

Francesca Bregoli, *Mediterranean Enlightenment. Livornese Jews, Tuscan Culture, and Eighteenth-Century Reform* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press 2014) pp. 338.

by *Ulrich Wyrwa*

After the conquest of Pisa and Livorno, until then a small and unimportant fishing harbour, in the mid 16th century the Medici planned to establish Livorno, or Leghorn, as it is named in English, as a central Tuscan port by expanding its commerce and trade activities. The first invitation to Jews and other oppressed or underprivileged people to settle in Leghorn took place during the reign of Cosimo I. However, it remained rather ineffective. Yet when Ferdinand I renewed the edict in the last decade of the 16th century – again inviting Jews and others to live there without any legal restrictions and offering them tax privileges to carry on commerce – the city underwent a rapid growth. This edict, the so-called Livornina, offered Jews not only the right to establish their own community but also ensured them wide-ranging autonomy. Furthermore, it gave Marranos the possibility to turn back to Judaism freely and with impunity. Leghorn, therefore, became the second largest Jewish community in the Italian peninsula. Even after the passage from Medici to Habsburg rule in 1737, Leghorn retained its privileged status. Furthermore, and in sharp contrast to all the other Italian cities, Livornese Jews were not forced to live in a ghetto. Whereas Jews in the Italian peninsula around the year 1800 accounted for only 0.2 % of the population, Leghorn had a Jewish population of 10 %. Its social profile was characterized by predominantly wealthy Jews who were active not only in commerce but also in textile, soap and coral manufacture. In this atmosphere of tolerance and prosperity, a unique and vivid Jewish life developed, and Leghorn enjoyed a European wide reputation as a paradise or oasis of the Jews.

The exceptional character of Leghorn's Jewish community and its environment has attracted a huge amount of historical research. Thus, the history of Leghorn's Jewry, together with the rich heritage of local histories, is well documented. On the basis of these documents and together with the additional sources available in the local archives, both of the Jewish community as well as of the Tuscan state, Francesca Bregoli presents the relationship of Livornese Jews with the Tuscan enlightenment. Strangely enough she does not use the English term for this port city, Leghorn, as for example the editors of the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* did.

After an introductory chapter concerning the peculiarity of the Jewish community of Leghorn and its relation to the Tuscan state, subtitled aptly a "A Fruitful Symbiosis," she directly turns to one of the most prominent figures of

the enlightened Livornese Jewry, Joseph Attias (1672-1745), who left commerce to address himself extensively to scientific studies and erudite conversations. He corresponded with some of the most important proponents of the Italian Enlightenment and established a huge library. His house became a vivid place of intellectual exchange between Jewish and Christian intellectuals. Strangely, however, Attias never published anything. Bregoli has analysed extensively his intellectual activities and the composition of his library as well as his conflicts with the Inquisition.

Bregoli considers the publications of Livornese Jews written under the influence of the Enlightenment, demonstrating the presence of the Galilean tradition among the Tuscan enlightenment, where she again highlights the central role of Attias. The next chapter examines the extensive medical studies of Livornese Jews presenting above all the Angelo de Soria, Joseph Vita Castelli and Graziadio Bondi. They all laud the Habsburg Grand Dukes of their times as patrons of sciences and medicine, as Bregoli underlines in her conclusion of this chapter. But she did not reduce her study to science alone, she also examines religious and devotional literature in the age of Enlightenment.

An interesting chapter is related to the emergence of the coffeehouse culture in Leghorn, and the participation of Jews therein. This chapter covers not only the foundation of the first coffeehouses in Leghorn but also the role of gambling and entertainment, including the debates within the Jewish community regarding these new forms of leisure activities.

Returning to the erudite culture, Bregoli then examines the business of Hebrew book printing in Leghorn, analysing its genres and distribution. In the last chapter she considers the peculiarities of Leghorn vis-à-vis the contemporary discussions of economic utility and political reforms. She notes that the European debate, opened by the publication of the Prussian enlightened reform politician Christian Wilhelm Dohm about the civil improvement of the Jews, found no reception in Leghorn. Instead the enlightened Jews of Leghorn extensively discussed the play of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *The Jews*, which had there found a French response, published and performed in that city. Bregoli concludes this chapter with a paragraph on the municipal reforms, drafted by Francesco Maria Gianni, the enlightened adviser of Grand Duke Peter Leopold.

Francesca Bregoli's study stands up not only because of her sensitive presentation of the interaction between Jews and non-Jews in Leghorn, but also due to her comparative observations and to her perception of some of the current historical debates, like those on the role and importance of port cities in Jewish history – and notably the debate on the term Port Jews. In this context she draws stimulating comparisons between Leghorn and Trieste, referring however

exclusively to Anglo-American publications like those of Lois Dubin, ignoring the rich Italian studies on Triestine Port Jews by Tullia Catalan.

Bregoli has given an impressive presentation of this “Livornese model of engagement with eighteenth-century culture” (p. 239), but it might be worth asking if this picture is perhaps too smooth, if the ambivalences and conflicts within the age of enlightenment are slightly glossed over. Four questions could be discussed:

The first relates to her impressive picture of Josef Attias and other Livornese Jewish ‘illuminati,’ underlining their extensive intellectual exchange with Christian scholars. Bregoli disregards the hindrances and obstacles Livornese Jews were confronted with in other circles of the Christian middle classes and in local academies. Whereas some of the Christian intellectuals in Leghorn presented themselves as open for debate with Jewish intellectuals, others held strong resentments against Jews and were not willing to accept them as members in their associations. Moreover, Bregoli has not followed the change of the intellectual mood in Leghorn, and underestimates the fact that the lively circle around Josef Attias in fact disappeared after his death, along with his library.

Second, Bregoli has ignored the ambivalences and two-faced character of the Age of Enlightenment, or in other words the contemporaneousness of the non-contemporaneous. Leghorn Jewry, in this view, lived not only in an enlightened surrounding world, they also took part in an elaborate and remarkable *representative* public sphere where they faced a highly self-regarding court culture, expressed for instance in the excessive festivities rendering homage for the new Grand Dukes. Here too, Leghorn is most impressive.

Third, next to the persistence of court culture, which is left out of the account, Bregoli has only casually mentioned, and therefore underestimated, the hostility against the Jews on the part of the Livornese lower classes, which broke out in riots in 1790. These were also strongly connected with the enlightened absolutist reform politics, because the Livornese lower classes initially staged protests against the ecclesiastical reforms of Peter Leopold. These protests soon turned against the Jews.

Finally, Bregoli undervalues the intricacies of the enlightened reform policy of Peter Leopold and his advisor Gian Maria Gianni. Jews as all other Tuscans remained subjects, and therefore the term citizenship is rather misleading, as Bregoli herself indicates in a footnote. The question remains, in which way did the policies shaped by Gianni and the Grand Duke pursue relics of a hierarchical corporative society? Here a discussion of the constitution project of Peter Leopold could have been informative, but this is perhaps beyond the realm of a study on Leghorn.

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However, these remarks do not diminish the worth of Francesca Bregoli's study. She has given us a well written and stimulating presentation of this inspiring and exceptional Jewish community in the exciting Age of Enlightenment.

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