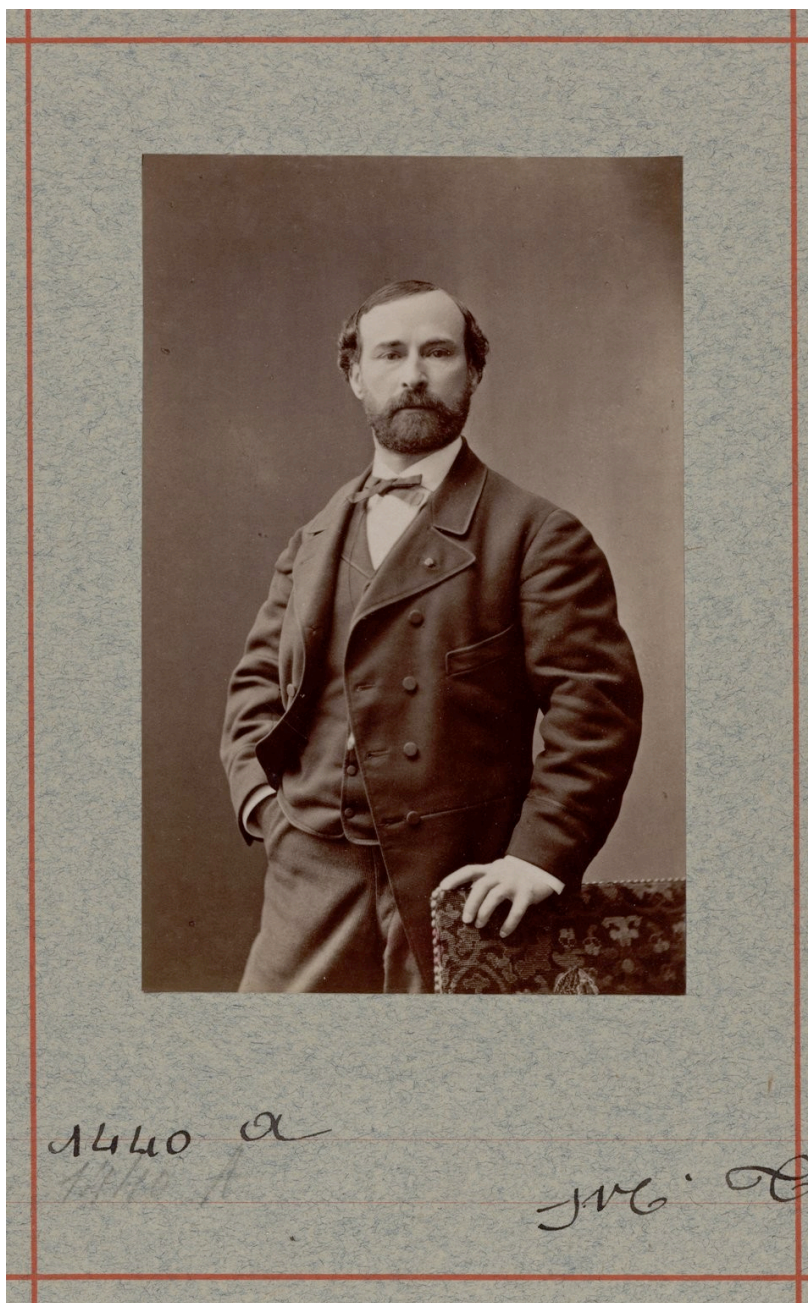


Giacobbe and Tullo Massarani

by Maurizio Bertolotti



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Tullo Massarani (1826-1905)

Abstract

The essay outlines the biographies of Jacob and his son Tullo in the context of the history of the Mantuan Jews in the age of emancipation. Giacobbe came from a family of the Jewish élite and was brought up to the Enlightenment ideas and to the principles of 1789. Following the path, which had been opened in Mantua by rabbis Simone Calimani and Jakob Rafael Jacob Saraval, Giacobbe turned toward the ideal of the reconcilability of faith with reason, in tune with prevailing tendencies also within non-Jewish bourgeoisie. The inclination to reduce religion to the “love of the neighbor” brought Giacobbe to the more or less explicit recognition of the equivalence of different faiths, which mirrored at a cultural level the social integration between Jewish elites and non-Jewish bourgeoisie.

Tullo’s detachment from traditional faith was even more radical, however a strong need for a faith survived and this was satisfied by the conversion to the religion of the nation. In this sense you can talk of a marked “assimilazionismo.” The animated opposition showed by Tullo in the 1890s against any proposals to make a Jewish identity reviving can be explained by his fear for the centrifugal tendencies, which - along with the escalation of the class struggle - could have endangered the unity of the new State. Massarani was obsessed with these risks and he consequently acted in order to prevent them.

- The Life of the Father as Narrated by his Son
- From Merchant to Agricultural Entrepreneur and Land-Owner: the Massaranis in the Age of Emancipation
- The Social Ascent of the Family
- Reasonable Truth and Good Works: the Education and Religion of Giacobbe
- “More an inspiration than a certainty”: the Religion of Tullo
- The Fatherland as a Substitute for Religion: Tullo and Jewish Identity
- Tullo Massarani after 1861: the Obsession with Unity
- What Doctor Lorenzi Thought
- Conclusions

The Life of the Father as Narrated by his Son

The pages in which Tullo Massarani recounts the life of his father Giacobbe, written and dated in 1865, constitute an important document of the history of Mantuan Jewry in the first half of the nineteenth century. It is reasonable to suppose that in this family memoir, the son focused on those traits of his father's personality and on those events that mostly influenced his own education. At the beginning of the text he clearly illustrates his opinion affirming that knowledge begins by learning family traditions.¹

Born in Mantua on September 16, 1793 in a family characterized by "the honourable modesty of a hardworking life," young Giacobbe grew up "among the noise, the violence, the battles that seemed – not only to the most timid – complete turmoil."² Under the French bombs the young man and his family perceived "the arrival of the new times" knowing that "welcoming new guests" would bring "the Spartan foster-mother of genius: liberty." After he studied art and literature at the *Accademia Virgiliana di Scienze* (Virgilian Academy of Science, Letters and Arts), where as professor he had the poet and philosopher Idelfonso Valdastri and the illustrious lawyer Luigi Casali, who then became "a close family friend," he enrolled at the recommendation of the latter in the Faculty of Law at the University of Bologna. Tullo observed that "The invigorating spirit of the eighteenth century pervaded and innovated science." Among the learned teachers his father had at Bologna, he recalled the Mantuan abbot Girolamo Prandi, "a liberal pupil of that vilified philosophy that disarmed the oppressor and founded kindergartens and hospices."³ The light shining on him dimmed, however, with the return of Lombardy under Habsburg dominion. Excluded from public office Giacobbe returned to his studies and profession. He settled in Milan and became acquainted with Gian Domenico

¹ Tullo Massarani, "L'Avvocato Giacobbe Massarani," Id., *Illustri e cari estinti. Commemorazioni ed epigrafi*, ed. Raffaello Barbiera, "Edizione postuma delle opere," Gruppo IV, "Ricordi," I (Florence: Successori Le Monnier, 1907), 269-295, 269-272.

² Ibid., 273; the quotations following in this paragraph are from 274 and 275. The impression of turmoil in the face of the revolutionary events was common to varied Mantuan milieux: see Maurizio Bertolotti, "Ceti, conflitti, identità" *Storia di Mantova. Uomini - ambiente - economia - società - istituzioni*, II, *Le radici del presente 1792-1960*, ed. Marzio A. Romani (Mantova: Tre Lune Edizioni, 2008), 339-429, 339-349.

³ Massarani, "L'Avvocato Giacobbe Massarani," 276.

Romagnosi, under whose “great wing” he rose “to the divine speculation of science.”⁴

In 1818, at the age of twenty-five, he returned to Mantua⁵. His admirable industriousness in these years was mainly due, according to Tullo, to the affection of his family. Giacobbe both “helped his brothers, not because of his age but because his wisdom, becoming right-arm, brain and soul of their affairs,” as well as his new family. In 1822 he married Elena Fano, a “damsel from a family of good lineage in the city” with whom he settled in Ostiglia, a small but important town to the east of Mantua, where he was allowed to exercise his profession despite being excluded from the city bar. His success relied not only on the quality of his practice, but on his “ability in financial matters.” In fact, he was entrusted with the administration of delicate assets and estates that eventually greatly flourished under his management.

Just as careful with his own property and assets, lawyer Massarani “diligently manages his family business which little by little developed in new nuclei and offshoots as his activities expanded into new companies with the happiness of all the parties involved.”⁶ The pursuit of a successful and brilliant life involved, according to Tullo, the constant collaboration with other businessmen: in correspondence with the principles of mutuality and association promoted by his father. Giacobbe seemed to operate in the same spirit in the field of charity. Generous in dispensing help to those in need of support, he galvanized the strengths in those who asked for help, allowing them to begin again and walk on their own feet.⁷ Since the religious inspiration for these works of charity is undeniable, it is no surprise that at this stage, Tullo decides to describes his father’s religion:

Born into a religious minority, he was holding it dear like any honest man holds dear the cause of the weak because of the ancient persecutions and senseless prohibitions, all of which had not yet disappeared. Nevertheless he still loved all men; his deep faith, was not wasted on vain appearances, but directed in heartfelt prayer that animated him to carry out good deeds. Intolerance was abhorrent to him but more in the moral perversion it created rather than in the usual offence or damage it caused.”⁸

⁴ *Ibid.*, 277.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 277. For the following quotation in this paragraph, 278-282.

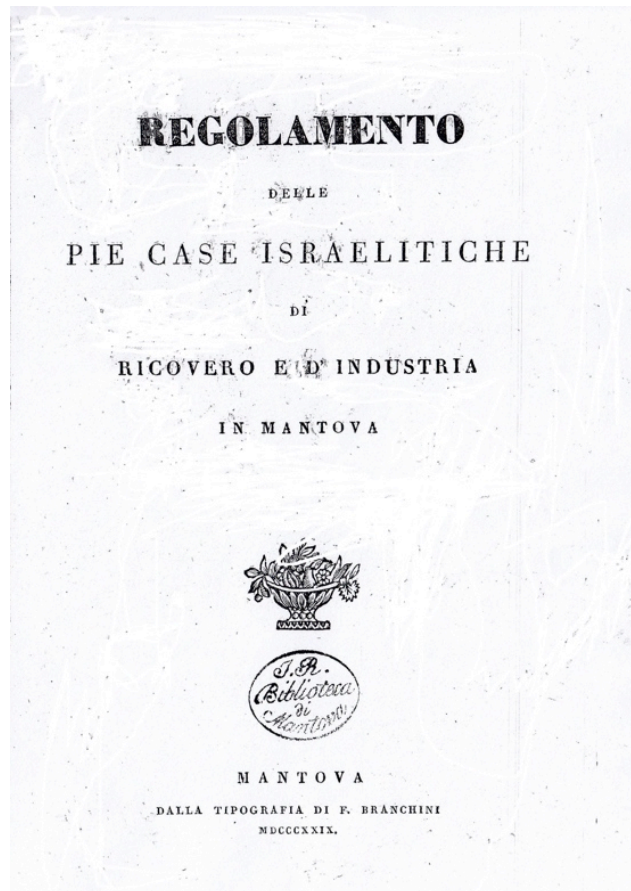
⁶ *Ibid.*, 283.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 284.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 284-285.

This important information becomes particularly significant, as it is emphasized by Tullo's subsequent statement about his father's industriousness in the community,⁹ a field that occupied those who wished to affirm their right to justice. Tullo's father did not like "education closed behind the gates of a cult, but available to everyone within the womb of a secular society." In this area the work of lawyer Massarani was carried out above all in the bosom of the city's Jewish community. He was interested in spreading "among men accused of being inclined towards trafficking (a more widespread vice among the institutions than among individuals)," not only liberal arts (*arti liberali*), but also feverish industries, deemed "rigorous teachers of a dignity that only arising from fatigue". Massarani assumed and maintained for a certain time the direction of the Chamber of Industry for the youth together with a hospice for the poor and elderly that was opened in the Jewish community in 1825. For the next ten years, making the most of the generosity of his co-religionist Samuel Trabotti, he developed the project for an institute to which he would be legal consultant until his death. The institute was meant to provide education for the adolescents, assistance to the infirm, grants to the young of poor families, and encouragement prizes for workers. [*Fig 1a; Fig. 1b*]

⁹ For the commitment of Jacob in the fields of care and education, see *ibid.*, 285-286.



*Fig.1a Regolamento delle Pie Case Israelitiche di Ricovero ed Industria in Mantova (Mantua: Tip. F. Branchini, 1829).
Biblioteca Teresiana, Mantua.*

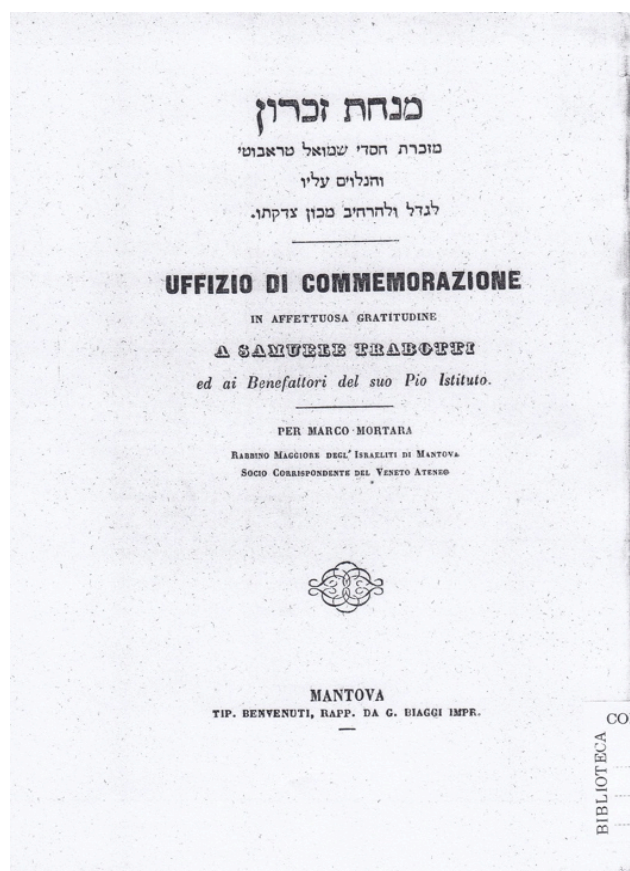


Fig. 1b Marco Mortara, *Uffizio di Commemorazione in affettuosa gratitudine a Samuele Trabotti ed ai Benefattori del suo Pio Istituto* etc. (Mantua: Tip. Benevenuti, s.d.).
Biblioteca Teresiana, Mantua.

In 1842 determined to support “wider horizons for the studies” of his son, Giacobbe moved his family to Milan, where he soon became highly esteemed.¹⁰ Here, when the Habsburg lost power, in 1848, he immediately states his own political position:

He held steadfastly to his cornerstone: the need to unite with the Italian province that would remain armed and pointed at liberty; to stop any domestic quarrels, to put off every type of dispute on the form of government and to rely, until the

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 287.

Austrians remain on a patch of Italian land, on Piedmontese *Statuto* and arms – our only hope, he said, and, if we use them wisely, infallible.¹¹

There is no doubt that Giacobbe was convinced of the need to entrust the destinies of Lombardy and Italy to an armed constitutional Piedmont. From Tullo's testimony we cannot infer that he was favourable to the merger of Lombardy with the Kingdom of Sardinia as proposed by the monarchists of the provisional government in opposition to the republicans led by Carlo Cattaneo, Giuseppe Ferrari and Enrico Cernuschi. Rather, it could be stated that he shared the idea, to which they all agreed in principle, to defer the definition of the institutional framework to apply at the moment of the complete liberation of Italy from foreign dominance. It would not, however, be rash to presume that, like his son, he had not approved of the decision taken on 12th May by the provisional Government to hold a referendum on the proposed merger.¹²

Giacobbe's support of the Piedmont of Vittorio Emanuele II and of Cavour was confirmed in the second half of the 1850s during a meeting in Paris with Daniele Manin.¹³ Now, however, it is no longer the story of the father only, but rather of Tullo, who was in this period undergoing his definitive break with Giuseppe Mazzini, one of the most important leaders of the Italian Risorgimento:

We talked and listened with reverence to the ruler of the Venetian Republic about the king who, loyal and a soldier, pledged himself to Italy; we celebrated the new dawn of the Latin people; we exulted at the flash of the guns, the waving of those flags that to the French announced the taking of Sebastopol: to us, to our minds, a premonition of a free Milan and Venice.... Venice! – Poor Manin, poor father!¹⁴ [Fig. 2]

From Paris, where he had arrived, the story of Giacobbe turns to domestic affection, to which he wished to quietly devote the last part of his life. The

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 288 e 289.

¹² On the disagreements about the fusion, see Enrico Francia, 1848. *La rivoluzione del Risorgimento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2012), 182-188. Tullo's position is documented by Massarani, *Carlo Tenca e il pensiero civile del suo tempo. Con una scelta di Poesie postume inedite e Ritratto* (Milan: Hoepli, 1886), 61 e 62.

¹³ We do not know how many meetings with Manin they had. If one only, it would date to 1856 because Tullo writes ("L'avvocato Giacobbe Massarani," 290) that he and his father went and made their "offer for Manin's guns" and we know that the subscription for "hundred guns" was announced by Manin on September 8, 1856: *Daniele Manin e Giorgio Pallavicino. Epistolario politico 1855-1857*, ed. Emanuele Baccio Maineri (Milan: L. Bortolotti, 1878), 419-421; but the following mention of common exultation for the capture of Sebastopoli would lead us to suppose a previous meeting in 1855.

¹⁴ "L'avvocato Giacobbe Massarani," 291.

longing for serenity was broken by the death of his wife.¹⁵ These were the days of the battles of Magenta and Solferino that gave new hope to Giacobbe. They were to be the last for Giacobbe, who died on 14th December, 1860 after “nine days of perfidious illness.” Before his coffin a “contrite and reverent multitude” gathered and the “testimony of the illustrious” was mixed with “simple words of the most humble and obscure.”¹⁶



Fig.2 Daniele Manin, Paris, Verry Fils. 1855 ca.
Roma, Museo Centrale del Risorgimento

From Merchant to Agricultural Entrepreneur and Land-Owner: The Massaranis in the Age of Emancipation

We have devoted particular attention to Tullo's memoirs of his father in as much as the biography of Giacobbe mirrors with great accuracy the history of the

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 292.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 294.

emerging middle class of rural origins. This middle class was the initiator of a modest capitalist modernization of Mantuan agriculture, which took place between the end of the eighteenth century and the mid nineteenth century, and contributed to the formation of a rural elite who in turn widely joined the patriotic conscription of 1848.

We are dealing with a class of farmers who, thanks to favourable circumstances and a prudent application of capitalist agricultural principles, accumulated considerable fortunes in a few decades. Some of them reached the fortunes of the nobility land-owners (landed gentry), which ranked the highest in property classifications. Speaking of the entrepreneurial Jewish élite as a sector of this broader class may appear as a long stretch. This may seem especially so when considering that the majority of families constituting the Jewish élite were long-term city dwellers, and when knowing that the capital that they invested in challenging and lucrative agricultural endeavours originated not from agriculture, but mainly from the commercial and manufacturing business. Nonetheless, the percentage of Jewish elite that lived in rural areas was not insignificant and, in the second-half of the eighteenth century, agriculture represented for them already an important sphere of activity.¹⁷ For the important families of the city ghetto, the factor tying them to those belonging to the emerging countryside middle-class, regardless of residence or origin of the capital invested, was the fact that agriculture quickly became an important part of their activity if not the key to their economic rise. In 1762, much earlier than the Patents issued by Maria Theresa in 1779 and Joseph II in 1781 that gave the Jews the liberty to lease, a government inquiry counted eighteen Jewish companies that leased out farms, the majority of which were of large dimensions.¹⁸ Among these was the Eredi company of Moisé Coen who took on the lease of the large

¹⁷ In western Mantua, for example, according to an inquiry held by the government in 1779, thirteen of the Jewish houses were of renters, notwithstanding the interdictions (these would be abolished soon after by the decrees of Mary Theresa in 1779 and Joseph in 1781): see *Elenco generale delle Famiglie Ebee, del loro traffico, della loro industria, degli stabili che possiedono in proprietà, della Popolazione, o del numero personale componente le dette Famiglie degli Ebrei sparsi nel Principato di Bozolo, e nel Ducato di Sabioneta, specificati e descritti negli elenchi A. B. C. D. E. F.*, Commercio, p.a., b. 55, Archivio di Stato, Milano, the document is published in the appendix to Daniele Montanari, "Da prestatori a mercanti. Gli ebrei del Bozzolese e del Sabbionetano in età moderna," *Annali di Storia moderna e contemporanea*, IV, 1978, n. 4, 73-95.

¹⁸ Archivio Gonzaga, b. 3390, Archivio di Stato, Mantova (after ASMn), quoted by Corrado Vivanti, *Le campagne del Mantovano nell'età delle riforme* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1959), 180-182 and Mario Vaini, *La distribuzione della proprietà terriera e la società mantovana dal 1785 al 1845*, I, *Il catasto teresiano e la società mantovana nell'età delle riforme* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1973), 227-228.

Virgiliana Estate of the Counts Zanardi in 1767. He converted 400 biolche (one biolche is approximately equivalent to 3,138 m²) of marshy land into rice fields. It is worth noting that Jewish investments in agriculture were characterized by the intention to intensify productivity and profits, through appropriate improvements, intention which entailed a fair amount of risks¹⁹.

Against this background, we place the story of the Massarani family. In 1797 Leon Vita, Giacobbe's father and a cloth and textile merchant,²⁰ acquired the workshop in the ghetto at number 2865, a short distance from his home,²¹ from which he had probably carried out his business for years.²² This represents a testimony of his initial rise that will be confirmed in the Napoleonic era by the purchase of other properties in the ghetto.²³

When exactly Massarani's expansion of the agricultural activity began is unknown, but from the large quantity of notarial documents involving the family it is quite clear that the decisive steps in this area were taken by the sons of Leon Vita, who until 1827 were in close partnership²⁴ which confirms what Tullo writes, not only about the collaboration of the father in the family business, but also about his strong adherence to the principle of association. In 1816 two of his sons rented out a tenancy at San Giorgio, a municipality neighbouring Mantua.²⁵ The circumstance is significant considering that the leasing of agricultural land constituted the main source of enrichment for the emerging Mantuan middle-class. At the end of the 1820s and the beginning of the 1830s we can witness a series of acquisitions of large and small farms in different districts in the province

¹⁹ This aspect is underlined in *Promemoria dell'Università degli Ebrei per il rinnovo della tolleranza*, May 1776, quoted by Paolo Bernardini, *La sfida dell'uguaglianza. Gli ebrei a Mantova nell'età della rivoluzione francese* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1996), 43, and in the answer of Benedetto Frizzi to the pamphlet against the Jews by Giovan Battista Gherardo d'Arco: see Benedetto Frizzi, *Difesa contro gli attacchi fatti alla nazione ebrea nel libro intitolato "Della influenza del Ghetto nello Stato"* (Bologna: Forni, 1977, facsimile of 1st ed., Pavia, 1784), 131.

²⁰ See *Elenco degli esercenti, artieri e mercanti, 1786-89 e 1792*, Archivio della Camera di Commercio, b. 136, ASMn.

²¹ Act of notary Vincenzo Codogni of Mantova, July 5, 1797, Archivio notarile, ASMn.

²² See the contract between Leon Vita and counts Hercules and Louis Bulgarini, , notary Adamo Nicola Rossi of Mantua, July 13, 1789, Archivio Notarile, ASMn.

²³ Acts of notary Adamo Nicola Rossi, June 9, 1812; notary Francesco Bacchi di Mantova, July 6, 1814 and June 6, 1816, Archivio Notarile, ASMn.

²⁴ Act of notary Ferdinando Rodoni, February 13, 1827, Archivio Notarile, ASMn: this act dissolved the partnership between Emanuel and Salomon and their brothers Jacob and Daniel.

²⁵ Act of notary Francesco Bacchi, September 19, 1816, Archivio Notarile, ASMn.

made by Giacobbe, some of which purchased jointly with his brother Daniele:²⁶ Giacobbe made the most numerous and important property and land investments between the 1830s and 1840s. It is significant, in this respect, that according to the Austrian surveys from 1824 – 1834, given his ownership over estates of approximately 400 *biolche*, he was considered among the top twenty-eight landowners in the province of Mantua (thirteen of these were Jews).²⁷

At the beginning of the 1840s most of the holdings were concentrated in Poggio Rusco, a village in the surroundings, where in 1841 Giacobbe had purchased 377 *biolche*²⁸ while, at the same time, selling property and land that he owned in other councils in the province of Mantua.²⁹ This frenetic buying and selling in the early 1840s should be read in relation to the transfer of the Massarani family to Milan. It can be inferred that, in doing so, Giacobbe attempted to obviate the excessive fragmentation of his property, which would not have been easy to manage from far-away Milan. In the following two decades the rents from the numerous farms at Poggio Rusco³⁰ and the income from practicing his profession, constituted an important part of Giacobbe's income, whose economic and social position appears to be a mix of professional practitioner and *rentier*.

His son Tullo, 34 years old at the time he inherited his father's entire fortune on February 26, 1826, was instead a *rentier* "puro." In the following decades and indeed up to his death (Milan, 8th August 1905) the conspicuous income from his companies assured him a considerable wealth, which allowed him to dedicate himself to his studies and administrative and political life. [Fig. 3]

²⁶ Acts of notary Francesco Bacchi, December 31, 1827; notary Pietro Pelosi of Gazzuolo (Mn), August 24, 1830, May 8, 1832, November 30, 1835, November 10, 1836; notary Ferdinando Rodoni of Mantova, January 14, 1833 (these are contracts of purchase or contracts of sale implying previous purchases), Archivio Notarile, ASMn.

²⁷ This data from Mario Vaini, *La società censitaria nel Mantovano 1750-1866* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1992) 68, tab. 3.

²⁸ See Libri partitari di Poggio Rusco, reg. 1338, fol. 507, Archivio del Catasto, ASMn.

²⁹ I limit myself to the sales in the first half of the decade: see the following acts : notary Atanasio Siliprandi of Mantua, September 13, 1841 and March 30, 1845; notary Pietro Cessi of Mantova, September 30, 1842; notary Francesco Bacchi, February 13, 1843; notary Stefano Bertolini of Mantova, June 13, 1844, March 26, and November 14, 1845, Archivio Notarile, ASMn.

³⁰ Many letting contracts are kept among the papers of the notary Domenico Zibordi of Poggio Rusco: see *Indice delle parti*, series of 1800, MAS, Archivio Notarile, ASMn.



Fig. 3 Poggio Rusco Palace, Town Hall. Designed by Luca Fancelli, it belonged to the Gonzagas noble family since the XV century. In the mid-nineteenth century it became the property of Tullo Massarani. He sold the Palace to the City of Poggio Rusco in 1904.

The Social Ascent of the Family

In the early years of the nineteenth century, when Leon Vita prepared his son Giacobbe for his studies, he was being influenced by his enormous wealth and by the possibility to provide his youngest son with a career that he had not been capable to offer to his oldest sons. Tullo stressed that his grandfather “thought that his house might gain prestige from such a ministry to studies.”³¹ Indeed, the main pathways to up-ward social mobility pursued by members of the new rural middle-class started with the acquisition of a house in the city, and the enrolment of their sons at the lyceum and then at university. For well-to-do Jews a house in the city was a remarkable achievement that permitted them to dwell outside the ghetto. It was likely that initially property purchases were limited to areas next to the ghetto and then spread to the rest of the city, including the most fashionable *contrade*. In fact, the provincial delegate De Villata in 1842 stressed that “the authorization that the Israelites have to own farms means that now they find

³¹ Massarani, “L’Avvocato Giacobbe Massarani,” 274.

themselves owners of the best estates around Mantua and the most conspicuous dwellings in the city.”³²

As for the Massarani, we know of significant acquisitions dating back to the early 1830s: two houses, one in Piazza Erbe the other in the Santissima Trinità *contrada*³³ (today via Roberto Ardigò). In Piazza Erbe, where the market was located, stood the medieval communal buildings, whereas in the Trinità *contrada* one could find the university, the lyceum, and the library founded by Maria Theresa in 1780. Other properties, which Giacobbe bought towards the end of the decade, were in areas relatively distant from the ghetto: a large building with workshops adjacent to the San Domenico complex (today via Mazzini) and a refined mansion in corso Pradella³⁴ (now corso Vittorio Emanuele II) “the widest and grandest in the city, a meeting place of the middle-classes, especially in the winter.”³⁵

It is likely that these property purchases and residential choices, together with the desire to up-ward social mobility, reflect Leon Vita’s propensity to loosen his ties with his original community, which were already manifest in the decisions regarding Giacobbe’s education. We don’t know whether Giacobbe received his first education from private tutors, from the Jewish school, which since 1788 had been modernized through the introduction of secular subjects and the Italian language,³⁶ or in the state school opened in the ghetto after 1787. In the latter, the superintendent Giovan Battista Gherardo d’Arco had replaced the teaching of the Catholic religion with teaching “of sound morals that could be reconciled with the principles of their religion.”³⁷ Certainly, from the moment of his enrolment at the *Ginnasio* (junior high school) of the Academy in the early years of the century, the education of Giacobbe was no longer exclusively influenced by the culture of his family or by the social group from which he came.

³² I quote from the report that the provincial delegate sent to the government of Milan, July 13, 1842, about the anti-Jewish riots of the previous days, I.R. Delegazione Provinciale, Affari riservati, b. 102, ASMn.

³³ For these two purchases see the acts of notary Stefano Bertolini, June 13, 1844 and January 23, 1843 (these are acts of sale, from which we know the dates of purchase), Archivio Notarile, ASMn.

³⁴ Acts of notary Stefano Bertolini, November 14, 1845 and notary Francesco Bacchi, April 7, 1846 (these too are acts of sale, from which we know the dates of purchase), Archivio Notarile, ASMn.

³⁵ Claudia Bonora Previdi, Luciano Roncai, “L’architettura: da città ducale a capoluogo di provincia,” *Storia di Mantova. Uomini - ambiente - economia - società - istituzioni*, II, 116.

³⁶ Bernardini, *La sfida dell’uguaglianza*, 108-110.

³⁷ Letter of G. B. G. d’Arco to Consiglio di Governo of Milano, August 13, 1788, Regia intendenza politica, b. 219, fasc. 5, ASMn, quoted by Bernardini, *La sfida dell’uguaglianza*, 206.

Reasonable Truth and Good Works: the Education and Religion of Giacobbe

Even in its vagueness, the characterization that Tullo gives to the dominant tendency of the era in which – it is 1811 – his father enrolled at the Faculty of Law at the University of Bologna is significant: “the refreshing spirit of the eighteenth century pervades and innovates the sciences.” Less vague is the note following note, with which he recalls the teaching of natural law by Abbot Prandi “a liberal pupil of that vilified philosophy that disarmed the oppressor and founded kindergartens and hospices.” Nominated professor at Bologna University in 1802, the Mantuan Prandi had previously been a teacher at the lyceum of the Academy of Mantua,³⁸ where Giacobbe’s thought began to develop. Giacobbe had also studied with Idelfonso Valdastrì, the successor of Prandi to the chair of logic and metaphysics at the lyceum in 1803, who taught him the rudiments of philosophy.³⁹ Tullo underlined how his father grasped “those few elements of John Locke’s philosophy” that his maestro “did not succeed in drowning in his own logic”⁴⁰, thus evoking the empiric orientation prevalent in the Academy of Mantua.

It is worth recalling that the Mantuan professor, while trying to reconcile the Christian faith with reason, vividly criticized the deists, guilty of openly questioning the truths of the Catholic religion⁴¹. In another work he vehemently attacked not only superstition in general, but also, although with caution, the yielding to superstition of those same Mosaic and Catholic religions of which he affirmed the truth.⁴²

Valdastrì did not exclusively criticised the “common people” guilty of being attracted by the material aspects of the cult, but also those ministers who— out of idiocy, vested interests, and desire to dominate— multiplied these exterior

³⁸ See the short obituary in *Antologia. Giornale di Scienze, Lettere e Arti*, XLV, January, February and March 1832, 156 e 157.

³⁹ See the biography of Valdastrì in Marialuisa Baldi, *Filosofia e cultura a Mantova nella seconda metà del Settecento. I manoscritti filosofici dell'Accademia Virgiliana* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1979), 197 e 198, with extensive bibliographical references.

⁴⁰ Massarani, “L’Avvocato Giacobbe Massarani,” 275.

⁴¹ Idelfonso Valdastrì, “Discorso filosofico inedito-postumo in difesa de’ principali Misteri della Religione Cristiana, ed analisi ragionata di altri punti del Cristianesimo,” Id., *Vigilie filosofiche. Inedite-postume* (Mantova: Tipografia Giovanni Agazzi, 1857), 3-31.

⁴² Valdastrì, “Dissertazione filosofica sulla superstizione,” Id., *Vigilie filosofiche*, 33-62.

elements against good sense and the religion itself.⁴³ According to him the roots of the abuses of the Inquisition and the vileness of the crusades⁴⁴, alongside with the absurdity of the opinion that “the virtue of great men born into the errors of paganism had remained without reward after death” contrasted with the deepest truth according to which “to the eyes of religious good sense, love for your neighbour will always, after the love of God, be the most sublime virtue.”⁴⁵ Rational religion tend to merge with the notion of Christianity reduced to its evangelical moral teachings, as confirmed by the affirmation of the coincidence between the teachings of stoic philosophy and those of Christ, which might be well summarized with the maxim that one should strive “for the common good of human society and for the pursuing of good for all according to one’s strengths.” On the one hand, Valdastrì believed that “God was the author of Christianity,” while on the other hand the logic of reasoning led him to recognize the insignificance of the superficial and dogmatic differences between the religions. He concludes, despite “the superstitious fanatics croak, virtue doesn’t change its nature because of the difference between the Cults and the different systems of the dogmatic moralists.”⁴⁶

The opinions of Valdastrì represent an orientation that (as documented by the essays submitted to the competition of philosophy announced by the Academy) in the last decades of the eighteenth century was prevalent in the Mantuan milieu. In this environment, the apologia for the scorned Christian religion co-existed with the criticism both of superstition and, more generally, of the ingrained prejudices that were considered the main obstacles to the diffusion of knowledge for the good and public felicity.⁴⁷ Among the main characters of that milieu was the Jesuit Saverio Bettinelli, who had penned in 1774 a warm eulogy of Piero Pomponazzi, “the foremost prophet among the blind followers of

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 45 e 46.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 57 e 58.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 53-54.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 55-57.

⁴⁷ See for example the dissertation *Veritas filia temporis*, written for the competition of philosophy Accademia Reale di Scienze e Belle Lettere announced in 1776 on the question *Se il presente Secolo sia stato a ragione chiamato da molti il secolo della Filosofia*, ms., Memorie di Filosofia, Archivio della Vecchia Accademia, b. 42, Accademia Virgiliana, Mantova; also dissertation by Ambrogio Zecchi, *La magia screditata*, *Ibid.*, is significant: the author wrote it to get the “accademicato,” presumably between 1770 and 1775, as supposed by Baldi, *Filosofia e cultura*, 107.



Fig. 4 Benedetto Frizzi, XIX century.
Cremona, Museo Civico Ala Ponzone

Peripato who confused religion with scholastic philosophy,”⁴⁸ and Juan Andrés who in his essay of 1776 on the philosophy of Galileo⁴⁹, had highlighted the negative consequences that the trial of the Pisan scientist provoked on science and philosophy in Italy. The Jewish thinker of the Enlightenment Benedetto Frizzi had been a pupil of Bettinelli and Andrés at the Mantuan Academy.

In a speech delivered in 1791 Frizzi praised the “firmness” with which his Jewish teachers, rabbis Simone Calimani and Jakob Rafael Saraval, had combined faith and reason⁵⁰, a eulogy that recapitulated the ideal which had inspired all his work, according to which the rationality of Mosaic teaching was embodied in his belief that tradition and modern science could cooperate for the good of humanity. [Fig. 4]

⁴⁸ Saverio Bettinelli, *Delle lettere e delle arti mantovane discorsi due accademici ed annotazioni* (1774), ed. Luigi Pescasio (Mantova: Padus, 1974), 79, 128 and 129. The pages Franco Venturi dedicated to Bettinelli are still fundamental: see Venturi, *Settecento riformatore*, V, *l'Italia dei lumi (1764-1790)*, I, *La rivoluzione di Corsica. Le grandi carestie degli anni sessanta. La Lombardia delle riforme* (Turin: Einaudi, 1987), 621-636.

⁴⁹ Juan Andrés, *Saggio della filosofia del Galileo dell'abate d. Giovanni Andres* (Mantova: Eredi di Alberto Pazzoni, 1776). On this Spanish Jesuit you can still usefully consult Miquel Batllori “Andrés, Giovanni,” *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, 3 (Roma: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1961), *ad vocem*; the most recent study is Damian Carlos Fuentes Fos, *Juan Andrés, Entre España y Europa* (Valencia: Institució Alfons el Magnanim, 2008).

⁵⁰ Benedetto Frizzi, *Elogio dei Rabbini Simone Calimani e Giacobbe Saravale* (Trieste: Giovan Battista Sperandio 1791). On the life and works of Frizzi see, in addition to Christine Wollner, “Benedetto Frizzi un die jüdische Aufklärung in Norditalien,” *Kairos. Zeitschrift für Religionwissenschaft und Theologie*, 36 (1994): 48-72, the essays in *Benedetto Frizzi. Un illuminista ebreo nell'età dell'emancipazione* (proceedings of the conference of the same name, Ostiano, November 7, 2008), eds. Marida Brignani and Maurizio Bertolotti (Florence: Giuntina, 2009).

It can be easily imagined how the Academic context influenced Giacobbe's religious education, not only directly but also indirectly, having perhaps propitiated the sensitivity of Giacobbe to the rationalist tendencies of thought present in Mantuan Jewish culture. Tullo's apparently simple description cannot conceal the complexity of the processes through which such opinions were formed. Let us re-read:

Born into a religious minority, he was holding it dear like any honest man holds dear the cause of the weak because of the ancient persecutions and senseless prohibitions, all of which had not yet disappeared. Nevertheless he still loved all men; his deep faith, not wasted on vain appearances but directed in heartfelt prayer, animated him to carry out good deeds. Intolerance was abhorrent to him but more in the moral perversion it created rather than in the usual offence or damage it caused.

From "vain appearances" to the "concentration in prayer" we can see a path that is above all a distancing from the religion of the community into which Giacobbe was born, as confirmed by the observation that his solidarity with the Jewish "minority" was not inspired by any particular spirit of belonging, but rather by a universal sentiment of compassion towards the oppressed. Thus, such a distancing implies his separation from any form of positive religion, while calling for a belief in faith manifested through love for all men. This faith also includes respect for other people's religious beliefs and it emphasizes the importance of good deeds rooted in love. The ideal, which Tullo attributes to Giacobbe, of an education "not closed behind the gates of a cult, but available to everyone within the womb of a secular society" fits perfectly into the picture, confirmed furthermore by his son recollections of the philanthropy of his father, and above all of the fundamental contribution that he made to the development of the charitable institutions of the Jewish community in Mantua.

Though the resemblance between Giacobbe's opinions and Verdastrì's teachings corroborates the hypothesis of the importance that his earliest studies had on his education, one must take into account that this education took place in the wider context of an epoch marked – also for Mantua's Jewish community – by profound transformations. By the second half of eighteenth century, Jewish communities encountered strong internal criticism, which ranged from failure to respect fiscal rules, habits of not-attending meetings of the governing organs, non-observance of ritual precepts to the abandonment of inveterate traditions. This criticism was especially voiced against the Jewish "elite."⁵¹ These attitudes offer clear clues on the progressive weakening of the ties between the community

⁵¹ These behaviours are well documented by Bernardini, *La sfida dell'uguaglianza*, 111-119; 127-129.

and some members of the elite. The strong entrepreneurial and capitalistic orientation of this group might explain part of this process. The progressively widening range of business dealings that led to ever closer business relations with non Jews, and the experience of different cultural environments, alongside with the competition between Jewish companies leading to marked quarrelsomeness contributed to these changes and to the weakening of the traditional society.⁵² The Massaranis were not different in this regard. Apart from the close business relations with non Jews that are well documented by the notarial acts, particularly significant are the pages where Tullo records the friendship with lawyer Luigi Casali, teacher of civil institutions at the lyceum, who eventually became “a close family friend” by virtue of the close relationship established between Giacobbe and his favourite *maestro*.

Moreover, Giacobbe’s university studies exerted a great influence in defining his cultural orientation. During his stay in Bologna, the young Mantuan Jew definitively identified himself with the traditions of the Italian, and especially Lombard, Enlightenment. The allusion of the son to the irrationality of the traditions and institutions of the past and the commitment to the application of knowledge to social progress pays tribute to the work of the great Enlightenment thinker Cesare Beccaria. A further proof of this relationship may be documented by the friendship Giacobbe established in Milan with one of the most important members of the Italian Risorgimento, Gian Domenico Romagnosi. Suffice to note that Romagnosi was “throughout the length of his life a deist if not atheist, proudly adverse to every metaphysical speculation, champion of a method founded on the analysis of positive facts and the systematic organization of the same,” as well as “convinced from an ethical and civil point of view of the primacy of society and social values.”⁵³

“More an inspiration than a certainty”: the Religion of Tullo

The penchant of Giacobbe for an education “not closed behind the gates of a cult, but available to everyone within the womb of a secular society” would be contradicted by his decision to entrust Tullo’s earliest education to his co-religionist David Aron Norsa. In correspondence with his *maestro* until his death in 1886, Tullo was always grateful and devoted, speaking of the education

⁵² See *ibid*, 105-107, 158-162.

⁵³ Sergio Moravia, *Introduzione* to Giandomenico Romagnosi, *Scritti filosofici* (Milan: Ceschina, 1974), I, 7-63, 8.

he received from him as an “adventure” that had “opened the horizons of thought,”⁵⁴ but without ever precisely defining what Norsa had added to his education. As we learn from an introductory biographical note to the small book *Pensieri d'un cattolico* [Thoughts of a Catholic], first edited in 1850, the period in which he was Massarani's teacher (coinciding more or less with the 1830s), Norsa experienced a most intense spiritual crisis that will eventually lead him, after a meeting with the famous writer Alessandro Manzoni, to convert to Catholicism.⁵⁵ His uneasy search for the truth and for good did not find answers in the religion of his fore-fathers. He turned, at first, to the teachings of stoic philosophy to reach eventually the “perfect morality” of Christianity. Norsa, however, could not find peace because he was tormented by an unbearable need to believe. The long crisis was resolved through baptism, which opened the way – as he recounts – towards the recognition of the necessity to ask for the gift of faith through the grace of God.⁵⁶ Once converted to the religion of the oppressors, Norsa continued to deprecate intolerance, in particular in the form of fanaticism, while wishing that propaganda inspired by the evangelic spirit would allow those who were still in error to embrace the true faith.⁵⁷ Neither did he manage to refrain from controversy, at times bitter, against those who claimed that it was enough “to be a good person, without accepting the mysteries of Christianity.”⁵⁸

Massarani was, moreover, a disciple of Norsa in the years in which skeptical rationalism still dominated the spirit of the *maestro*.⁵⁹ One could presume that this teachings would have encouraged in the young man a critical disposition (a basis laid down by his family education) towards the religion into which he was

⁵⁴ Tullo Massarani a Davide Norsa, Milan, October 5, 1870, Massarani, *Una nobile vita. Carteggio inedito di T. M. Scelto, ordinato e postillato da Raffaello Barbiera*, “Edizione postuma delle opere”, Gruppo IV, “Ricordi”, VI (Florence: Successori Le Monnier, 1909), I (1851-1885), 123-124. October 5 was the day when Norsa had received Tullo as a pupil, and every year on this date the disciple used to write to his “maestro.” For a profile of Massarani's teacher see Bruno Di Porto, “Norsa, David Aron,” *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 78 (Roma: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 2013), *ad vocem*.

⁵⁵ Davide Norsa, *Pensieri d'un cattolico, Seconda edizione accresciuta con lettere del Manzoni, del Lambruschini e di mons. Corti. Con proemio sulle condizioni attuali d'Italia e con note alle meditazioni del Mamiani* (Florence: Tipografia Cooperativa, 1874), 29-31.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 26-32.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 36 e 37.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁵⁹ See *ibid.*, 42, what Norsa writes: “The difficulty of believing really is a terrible obstacle for our miserable reason. I felt it too much myself not to appreciate it.”

born. This would allow us, among other things, to consider in the right light Giacobbe's decision to entrust his son's education to the troubled co-religionist.

The impatience of Norsa affected not only the Jewish religion but also other aspects of the culture of the community to which Tullo belonged: "Right from an early age," he wrote⁶⁰, "I loved to study and had instead to deal with business." His distaste for business was combined with the drive for emancipation and the rejection of tradition. This distaste ended, he recounts, in 1840.

The disciple trod in his footsteps: for Tullo the position of *rentier* and the refusal to practice the profession of lawyer, as urged by his father, represented a choice dictated essentially by the vocation of studying, which Norsa had instilled in him. In a letter of 5 October 1885 Tullo wrote of his early education as "an ancient and patient initiation" that had accustomed him "to recognize from the exercise of intelligence the comforts that were less precarious, less uncertain, less fleeting and less subject to chance and fortune," and "to live in the serene sphere of ideas rather than in the tumult of interests and ambitions."⁶¹

Although Norsa proved to be an influential teacher for Tullo, the point of arrival of the disciple was somewhat distant from that of the *maestro*. One must bear in mind the acceleration that the 1848 revolution impressed on social and cultural life, and namely on the understanding of religion among the educated classes.⁶²

The development of Tullo's thought in the direction of an explicit atheist position demonstrates a generational fracture and divergence from his father's and teacher's ideas caused by the revolution. Massarani gave more than one testimony on his inability to believe. Recalling his teacher's faith, at his funeral oration on 23 November 1886, he observed that if not to all were granted the "ineffable comforts" that Norsa acquired through the "faithful, tranquil and impassioned contemplation of the Supreme idea" to all was given "the search for reflected light in the best."⁶³ Ten years earlier, in a letter to Giuseppe Guerzoni, who had been a *Garibaldino*, he confessed that while for him the idea of religion was "more an aspiration than a certainty," he understood and praised the "noble

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁶¹ Tullo Massarani to Davide Norsa, Milano, October 5, 1885, Massarani, *Una nobile vita*, I, 493-495.

⁶² You find a wide examination of the religious aspects of the revolution in Francia, 1848. The author, who offers an accurate reconstruction of the dynamics of the revolution, is less interested to their connection with the long-running processes.

⁶³ Massarani, "Davide Norsa," *Id.*, *Illustri e cari estinti*, 318-321; 321.

sentiment” that had suggested his friend “to give a generous part to faith” in his university teaching.⁶⁴ The thoughtful attention that Massarani gave to religious feeling is more accurately motivated in a letter in 1884 to Gaetano Trezza, who had given him his book *La religione e le religioni* (*Religion and Religions*).⁶⁵ Massarani thought that “behind the ruins of that Medieval castle, which Trezza thoroughly scrutinized— religion still remained “an innocent and impregnable refuge,” where the human conscience could “peacefully recover with dreams of the Divine.” He stressed how the infinite and moral laws were sufficient concepts “to build a soaring idealism” which, “accessible to sentiment without the help of scientific reason” was beneficial and continued to live and shine for all those for whom “not only science but also subtle reasoning” would remain “on perpetual fast.”

This form of idealism underwent numerous changes, developing out of mythical and ritual structures that were slowly dismissed. It therefore did not disappear, because it still proved its “educational efficacy” not only for “the majority of men” but also for those of who were gifted with “subtle reasoning.”

At this point he wrote by way of conclusion: “Thanks to our Mazzinian education with its idealistic binomial [God and the People], have we not come out better men than the revolutionaries of today, who have torn out from the symbol all the idealistic parts?”⁶⁶

The Fatherland as a Substitute for Religion: Tullo and Jewish Identity

These concluding remarks convey two recurring themes in the writings of Massarani. First of all, he seems to stress the religious inspiration of the national ideals shared by the patriots of the Risorgimento; secondly, he highlights the deprecation of forms of materialism which became ever more powerful after the end of the heroic season of political unification.

⁶⁴ Tullo Massarani to Giuseppe Guerzoni, Milan, February 6, 1876, Massarani, *Una nobile vita*, I, 236 and 237.

⁶⁵ Gaetano Trezza, *La religione e le religioni* (Verona e Padova: Drucker e Tedeschi, 1884).

⁶⁶ Tullo Massarani to Gaetano Trezza, Milan, March 13, 1884, Massarani, *Una nobile vita*, I, 462-464.



Fig. 5 Portrait of Tullo Massarani

Retrieved from <http://www.lombardiabeniculturali.it/opere-arte/schede/3n110-00107/>

In the chapter “Rome and the religious idea” from the book *Come la pensava il dottor Lorenzi. Confidenze postume di un onesto Borghese* (What Doctor Lorenzi thought. Posthumous Confidences of an Honest Bourgeois), where

Massarani/Lorenzi dialogues with professor Antidei/Trezza,⁶⁷ the author observes that the religious character of the Mazzinian apostleship, which seduced the young people of his generation, was similar to the teachings of Cesare Balbo and Vincenzo Gioberti, who had inspired the “generation before 1848.” This perspective, applied to the previous generation, tended to manifest itself in a general interpretation of nationalism as a substitution for traditional faith. One cannot but recognise Massarani’s perspicacity (that was certainly not only his⁶⁸) in observing the cultural dynamics of his era, in which he himself, like his father before him, was deeply involved, especially when stressing the religious interpretation of nationalism. [Fig. 5]

If for Jews and Christians alike the common point of departure is the estrangement from belief and traditional religion determined by the widening sphere of activity beyond the confines of one’s original community⁶⁹— alongside with the encounter with rationalist thought— one does not find, however, a reassuring place of arrival. The painful feeling of contingency and social fragmentation instigate the search for a new belonging in virtue of which, as has already been written, the conversion “of fatality into continuity, into meaning” becomes possible.”⁷⁰ The point of arrival also for those in the bosom of the same tradition, are most diverse due to the weaker or stronger ties with their culture of origin, apart from the diversity of their social condition or the intellectual milieu they frequent. The point of arrival could be a renewal of Judaism or a return to evangelism, Saint Simonism or freemasonry, the religion of the fatherland or the religion of progress, but some significant traits unite all those who live these experiences of crisis and transition. Firstly, the powerful need to believe in the face of one’s own incredulity. Secondly, the aspiration to a form of religion in which the attenuation of the most visible and external characteristics of the cult

⁶⁷ Tullo Massarani, *Come la pensava il dottor Lorenzi. Confidenze postume di un onesto borghese*, “Edizione postuma delle opere,” Gruppo I, “Studii civili,” IV (Florence: Le Monnier, 1907, 1st ed. Rome: Forzani, 1894), 146-159.

⁶⁸ David Levi showed the same acuity: see his essay “Prime fasi del socialismo in Italia. Il sansimonismo,” *Nuova Antologia*, 153 (1897): 454-458, reproduced in Francesca Sofia, “David Levi,” *Gli ebrei e l’orgoglio di essere italiani. Un ampio ventaglio di posizioni tra ‘800 e primo ‘900*, ed. Fabio Levi (Turin: Zamorani, 2011), 23-60, 43-47.

⁶⁹ The distancing from traditional cultures in the development of nationalism is examined especially by Ernest Gellner, *Nations and nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983) and “Il mito della nazione e quello delle classi,” in *Storia d’Europa Einaudi*, I (Turin: Einaudi, 1993), 635-689. I discussed Gellner’s theory in Maurizio Bertolotti, *Le complicazioni della vita. Storie del Risorgimento* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1998), 118ff.

⁷⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised ed. (London-New York: Verso, 1991), 10-12.

favour the brotherhood with the faithful of other religions, in which the imperatives of conscience and the needs of reason are put before the prescriptions and proscriptions of the religious authorities, in which love for your neighbour gains an unprecedented importance and autonomy compared to the love for God, and in which the prospect of salvation takes the form of the progress of humanity in this world instead of, or before, the reunification with God in the other. Thirdly and finally, the propensity to profess more than one of these new faiths at the same time and to “blend” them as one prefers.

A comparison – even if rapid – of the paths taken by David Norsa, David Levi⁷¹ and Tullo Massarani (the latter, following the path opened by his father) is very instructive. The point of departure for all three was the same: a distancing from the old faith. The point of arrival, however, was to an extent different. If Norsa converted to Christianity, Levi adhered to Saint Simonism and freemasonry, advocating eventually for a renewal of Judaism, whilst Massarani’s Masonic activism is attested. All three embraced at the same time the religion of the fatherland; Norsa in the form of moderate monarchism,⁷² while the other two in a form of Mazzinianism from which, however, Massarani distanced himself in the 1850s, to eventually identify himself with the constitutional monarchism of Cavour.

As far as Tullo’s pledge to Masonic lodges is concerned, his correspondence might result quite informative. With the exception of some letters to the presidents of the *Insubria*, *La Ragione* and *Cisalpina*, three important lodges, together with a commemoration of Giovanni Faldella,⁷³ Massarani never referred to this allegiance, nor, as far as I am aware, ever wrote about freemasonry. Even if his declared, yet moderate atheism might have proven incompatible with the

⁷¹ With regard to Levi the essays by Francesca Sofia are essential: see “Gli ebrei risorgimentali fra tradizione biblica, libera muratoria e nazione,” *Storia d’Italia Einaudi, Annali*, 21, *La Massoneria*, ed. Gian Mario Cazzaniga (Turin: Einaudi, 2006), 244-265; “David Levi;” “Il vangelo eterno svelato: David Levi e la Massoneria,” *Massoneria e unità d’Italia. La Libera Muratoria e la costruzione della nazione* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011), 203-221.

⁷² Norsa’s political opinions are well documented in the *Nuovo Proemio* to the 2nd edition of his *Pensieri d’un cattolico*, 9-25.

⁷³ The letter, dated Milan, April 11, 1878, is in Massarani, *Una nobile vita*, I, 312-313. Here first of all Massarani recalls the lay character of the Municipality and the freedom of everybody to choose “the rite with which he wishes his grave would be consecrated;” then he declares his agreement with the presidents of the lodges who dissented from the Municipality’s decision to build a Christian altar on the ossuary of the Monumental Cemetery;” yet he observes that the matter demands “moderation,” in order that “the defence of one’s own freedom would not seem intolerance of the freedom of others.”

Masonic faith, one would be led to think that his propensity for a religion rooted in his innermost conscience,⁷⁴ would have instilled him with a certain diffidence towards the exuberant rituals of the lodges.

This may lead one to think that on this issue Tullo followed a little servilely in the footsteps of his father. In fact, the latter could have been affiliated with his teacher and friend Romagnosi whose important role in the Gioseffina Lodge in Milan is attested by documents published by Alessandro Luzio.⁷⁵ Certainly Tullo would have acknowledge the opinion that Romagnosi expressed in one of the speeches published by Alessandro Luzio, where he stated that “ the Mason is called upon to procure the happiness of the human species, fostering and accelerating the intellectual, moral and political development of the same.”⁷⁶ However this is not sufficient to sustain that Masonic activism had a very important role in his life. [Fig. 6]



Fig. 6 Ernesta Bisi, *Portrait of Gian Domenico Romagnosi*.

Retrieved from: *Opere edite e inedite di Gian Domenico Romagnosi, riordinate e illustrate da Alessandro De Giorgi*, I, Perelli e Mariani, 1841.

⁷⁴ See the letter to Mauro Macchi which I quote further on in the text.

⁷⁵ They are two speeches delivered during two rites of his lodge, in 1807 and 1808, and a report testifying the presence of Romagnosi in another rite in 1811: they are published in Alessandro Luzio, *La Massoneria e il Risorgimento italiano. Saggio storico-critico con illustrazioni e molti documenti inediti* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1925), I, 81-92.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

Least of all does it seem feasible that there are elements allowing us to recognise in any of Massarani's texts the testimony of a relationship, even indirect, between Jewish identity and the humanitarian Masonic *credo*. Such a hypothesis was suggested by Francesca Sofia on the basis of an extract of a letter written in 1872 where Massarani replied to Mauro Macchi asking him his thoughts on a proposed law intended to concede the swearing of oaths following one's own personal religious rites.⁷⁷ The extract is of the greatest importance:

Either I'm fooling myself – writes Massarani – or here is the weak link in the theory. There is nothing more irrepressible nor anything that refuses to be defined or categorised more than belief. For me the sanctity of innermost conscience is violated from the moment that a person is obliged to suffer one of those definitions, to throw himself headlong into one of those categories pre-established by law. Suppose for example that one who belongs by birth to a religious minority— and does not wish to deny it if for no other reason than that it seems ungenerous to separate oneself from the few who were previously the weak and oppressed—would he not have the right to turn to the legislator and judge and to keep a language of this type: I do not repudiate the traditions of my fathers; but I do not recognise in these traditions anything that confers, with any ritual, the authority to bind my conscience more than the commitment of a solemn testimony of the truth [...]. Thus allow me to solemnly attest the truth without suffering a ritual that is not mine, and without repudiating my conscience?⁷⁸

Neither from the text as a whole, nor from the context in which it was written could one, in my opinion, infer that in the moment in which he defended the right of a member of a minority to see the liberty of one's conscience respected without suffering rituals that did not pertain to him, does Massarani associate in his mind Jewish and Masonic thought, as Ernesto Natan, the future mayor of Rome, would do later.⁷⁹ Conversely, without any doubt and notable to our knowledge, the hypothesis that someone “who belongs by birth to a religious minority and does not wish to deny it if for no other reason than that it seems ungenerous to separate oneself from the few who were previously the weak and oppressed” was not in the least an abstract supposition but rather concrete reference to his father whose enduring bond to his original community— as we will be reminded— should be attributed in his son's opinion not to a spirit of belonging, but rather to a feeling of solidarity towards a minority that until not

⁷⁷ Sofia, “Gli ebrei risorgimentali,” 261.

⁷⁸ Massarani, *Una nobile vita*, I, 145-146.

⁷⁹ Sofia, “Gli ebrei risorgimentali,” 262.

long before had been oppressed. This is a reference to himself too, as there is not the slightest doubt that his opinions and sentiments were the same as Giacobbe's. In 1891, on the occasion of the expulsion of the Jews from Moscow, he took part in a subscription in their favour promoted by his friend Antonio Allievi, accompanying his donation with a letter. Here he lamented the fate of those poor wretches and, even more so, the fate of the end of the century in which he was living: "after having boasted the many victories of humanity and of reason, is reduced to seeing inert (and for its inertia it is almost an accomplice) the Medieval, with all its injustices and with none of its excuses, re-lived." In the postscript he begged his friend, however, not to enrol in any subcommittee, as, he explained, the "humanitarian character" of the initiative should emerge clearly from the fact that its promoters had no motive to represent it "other than in the name of humanity."⁸⁰

The following year he accepted the appeal by Leone Ravenna to speak out against the publication of an article in the "Standard," translated and published by a Milan newspaper, about the sacrificial killing of a child by Jews. However, he limited himself to writing a private letter to the article's author, because, as he explained to Ravenna, "I did not and do not believe it opportune to raise a fuss on a theme beyond the belief of men of good faith."⁸¹

The fact is that Massarani, seriously worried about the wave of anti-Semitism, was also afraid that Jews would protest as Jews, so reintroducing a distinction and a separation, the overcoming of which he strived for with all his force.⁸² This explains his radical disagreement with David Levi.

In 1874 Levi had asked Massarani for his financial support for the renovation of the Jewish cemetery, but Tullo had made an eloquent refusal that, among other things, sheds light on the implications of the letter to Macchi two years earlier. "I believe" he explained "that civil laws should be applied indiscriminately to all religious faiths. All should have their last resting place in common, just as they

⁸⁰ Tullo Massarani to Antonio Allievi, Milan, July 28, 1891, Massarani, *Una nobile vita*, II (1886-1905), 186 and 187.

⁸¹ Tullo Massarani to Leone Ravenna, Milan, July 8, 1892, Massarani, *Una nobile vita*, II (1886-1905), 195-197.

⁸² Another circumstance is no less significant: the lodges Insubria, La Ragione e Cisalpina had asked him to sponsor the opposition to the Municipality's decision to build a Christian altar on the ossuary of the Monumental Cemetery; he replied in the quoted letter on April 11, 1878 that "the action could avoid better the censures by partisan and intolerant persons if sponsored by people born in the religion of the majority: otherwise it would not be spared criticisms."

already shared, dwelling places, offices, relationships,” and added that he understood that “these ideas” as he wrote, “are not accepted by many, who find it easier to complain about the ancient divisions than to help make them disappear.”⁸³

It is exactly with the shared memory of David Levi that a letter of 1898 is concerned. This can be considered as probably the most significant document on the relationship of Massarani with Jewish tradition and of his concept of relations between Jews and non-Jews. He received an article dedicated to Levi (who had just died) from the young Arturo Foà from Turin. Foà, who was born in 1877 and who became the pupil of renown literary critic Arturo Graf, would soon establish himself as a poet. He later became a fervent fascist, faithful to Mussolini notwithstanding the racial laws, and died at Auschwitz in 1944. Massarani returned the article to him considering it not opportune “at this time.” If and where the article was published and what its tenor was I have not been able to find out, but judging by Massarani’s comment, it must have been praise for the work carried out by Levi. Massarani wrote:

It is fortunate that in Italy the cancer of anti-Semitism has not taken root; this is due, I believe, in great part to the Israelites having made every effort to give a good account of themselves in all the intellectual and civil fields, without accentuating their countenance, that labels them as a distinct stock, not irrevocably mixed and merged in the bosom of the nation to which they belong. Israelitism is the cult of a minority and cannot and must not be a symbol of a separate literary or political movement. All of which makes me think of the existence of a separate cultural orientation which returns to damage that assimilation that must be in the wishes of all citizens devoted to their country and to equal rights.⁸⁴

⁸³ Tullo Massarani to David Levi, Milan, March 5, 1874, Massarani, *Una nobile vita*, I, 194 e 195.

⁸⁴ Tullo Massarani to Arturo Foà, Milano, October 29, 1898 [here I must rectify the error of the editor of Massarani’s epistolary, Raffaele Barbiera, who dates the letter on October 29, 1893, which is impossibile because Levi died on October 18, 1898), Massarani, *Una nobile vita*, II, 230 e 231. The answer Massarani gave Dante Lattes who had sent him the text of his lecture on Max Nordau held in Trieste February 6, 1900 should also be quoted in full. Since Lattes had on that occasion complained that with the disappearance of the ghetto “a characteristic life,” which “was ours” had died out, while the new life represented “a break-up,” Massarani replied: “Where the victory of civilization is well advanced and the assimilation of all citizens is near to triumph both in the customs as in the laws, I cannot understand why we should redo the path so laboriously travelled, and go back to the ancient separation” (Massarani to Dante Lattes, Milan, 8 luglio 1904, *ibid.*, 502-504). Alberto Cavaglioni, “I vecchi e i giovani. Due generazioni ebraiche a confronto tra Otto e Novecento,” *Annali dell’Istituto Italiano per gli studi storici*, XXVIII, 2012-2013, II, 1025-1038, documents how Alessandro D’Ancona had answered in very similar terms (see 1035), and

If, as Francesca Sofia has observed, it is true that in the nineteenth century emancipated Judaism was confronted with the alternative between the embracing of modernity (of which the nation was the synthesis) “as a sort of substitute for religion” and affirming the “birthright of Judaism in comparison with modernity” on the basis of the “apparent analogy between the values established in the century and traditional teaching,”⁸⁵ and if it is true that David Levi followed the latter path, there is no doubt that Massarani chose the former. Nevertheless, to fully understand the radical assimilation he supported, as the letter to Foà demonstrates, it is essential to place his extreme position in the context of his conversion to the religion of his fatherland.

Tullo Massarani after 1861: the obsession with unity

A moderate liberal, with a propensity for constitutional monarchy, in 1848 Giacobbe is among many who would prefer to entrust the Italian cause to Piedmont and Carlo Alberto. The son deviates from his father's path and in those days looked towards Mazzini, participating, after the total failure of the revolution, in the conspiratorial initiatives he supported. In the volume dedicated to Carlo Tenca, Tullo admirably narrates how in the years immediately following, ever more critical of the ill-timed and unsuccessful insurrectional acts desired by the Apostle, and by now persuaded by the soundness of Cavour's policies, he ended up recognising, along with many other patriots and in particular his *Crepuscolo* friends, that only the Savoy monarchy could lead Italy to its goal.⁸⁶ In this way Tullo, among other things, resolved the disagreements

notes that if young people had listened to the voice of these “Great Old Men,” instead of “flying the flag of diversity with an air of nationalism,” becoming old they would not have been easily dazzled, as happened, by “the chimeras of Mussolini” and the number of Jewish fascists would not have been so considerable (see 1032). The contrary hypothesis – that would in any case be submitted to the verification of a specific investigation – seems more plausible to me: was not the passionate patriotism – that characterized, like Massarani, many Italian Jews and that fed their strong assimilationist tendencies – to induce them to acquiesce to fascism?

⁸⁵ Sofia, “La nazione degli ebrei risorgimentali,” in *Rassegna Mensile di Israel*, 76/1-2 (2010): 95-112; I should warn that in my opinion the option of how many supported the correspondence between the new values and the Jewish tradition was probably influenced by their institutional position; in fact the rabbis prevail: in the essay “Gli ebrei risorgimentali,” 248-252, the author recalls in this regard Lelio Della Torre, Giuseppe Levi, Marco Mortara, Elijah Benamozegh.

⁸⁶ Massarani, *Carlo Tenca*, chapt. IV. See also the letter of Tullo Massarani to Antonio Gallenga, Milan, November 7, 1895, Massarani, *Una nobile vita*, II, 273-275: “The high ideals and the attractiveness of the danger pushed me well to put me in connection with Mazzini; but I did not

with his father, and accompanied him to Paris to a decisive meeting with Daniele Manin.⁸⁷ Significant in his account is Massarani's tendency to attenuate the importance of this turning point. He extensively quoted the proclamation in the first number of "Italia del Popolo," May 20th 1848, in which Mazzini outlined his position about prospects of an Italian revolution, and underlined how the concept of unity was the fulcrum of this proclamation, evoking in particular the passage where Mazzini solemnly declared that if "an Italian prince" were to become "the living incarnation of Italian unification" he would without any hesitation be recognised as "the elect of the Nation."⁸⁸ Here we are talking about symbols, Massarani explained, "of which no-one should regret having accepted" and in the next chapter he adds as a conclusion to his reasoning that during the Crimean War, when Vittorio Emanuele had demonstrated the desire to raise the Italian flag from the dust and ashes, one could not but take cognizance of the fact that the prince yearned by Mazzini had finally arrived.⁸⁹ Even when one admits that here Massarani was concerned with demonstrating the coherence, to tell the truth not irrefutable, of his choices, these pages remain a testimony of the ever more notable demands unity made to his eyes after 1848. These demands informed his thinking for the greater part of his activity until his death.

Roberto Balzani has observed that, while after 1860 and up to his death Massarani's public activity was spread over many different fields – from culture to administration – his political work after Unity was in the form of "narration which was almost entirely posthumous,"⁹⁰ i.e., in the form of regret for an epoch in which the Risorgimental ideals were not suffocated as they were at that time by the alchemy of parliamentary life and the divisions between factions. If, as he wrote in a letter to Clara Maffei in 1865, these went at the expense of "public benefit,"⁹¹ we can imagine that he was equally worried by the threat they

want to ever pronounce vows that bind my conscience. I moved away from Mazzini, like many others, under the auspices of Daniele Manin, when the monarchy of Savoy gave the assurance, with the war of Crimea and afterwards at the Paris Congress, that it would vigorously take up the cause of Italy."

⁸⁷ Massarani, "L'Avvocato Giacobbe Massarani," 290-291.

⁸⁸ Massarani, *Carlo Tenca e il pensiero civile del suo tempo*, 62-65.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁹⁰ Roberto Balzani, "La politica postuma di Tullo Massarani," paper read at the meeting *Tullo Massarani: un patriota ebreo da Mantova a Milano*, Mantua and Milan, March 12 and 13, 2014 (the conference proceedings will be published soon). I warmly thank Balzani for allowing me to read and cite his text before publication.

⁹¹ Tullo Massarani to Clara Maffei, Firenze, December 5, 1865, Massarani, *Una nobile vita*, II, 347.

represented for the unity of the nation.⁹² It was impatience that contributed to his decision in 1860 to resign from the Chamber of Deputies, in which he entered in 1860 and to whose work he had made an effective contribution, involving himself in mutual societies, taxation, pious works, teachers and art property. Above all in significance, however, was the spirit in which he accepted in 1876 the nomination as Senator: a place (the Senate), he wrote to Norsa, in which “it seems to me one has the task of advising rather than that of battling.”⁹³

Many important aspects of Massarani’s public work can be better understood in the light of this fundamental anxiety. For instance the commitment he showed right up to his last days towards the communal and provincial councils of Milan was sustained by the conviction that due to the closeness between government institutions and the citizen’s needs in the local administration, the action on behalf of the public good would be faster and more incisive.⁹⁴ Although the recognition of the fundamental role played by the autonomous communes constituted a cornerstone of Mazzini’s thinking, Massarani’s opinions certainly owed much to Carlo Cattaneo, whose essay *La città considerata come principio ideale delle istorie italiane* (*The City Considered as Ideal Principle of Italian History*) he had read with enthusiasm in 1858.⁹⁵ Despite his admiration for the Lombard scholar, especially for those elements of his thinking, Massarani could not be convinced of the effectiveness of a federalist solution because he was aware of the risks that national unity entailed. In 1897 he would recount to Felice Momigliano of having built a “great part” of his literary education, but not his political convictions, on the works of Cattaneo. In fact, he completely dissented

⁹² On this aspect of the thoughts of Massarani, apart from Balzani, Mariachiara Fugazza has opportunely persisted, in “Massarani and the memory of the Risorgimento,” a paper read at the conference quoted in the previous note. I also thank Fugazza for allowing me to read her text before publication. The interpretation proposed by Balzani and Fugazza was formulated *in nuce* in the essay that Benedetto Croce published on Massarani in n. 36 of 1938 of the *Critica*, in the section “Aggiunte alla *Letteratura della nuova Italia*”, 328-336; At 328 Croce writes: “The truth is that Massarani had lived and almost exhausted his affective and practical life during the long eve 1849-60, and he remained attached to that time with all his soul and wanted to preserve in his writings the high memories of it, for his comfort and for admonition of others.”

⁹³ Tullo Massarani to David Norsa, Milan, October 5, 1876, Massarani, *Una nobile vita*, I, 258. See Balzani, “Massarani, Tullo,” *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 71 (Roma: Istituto dell’Enciclopedia Italiana, 2008), *ad vocem*.

⁹⁴ On this point too there are valuable observations in Balzani, “La politica postuma.” The opinions of Massarani about the Municipality are expressed in broad form in *Come la pensava il dottor Lorenzi*, chapt. VIII.

⁹⁵ This information is in the letter of Tullo Massarani to Michele Amari, Milan, December 16, 1858, Massarani, *Una nobile vita*, I, 12.

with Cattaneo's political convictions: "I think," he explained, "that independence, nationality and unity are indispensable foundations for the political edifice of this our Italy, whose disintegration is owed to centuries long serfdom."⁹⁶

National education should have strived to counter the effect of that disintegration, and Massarani certainly did not conceive it as an abstract form of preaching. Apart from what compulsory education could do,⁹⁷ it is notable how important he considered the function of knowledge and the safeguarding of the artistic and historic heritage, following the conviction Tenca had already highlighted from the time of the "Rivista Europea."⁹⁸ When in 1877 the Senate presented a law on the *Conservation of monuments and antique objects and art*, discussed five years previously, Massarani did not hesitate, in contrast with the majority of his colleagues, to support the proposal of Francesco di Giovanni to prohibit the exportation of valuable works. This stand was motivated by the consideration that, given the impossibility of the state to exercise the right of pre-emption on all the works on the market, it could not otherwise guarantee effective protection. To the many, like the Minister Coppini, that "bow to the *Deus Terminus* of private property," Massarani objected that "the history of judicial progress" was no other than the history of "perpetual compromise between the antique and boundless heroic right of the possessor and the new civil right of the legislator and judge."⁹⁹ If in this case a compromise, entailing without doubt a notable limitation to private property, seemed to him admissible and necessary, it was precisely because works of art reflected the history of the nation that their custody in Italy and their enjoyment, not only by the literary classes but also by the working class, would have provided irreplaceable function in the formation of a national identity and the consolidation of the country's unity. [Fig. 7]

⁹⁶ Tullo Massarani to Felice Momigliano, Milan, October 5, 1897, Massarani, *Una nobile vita*, II, 327-330.

⁹⁷ Massarani, *Come la pensava il dottor Lorenzi*, chapt. VIII; the wide chapter X is reserved to the school.

⁹⁸ Massarani, *Carlo Tenca e il pensiero civile del suo tempo*, 49.

⁹⁹ I quote the intervention of Massarani in the session of November 23, 1877, Tullo Massarani, *Ricordi parlamentari*, Series II, *In Senato*, I (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1908), 32-34.

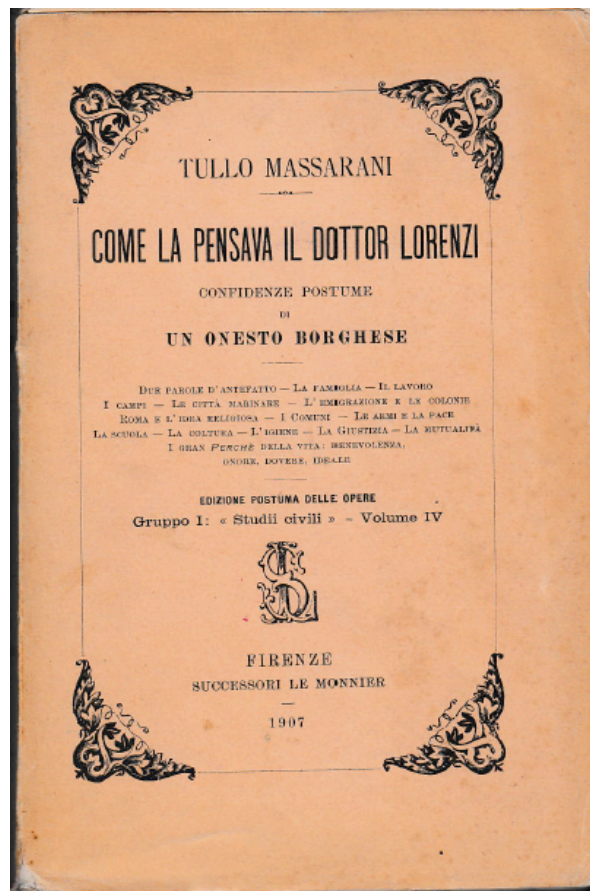


Fig. 7 Tullio Massarani, *Come la pensava il dottore Lorenzi. Confidenze postume di un onesto borghese* (Florence: Successori Le Monnier, 1907)

From the 1880s on, against the background of the successful rise of the socialist movements in Europe and Italy, Massarani's preoccupation for national unity became an obsession.¹⁰⁰ During the violent repression of the riots in Milan in May 1898 led by Fiorenzo Bava Beccaris, he called for national unity, along with courageous economic public interventions, "severe brakes" on the freedom of

¹⁰⁰ Obsession: I take the concept and the word from Gramsci, who qualifies as such the unitarianism of Francesco Crispi in paragraph 24 of *Quaderno 19*: "For his programme Crispi was a moderate pure and simple. His nobler Jacobin 'obsession' was the political and territorial unity of the country;" I quote from Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderno 19. Risorgimento Italiano*, Introduction and notes by Corrado Vivanti (Turin: Einaudi, 1977), 105 (see also 107).

press, of association, and of teaching.¹⁰¹ Anti-socialist polemics, a leitmotiv in letters of the period, is one of the threads in his 1894 volume.

What Doctor Lorenzi Thought

With the aim of giving the maximum clarity to the concept he had at heart, i.e., to the conflict between the ideas of socialism and communism and the Risorgimental ideals, Massarani here gives way to Mazzini, quoting his appeal to the artisans in 1871,¹⁰² in which he denounced the “wild intrusion [...] of arbitrary irrational negations of Russian, German and French demagogues [...] who came to announce that to be happy humanity must live without God, without a fatherland, without personal property and, for the most rational and daring, without the collective sanctity of the family.”¹⁰³ Dragged along by the passion of this deprecation of the present, Massarani did not hesitate to postulate a harmony between the Risorgimento forces that, in reality, never existed before:

For about ten years, or perhaps fifteen or twenty if I remember correctly, we all more or less loved one another. Oh, idyllic years of Congresses, of brotherhood, of canticles, of “fuori i lumi” (“everybody on the streets!”). And also of sword fighting! Oh, years tragically great and divine of conspiracies of each and all in one idea alone, of heroic silences, of magnanimous suicides, of the gallows met head-held-high as if a victory, greeted with tears like a promise of redemption, honoured in military actions, storybook fortunes and even undeserved victories!¹⁰⁴

To a Jew who feared the dis-union of the country it is not surprising that even the development of new currents of thought within the Jewish world appeared as a threat. He saw in that, as in resurgent anti-Semitism, the manifestation of antagonism that he underlined in the previously quoted letter to Leone Ravenna in 1892, fueled by the war of 1870 that had aroused “among the most civil stock:”

¹⁰¹ See the letters to Gaspare Finali, Milan, May 12 and June 5, 1898, Massarani, *Una nobile vita*, II, 355 and 356, 362-364.

¹⁰² This is the appeal to the artisans about to meet in the XII Congress of Workers' Associations to be held in Rome in early November: it was published in *La Roma del Popolo* on October 12, 1871.

¹⁰³ Quoted in Massarani, *Come la pensava il dottor Lorenzi*, 350.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 356-357.

From here the rekindling of all the evil passions and the re-awakening of all the most forbidden prejudices in economics, judicial, and moral matters: intolerance leading to persecution, rancour against races, class struggles, price wars and all the rest.

In the eyes of Massarani, the Jewish question took shape as an aspect of the national question, but both presupposed the social question.

Where do you see more – he wondered in a page of *What Doctor Lorenzi Though* – I’m speaking in general, that spontaneous and sincere benevolence is welcomed as it should be; the benevolence that, in the desire of every honest man and in the opinion of Spencer, would re-awake in the recipients of such help feelings of beatitude and affection and do good? Where can you find the recipients of help in good relations with their benefactors, to see stability and solidarity grow in the Community (as the great sociologist stated that thanks to reciprocal benevolence it should happen)?¹⁰⁵

The preference Tullo had for the mutualism of Spencer, author of *Social Statics*, compared to the more extreme expression of the Spencerian social Darwinism, represents an orientation shared by the majority of the rural Mantuan middle-class in the nineteenth century. It was primarily this rural middle-class that raised the question of the improvement of the living conditions of the peasants and dealt extensively with their education and moralization, as an indispensable factor in the process of the capitalist transformation of agriculture and, more generally, economy.¹⁰⁶ Moise Susani, a Jewish land-owner and scholar, wrote in 1844 an essay on the request of Carlo Cattaneo for his unpublished second volume of *Natural and Civil Reports on Lombardy*, where he claimed that through education and above all through the extension of participation, i.e., *metayer* farming, the peasant would soon raise his position from his indolence in order to be part of the life of progress.¹⁰⁷ We recognize here the underlying direction of Giacobbe, who was decidedly inclined, as his son recalls, not to unproductive charity but to initiatives aimed at giving the poorest the possibility of earning dignity through work. As observed,¹⁰⁸ the welfare and educational institutions supported by the Jewish community (as well as those that thanks to

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 354.

¹⁰⁶ For a wider examination of these discussions see Bertolotti, *Le complicazioni della vita*, chapt. 4.

¹⁰⁷ Moise Susani, *Sulle attuali condizioni massime economiche dell’agricoltura nella provincia di Mantova*, ed. Renato Giusti, (Mantova: Museo del Risorgimento, 1971), 101.

¹⁰⁸ Monica Miniati, “L’insostituibile pesantezza del povero. La beneficenza ebraica fra tradizione e modernizzazione,” *Rassegna Mensile di Israel*, LXXVI, (2010): 1-2; 275-297.

the contribution of Giacobbe were among the first to be established in Mantua) answered the needs of a regeneration judged both by Jews and Gentiles as necessary in order to achieve complete integration. If this regeneration were to take place, these institutions would have had, like the analogous non-Jewish institutions, to meet the wishes of their supporters in encouraging solidarity between the social classes.

The above quoted passage by Massarani highlights how social concord was at the top of Tullo's priorities. Both direct and indirect testimonies indicate how selfless he was in trying to pursue it. The tenor of his reports with country dwellers is clear from a letter written in 1876 where he describes the warm reception he received during one of his visits to his lands in the countryside. The curator underlined that, as reported by an article in "Diritto" in Rome, his tenants went to meet him "with music and hurrahs."¹⁰⁹ There is no doubt that Massarani was not, unlike other landowners, the object of anti-Semitic hostility, which conversely was widely spread among countryside dwellers in nineteenth century Mantua.¹¹⁰ This is probably due to the fact that he supported the *metayer* system, which he expressly praised in the fourth chapter of *What Doctor Lorenzi Thought*. In this context the action that he took in the Senate in favour of legal measures limiting the work of women and children and on safety at work acquire a particular significance.¹¹¹

There is no need to underline the harmony – leaving aside differences of political direction - with important members of the rural Mantuan middle-class who in the same decades were promoters of the most significant local experiences of democratic mutualism and founded some of the most celebrated newspapers of Italian social democratic culture. These include "La Favilla" of Paride Suzzara Verdi and "La Provincia di Mantova" of Alberto Mario. Mid-way through the 1880s we find, however, important members of this group – for example Eugenio Sartori and Francesco Siliprandi – organizing the peasants in two associations, which were protagonists of the "la boje!" unrest. It is in this circumstance, in the face of the economic and social upheaval caused by the great depression, that the illusion of "bringing the classes together" as hoped for by Luigi Boldrini finally

¹⁰⁹ Tullo Massarani to Davide Norsa, Milan, October 5, 1876, Massarani, *Una nobile vita*, I, 257-261. It was not possible to trace the article in the *Diritto* referenced by the editor.

¹¹⁰ See Bertolotti, "I contesti sociali dell'ambiguità. Manifestazioni antisemitiche nel mondo socialista italiano dell'Ottocento," *Antisemitismi a confronto: Francia e Italia. Ideologie, retoriche, politiche*, eds. Michele Battini and Marie-Anne Matard Bonucci (Pisa: Pus, 2010) 57-78.

¹¹¹ This action is documented by Massarani, *Ricordi parlamentari*, Series II, *In Senato*, I and II (Florence: Le Monnier, 1908 and 1909).

fades away¹¹² (Boldrini was one of the most important figures of the great renters patriots, but an advocate of the small-scale farmer). Finally, a clear division took place within the rural democratic middle-class between the supporters of the cooperation among classes, and the ones who followed the socialist ideas stressing the cultural and political autonomy of the agricultural proletariat.¹¹³ It is against this background that, in front of the rural movement known to history as “la boje,” Massarani joined the association created by the landowners and the renters in 1885 in order to safeguard their own interests.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, until 1885 a radical and magnanimous conception of progress had assured, above and beyond the various individual personalities, high degree of unity among the exponents of this social and political group, who committed both energy and resources to improve the material and “spiritual conditions” of the peasants, and worked for their full integration as members of the nation state. It is in this context that we may better understand the full sense of the disillusion and distrust in the present described by Massarani in his works in the 1880s and 1890s. Finally, it is on this backdrop that the lives and works of Giacobbe and Tullo Massarani bear an extraordinarily valuable witness of the history of the Jews in Mantua and Italy in the era of emancipation and, more widely, of the history of Italian society in the nineteenth century.

Maurizio Bertolotti has been president of the Istituto mantovano di storia contemporanea since 2005. He has been doing research on several subjects: European witchcraft and popular culture; Italian Communist Party; Italian Risorgimento and 19th century nationalism; Ippolito Nievo. His main publications are: *Carnevale di Massa* 1950 (Turin: Einaudi, 1991); *Le complicazioni della vita. Storie del Risorgimento* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1998). In the last decade he has been working on the relations between Jews and non-Jews in the context of the history of Mantua; on this subject he published the following essays: *La disputa d'Arco-Frizzi e gli ebrei del Mantovano occidentale*, in *Benedetto Frizzi. Un illuminista ebreo nell'età dell'emancipazione*, ed. Marida Brignani e Maurizio Bertolotti, (Florence: Giuntina, 2009) 67-80; *I contesti sociali dell'ambiguità. Manifestazioni antisemitiche nel mondo socialista italiano dell'Ottocento*, in *Antisemitismi a confronto: Francia e Italia. Ideologie, retoriche, politiche*, eds. Michele Battini e Marie-Anne Matard Bonucci, (Pisa: Pus, 2010) 57-78; *Sette ebrei sulla forca*.

¹¹² The quote is from an article that appeared in *I Contadi* (the magazine founded by Boldrini in Milan in 1868), 2, January 25, 1868.

¹¹³ On this crisis and the story of Boldrini, (who was an exemplary expression of the crisis), I wrote in “Fine della fratellanza. La doppia memoria d'una festa,” *Memoria e Ricerca*, VI, new series, 2, July-December 1998, 43-60.

¹¹⁴ See the first page of the *Gazzetta di Mantova*, January 22, 1885.

Dalla Trinità di Rubens (1605) alla Madonna della Vittoria di Mantegna (1495-96), La fede degli italiani. Per Adriano Prosperi, eds. Guido Dall'Olio, Adelisa Malena, Pierroberto Scaramella (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2011) 291-306.

How to quote this article:

Maurizio Bertolotti, *"Giacobbe and Tullo Massarani"*, in *Portrait of Italian Jewish Life (1800s-1930s)*, eds. Tullia Catalan, Cristiana Facchini, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC*, n. 8 November 2015
url: www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=364