

**Jewish Self-Defense against the Blood Libel in Mid-Nineteenth Century Italy:
The Badia Affair and Proceedings of the Castilliero Trial (1855-56)**

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Abstract

In 1855, the Badia affair, the sequel to a blood libel against a Jewish businessman in a Veneto town, temporarily put in question relations between state, society and the Jewish minority in the Lombardo-Venetian Kingdom. After reconstructing the stages of the episode, the present article analyzes the strategies of response to the crisis resorted by the Jewry of Hapsburg Italy, then in the process of emancipation nearly achieved. With the support of state authorities, community leaders and Jewish intellectuals together with some Catholics, Venetian liberalism urged in favor of an apologetic explication to undermine majority prejudice. The effort led to the creation of a text, published as a supplement in the authoritative Eco dei Tribunali, which used the trial minutes against the slanderer, making the legal proceedings into a refutation of the ritual murder stereotype.

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Blood Libels in Restoration Italy

The Restoration coincided with the process of emancipation for Italian Jewry when it became the victim of a new, now little-known wave of blood libels. The six documented cases took place between 1824 and 1860 in cities and towns of the Lombardo-Venetian Kingdom, the Papal States, and the Kingdom of Sardinia.¹ The accusations of ritual murder were local in scope overall; urban Jewish communities of varying size and demographic and socio-economic makeup were involved. The immediate cause provoking a libel was often the violent death or the disappearance of a young Catholic, for which the public authorities could not provide an adequate explanation. Local communities questioned these traumatic events in search of a “truth” more persuasive than the official account. The answer would typically surface based on the slanderous claim, widespread to the point of being taken to be common knowledge,² that Jews had some religious rites which called for the sacrifice of Christian youths and then for feasting upon their blood as part of ritual ceremonies. The accusation would spread among the common folk as a rumor,³ increasing the sense of alarm and fueling strong anti-Jewish hostility among locals. Brought together by their belief in the veracity of the slander, the community would feel that it had to punish the Jews for the monstrous crime, as well as to neutralize the threat posed by their degenerate religiosity. The ensuing anti-Jewish riots saw different degrees of local participation and intensity, sometimes resulting only in symbolic acts of exclusion, sometimes in violence against individuals and property or, in some extreme cases, in mass assault on the former ghetto areas.⁴

¹ Attilio Milano, *Storia degli ebrei in Italia*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1963), 606; Alessandro Novellini, “«Perseguitar li Ebrei a morte.» I tumulti contro il ghetto di Mantova nella prima metà dell'Ottocento,” *Storia in Lombardia*, 22/1 (2002): 75-95; Marco Francesco Dolermo, *La costruzione dell'odio. Ebrei, contadini e diocesi di Acqui dall'istituzione del ghetto del 1731 alle violenze del 1799 e del 1848*, (Turin: Zamorani, 2005), 102-7; Valerio De Cesaris, *Pro Judaeis. Il filogiudaismo cattolico in Italia (1789-1938)*, (Rome: Guerini e Associati, 2006), 70-6; 150-62; Abigail Green, *Moses Montefiore. Jewish Liberator – Imperial Hero*, (Cambridge – London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 275-7.

² Hillel Kieval, “Antisémitisme ou savoir sociale? Sur la genèse du procès moderne pour meurtre rituel,” *Annales*, 49/5 (1994): 1091-105.

³ On oral communication and the production of “truth,” see Helmut Walser Smith, *The Butcher's Tale. Murder and Anti-Semitism in Wilhelmine Germany*, (New York – London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), 67-8.

⁴ For a typology of anti-Jewish violence, see Werner Bergmann, “Exclusionary Riots: Some Theoretical Conclusions,” in *Exclusionary Violence. Antisemitic Riots in Modern German*

In Restoration Italy, blood libels became the expression of a new anti-Jewish hostility stemming from long-term religious, cultural, and socio-political causes as well as aversion to secular modernity and its call for emancipation.⁵ The accusations' breeding ground was the restored cultural legitimacy of the ritual murder stereotype, a medieval ecclesiastical concoction which, in the course of its secular history, was shared by theological anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism.⁶ Its revival was part of an overall negative anthropology of Judaism originating in Catholic circles close to the anti-modern positions espoused by the Church between the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries.⁷ Contributing to this, hagiographies of the alleged "martyred victims of Jewish hatred,"⁸ echoes of the Damascus affair (1840),⁹ propaganda against emancipation,¹⁰ and writing of questionable merit¹¹ all combined to create a popular notion of the Jews as a dangerous group animated by hatred of everything Christian and committed to religious crime, cannibalism and vampirism. Christianity needed to defend itself against all of these. However, the six documented cases of ritual murder charges in

History, eds. Christhard Hoffmann, Werner Bergmann Helmut Walser Smith, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002), 181-2.

⁵ Simon Levis Sullam, "I critici e i nemici dell'emancipazione degli ebrei," in *Storia della Shoah in Italia*, vol. 1, *Vicende, memorie, rappresentazioni*, eds. Marcello Flores, Simon Levis Sullam, Marie-Anne Matard-Bonucci, Enzo Traverso, (Turin: Utet, 2010), 45-6.

⁶ Ruggero Taradel, *L'accusa del sangue. Storia politica di un mito antisemita*, (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 2008).

⁷ Giovanni Miccoli, "Santa Sede, questione ebraica e antisemitismo tra Otto e Novecento," in *Gli ebrei in Italia. Storia d'Italia. Annali*, vol. 11/2, ed. Corrado Vivanti, (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), 1369-574; Marina Caffiero, "Alle origini dell'antisemitismo politico. L'accusa di omicidio rituale nel Sei-Settecento tra autodifesa degli ebrei e pronunciamenti papali," in *Les racines chrétiennes de l'antisémitisme politique (fin XIXe-XXe siècle)*, eds. Catherine Brice, Giovanni Miccoli, (Rome: École française de Rome, 2003), 25-59; Marina Caffiero, *Battesimi forzati. Storie di ebrei, cristiani e convertiti nella Roma dei papi*, (Roma: Viella, 2004), 43-60.

⁸ Tommaso Caliò, *La leggenda dell'ebreo assassino. Percorsi di un mito antiebraico dal Medioevo a oggi*, (Rome: Viella, 2013); Nicola Cusumano, *Ebrei e accusa di omicidio rituale nel Settecento. Il carteggio tra Girolamo Tartarotti e Benedetto Bonelli (1740-1748)*, (Milan: Unicopli, 2012).

⁹ Jonathan Frankel, *The Damascus Affair. Ritual Murder, Politics and the Jews in 1840*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). On its Italian reception, see David I. Kertzer, *I papi contro gli ebrei. Il ruolo del Vaticano nell'ascesa dell'antisemitismo moderno*, (Milan: Rizzoli, 2001), 94-114; Caliò, *La leggenda dell'ebreo assassino*, 117-39.

¹⁰ Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, *Il prezzo dell'eguaglianza. Il dibattito sull'emancipazione degli ebrei in Italia (1781-1848)*, (Milan: Angeli, 1998), 70-7.

¹¹ Riccardo Bonavita, "Grammatica e storia di un'alterità. Stereotipi antiebraici cristiani nella narrativa italiana 1827-1938," in Id., *Spettri dell'altro. Letteratura e razzismo nell'Italia contemporanea*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2008), 108; 112-5.

this period became an expression of the socio-political anxieties of the classes most affected by the crises of modernization. During the process of emancipation, Italian Jewry was identified with its bourgeois élites, and was perceived as a social enemy, the beneficiary of a modernity which, from the point of view of many, was nothing but the harbinger of worse living conditions to come. Rural dwellers' anti-Jewish hostility, impacted by misleading social claims, was also often linked to the loss of land in ways which advanced the interests of bourgeois Jews,¹² while nobles were resentful about the "usurpation" of rights which had once been their prerogative.¹³

The Jewish response to blood libels in Restoration Italy has not been the object of focused historical research, apart from sporadic exceptions.¹⁴ The leaders of the targeted Jewish groups seem to have defended themselves mainly by means of the traditional vertical alliance with the sovereign power,¹⁵ calling for protection by its local representatives. State authorities disposed of superior forces and appeared more reliable than the local; they were also not about to leave a "useful" population at the mercy of a local populace in turmoil. Even though dictated by a somewhat mythologized rereading of its own historical experience, this approach was generally effective in normalizing situations of crisis. To retain their growing monopoly over force, state authorities tried to prevent general unrest or, if this proved impossible, to repress it by military means. Control of the territory would sometimes be accompanied by the attempt to eradicate the source of the crisis. In 1824, government representatives in Mantua, in addition to taking the usual measures to preserve public order, organized a public refutation of the blood libel, all as part of a popular education effort to "tolerance."¹⁶ In this as in other cases,

¹² Renzo Derosas, "Strutture di classe e lotte sociali nel Polesine preunitario," *Studi storici*, 18/1 (1977): 80; Maurizio Bertolotti, introduction to *Drammi giovanili. Emanuele. Gli ultimi anni di Galileo Galilei*, by Ippolito Nievo (Venezia: Marsilio, 2005), 27-8; Dolerio, *La costruzione dell'odio*, 110; Marida Brignani, "Ostiano e Benedetto Frizzi," in *Benedetto Frizzi. Un'illuminista ebreo nell'età dell'emancipazione*, eds. Marida Brignani, Maurizio Bertolotti, (Florence: Giuntina, 2009), 64-5.

¹³ Bertolotti, introduction to *Drammi giovanili*, 29-33; Paolo Pellegrini, "Ebrei nobilitati e conversioni nell'Italia dell'Ottocento e del primo Novecento," *Materia giudaica*, 19/1-2 (2014): 277-8.

¹⁴ Enzo Sereni, "La Comunità di Roma e l'affare di Damasco," *La Rassegna mensile di Israel*, 3/2-3 (1927-28): 87-98.

¹⁵ Yoseph Hayim Yerushalmi, «*Servitori di re e non servitori di servitori.*» *Alcuni aspetti della storia politica degli ebrei*, (Florence: Giuntina, 2013).

¹⁶ De Cesaris, *Pro Judaeis*, 74.

defending the Jews from a blood libel charge depended on the attitude and choices of the sovereign power.¹⁷ To this end, self-defense measures taken by the Jews were not aimed directly at the surrounding dominant culture; the apologetic explanations documented in community archives or in the Jewish press¹⁸ were rather intended to support the plea for assistance from the authorities.

The Badia affair is an instance of this kind; however, it also involves a number of elements that make it unique in the history of pre-unification Italy.¹⁹ Without providing a systematic analysis and reconstruction of the events, which I leave for a future monograph, in this essay I propose to examine the Jewish response to the 1855 blood libel in a small town in southern Veneto. The Jews of Hapsburg Italy, whose civil emancipation was nearly complete by this time, managed a public self-defense which culminated in the publication – in the non-Jewish *Eco dei Tribunali* – of the report of the trial against the instigator of the charge of ritual murder.²⁰ Similar to long-established trends elsewhere among contemporary European Jews, the decision to undertake a public refutation – which was also part of the attempt to achieve full emancipation²¹ – was taken in response to a socio-political crisis of unexpectedly vast proportions. The short-term cause, the local failure of the vertical alliance, led to the arrest of a respected bourgeois Jew, the victim of a heinous accusation. After a summary of the events, the present essay will reconstruct the history of the publication of the proceedings, focusing in particular on the case of Lombardo-Venetian Jewry. The publication will be considered together with some non-Jewish exhortations to liberal thought, and the apologetic and intellectual strategies used.

¹⁷ On the limits of vertical alliance Paolo Bernardini, *La sfida dell'uguaglianza. Gli ebrei a Mantova nell'età della rivoluzione francese*, (Rome: Bulzoni 1996), 161; Pierre Birnbaum, *A Tale from a Ritual Murder Trial in the Age of Louis XIV. The Trial of Raphael Levy, 1669*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 123-35; Cristiana Facchini, “Lecture di storia ebraica. Riflessioni a margine di alcune recenti pubblicazioni,” *Storica*, 19/56-57 (2013): 189-202.

¹⁸ See for example [Isacco Samuele Reggio], “Ebrei di Candia,” *Strenna israelitica per l'anno dalla creazione del mondo 5615*, 3 (1854-55): 23-4.

¹⁹ On the Badia affair, see Gabriella Cecchetto, “Gli ebrei a Venezia durante la III dominazione austriaca,” *Ateneo Veneto*, n.s., 13/2 (1975): 84-87; De Cesaris, *Pro Judaeis*, 152-58; Emanuele D’Antonio, *Badia Polesine 1855. Storia di una calunnia del sangue nell’Italia dell’Ottocento*, (PhD Thesis, University of Udine, 2016).

²⁰ *Processo Giuditta Castilliero. Supplemento [sic!] al n. 641 dell’Eco dei Tribunali, Sezione prima*, (Venice: Tipografia de L’Eco dei Tribunali, 1856) [from now, PC].

²¹ Luzzatto Voghera, *Il prezzo dell’eguaglianza*, 74.

Crisis and Resolution

The first seven years of the third Austrian period of rule were a critical phase in the history of the Austrian Lombardo-Venetian Kingdom, marked by military domination – though incomplete and fluctuating – of the state apparatus, and by a profound economic crisis which had far reaching social consequences.²² The Jewish minority, represented by the communities of Mantua in Lombardy and Venice, Padua, Verona and Rovigo in Veneto,²³ was faced with additional difficulties. The failure of the Revolution of 1848, a source of great disappointment for its many Jewish supporters, had meant the loss of the civil and political equality achieved during the Republic of Manin.²⁴ The old discriminatory laws were reenacted, and the Austrian authorities seemed more interested in using political institutions to promote a slow, gradual expansion of rights related to “civil tolerance.” This approach was endorsed by a positive evaluation of the socioeconomic and cultural integration achieved by the Jews of Hapsburg Italy.²⁵ The preceding three decades had shown partial emancipation to be – compared with other geopolitical developments in the peninsula – especially favorable to the rise of a Jewish bourgeoisie throughout the country.²⁶ Jewish

²² See Marco Meriggi, *Il Regno Lombardo-Veneto*, (Turin: Utet, 1987), 355-65; Bruno Caizzi, “La crisi economica del Lombardo Veneto nel decennio 1850-59,” *Nuova Rivista storica*, 62/2 (1958): 205-26; Renzo Derosas, “Lo sciopero de «La Boje» nel Polesine e le sue origini,” *Società e storia*, 1/1 (1978): 65-86.

²³ See Francesca Cavarocchi, *La Comunità ebraica di Mantova fra prima emancipazione e unità d'Italia*, (Florence: Giuntina, 2002); Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, “Gli ebrei,” in *Storia di Venezia*, vol. 3/1, *L'Ottocento*, ed. Stuart J. Woolf, (Rome: Istituto per l'Enciclopedia Italiana, 2002), 619-48; Ariel Viterbo, “Da Napoleone all'Unità,” in *Ha-Tikvā. Il cammino della speranza. Gli ebrei e Padova*, vol. 2, ed. Claudia De Benedetti, (Padua: Papergraf, 2000), 1-58; Valeria Rainoldi, *Il ghetto e la sinagoga di Verona fra Ottocento e Novecento. Introduzione di Achille Olivieri, prefazione di Michele Luzzati*, (Padua: Cleup, 2006); Antonia Savio, *La comunità israelitica di Rovigo tra Ottocento e Novecento. Aspetti, forme, problemi*, (Graduate Thesis, University of Trieste, 1997-98).

²⁴ Tullia Catalan, “‘La primavera degli ebrei.’ Ebrei italiani del Litorale e del Lombardo Veneto nel 1848-1849,” *Zakhor. Rivista di storia degli ebrei d'Italia*, 6 (2003): 35-66. For the case of Venice, see Ester Capuzzo, “A Venezia con Manin,” in *Gli ebrei italiani dal Risorgimento alla scelta sionista*, (Florence: Le Monnier, 2004), 50-78; Elena Bacchin, “Per i diritti degli ebrei: percorsi dell'emancipazione a Venezia nel 1848,” *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa. Classe di Lettere e Filosofia*, s. V, 5/1 (2013): 91-128.

²⁵ Cecchetto, “Gli ebrei a Venezia,” 88-91.

²⁶ Marino Berengo, “Gli ebrei veneti nelle inchieste austriache della Restaurazione,” *Michael. On the History of the Jews in the Diaspora*, ed. Shlomo Simonsohn, 1 (1972): 9-37; Id., “Gli ebrei

leaders, however, understanding the meaning of complete civil emancipation, could not accept a partial one; they were also concerned about the negative impact of the rapprochement between the Empire and the Holy See, which had led to the 1855 Concordat.²⁷ Finally, surrounding majority views on the “Jewish question” were divided between pro-equality liberals and an opposition camp, which was probably larger and more articulate than intransigent Catholic circles.

The blood libel that broke the fragile balance in the relations between state, society, and the Jewish minority in the Lombardo-Venetian Kingdom took place in Badia in the province of Rovigo, a location significant in terms of rural, manufacturing, and commercial activity and having about five thousand inhabitants.²⁸ The affair broke out on June 25, 1855, with the return of Giuditta Castillero, who had disappeared from the town eight days previously. The young woman, a twenty-one-year-old peasant officially resident in nearby Masi, was living in the house of an aunt and publicly explained her disappearance by claiming to have escaped from a ritual murder. As per her account, the Jews had kidnapped her and taken her to Verona, where they had tried to sacrifice her along with an unknown little girl whom she later lost track of. Her executioners had stunned her by repeatedly bloodletting her in the arms, collecting her blood in a terracotta basin. The “martyrdom” was prevented by a Catholic servant, who assisted her in escaping and, after a stop in nearby Legnago, returning to Badia. Among the alleged Jewish perpetrators, Badians recognized their fellow townsman Caliman Ravenna. He was accused of kidnapping a Christian for the purpose of ritual murder. As evidence of the alleged bloodletting, Castillero displayed six wounds in her arms, evoking perfect resonance with deep-rooted common anti-Jewish fantasies.

The blood libel immediately fueled strong anti-Jewish sentiment; townsfolk united against the alleged kidnapper. Born in Rovigo in 1817, Ravenna had arrived

nell'Italia asburgica nell'età della restaurazione,” *Italia. Studi e ricerche sulla storia, la cultura e la letteratura degli ebrei d'Italia*, ed. Shlomo Simonsohn, 6/1-2 (1987): 62-103.

²⁷ On the anti-Jewish attitude of the Church in the Venetian provinces Angelo Gambasin, *Religione e società dalle riforme napoleoniche all'età liberale*, (Padua: Liviana, 1971), 57-8; 102-21. See also Ignazio Veca, “La strana emancipazione. Pio IX e gli ebrei nel lungo Quarantotto,” *Contemporanea: rivista di storia dell'800 e del '900*, 17/1 (2014): 3-30.

²⁸ Gianpaolo Romanato, “L'Ottocento,” in *Badia Polesine: contributo per la conoscenza della città*, (Badia Polesine: Biblioteca Civica Bronziero, 1993), 158-79.

in Badia with his wife Stella Levi in 1840. The few Jews of the town²⁹ were formally members of the Jewish community of the provincial capital, Rovigo. Ravenna was a well-respected entrepreneur, hardware merchant, district tax collector, and moneylender.³⁰ His success in business had placed him at the top of the bourgeoisie in Badia,³¹ making him an integral part of the elite. Ravenna was prominent in the city's public life, frequented its salons and cafés, became co-founder of its Philharmonic Society and was one of the owners (*palchettisti*) of the local *Teatro Sociale*.³² His prestige could not protect him from prejudice, however. Opinion among his Catholic acquaintances was divided concerning his alleged guilt, further contributing to Ravenna's social isolation. Amid mounting tension, the first wave of anti-Jewish agitation washed over Badia at the same time.³³ Rumors helped spread this throughout the area, reaching as far as Rovigo.³⁴

The local authorities' intervention led to the acknowledgment of the blood libel. Having being warned of the seriousness of the case, Ravenna went to the local government representative (*commissario distrettuale*)³⁵ to proclaim his innocence and ask that measures be taken to protect his "honor."³⁶ The officer, though skeptical about the attempted ritual murder, did not respond to his request, and under pressure from the municipal authorities transferred the case to the justice authority. Investigation by the local magistrate (*pretore*) put Ravenna in an even

²⁹ On Jews in Badia in the Middle Ages, a study unconnected to the nineteenth-century Badia's Jewish minority, see Elisabetta Traniello, *Gli ebrei e le piccole città: economia e società nel Polesine del Quattrocento*, (Rovigo: Minelliana, 2004).

³⁰ Municipality of Rovigo, "Register of Population, Jewish Community, 1836," Archivio Storico del Comune di Rovigo, 14:31, Archivio di Stato di Rovigo; Municipality of Badia Polesine, "Register of Population, 1871," 21, Archivio Comunale, Badia Polesine.

³¹ Chamber of Commerce, "List of prominent 'shopkeepers' in the Province of Rovigo, 1854," Camera di Commercio della Provincia del Polesine, 90:88, Archivio di Stato di Rovigo.

³² Municipality of Badia Polesine. "List of *palchettisti* (heirs or successors in 1895)," Teatro Sociale, Archivio Comunale, 6:4, Biblioteca Civica Bronziero, Badia Polesine.

³³ Giuseppe Cappelli. "Report to Delegazione provinciale di Rovigo, 27 June 1855," Presidenza della Luogotenenza, 97/I.1-66, Archivio di Stato di Venezia (from now, ASV).

³⁴ Giacomo Angelo Giustinian Recanati. "Report to Luogotenenza veneta, 10 August 1855," Presidenza della Luogotenenza 97/I.1-66, ASV.

³⁵ On this public officer, see Luca Rossetto, *Il commissario distrettuale nel Veneto asburgico. Un funzionario dell'Impero tra mediazione politica e controllo sociale (1819-1848)*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2013).

³⁶ PC, 3; Jewish Community of Rovigo. "Story of the event, 21 October 1855," Jewish University of Rovigo, IT/Rov 360:7b, Central Archives for the History of Jewish People, Jerusalem (from now CAHJP).

worse position. Strongly prejudiced, the investigators accepted Castilliero's allegations, swayed by the deposition given under oath and the forensic examination of the injuries to her arms.³⁷ On June 28, Ravenna, charged with public violence,³⁸ was taken into preventive custody in the Badia prison. Next the case, in accordance with procedural requirements, moved on to the Court of Rovigo. The magistrates of the provincial capital, together with other criminal authorities, expedited the investigation of the crime, allegedly inspired by the "religious superstition of the Jews."³⁹ The immediate arrest of the perpetrators, from their point of view, was also a public order measure. Answering the public's calls for "justice" could limit the unrest, and prevent its spreading to the cities where the larger Jewish communities of the Lombardo-Venetian Kingdom were concentrated.

The Badia affair became a regional crisis once the first accounts of it appeared in the press. On July 5, the *Annotatore friulano*, an authoritative weekly printed in Udine, published an account of the violence suffered by the "young little peasant" from Polesine.⁴⁰ Without mentioning the Jewish identity of the alleged perpetrators, the report helped spread the libel by indirectly endorsing a story already familiar to its readers through rumors. Public opinion put Judaism on trial on its own, in discussions held among the social elites of the cities of Veneto and elsewhere. The Pedrocchi coffeehouse in Padua, where the *Annotatore* was typical reading, became the scene of verbal abuse against Jewish patrons.⁴¹ The agitation spread to the popular social classes in Venice and Padua, who were shaken by the rumors and determined to avenge the self-proclaimed "martyr."⁴² In Venice, Jewish institutions received threatening letters that ordered Jews to stay away from

³⁷ The documents are published in PC, 34, 38-41.

³⁸ On this crime, see Claudio Povolo, *La selva incantata. Delitti, prove, indizi nel Veneto dell'Ottocento*, (Sommacampagna: Cierre, 2006), 45.

³⁹ State Prosecutor to Luogotenenza veneta, June 29, 1855, Presidenza della Luogotenenza, 97:I/1-66, ASV.

⁴⁰ *Annotatore friulano*, July 5, 1855: 108, appendix. On this usually philo-Semitic journal, see Emanuele D'Antonio, *La società udinese e gli ebrei tra la Restaurazione e l'età unitaria. Mondi cattolici, emancipazione e integrazione in Friuli 1828-1866/70*, (Udine: Istituto Pio Paschini, 2012).

⁴¹ Hoffer. "Report to Luogotenenza veneta, 8 July 1855," Presidenza della Luogotenenza: 97:I/1-66, ASV.

⁴² General head of police. "Report to Luogotenenza veneta, 7 July 1855," Presidenza della Luogotenenza, 97:I/1-66, ASV. See also General head of police. "Daily reports on public spirit, 11 July 1855," Presidenza della Luogotenenza, 97:I/1-66, 133, ASV.

the public sphere, or face an imminent massacre. Armed intervention proved needed to block the escalation of anti-Jewish violence, ultimately preventing damage to property and physical attacks against individuals.

State authorities interfered to respond to the pleas for protection from the area's Jewish leadership. Diplomatic efforts by the Venetian community were paralleled by those of other communities approaching their various provincial authorities; together, they proved decisive in winning the support of the Veneto government.⁴³ The Jews' leading arguments⁴⁴ must have been the refutation, in principle and in fact, of the accusation of ritual murder, as well as the political criminalization of the charge's supporters. The Badia affair undermined "civil tolerance" and could be used as a cover for a conspiracy against Austria. The hypothesis that the anti-Jewish agitation signaled a renewal of the patriotic movement in Italy was farfetched and instrumental, but sounded dangerous to a power still traumatized by the events of 1848 and obsessed with the ghost of the Revolution.⁴⁵ The highest political authorities in Venice took over the supervision of the case, and used the administrative bodies subordinate to them to conduct an effective defense of the Jews and an investigation to challenge the accusation.

Public opinion responded immediately to the change in the political climate. On July 9, the *Gazzetta ufficiale di Venezia*, the leading newspaper in Veneto, published a front-page refutation of the blood libel by Abraham Lattes, the chief rabbi of the Venetian community.⁴⁶ Three days later, the Viennese *Corriere Italiano*, a ministerial newspaper widely read in Hapsburg Italy, accused the *Annotatore* of having intentionally promoted an anti-Semitic campaign.⁴⁷ These

⁴³ "Article in the journal *L'Orfeo*, 18 July 1855," Viterbi Archive, P56:13, CAHJP.

⁴⁴ See, for example, the petition from the Jewish Community of Mantua, July 6, 1855, published in Angelo Tedeschi, "La calunnia del sangue pasquale," *Educatore israelita*, October 1862: 335-8.

⁴⁵ Meriggi, *Il Regno Lombardo-Veneto*, 354-57.

⁴⁶ Abraham Lattes, "Agli amici della giustizia, onesti ed illuminati," *Gazzetta ufficiale di Venezia*, July 9, 1855. See also "Brescia, 12 luglio 1855 (Agli amici della giustizia, onesti ed illuminati)," *Gazzetta provinciale di Brescia*, July 13, 1855.

⁴⁷ "Notizie diverse. Vienna 11 luglio 1855," *Corriere italiano*, July 12, 1855. The article was republished in *Gazzetta di Mantova*, July 17, 1855. On the Viennese newspaper, see Giuliano Gaeta, "Il «Corriere italiano» di Vienna (1850-1857) ed il suo redattore," *Rassegna storica del Risorgimento*, 40/4 (1957): 690-724

articles made the weekly in Udine, after an inconsistent attempt at self-defense,⁴⁸ retreat into silence for fear of penal sanctions.

This critical phase of the Badia affair ended with the collapse of the legal endorsement of the blood libel. On July 9, Castilliero was arrested for theft committed in Legnago against a family who, unconnected to the blood libel, had hired her as a domestic servant; the theft took place during the days of Castilliero's disappearance.⁴⁹ This news obviously contradicted the story of the attempted ritual murder; the indictment against Ravenna and his alleged accomplices from Verona was undone. The investigators, after obtaining the young woman's confession, next devoted their efforts to identifying her apparent accomplice, the instigator of the libel. On July 14, Ravenna was released from jail. He held a celebration in the public square, thus starting his reintegration into the city community. The news was immediately published by the *Sferza* in Brescia,⁵⁰ and ten days later, in greater detail in the *Gazzetta di Mantova*; this latter article was widely reproduced by the newspapers of Hapsburg Italy.⁵¹ The disproof of the charge of attempted ritual murder crowned the press campaign initiated by Rabbi Lattes' refutation.

Preparing the Refutation

The Badia affair cast in question the real extent of the Jews' integration in Lombardo-Venetian society; the shock reverberated throughout the Jewish world of the land. The widespread public acceptance of the blood libel called for an immediate response and a public refutation capable of counteracting prevalent prejudice. This project, though the names of its initiators are today impossible to establish, took shape among the leaders of the Jewish communities in Padua and

⁴⁸ *Annotatore friulano*, July 19, 1855: 116. See also La Redazione, "Dichiarazione," *Annotatore friulano*, July 12, 1855: 112.

⁴⁹ PC, 26-30 e 43.

⁵⁰ [Luigi Mazzoldi,] "Onestà e tolleranza," *La Sferza*, July 17, 1855.

⁵¹ "Regno Lombardo-Veneto, Mantova, 24 luglio 1855," *Gazzetta di Mantova*, July 24, 1855. The article was republished in *Gazzetta ufficiale di Venezia*, July 26, 1855, *Gazzetta ufficiale di Verona*, July 28, 1855, and *Osservatore triestino*, July 28, 1855. See also "Un po' di tutto. Il fatto di Badia," *Il Diavoletto*, July 29, 1855.

Venice, and in the intellectual circles close to the Rabbinical College of Padua,⁵² the main Jewish cultural center in the area. The support of political authorities, which had been crucial for the success of the campaign against the libel in the press, was guarantee against intervention from the censors. Hailing from a long-standing tradition, public self-defense also reflected contemporary states of mind among European Jews, affected especially by the Damascus affair.⁵³ In 1840, Lipman Hirsch Löwenstein published his *Damascia*, soon to have widespread impact and urging his coreligionists to break with the isolation induced by an enlightened culture that had nonetheless come to terms with “superstition.”⁵⁴ The strategy envisaged by the Hebraist from Frankfurt did not seek the emotional support of non-Jews but rather aimed for their rational persuasion, based on rigorously documented facts about religion and history. Samuel David Luzzatto (Shadal), professor at the Rabbinical College and renowned Hebraist, was familiar with the text⁵⁵ and shared its perspective. His rationalist approach followed the principles of the *Wissenschaft des Judenthums*, a European Jewish movement which rediscovered, by using scholarly method and analysis, its own religious and historical-cultural heritage.⁵⁶ The strategy of rational persuasion of non-Jews also adhered to a particular apologetic tradition, masterfully analyzed by Cristiana Facchini, which had emerged in the Veneto area at the end of the seventeenth century.⁵⁷ Carrying out a public refutation of the blood libel, however, required the unanimous consent of the Jewish leadership of the area.

⁵² Maddalena Del Bianco Cotrozzi, *Il Collegio rabbinico di Padova. Un'istituzione religiosa dell'ebraismo sulla via dell'emancipazione*, (Florence: Olschki, 1995).

⁵³ David Biale, *Blood and Belief. The Circulation of a Symbol between Jews and Christians*, (Los Angeles – London: Berkeley University Press, 2007), 163-7. See also Taradel, *L'accusa del sangue*, 169-73.

⁵⁴ Lipman Hirsch Löwenstein, *Damascia. Die Judenverfolgung zu Damaskus und ihre Wirkungen auf die öffentliche Meinung, nebst Nachweisungen über die Ursprung der gegen die Juden wiederholten Beschuldigung*, (Rödelheim: Lehrgeber und Co., 1840). On this book, see Frankel, *The Damascus Affair*, 402-07.

⁵⁵ Samuel David Luzzatto to Abraham Lattes, 31 maggio 1853, *Epistolario italiano francese latino di Samuel David Luzzatto da Trieste pubblicato da' suoi figli*, 2 vols., (Padua: Tipografia della Minerva dei fratelli Salmin, 1890), 756.

⁵⁶ Luzzatto Voghera, *Il prezzo dell'eguaglianza*, 158-165. On the *Wissenschaft*, see Yoseph Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor. Storia ebraica e memoria ebraica*, (Parma: Pratiche, 1983).

⁵⁷ Cristiana Facchini, *Infamanti dicerie. La prima autodifesa ebraica dall'accusa del sangue*, (Bologna: EDB, 2013). See also Yoseph Hayim Yerushalmi, *Dalla Corte al ghetto. La vita le opere le peregrinazioni del marrano Cardoso nell'Europa del Seicento*, (Milan: Garzanti, 1991), 384-91.

The news of Castilliero's arrest, even before it was officially announced, relieved the pressure on the Jews of Lombardo-Veneto. Once the minutes of the legal proceedings had been made public, the President of the Community of Padua invited the leaders of the other four Jewish communities of the kingdom to send representatives to a conference to plan "further steps to be taken vis-a-vis the Higher Government Authorities" in order to advance "the state of well-being overall."⁵⁸ The call for coordinated action echoed widespread trends towards self-organization in contemporary European Jewry;⁵⁹ it was also in perfect consonance with recent developments in Lombardo-Venetian Jewish political tradition. Under the Austrians, Jewish leadership in the area had repeatedly produced joint responses to dangerous challenges from majority society.⁶⁰ But joint effort in the past had been based on contingent choices informally agreed upon by the members of the five presidencies. The conference of 1855 was, by contrast, an official event, which required participating members to renounce their traditional autonomy.⁶¹ The struggle against the blood libel required a joint initiative of an extraordinary nature. The idea of publishing the proceedings was, perhaps, transparent to the invitation's recipients, but remained hidden between the lines of the circular from Padua.

The representatives of the communities of the Lombardo-Venetian Kingdom finally met in Venice, at Graziadio Vivante's house, on October 23.⁶² The delay was due to the resistance of Mantua's Jewish leaders, the only ones hostile to the initiative.⁶³ The choice of venue underlined the hegemony of the Venetian

⁵⁸ Jewish Community of Padua. "Letter to the Jewish Communities of the Lombardo-Venetian Kingdom, 11 July 1855," *Oggetti generali*, 504: Badia-Rovigo, Archive of the Jewish Community, Venice (from now ACEV).

⁵⁹ Perrine Simon-Nahum, *Aux origines de l'Alliance*, in *Histoire de l'Alliance israélite universelle de 1860 à nos jours*, ed. André Kaspi, (Paris: Colin, 2010), 11-52.

⁶⁰ See, for example, the documents kept in *Persecuzioni*, 75: *Calendario antiebraico*, Damasco, ACEV. See also Capuzzo, "A Venezia con Manin," 58-9.

⁶¹ The Jewish Communities of the Venetian provinces had however participated in some Jewish political meetings during the Early Modern period, such as the synods held in Ferrara (1554) and in Padua (1585-6), Milano, *Storia degli ebrei*, 478-79.

⁶² Jewish Community of Rovigo. "Decisions taken in Venice, 23 October 1855," Jewish University of Rovigo, IT/Rov 360:7b, CAHJP.

⁶³ Jewish Community of Mantua, "Protocol 608:329," 464/1855, Archives of the Jewish Community (Administrative Section), Mantua. See also Jewish Community of Padua, "Letter to the Jewish Communities of the Lombardo-Venetian Kingdom, 10 October 1855," *Oggetti generali*, 504: Badia-Rovigo, ACEV. Reasons for Mantua's hostility to the meeting may not have been

Community in the nascent consortium, but it must also be interpreted as offering a guarantee. The community's president, Abramo Errera,⁶⁴ was also in charge of the presidency of the Rabbinical College,⁶⁵ the only institution shared in by all five of the kingdom's communities. The participants were almost all members of their cities' Jewish elites. They were distinguished people even in the eyes of non-Jewish society and experienced in dealing with the political authorities.⁶⁶ Prominent among them were Rabbi Lattes, the director of the Rabbinical College, Giuseppe Consolo,⁶⁷ and a member of the presidential committee of the community of Rovigo, Alessandro Levi.⁶⁸ Levi was Caliman Ravenna's brother-in-law and his advisor on legal matters. The conference finalized the decision to take action against surrounding majority prejudice by publishing a report on the upcoming Castillero trial together with a refutation of the blood libel based on rigorously documented historical-religious arguments. The expenses incurred would be shared by the communities as per the "carat" system used in financing the Rabbinical College,⁶⁹ that is, in proportion to community size.

Immediately following the conference, Jewish leaders of the region began preparation for the envisioned publication, led by Venice. Returning to Rovigo, Levi met with Alessandro Cervesato, a Catholic liberal and a supporter of emancipation,⁷⁰ as well as Ravenna's future defense attorney. Levi asked

documented. The local Jewish leadership probably opposed the strategy of public self-defense in a context complicated by recurrent conflicts with the Jewish communities of the Venetian provinces, with the exception of the community in Verona. On these issues, see Maurizio Bertolotti, "Giacobbe and Tullio Massarani," in *Portrait of Italian Jewish Life (1800s-1930s)*, eds. Tullia Catalan, Cristiana Facchini, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC*, n. 8, November 2015, url. <http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?issue=8&id=364>; Berengo, "Gli ebrei nell'Italia asburgica," 75; Del Bianco Cotrozzi, *Il Collegio rabbinico di Padova*, 192.

⁶⁴ On Errera, see Lelio Della Torre, "Abraham Errera, à Venise," *Archives israélites*, June 1861: 329-34.

⁶⁵ Del Bianco Cotrozzi, *Il Collegio rabbinico di Padova*, 294-5.

⁶⁶ See, for example, Berengo, "Gli ebrei dell'Italia asburgica," 79; Bertolotti, introduction to *Drammi giovanili*, 15 e 71-2.

⁶⁷ On Consolo, see Maddalena Del Bianco Cotrozzi, "«Con zelo operosissimo e con illuminata sapienza». Il contributo di Giuseppe Consolo all'Ebraismo italiano dell'Ottocento, fra tradizione e modernità," *La Rassegna mensile di Israel*, 67/1-2 (2001): 215-42.

⁶⁸ On him, see "Rovigo. Cenni necrologici," *Educatore Israelita*, February 1873: 62.

⁶⁹ Del Bianco Cotrozzi, *Il Collegio rabbinico di Padova*, 291-2.

⁷⁰ For his views on the "Jewish question," see [Alessandro Cervesato,] "Sul divorzio," *Corriere israelitico*, December 1864: 260-62. On the debate on divorce and Jewish identity in nineteenth-

Cervesato to clarify the structure of the upcoming Castilliero trial. The risk was that the young woman would be indicted for theft primarily and the slander reduced to an ancillary crime, thus downplaying the importance of the mistreatment suffered by Ravenna and the need for redress. This scenario required an alternative strategy. The attorney gave a reassuring opinion, which ultimately proved to be correct.⁷¹ The main charge in the trial was slander; this was a more severely punishable offense than theft by virtue of some codified aggravating circumstances. By suing for civil damages, the victim of the slander would play a central role in the trial, testifying about the circumstances and consequences of the “infernal accusation.” The lawyer also supported printing the trial proceedings, both so as to advance Ravenna’s public rehabilitation and in order to establish the relevance of the legal case as a whole. Castilliero’s verdict would set a precedent that could prevent new blood libels in the future.

Reassured by Cervesato’s opinion,⁷² Jewish leaders started work on the explanatory, or apologetic, part of the publication. The task of drafting the preliminary briefs, which would specify documentary sources and outline an overall strategy, was assigned to two learned experts with a solid background in Jewish history and religious lore.⁷³ Trained at the College in Padua, the Rabbi of Rovigo, Abram Mainster, was a Judaica scholar with a rigorous background in philology. Through his mentor, Luzzatto, he was also connected to the *Wissenschaft des Judenthums* movement.⁷⁴ New to Jewish learning but familiar with the literature of the *Wissenschaft des Judenthums*, the Venetian Samuele Romanin was a renowned historian, a believer in the “religion of the document,” which then dominated scholarly research, and the author of an innovative *Storia*

century Italy, see Carlotta Ferrara Degli Uberti, *Fare gli ebrei italiani. Autorappresentazioni di una minoranza (1861-1918)*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2012), 161-77.

⁷¹ Alessandro Cervesato to Alessandro Levi, November 3, 1855, Oggetti generali, 504: Badia-Rovigo, ACEV.

⁷² Jewish Community of Venice to Jewish Community of Rovigo, November 16, 1855, Oggetti generali, 504: Badia-Rovigo, ACEV; Jewish Community of Padua to Jewish Community of Rovigo, November 16, 1855, Jewish University of Rovigo, It/Rov 360: 7b, CAHJP.

⁷³ Biale, *Blood and Belief*, 169-70.

⁷⁴ On Mainster, see Del Bianco Cotrozzi, *Il Collegio rabbinico di Padova*, 257-8; Luzzatto Voghera, *Il prezzo dell’eguaglianza*, 148-9; Marco Di Giulio, “Resisting Modernity: Jewish Translations of Scripture and Rabbinic Literature in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Italy,” *Modern Judaism*, 35/2 (2015): 204-10.

documentata di Venezia that was just then being printed.⁷⁵ The director of the Rabbinical College, Consolo, was unable to collect at the College all of the documents pertaining to the blood libel which were in the communities' possession;⁷⁶ the College was left out of this preparatory work as a result. Luzzatto was instrumental in other ways, giving Mainster bibliographical leads⁷⁷ and inspiring the research conducted by Romanin, to whom he was connected by feelings of esteem and friendship.

The briefs provided the Jewish leadership with essential material for the refutation. Mainster's draft added a preliminary documentary basis. Studying two polemical writings published in connection with the Damascus affair, one by the Parisian lawyer, Alphonse Pinède, and the other by the founder of *Wissenschaft*, Leopold Zunz,⁷⁸ had allowed him to put together a heterogeneous textual corpus to demonstrate that Jews could not possibly be involved in ritual murder.⁷⁹ The Rabbi of Rovigo, albeit skeptical about the usefulness of the publication plan, suggested emphasizing the Christian tradition opposed to the blood libel, as in his opinion Catholics would accept this as more authoritative than Jewish sources of similar content. As we will show, the refutation was eventually based on a Protestant text and represented – in a manner consciously apologetic – the blood libel as a malicious deviation from Christian worldview.

⁷⁵ On Romanin, see Gino Benzoni, "Dal rimpianto alla ricostruzione storiografica," in *Venezia e l'Austria*, eds. Gaetano Cozzi, Gino Benzoni, (Venezia: Marsilio 1999), 364-9; Filippo Maria Paladini, "Civilizzazione europea, storia italiana e rigenerazione di Venezia," in *Ateneo Veneto 1812-2012. Un'istituzione per la città*, eds. Michele Gottardi, Marina Niero, Camillo Tonini, (Venice: Ateneo Veneto, 2012), 39-46.

⁷⁶ Jewish Community of Padua. "Letter to the Jewish Communities of the Lombardo-Venetian Kingdom," November 16, 1855, Oggetti generali, 504: Badia-Rovigo, ACEV. For a negative response, see Jewish Community of Mantua, "Protocol," 608: 540/1855, Archive of the Jewish Community (Administrative Section), Mantua; Jewish Community of Venice to Jewish Community of Padua, November 27, 1855, Oggetti generali, 504: Badia-Rovigo, ACEV.

⁷⁷ Samuel David Luzzatto to Abram Mainster, January 23, 1856, Epistolario Luzzatto, X:2175, Centro Bibliografico UCEI, Rome.

⁷⁸ [Alphonse Pinède,] "Damas," *Archives israélites de France*, July 1, 1840: 390-6; Leopold Zunz, "Damas. Parole de défense," *Archives israélites de France*, August 1, September 1, 1840: 426-32, 471-7.

⁷⁹ Abram Mainster, "Brief, 26 January 1856," Jewish University of Rovigo, IT/Rov 360:7b, CAHJP.

Romanin's brief pursued a very different goal, but came to similar conclusions.⁸⁰ The Venetian scholar went on a research mission to Trent and produced a historical-documentary refutation of the "martyrdom" of the then blessed Simonino. The legend of the infant from Trent sacrificed by the Jews in 1475⁸¹ had served as one of the main sources for legitimating the allegation of ritual murder. Its appeal derived from popular religious devotion, recognized by the Church, and had been revived by both erudite and popular hagiography, with increasing intensity, since the mid-eighteenth century.⁸² The story of the "martyrdom" was perpetuated in liturgy and hagiographic narratives, arousing interest far beyond the religious sphere, and entrenching the belief that Jews killed young Christians to feast on their blood in the Jewish Easter banquet ceremonies.⁸³ Its strong anti-Jewish potential was evident in propagandistic texts, and could easily become the cause of blood libels in the future. In 1824, the people of Mantua cried "ritual murder!" following the discovery of a missing child near a Jewish property; according to rumor, the girl's wounded body resembled that of Simonino, bleeding "from innumerable punctures [...] made with a needle."⁸⁴

Romanin was the first Jewish intellectual to examine the documents of the "great trial" against the Jews of Trent, but he was not the first to deploy critical method in studying the case. His work continued a project conceived by Shadal during the Damascus crisis.⁸⁵ In 1840, addressing German-speaking Jews and based on a

⁸⁰ Samuele Romanin, "Brief, 26 March 1856," Jewish University of Rovigo, IT/Rov 360:7b, CAHJP.

⁸¹ *Processi contro gli ebrei di Trento (1475-1478)*, eds. Anna Esposito, Diego Quaglioni, vol. 1, (Padua: Cedam, 1990), and Vol. 2, *I processi alle donne*, (Padua: Cedam, 2009); Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia, *Trent 1475. Stories of a Ritual Murder Trial*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

⁸² Caliò, *La leggenda dell'ebreo assassino*, 108, 162. See also Cusumano, *Ebrei e accusa di omicidio rituale*; Marco Iacovella, "San Simonino da Trento. Un culto locale dall'antisemitismo politico al Concilio Vaticano II," *Rivista di Storia del Cristianesimo*, 12/2 (2015): 381-404. For Simonino's legacy in Polish Catholicism, see Magda Teter, "The Sandomierz Paintings of Ritual Murder as *Lieux de Mémoire*," in *Ritual Murder in Russia, Eastern Europe and Beyond. New Histories of an Old Accusation*, eds. Eugene M. Avrutin, Jonathan Deckel-Klein, Robert Weinberg, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 253-77.

⁸³ See, for example, Emmanuele Antonio Cicogna, *Delle iscrizioni veneziane raccolte ed illustrate*, vol. 1, (Venice: presso Giuseppe Orlandelli, 1824), 89; vol. 4, (Venice: presso Giuseppe Picotti, 1834), 557.

⁸⁴ Giovanni Arrivabene, *Compendio cronologico-critico della storia di Mantova dalla sua fondazione ai nostri giorni*, vol. 6, ed. Renato Giusti, (Mantua: Accademia Virgiliana, 1975), 180.

⁸⁵ Samuel David Luzzatto to Samuele Romanin, August 9, 1855, *Epistolario italiano francese latino*, 826.

historical-philological critique of the available documents, the Hebraist from Padua had exposed the groundlessness of the hagiographic narratives of Simonino's "martyrdom."⁸⁶ The Venetian scholar, somewhat by contrast, analyzed historical-documentary evidence to refute the original source as reproduced in a seventeenth-century rendition of the documented proceedings involving six defendants.⁸⁷ The accusation of ritual murder had emerged, in his opinion, in a climate of anti-Jewish hatred promoted by Franciscan preaching. This brought the civil and ecclesiastical authorities together to search for a new saint who would attract a stream of devotees and pilgrims, bringing prestige and income to the city of Trent. Nonetheless, the Trent case, in the historian's opinion, had to be omitted from the refutation "in order not to clash with the belief, which the Church has unfortunately made a religious tenet, in the alleged Saint." Challenging Simonino's beatitude would have provoked Catholic hostility, leading ecclesiastical authorities to call for censorship. The publication would then lose much of its persuasive impact, even if still permitted to circulate without restriction.

Endorsing Mainster's and Romanin's briefs, Jewish community leaders next needed to find an appropriate publishing house. Making choices of this kind had always posed a problem for the Jewish community; the issue remained unresolved as late as the end of the nineteenth century. Lombardo-Venetian Jewry under Austrian rule was typically reluctant to intervene publicly in political or religious questions that concerned them directly: the risks involved – censorship and clashing with hostile Catholic public opinion – were effective deterrents.⁸⁸ Refuting the blood libel – any attack on the Church excepted – was granted the political authorities' support, but it still had to face the prejudice of the surrounding milieu. Issuing a publication by the communities themselves appeared a doubtful course to pursue. The public would have greeted an

⁸⁶ S.D.L. "Nachrichten und Correspondenzen. Padua, 25. Sept.," *Israelitische Annalen*, October 16, 1840: 353-4. For the Italian manuscript of the article, originally called *Intorno a San Simonin da Trento*, see Samuel David Luzzatto to Isaac Marcus Jost, 25 September 1840, *Epistolario italiano francese latino*, 380-5.

⁸⁷ Ms BCT1-1591, Biblioteca Comunale, Trent.

⁸⁸ Luzzatto Voghera, *Il prezzo dell'eguaglianza*, 96; Piero Brunello, *Colpi di scena. La Rivoluzione del Quarantotto a Venezia*, (Sommacampagna: Cierre, 2018), 191-2, 412. For some examples of this attitude, see the documents kept in Oggetti generali, 503: Jabalot, ACEV. See also Abramo Errera to Samuele Salomone Olper, August 11, 1840, Samuele Salomone Olper to Abramo Errera, February 18, 1841, Persecuzioni, 75: Damasco, ACEV.

“Israelitic” publication with “unpleasant polemics,” exposing it to “religious bias that would make it significantly less credible.”⁸⁹ This fear was shared by Jewish intellectuals and the leaders of the communities of Rovigo and Mantua; the apprehension in this latter seemed even stronger. Any statement by a Jewish apologist would be treated by the Catholic public as “always suspect” of being partial, as Shadal put it.⁹⁰

In June 1856, Paride Zajotti (*junior*) approached Ravenna with the idea of publishing the trial’s proceedings in his *Eco dei Tribunali*, thus putting the Jewish leaders out of their embarrassment. The periodical offered by the young Venetian journalist, a leading liberal publication, was a respected biweekly covering legal issues.⁹¹ Ever since its founding, reports that appeared on its pages about hearings of well-known cases had attracted great public interest. Zajotti himself, a pro-emancipation Catholic, thought of the need to disprove the blood libel as a “question of civilization,”⁹² while liberal-minded lawyers wanted to make their “academic” contribution as part of criticizing the inquisitorial system. The prejudice, as Rabbi Lattes had written on the same periodical’s pages, was also fostered by uncritical adherence to outdated legal decisions and documents. The confessions extracted under torture from the Jews accused of ritual murder, however, satisfied the superstition of the town’s magistrates, not the test of historical truth.⁹³

Zajotti’s proposal was given an enthusiastic welcome in Rovigo and Venice. Acting on Ravenna’s behalf, the community of Venice gave Zajotti exclusive

⁸⁹ Jewish Community of Rovigo to Jewish Community of Venice, June 27, 1856, Oggetti generali, 504: Badia-Rovigo, ACEV.

⁹⁰ Samuel David Luzzatto to Alessandro Manzoni, 24 March 1843, *Epistolario italiano francese latino*, 419.

⁹¹ On Zajotti and his journal, see *In morte del comm. Avv. Paride Zajotti (9 giugno 1886)*, (Venice: Tipografia della Gazzetta di Venezia, 1887); Ettore Dezza, “Forme accusatorie e garanzie processuali nelle attese dei giuristi lombardo-veneti. Il primo anno de «L’Eco dei Tribunali» (1850-1851),” in *Processo penale e opinione pubblica in Italia tra Otto e Novecento*, eds. Floriana Colao, Luigi Lacché, Claudia Storti, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008), 31-75.

⁹² Paride Zajotti to Jewish Community of Venice, July 10, 1856, Oggetti generali, 504: Badia-Rovigo, ACEV.

⁹³ “Varietà. L’accusa del sangue contro gli Ebrei,” *Eco dei Tribunali. Sezione prima. Giornale di Giurisprudenza penale*, 3/299 (1853): 812-14.

rights to publish all trial documents.⁹⁴ Beyond this, the Jewish communities of the Lombardo-Venetian Kingdom, pledged to buy five hundred copies of the publication.⁹⁵ The preliminary investigation conducted by the Court of Rovigo had drawn to a close in the meantime; the Castilliero trial would not involve the instigator of the Badia affair. Protected by the young woman's staunch silence, this character was not going to appear as one of the accused.

The Blood Libel on Trial

Castilliero, charged with having slandered Ravenna, was tried in the Court of Rovigo during September 29-October 1, 1856. Following the proceedings, Zajotti returned to Venice, where he started printing the special supplement to the *Eco dei Tribunali*. This was published in fourteen biweekly installments later to be collected in a large-format booklet of fifty-six pages. The text was divided into two interconnected parts, the first a detailed report of the trial proceedings and the second made up of two refutations of the blood libel. One of these was fully referenced with extensive primary source citations. The exact number of copies printed is not known, but the publication must have been widely circulated, especially in the Veneto area. Advertised by the *Gazzetta di Venezia*, distribution was officially in the hands of local book markets in Veneto's provincial capitals, as well as in Milan and Trieste (but not Mantua).⁹⁶ In addition, Jewish communities promoting the publication distributed their five hundred copies among the Jews of the peninsula and in Europe beyond; the booklet, re-launched by the Jewish press outside the Lombardo-Venetian Kingdom,⁹⁷ was instrumental in augmenting the refutations arsenal available to European Jewry as a whole should more ritual murder charges appear in the future.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Jewish Community of Venice to Paride Zajotti, June 30, 1856, Oggetti generali, 504: Badia-Rovigo, ACEV.

⁹⁵ Jewish Community of Venice to Paride Zajotti, 22 July 1856, Oggetti generali, 504: Badia-Rovigo, ACEV.

⁹⁶ "Avvisi diversi. L'IMPORTANTE PROCESSO," *Gazzetta di Venezia*, October 1, 1856.

⁹⁷ "Processo Giuditta Castilliero," *Educatore Israelita*, October, November, 1856: 303-14, 364-69. For echoes of this in the French Jewish press, see "Chronique du mois," *Archives Israélites*, November, December, 1856: 649-50, 725; Madame [Niny Modona-]Olivetti, "Procès Judith Castilliero," *Archives Israélites*, January 1, and February 1, 1857: 22-30, and 88-97.

⁹⁸ The tantalizing question of the booklet's availability in Italian and other European Jewish libraries and archives today requires further research.

As reported in the *Eco dei Tribunali*, the trial was conducted in a manner acceptable to the Jews, even if an occasional shadow was cast on certain points. The public in the courtroom found the proceedings captivating, but the trial itself did not yield any new relevant disclosures. The slanderer's guilt was established based on abundant evidence as well as her own confession; it was not put in question. The magistrates used the proceedings to address the only question still open, urging the accused to reveal the identity of her instigator. Blaming an unknown carter, Castilliero repeated a story that had already been disproved, and thus lost the disposition of the Court in favor of clemency. The court debate, as would often happen in Lombardo-Veneto, became a clash between "two opposing, if not antithetical, truths."⁹⁹ The recalcitrance of the accused, whom many saw as a naive victim of seasoned criminals, was greeted with general sympathy by those present, which was likely the overt expression of deeper seated feelings of anti-Jewish hostility. The trial also marked Ravenna's solemn rehabilitation, legally irrelevant but crucial for the economy of the publication. Having legally established his innocence, the entrepreneur, through a statement delivered by his lawyer Cervesato, withdrew from the proceedings and forgave his slanderer. After brief deliberation, the Court issued the sentence requested by the public prosecutor. Castilliero was sentenced to six years' imprisonment (*carcere duro*), confirmed on appeal, the term to be served in the Giudecca women's prison in Venice.¹⁰⁰

In his introduction to the trial minutes, Zajotti invited the public to rethink the Badia affair without prejudice, focusing on "the facts" so as to arrive at the correct legal and historical-cultural conclusions.¹⁰¹ Similar in form and structure to a document produced by a court registry, the text does not tell the story of an attempted ritual murder, but uncovers a conspiracy against an honest and well-respected Israelite. The architect of the crime was an unidentified Ravenna enemy, with personal ties to the accused, whom he was able to take advantage of to act upon his plan. Justice had initially been deceived by the conspirators, depriving

⁹⁹ Povoletto, *La selva incantata*, 132.

¹⁰⁰ Court of Appeal, "Session, November 5, 1856," Tribunale generale d'Appello, Atti 3316, sez. IV, 632:1856, ASV. On the Giudecca women's prison, see Simona Trombetta, *Punizione e carità. Carceri femminili nell'Italia dell'Ottocento*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2004), 131-8, 189-95, 229, 269-70.

¹⁰¹ PC, 1.

Ravenna of his honor and freedom. But truth was soon reestablished, and eventually led to the release of the slandered victim and the arrest of the slanderer. Although she had confessed, Castilliero was still loyal to the criminal network she had acted at the behest of; she was not sincerely repentant, and deserved no pity. The Badia affair taught this lesson: Jews should not be attacked on the basis of slander and prejudice. Contributing to the hope of identifying the core fueling the conspiracy, Castilliero's conviction sent a warning to society as a whole: the State would not tolerate the recurrence of similar incidents.

The chronicling of the Badia affair formed the basis for the refutation of the ritual murder stereotype. To this end, two discussion pieces followed up on the court proceedings, constituting the second part of the publication. The first piece was composed in the form of a letter addressed to Zajotti; it contains a brief but well-documented counter-history of the blood libel by Cervesato.¹⁰² He was presumably commissioned to compose the piece by the Jewish leadership of Rovigo, in keeping with its tradition of entrusting the writing of its appeals to Christian lawyers.¹⁰³ Despite there no longer being any valid legal prohibition in this regard, a defense of Judaism produced by a Catholic was believed, as discussed above, more effective vis-a-vis non-Jewish public opinion than one by a Jew. Jewish intellectuals, nonetheless, played a decisive role in the composition of the text, providing the lawyer with the documentary references needed and elucidating the strategy to be adopted based on the briefs by Mainster and Romanin. His argument was primarily indebted to one of the first systematic refutations of the blood libel ever produced by a Christian; the official text of this had been submitted to the Elector of Saxony, Frederick Augustus II, by the Theological Faculty of Leipzig in 1714.¹⁰⁴ Romanin had come upon this document in *Damascia*; it had probably also been known to Luzzatto even earlier.¹⁰⁵ It discredited ritual murder theories produced by European culture over the centuries as superstition. Synthetic and schematic, the text was chosen to be the mainstay of the documentary appendix and would be published on the pages of

¹⁰² Alessandro Cervesato, "[Letter to] Signor Redattore," PC, 50-51.

¹⁰³ Kenneth Stow, *Jewish Life in Early Modern Rome: Challenge, Conversion, and Private Life*, (London – New York: Routledge, 2007), 242.

¹⁰⁴ Taradel, *L'accusa del sangue*, 179-83; Cusumano, *Ebrei e accusa di omicidio rituale*, 44-49.

¹⁰⁵ Löwenstein, *Damascia*, 352-62.

the *Eco* with the trial proceedings.¹⁰⁶ Rabbi Mainster is likely to have done the Italian translation, which was later edited by Luzzatto who, upon seeing it printed, experienced “great pleasure.”¹⁰⁷ This primary source enabled Cervesato to argue that the ritual murder accusations originated from superstition, fought by the Church and Christian authorities whenever it broke out in history, as the “unfortunate [...] bait of social upheaval.”

In the introduction to his piece, Cervesato, although satisfied with the outcome of the trial proceedings, reminded the reader that the “cardinal issue” of the Badia affair remained unresolved. As long as the motive as well as the identity of the “moral culprit” remained unknown, it would remain impossible to expose the case against Ravenna as an anti-Jewish conspiracy motivated by material gain. This hypothesis about the libel’s roots was inspired by an understanding of the libel’s function which was widespread among the Jewish intellectuals of the area. Less nuanced than Romanin, Luzzatto had voiced the same idea in explaining the Trent libel, borrowing this interpretation from early modern Jewish histories and memoirs. His main reference, in the aforementioned text of 1840, was the *Valley of Tears* (*Éméq ha-bacha*, 1558) by Yoseph ha-Cohen, a Hebrew manuscript published by Meir Letteris in Vienna in 1852.¹⁰⁸ On the pages of the *Eco*, stating the conspiracy hypothesis was relegated to a legal document published in the appendix. In their investigation of a recent case from the vicinity of Aachen, the Prussian judiciary had withdrawn the charge against two Jews, and recorded the discovered motive of their slanderers: a sum of money which they stood to gain.¹⁰⁹

Cervesato’s text goes on to refute the two main theories of ritual murder which had been in circulation together with Castillero’s story. In the summer of 1855 the blood libel, according to the testimony of the rabbi and teacher at the Paduan

¹⁰⁶ “Parere della facoltà teologica di Lipsia dell’8 agosto 1714,” PC, 51-54.

¹⁰⁷ Samuel David Luzzatto to Abram Mainster, November 14, 1856, Epistolario Luzzatto, X:2191, Centro Bibliografico UCEI, Rome.

¹⁰⁸ Alain Boyer, Maurice-Ruben Hayoun, *L’historiographie juive* (Paris: Presse Universitaire de France, 2001), 33-4. On another source familiar to Luzzatto, see Mauro Perani, “Un’accusa di omicidio rituale contro gli ebrei di Ragusa-Dubrovnik nel 1622: il Ma’aseh Yeshurun di Aharon ben David ha-Kohen, Venezia 1657,” *Annali di Storia dell’Esegesi*, 16/2, (1999): 403-34.

¹⁰⁹ “Dichiarazione del R. Procuratore generale prussiano (21 marzo 1840),” in PC, 54-5. The declaration, originally published in the *Stadt-Aachener Zeitung* on March 22, 1840, was found in Löwenstein, *Damascia*, 312-5. On Prussian officers’ skepticism about ritual murder, see Smith, *The Butcher’s Tale*, 114.

Colle, Lelio Della Torre,¹¹⁰ had led to attacks on Judaism based on ancient theological stereotypes enhanced by echoes of the Damascus affair and spread far and wide by ultramontane propagandistic literature. The Jews, according to claims often connected to these attacks, used Christian blood in ceremonies prescribed by their religion. The main target of this theory, although Della Torre did not explicitly mention it,¹¹¹ must have been the Talmud, a then unknown work which had been denigrated by the Church for centuries,¹¹² and which aroused the distrust of the surrounding non-Jewish milieu. Casting the Talmud as a normative religious text prescribing ritual murder, a central theme of the Damascus affair,¹¹³ overlapped with the established notion of “Talmudism,” according to which Judaism had departed from its biblical roots, re-founding its morality on anti-Christian hatred.¹¹⁴ According to Della Torre, however, the main theory behind ritual murder charges was different, and had been assimilated by Italian Catholic culture through the echoes of the Damascus affair.¹¹⁵ Its supporters did not impute the “bloody ceremonies” to all Jews, but to a “secret sect” that had deviated from Judaism’s religious principles and was unknown to most of its coreligionists. The sect’s members supposedly practiced human sacrifice in deference to an esoteric tradition taken over from idolaters in antiquity, then charging the practice with anti-Christian meanings during the Middle Ages. In the absence of a clear description of the sect, the theory lent itself to elastic application, open also to magical-witchcraft interpretations of the use of Christians’ blood.¹¹⁶ The images

¹¹⁰ Lelio Della Torre “Ausführlicher Bericht über die Anklage von Badia,” in Id., *Scritti sparsi. Preceduti da uno studio biografico intorno all'autore*, vol. 2, (Padova: Prosperini, 1908), 346-50. The article was originally published anonymously as “Wichtige Nachrichten. Aus Oberitalien, 31. Juli,” *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, October, 1855: 436-7.

¹¹¹ See, for example, the unusual apologetic article by Carl Gutzkow, “Gli ebrei e il Talmud,” *Corriere italiano*, July 24, 31 and August 1, 2, 1855.

¹¹² Fausto Parente, “La Chiesa e il Talmud,” in *Gli ebrei in Italia. Storia d'Italia: Annale*, 11/1, ed. Corrado Vivanti, (Torino: Einaudi, 1996), 524-646.

¹¹³ See Frankel, *The Damascus Affair*, 438-9; Taradel, *L'accusa del sangue*, 213-4; Kertzer, *I papi contro gli ebrei*, 109-11.

¹¹⁴ Miccoli, “Santa Sede, questione ebraica e antisemitismo,” 1385.

¹¹⁵ Luigi Vincenzi, *Alcuni pensieri sopra gli atti di beneficenza del sommo pontefice papa Pio IX felicemente regnante verso gli ebrei di Roma, e sopra vari commenti manifestati al pubblico su questo proposito*, (Roma: Zampi, 1848), 57. On the theological origins of this theory, and on its fortune in the context of the Damascus affair, see Frankel, *The Damascus Affair*, 265; Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder. Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany*, (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 1988), 128.

¹¹⁶ On the stereotype of the Jewish sorcerer, see Marina Caffiero, *Legami pericolosi. Ebrei e cristiani tra eresia, libri proibiti e stregoneria*, (Turin: Einaudi, 2013).

that emerged from this theory, in the worldview of the upper urban classes of the area, gave it a further appearance of plausibility. The survival of “primitivism” in an otherwise “civilized” society seemed proven by the continued existence of rural lifestyles structured by archaic beliefs and practices routinely dismissed as “superstitious.”¹¹⁷ It was therefore not surprising that the Jewish population, like the society around them, would include isolated groups of fanatics committed to criminal practices most typical of “savages.”

In mounting an attack against these claims, Cervesato relied heavily on the historical and religious information affirmed by the official statement by the Theological Faculty of Leipzig. The reference to the Mosaic laws of purity, which forbade ingestion and contact with blood, directly disproved the accounts of the bloodthirsty “rabbinical rite.” The hypothesis of the original laws’ subversion by later interpreters was contradicted by the Jewish “abhorrence” of blood, developed over centuries of observance and documented in contemporary Europe, as well. Thus, the Jews refused to eat meat not slaughtered according to ritual *shechitah* procedure, for fear of being contaminated by its blood residues.¹¹⁸ The lawyer went on to refute the secret sect theory, arguing that no historical basis could be adduced for the claim of the Jews’ having assimilated the practice of human sacrifice. The blood libel as a ploy based on using trumped up charges, had appeared in the late ancient period, striking, as Tertullian wrote, the first Christians.¹¹⁹ The absence of any suspicions about the Jews, in the context of a bitter political-religious struggle, proved their original non-involvement in the practice.¹²⁰ The accusation, once Christians had been cleared, rebounded on the Jews only in the thirteenth century.¹²¹ Cervesato argued it was a far-fetched

¹¹⁷ Piero Brunello, *Ribelli, questuanti e banditi. Proteste contadine in Veneto e in Friuli 1814-1866*, (Sommacampagna: Cierre, 2012), 212.

¹¹⁸ On this argument, see Biale, *Blood and Belief*, 127. It should also be noted that, in his *Dissertazioni di polizia medica del Pentateuco* (1787-90), the Jewish physician Benedetto Frizzi from Ostiano constructs a medical interpretation of ritual *shechitah*, which he uses to defend Judaism, Lois Dubin, “Una corda a tre capi: cura, apologetica e critica nell’opera di Benedetto Frizzi,” in *Benedetto Frizzi*, 26-36.

¹¹⁹ Tertulliano, *Apologia del cristianesimo*, (Milano: Rizzoli, 2012), 38. On this point, crucial in connection with Jewish self-defense against blood libels throughout history, see Facchini, *Infamanti dicerie*, 75-81.

¹²⁰ For a different refutation strategy, see Samuel David Luzzatto, *Il Giudaismo illustrato nella sua teorica, nella sua storia e nella sua letteratura*, vol. I, (Padua: Bianchi, 1848): IV, II.

¹²¹ According to the Declaration by the Theological Faculty of Leipzig, Cervesato turns out to be wrong; on the origins of the blood libel in the 12th century, see Taradel, *L’accusa del sangue*, 21.

connection, considering the Jews' political predicament in medieval Christian Europe. Reduced to impotence, the Jews would have paid a heavy price had they really ever challenged Christian society in this way: they would have been deprived of the "only social protection" they had – the laws of tolerance – and de facto condemned to extinction. The genesis of the anti-Jewish ritual murder charge was explained, as hypothesized by the Saxon theologians, as a byproduct of the political-religious fanaticism fueled by the Crusades. The monks and the opportunists who had devised the blood libel against the Jews wanted to satisfy their lust for power and wealth, fighting a sort of parallel anti-Jewish crusade of their own. Invoking the pogroms of the Rhine and Moselle valleys, the lawyer recalled the Church's defense of the Jews, well known to an audience familiar with the romantic rediscovery of the Crusades.¹²² Catholic culture glorified this as a shining example of Christian charity, while typically did not question the accusation of ritual murder.¹²³ By contrast with this, Cervesato emphasized the struggle of the ecclesiastical authorities against the "senseless slander," describing this as a rational choice documented by a long series of papal pronouncements. According to him, the position of the medieval popes had been adopted by the civil authorities, uniting them in the defense of the laws of tolerance in the face of the periodic re-emergence of the accusation. In his conclusion, Cervesato urged the legal authorities to bring to justice the "occult engine" of the Badia affair, the cause of a temporary relapse into barbarity of a "civilization" that now considered Jews and Christians "children [almost] of a single family."

In the second and final commentarial piece, Zajotti refuted the blood libel from a "legal" perspective with extensive historical and cultural repercussions.¹²⁴ The journalist reconstructed the developments leading to Ravenna's "luminous" acquittal, and then polemically wondered what the outcome would have been had the legal authorities worked with the "Inquisition's system." In this case, defending the accused would turn into more than just a legal problem. Since the late eighteenth century, criticism of torture had been linked to the

¹²² Charles Tyerman, *L'invenzione delle Crociate*, (Turin: Einaudi, 2000).

¹²³ Giuseppe Francesco Michaud, "G'Israeliti nel tempo delle Crociate," in Id., *Storia delle Crociate. Prima edizione veneta sopra la sesta francese*, vol. 4, (Venezia: Tommaso Fontana, 1847), 372. See also Lodovico Menin, *Il costume di tutte le nazioni e di tutti i tempi descritto ed illustrato*, vol. 3: *Costume moderno*, (Padua: Società editrice co' tipi della Minerva, 1843), 7; Vincenzi, *Alcuni pensieri*, 57, 66, 108.

¹²⁴ P.Z., ["Conclusioni"], PC, 55.

Enlightenment's struggle against superstition, relegating beliefs in constructs such as witchcraft and pestiferous unguents to a past both "barbaric" and irrational.¹²⁵ Shortly prior to this time, the topic had been taken up by Alessandro Manzoni in his acclaimed *Storia della colonna infame* (1840/42), a critical reconstruction of the 1630-31 trial against the Milanese men accused of intentionally spreading the plague through the use of unguents (*untori*). In his account, the Lombard writer had delegitimized the "infernal" condemnation of the defendants: their crime, to which they had confessed under brutal torture, existed only in the magistrates' minds overwhelmed by "passion" and "prejudice." In nineteenth-century Italy, criticism of torture, though present in some Jewish writing in defense of Judaism,¹²⁶ does not seem to have been systematically relied upon by non-Jewish writers rejecting the blood libel.¹²⁷ This omission, openly hostile in the case of Manzoni,¹²⁸ left room for uncritical acceptance of older legal sources along with undisguised anti-Jewish propaganda.¹²⁹ In the Veneto area, the most dangerous, deemed authoritative, and widely accepted project serving this end was the recent work of a Venetian scholar and priest. In 1853, Giuseppe Cappelletti, in an installment of his *Storia della Repubblica di Venezia*, had summarized his view of local Jewry – a religious, moral, and social "pestiferous infection" of the *Serenissima* – by accusing them of ritual murder.¹³⁰ The "evidence" consisted of the conviction of three Jews from Portobuffolé, burned at the stake in Piazza San Marco in 1480.¹³¹ Although he did not directly attack Cappelletti, Zajotti exposed his type of account, criticizing its ahistorical use of primary sources. His proof was based on an imagined trial against Ravenna held according to inquisitorial procedure. The deposition of Castilliero, although far-fetched, was supported by sufficient evidence to resort to the use of torture. In what followed, the magistrates, faced with Ravenna's denial, would have "placed him on the rack."

¹²⁵ Paolo Preto, *Epidemia, paura e politica nell'Italia moderna*, (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1987), 105-8.

¹²⁶ Facchini, *Infamanti dicerie*, 90-94.

¹²⁷ For remarks on this, see Luigi Maffoni, *Origine delle interdizioni israelitiche e dannosi effetti dalle medesime derivanti*, (Turin: Mussano, 1847), 32; "Inghilterra. Adunanza di banchieri per provveder agli Ebrei di Damasco," *Gazzetta privilegiata di Venezia*, July 16, 1840.

¹²⁸ Luzzatto Voghera, *Il prezzo dell'eguaglianza*, 92.

¹²⁹ Calìo, *La leggenda dell'ebreo assassino*, 138-9, 155.

¹³⁰ Giuseppe Cappelletti, *Storia della Repubblica di Venezia dal suo principio sino al giorno d'oggi*, vol. 9, (Venezia: Antonelli, 1855), 120, 135, 155. On Cappelletti and his anti-Semitism, see Benzioni, *Dal rimpianto alla ricostruzione storiografica*, 362-3; D'Antonio, *La società udinese e gli ebrei*, 204-7.

¹³¹ On that late medieval case, see Salomon Radzik, *Portobuffolé* (Florence: Giuntina, 1984).

Then the “progressive increase in martyrdom,” as in the situation in 1840 in Damascus, would have forced him to yield, confessing to the crime he was accused of. His conviction, however, would not have proven his guilt, nor produced any revelation about his religious tradition. Thanks to the legal safeguards, Ravenna had instead proved his innocence, persuading magistrates and even the most obstinate observers. The Badia affair thus had “immense historical significance,” as it invalidated in one swoop all the convictions ever obtained by torture from Jews accused of ritual murder.

Useful Knowledge?

Publicizing the proceedings of the Castillero trial, a satisfying enterprise for the Jewish communities of the land with the exception of Mantua,¹³² had a positive impact in the short term. The publication’s reception helped to change the attitude of the political authorities, endowing Lombardo-Venetian Jewry with effective defense tools against the blood libel. In the years following, state authorities would consider the libel, as the unusual case of Lendinara (1860) shows, a superstitious, defamatory and dangerous belief that had to be “eradicated” from the “plebs” through public refutation and the summary legal conviction of its promoters.¹³³ The publication also had an impact, albeit a limited one, on prejudice of dominant cultures. In the decades immediately before and after Italy’s unification, the booklet – together with other apologetic writings – forced some propagandists of the ritual murder accusation publicly to retract their statements.¹³⁴ Its persuasive power was, however, nullified by clerical propaganda which, amid the turbulence of the *fin-de-siècle*, made the blood libel a pillar of its campaign to demonize Judaism, the “hidden instigator” of the abhorrent secularizing modernity.¹³⁵ The text was mentioned in some later Jewish apologetic

¹³² Jewish Community of Mantua to Jewish Community of Rovigo, February 18 1857, ACEV 504, Oggetti generali: Badia-Rovigo.

¹³³ Documents on the Lendinara case are kept in Delegazione provinciale di Rovigo, protocolli riservati 1860:122, Archivio di Stato di Rovigo. On this episode, see also De Cesaris, *Pro Judaeis*, 158-61.

¹³⁴ See, for example, Giuseppe Levi to the Jewish Community of Venice, April 22, 1857, Oggetti generali, 504: Badia-Rovigo, ACEV.

¹³⁵ Ruggero Taradel, Barbara Raggi, *La segregazione amichevole. «La Civiltà Cattolica» e la questione ebraica 1850-1945*, (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1999), 22-6, 45-6; Taradel, *L'accusa del sangue*, 214-7.

writings,¹³⁶ but was more often ignored and sometimes even ridiculed by polemicists. The “truth” about ritual murder, wrote a Paduan clerical daily in the period of the debates surrounding the Beilis trial, had been revealed by the magistrates of Damascus; those of Rovigo had only unmasked the “trick” of a young peasant girl.¹³⁷ Rational argumentation, carried out in an apologetic key, was finally overwhelmed by a far more powerful mythologizing machine.

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¹³⁶ Corrado Guidetti, *Pro Judaeis. Riflessioni e documenti*, (Torino: Roux e Favale, 1884), 151, 333-51. On this author, a journalist close to the Jewish Community of Padua, see Luzzatto Voghera, *Il prezzo dell’eguaglianza*, 45.

¹³⁷ G.M., “Ancora sul delitto rituale degli ebrei. Ad un avvocato che ignora troppe cose,” *La Libertà. Quotidiano cattolico*, November 7, 1913. The article is a polemicized reply to the lawyer Aronne De Benedetti, author of a journalistic refutation of the blood libel. See Aronne De Benedetti, “Lettere al giornale “Il lavoro.” A proposito pel “delitto rituale” a Kiev,” in Id., *Conférenze. Epistole*, (Genova: Tipografia Sociale, 1915), 26-7. On the Beilis affair, see Robert Weinberg, *Blood Libel in Late Imperial Russia. The Ritual Murder Trial of Mendel Beilis*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014).