Italia*, ed. Corrado Vivanti (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), 1069-1087; 1072-1074; Caffiero, *Tra Chiesa e Stato. Gli ebrei italiani dall'età dei Lumi agli anni della Rivoluzione*, in *Ibid.*, 1091-1132.

⁹⁹ For more on the Talmud and the Congregation of the Index, see Frajese, *Nascita dell'Indice*, 127-131. For general information on the relationship between the Inquisition, the Index and Jews: Pier Cesare Ioly Zorattini, ed., *Processi del S. Uffizio di Venezia contro Ebrei e Giudaizzanti*, 2 vol. (Florence: L. S. Olschki, 1980-1999); Ioly Zorattini, "Il S. Uffizio di Venezia e il controllo della

Holy Office's Congregation of Cardinals was to protect the purity of the Catholic faith, particularly against the spread of heterodox ideas and the Reformation, and thus to take action against heresy and heretics.¹⁰⁰ Jews did not theoretically fall within this category,¹⁰¹ but they came within the Inquisition's purview if their views were deemed detrimental to Christianity:¹⁰² that of course included the reading or storage of books deemed heretical and containing blasphemy.¹⁰³ Jews could be subject to the Holy Office's judgment for crimes involving offenses against the Christian doctrine. Alleged offenses—which could be contained in Hebrew books especially, as mentioned, in the Talmud—related to blaspheming against Jesus or Mary, cursing Christians and making propositions against God.¹⁰⁴

stampa ebraica nella seconda metà del '500," in *La censura libraria nell'Europa del secolo XVI*, ed. Ugo Rozzo (Udine: Forum, 1997), 127-147; Stephan Wendehorst, ed., *The Roman Inquisition, the Index and the Jews* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Paul Grendler, *The Roman Inquisition and the Venetian Press, 1540-1605* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

¹⁰⁰ The establishment of the Holy Office of the Inquisition by Paul III (1534-1549) in 1542, with Apostolic Constitution *Licet ab initio*, was intended to renew the previous Inquisitorial office. For more on the history and goals set out in *Licet ab initio*, see Gianluca D'Errico, "Licet ab initio," in *Dizionario storico dell'Inquisizione*, eds. Prosperi, Lavenia, and Tedeschi, vol. II, 906. For general information on the history of the Inquisition: John Tedeschi, *The Prosecution of Heresy: Collected Studies on the Inquisition in Early Modern Italy* (New York: Binghamton, 1991); Adriano Prosperi, *Tribunali della coscienza. Inquisitori, confessori, missionari* (Turin: Einaudi, 1996); Andrea Del Col, *L'Inquisizione in Italia. Dal XII al XXI secolo* (Milan: Mondadori, 2006); Katherine Aron-Beller and Christopher Black, eds., *The Roman Inquisition. Centre versus Peripheries* (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2018).

¹⁰¹ Jews, especially those hailing from Spain or Portugal, could be persecuted in instances in which they were accused of practicing their former religion after having been baptized. Adriano Prosperi, "L'Inquisizione romana e gli ebrei," in *L'Inquisizione e gli ebrei in Italia*, ed. Luzzatti, 67-120; 76-78; Pier Cesare Ioly Zorattini, ed., *L'identità dissimulata. Giudaizzanti iberici nell'Europa cristiana dell'età moderna* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2000).

¹⁰² For more information: Pier Cesare Ioly Zorattini, "Ebrei in Italia," in *Dizionario storico dell'Inquisizione*, eds. Prosperi, Lavenia, and Tedeschi, vol. II, 523-527. On the subject of the assimilation of Jews/heretics/infidels in the Middle Ages: Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and Its Relation to Modern Anti-Semitism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943), 170-187.

¹⁰³ For information on the legal bases for the Inquisition's controls over Jews: Stow, *Il Ghetto di Roma nel Cinquecento*, 11-12.

¹⁰⁴ Parente, "La Chiesa e il «Talmud»," 548-566; Stow, *The Burning of the Talmud in 1553*. Also see the matter in connection with the Bible in Gigliola Fragnito, *La Bibbia al rogo. La censura ecclesiastica e i volgarizzamenti della Scrittura (1471-1605)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997).

Accusations of heresy arose from misunderstandings or distortions of the meaning of Scripture, especially with regard to passages relating to messianic prophecies.¹⁰⁵ In that same period, on 17 September 1751, Benedict XIV republished the so-called *Editto sopra gli Ebrei*, on the basis of what Clement XII (1730-1740) had issued on February 2, 1733.¹⁰⁶ Hebrew books play a significant role in the proposed Catholic rulings set forth in the text.¹⁰⁷ This is not the place for a detailed analysis of the relationship between the Holy Office and Hebrew books,¹⁰⁸ but it is necessary to call attention to certain tools through which the Church took care of the problem of books: the role of converts. Costanzi—former rabbi and Christian convert—represents one of those tools. His work as a reviser and interpreter of Hebrew books allows us today to investigate certain specific aspects of Catholic control in the Papal States. Through Costanzi, appointed as he was to roles in expurgation, censorship and sequestration, we can today access precious information not only on the complex mechanism of Catholic surveillance and rule, but also on the important library collections of eighteenth-century Jewish Italians. An in-depth study of the *Relazioni* cited above, alongside analysis of the size of the collections of Jewish works held, for example, in the Casanatense Library or in other collections to which the requisitions likely contributed, would reveal an important starting point for understanding part of the heritage of Hebrew books.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ For information on the condemnation of the Talmud as a heretical book, see Parente, “La Chiesa e il «Talmud»,” 612-615.

¹⁰⁶ L’*Editto sopra gli Ebrei* was republished by Pius VI (1775-1779) on April 5, 1775 and again in 1793. For more on this, see Attilio Milano, “L’Editto sopra gli ebrei di Pio VI e le mene ricattatorie di un letterato,” *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 19, no. 2 (1953): 65-80; Milano, *Storia degli ebrei in Italia*, 296-296; Paolo Elia, “I fratelli Verri e l’editto di Pio VI,” *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 43, no. 3-4 (1977): 133-136; Marina Caffiero, “Le insidie de’ perfidi giudei. Antiebraismo e riconquista cattolica alla fine del Settecento,” *Rivista storica italiana* 2 (1993): 555-581. The 1775 edict is perhaps the most renowned, as it has often been used in contemporary historiography to highlight the Church’s attitude towards Jews in the 18th century.

¹⁰⁷ Books are the subject of the very first clauses, which underscore the prohibition of the Talmud and of other works deemed dangerous due to containing material offensive to Christianity. The sequestration of Hebrew books had to be authorized by the Church authorities. The rules reiterate earlier legislation on books, which is stated in the text itself.

¹⁰⁸ For more on this: Caffiero, *Legami pericolosi*.

¹⁰⁹ For some aspects concerning Hebrew books in the Jewish communities of Modena and Livorno, see, respectively, Federica Francesconi, “Dangerous Readings in Early Modern Modena: Negotiating Jewish Culture in an Italian Key,” in *The Hebrew Book in Early Modern Italy*, eds. Joseph R. Hacker and Adam Shear (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 133-155;

Specifically, it could give us important information on what Jews in eighteenth-century Italian communities definitely read and had in their possession, and how Catholic control shaped the culture, altering what Hebrew books were produced, preserved and circulated.¹¹⁰

Appendix

A List of Jews converted by Giovanni Antonio Costanzi, provided in the footnote of his 1747 petition requesting suitable remuneration for his role as Reviser of Hebrew books.¹¹¹

Jews Converted to the Holy Faith by the *Oratore*

Moisé Taracino Livornese, now Antonio Ricciajolo, convinced of the Catholic truth by way of a letter, came to Rome, where he received his Holy Baptism alongside his wife, three daughters aged 9, 7 and 2, and spinster sister-in-law, 18.

Gentile Gallica Romana, now Maria Teresa Albani, finding herself in the home of a Christian for obvious reasons was convinced that she had been tricked by Rabbis and, as the Messiah has already come, was baptized with her son known as Agostino Giustiniani who was an expert of the Christian faith in the first year of His Holiness's glorious Papacy.

Samuele Fermon Costantinopolitano, now Gaspare Cagnetti, of Livorno, was persuaded of the Catholic truth [by] way of a letter and came to Rome where he was baptized with his two daughters, 18 and 16, now both nuns outside of Rome.

Francesca Bregoli, "Hebrew Printing in Eighteenth-Century Livorno: From Government Control to a Free Market," in *Ibid.*, 171-196.

¹¹⁰ For general information on the influence the control of books has on culture, see Darnton, *I censori all'opera*.

¹¹¹ ACDF, Priv. S.O. Priv. S.O. 1743-1749, 117. The English translations was done by a translator from the Italian original language.

Angelo della Riccia, now Gioacchino di Santa Famiglia, 82, convinced of the truth by means of a sermon, received his Holy Baptism and now resides in the devout *Casa de Catecumeni*.¹¹²

Miriam Benfatto earned her PhD in History of Christianity and Church History from the University of Bologna. She is currently a research fellow at the Department of History and Cultures at the same university and is the recipient of a two-year scholarship sponsored by the Rothschild Foundation Hanadiv Europe. Her research focuses on historiography of the Historical Jesus and Jewish-Christian polemical literature in the early modern period.

Keywords: Giovanni Antonio Costanzi, Holy Office, Censorship, Hebrew Books, Jewish converts

How to quote this article:

Miriam Benfatto, “From Rabbi to Reviser: Once More on Giovanni Antonio Costanzi (1702-1786), a Convert in the Service of the Holy Office,” in *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC* 24, no. 2 (2023), DOI: [10.48248/issn.2037-741X/14488](https://doi.org/10.48248/issn.2037-741X/14488)

¹¹² The name Angelo della Riccia appears in the *Descriptio hebreorum* of 1733. See Monica Militi, “Descriptio hebreorum,” in *Gli abitanti del ghetto di Roma*, ed. Groppi, 237; 250.