
T A N G E N C I E S

Italian Jewish Society and Torah during the Modern Age Notes for an Anthropological Perspective

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“We shall investigate nature and its founder, so that from the world and its multitude of things, as if by a ladder, with enlightened and instructed mind, we may be lifted to God, its maker. . .”
(Isaac Cardoso)

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THE FAMOUS Venetian rabbi and preacher Azariah Figo (1579–1647) wrote in his work *Binah le-Ittim* (Wisdom for the proper times) (Venice, 1648), a homiletic book containing seventy-five sermons for Shabbat and other celebrations of the Jewish calendar: “You have to know that our Holy Torah is not like the kind of sciences that depend on each other . . . Our Torah requires no science or study outside of itself, because everything is in it and everything comes from it. . .”¹

Comparing the astronomical knowledge of the Talmud, having the object of setting the religious feasts of the Jewish calendar, and the secular astronomy, which is involved in understanding the mysteries of the universe, Figo also observed:

It's therefore unrelated to the interests of the sages of Israel, because they follow paths that lead the soul to eternal

*happiness through immortality. That's the reason for which we were created, and not for something that isn't oriented to this purpose. It is for this reason that we have received from Him, the blessed Lord, the precept to calculate the cycles and the constellations, not to acquire this science in itself—so that we can know everything is above in the Heaven—but for everything that may descend through deeds on the Hearth . . .*²

Today, in the light of new scientific knowledge, the Bible presents a surprising anthropological background, because it is “not only the history of the Revelation,” but also the narrative of how the Revelation has developed and manifested itself along the historical-evolutionary path of the Jewish civilization, alongside the progressive construction of Jewish society and identity, both marked by a strong theophanic heritage since *Bereshit*.

Avoiding a forced paradigm of interpretation, we can say that inside the Torah there is a sort of “biological-cultural program,” established at the beginning of the individual Jewish life by the circumcision (*Brit milah*), which is the ritualized seal of the divine covenant with Abraham and also the instrument for a “genetic isolation” of Israel among other nations.³ The selective propagation of the Jewish people through the encouragement of fertility (as in the case of the levirate: Deut. 25: 5–6) confirms that the Mosaic Law was intended to protect the lives of the people who followed it. In this way the succeeding generations would be preserved by the Torah and at the same time they would be obliged to respect it.⁴ This concept has led to the social cohesion of the group, stemming those phenomena generated by the tendency to change, present in every historical society. However, the community, because of the assimilation occurred in the Diaspora, could not prevent the changes resulted in a further development. This event was an adaptation for survival also urged by the prophet Jeremiah (29: 4–7), in these words addressed to the exiled people in Babylon:

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses to dwell in; plant gardens, and eat their fruits. Take wives and beget sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters. There you must increase in number, not decrease. Promote the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you; pray for it to the Lord, for upon its welfare depends your own.

The adaptation to different contexts and the respect of the covenant with God governed the mechanisms of hybridization imposed by selective pressure, and regulated the Jewish assimilation into social and religious foreign worlds. According to the French philosopher and theologian Claude Tresmontant “bio-

logy speaks the language of creation,” and evolution is “the creation at the moment in which it happens.”⁵ The thread of creation appeared thus interwoven with the Torah’s narrative tradition, conceived as a multi-millennial “flow of messages” from God to mankind.⁶ These pieces of information/requirements are not only ethical, but also directed “to ensure man’s life,” since the Revelation is the “communication from God” of “a creative information to the created man.”⁷ Every creation from *Bereshit* is the result of a new life’s communication, transmitted across the generations (Ps. 78: 4–5): “We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children.”

This duty was strictly respected by Jewish culture during the modern age. The physician and philosopher Isaac Cardoso (1603/04–1683), who lived in the Ghetto of Verona during the 17th century, was the author of *Las Excelencias y las Calumnias de los Hebreos*, published in Amsterdam in 1679. In this work Cardoso defended the Jewish faith against the attacks of his enemies. He wrote about the Torah: “The Law begins with Bereshit and ends with Israel, as if this one was the intention and the purpose of the creation of the world, because in the Holy Law, the names, the letters and the vowels are full of deep mysteries. From the Hebrew letters, which contain great mysteries, you can obtain wonderful concepts.”⁸

In this statement we can see a sort of *generativity declaration of the biblical word*: *dabar* becomes life, creation, vital imagination, participation to God’s vision. Even in the rabbinic tradition we find the identification of the Jewish people with God—not ideal but real, experienced by the senses, including hearing through the voice.⁹ For instance, in the important work *Shenei Luhoth ha-Berith* (Two tables of the Covenant), R. Isaiah Horowitz (c. 1565–1630) reports a Talmudic judgment (*Chagigah*, 15b) in order to emphasize the centrality of the creative tradition: “the Holy One delivers the Torah through the mouth of all the rabbis.”¹⁰

Life and survival were granted by the Torah. The Leviticus and the Deuteronomy, for example, defined the *new decalogue* which could occur within the mechanisms of survival of the group, ensuring the observance of the precepts in the adoption of instruments for the cultural and social conservation, obviously never far from the influence of the external environment.

The duty of procreation, and therefore the participation of mankind to God’s creative design, is contained in the Talmud, in the words of Ben Azhai (2nd century AD), who notes that the loss of the procreative act is similar to the shedding of blood. It decreases the image of God, man being similar-looking to the

divinity (TB *Jevamòt*, 63b).¹¹ The *kohanim* had a duty established by the Torah (Num. 6, 22). According to the biblical formula, every day they had to bless the people, but with an exception: if they had caused the death of a person. A rabbinic *responsum* recently wondered if it was possible to bless people for a kohen doctor who had performed an abortion—not in one of the cases provided by the Jewish law. The answer is no, because the Torah is the “source of life and every blessing.” The physician used his knowledge to cause someone’s death, so he lost the “right-duty” to bless man, the *tzelem* (image) and *demut* (likeness) of God (Gen. 1: 26).¹²

The continuity of this *life-project* was made possible by two special conditions: the relationship with a transcendent and personal God, and the conception of monotheistic religion as an “operating system.” Thanks to the Jewish relationship with the “sacred” and “sacredness,” it is not possible to accept a definition such as that of “fossil society,” referring to the Jews, coined by the British historian Arnold Toynbee in the thirties of the twentieth century. The Jewish people, chosen as well as separate (*Kadosh*) from the “gentes,” “constantly reflected the image of a *living God*.” The Almighty could be the “ganz Andere” for the “Gentes,” but not the “wholly Other” for Israel, because the calling of Abraham (Gen. 12: 1–20) has built a dualistic relationship with God. So God had *personally* “participated to the development of history in terms of reciprocity with man.”¹³

According to a Jewish mystic interpretation, the return of the Jews to Eretz Israel from the Diaspora is an allegory of the return of the *Shekinah* (the divine presence) to God. From an archetypal point of view, this return corresponds to the union of God with the *Shekinah*, like a symbol which represents the metaphysical and transcendent dimension male/female. As Carl Gustav Jung said: “The symbols make possible the irrational union of opposites.” The “cabalistic symbol of the union of God with the *Shekinah*” becomes thus similar to the divine feminine principle “elevated to the level of the male one,” that is, the Mother to the level of the Father.¹⁴

The alliance/union with God itself originated through the patriarchs. The election/vocation from God was the first step towards Abraham’s progeny. If Moses was the “eponymous father of the people/state,” who gave the Jews the *nomos* transmitted by God, Abraham was the “eponymous father of the future lineage” (through the *genos*).¹⁵

Furthermore, the patriarchs seemed to be the founders of the arts, especially of the sciences of nature, or better—as we could say in a Foucauldian way—of the “representation and discourse” about it. Baruch (Benedictus) Nehemiah De Castro (1597–1684), doctor of medicine in Padua and a scientific authority of his time, in *Flagellum calumniantium seu Apologia* (Hamburg, 1631) wrote

that it was God who granted the Jews the art of medicine as a hereditary right: “Moses, the most famous of all legislators . . . was the one who laid the foundation of medicine as the most conspicuous of all arts . . . Solomon the wise . . . left an exhaustive history of healing plants. . .”¹⁶

Tradition and the Torah have ensured the cohesion of the group, through a mechanism which could be called “intra-conformism.” Its weakness could cause the extinction of the social and religious structure. Consequently, if selfishness prevailed in some members because of individualism, the group could be more vulnerable.¹⁷ In avoiding this possible event, the absolute respect for the Law “recalled the Jews to communitarian values and duties.”¹⁸ As it was noted by Erich Fromm, thanks to the loyalty to the Law or not, Judaism has experienced an encounter with the “social body” of the host peoples, and therefore its survival was based on the dual inclusion in and/or differentiation from them. Thus “despite the loss of the state, the territory and a profane language, Judaism has survived as kin group, joined in the continuity of a common destiny; this group has primarily focused its efforts and vitality in impregnating the social body with the religious idea of which it was custodian.”¹⁹

Since the second half of the 16th century the Jewish concentration/segregation facilitated in a certain way the development of mysticism and cabalistic studies (manifestations of the religion’s *operative knowledge*), in addition to reinforcing, through a cultural medium, some forms of socio-political autonomy.²⁰ The legal prerogatives were based on the Torah (or partially on the Roman-Christian *Jus commune*) and on the moral authority assigned to the rabbis. Therefore the Jewish ghetto constituted a significant socio-biological laboratory for observing the self-preservation mechanism of a minority that was socially weaker, but at the same time culturally very solid.

Louis Wirth wrote that although “the sociologist sees in the ghetto more than the experience of a people in a specific historical context,” we cannot ignore that it “represents a study of human nature,” revealing “the varied and subtle reasons that lead men to act as they act.”²¹ So, inside the ghetto, populated by an ethno-religious community founded on the observance of the Torah and Halakhah, it is possible to grasp more clearly “all those mechanisms that give rise to the human society,” such as “the kin selection that *homo sapiens* shares with all social organisms.”²²

Since the modern age, Jewishness, between secularism and religion, assimilation and preservation of identity, confirmed itself as the result of a unique historical experience—“a kind of *synthesis of the human condition*.” This is because homogeneous and at the same time different cultural experiences mingled together like in a sedimentation, to which the Bible testifies through the “narrative representations” of Jews and their history.²³



A portrait of JOSEPH SOLOMON DELMEDIGO,
from the frontispiece to his *Sefer Elim* (1629)

The philosophical concept of “plurality of worlds” was for example an issue of great debate in 17th century Jewish thought. It contrasted with the idea of a world ordered by the divine mind in its harmony and proportion inside a finite universe. For this reason the Jews feared that this new vision of the universe could put into discussion the Torah. Rabbi David Nieto (1654–1728), born in Venice, physician and later Jewish preacher at Livorno, successor of Solomon Ayllon as religious leader of the Portuguese Jews in London, dedicated an entire treatise, *De la Divina Providencia* (London, 1704), to the implications of the new science, saying however that its statement was not in contrast with the Torah.²⁴ Doctor Joseph Delmedigo (1591–1655), a physician and scientist who studied at Padua taking classes in astronomy with Galileo Galilei, in *Sefer Elim* (Amsterdam, 1629)²⁵ affirmed that “the world’s plurality leads ineluctably to a heightened appreciation of the Creator Himself.” Tobias Cohen (1652–1729), doctor in Padua, in his work *Ma’aseh Tuviyah* (Work of Tobias) (Venice, 1708), a training manual for physicians, supported some arguments in favor of this vision and others against it. Doctor Isaac Cardoso objected rather strongly the hypothesis of the existence of many worlds, because the existence of many creators would be impossible. So he affirmed: “Unus Deus unum mundum creavit.”²⁶

Furthermore, is it possible to compare the “autonomous” nature of the 20th century with the Providence of three centuries before? Concerning the contribution of Divine Providence, Delmedigo wrote in *Sefer ta’alumat hokhmah* (Book of the depths of wisdom) (Basel, 1629–1631)—a book significantly present in Spinoza’s library (Inventory, 1677: “30. Joseph del Medico abscondita sapientiae”): “Some philosophers thought that nature is equivalent to God himself because his works were wondrous in their eyes.” In his *Sefer Elim* he had moreover concluded that “Contemplating every one of [God’s] creatures leads man to recognize his exalted Creator and to praise the Master and Cause of everything is good, since ‘from our flesh, we shall see God’ (Job 19: 26) our Maker and glorify him since all of ‘His judgments are like the great deep’” (Ps. 36: 7).²⁷

From his point of view, Cardoso in *Philosophia libera* (Venice, 1673) described God as “a universal axiom of nature.”²⁸ And later on he stated: “We shall investigate nature and its founder, so that from the world and its multitude of things, as if by a ladder, with enlightened and instructed mind, we may be lifted to God, its maker; for his creatures are the ladder by which we ascend to God, the organ with which we praise God, and the school in which we learn God.”²⁹

In *Sefer Or Nogah*, a work by Joseph Hamiz (graduated from the medical school of Padua in 1624), who “turned from scientific to mystical studies”—as Ruderman wrote—, we have another demonstration of this perspective: “One must understand natural things in order to know what is beyond nature . . . for

one must look at heaven to see what is considerably higher than nature, that there exists a leader and organizer of nature regarding every particular thing.”³⁰

These positions were not an expression of pantheism or immanentism (as Nieto said), but rather the manifestations of the human faith, full of biblical wonder. For instance, in the dialogue between Simon and Reuven in *De la Divina Providencia*, the latter describes the position of the former as an expression of deism because he “believed that there was only one God but He didn’t trouble himself in the government of the world. They say that nature directs [this machine] and governs everything in its way . . . that God left the power of governing the world to a supposed universal nature as a prince who leaves the government to his minister.”³¹

The community’s institutions in the Italian ghettos during the modern age ensured within the “micro-marginal society” the bonds of solidarity that fitted the basic needs of its members and preserved the social peace.³² This social status was firmly built on reciprocity and altruism. As David P. Barasch writes:

*The theory of reciprocity suggests that altruism will characterize communities in proportion to their composition of individuals who know each other. To some extent, this should distinguish small towns from large cities. . . . Inhabitants of a small town would unlikely ignore a murder or step over a body on the sidewalk. In addition, the theory suggests tendencies for altruism in proportion to how sedentary the population is: the altruist has a reasonable expectation that his beneficiary will have the opportunity to reciprocate.*³³

We have to say that the itinerant Jewish condition was balanced by the loyalty to the ethical code of cohabitation.

An essay by Stephanie Siegmund on the life of Italian Jews in the ghettos offers to us interesting considerations on the traditional structures:

*Segregation, by urbanizing and concentrating Jews in large numbers, was the catalyst that led to the development of new associations and particular social spaces. . . . In the ghettos the Jews expressed their identity and solidarity as neighbors, as members of ethnic groups that maintained separate synagogues, as economic groups that contracted marriages only between them, as intellectual elites that attended medical schools and rabbinical academies, as members of confraternities, as men, as women. . . . In determining the true community of the ghetto was the proliferation of identities and subcommunities in combination with each other,³⁴ which transformed in a vital society what the state has created as a legal and material construction within a bounded space.*³⁵



The House of the Body, an allegorical image which compares the human organs to the divisions of the house. From TOBIAS COHEN's *Ma'aseh Toviyah* (1708) (Heb 7459.800, Houghton Library, Harvard University)

THIS WAS the case of the Jewish religious confraternities in the service of the poor. In 1554 Bologna hosted 11 of the 115 synagogues present on the territories of the Church. In 1555 (14 July) Pope Paul IV decided the construction of the ghetto (papal bull *Cum nimis absurdum*).³⁶ In 1566 Paul V ordered a series of restrictions to Jewish trade, and in 1569 it was decided to expel the Jews from the city (the bull *Hebraeorum gens*), which became definitive in 1593 under the reign of Clement VIII (the bull *Caeca et Obdurata*).³⁷ In 1546, in a more favorable climate, previous to this context, the Jewish community founded the Confraternity of the Solerti (Zealous), *Chevrat Nitzhaim*, which had three goals: studying the Torah, prayer and charity. In 1547 its internal regulations were revised and expanded. One of the items was the following: “In order to obey God we will cleanse ourselves and be holy. Since good deeds are done by good men, therefore, with God’s help, everyone attains merit for himself and for the public.”³⁸

In the regulations there is a constant reference to the Bible. Also in the regulation of 1547 it had been affirmed that the foundation of the confraternity must be written in the hearts of its members: “This shall be written down for the last generation who follows; and the people who shall be created shall praise the Lord” (Ps. 102: 19).³⁹ Furthermore, thanks to the study of the Torah by the Solerti, “from out of Bologna shall go forth the Torah, and the word of the Lord from *Chevrat Nitzharim*” (Paraphrase of Isaiah 2, 3).⁴⁰ The phrase derives from the familiar expression: “from out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the word of the Lord from Soncino,” referring to the *editio princeps* of the full Hebrew Bible printed in the Lombard village of Soncino (1488), situated between Cremona and Brescia, and to Bologna’s *editio princeps* of 1482. A similar expression was: “from out of Bari shall go forth the Torah, and the word of the Lord from Otranto.”⁴¹

Roberto Bonfil wrote that these regulations generally reflected the crystallization of socio-economic and cultural situations, as the attempt to find a compromise between conflicting tendencies. The Confraternities resembled *communities in progress*, “exclusive clubs” of the richest community members. They saw themselves as natural “leaders” of the group, “responsible in providing to their co-religionists services believed more urgent or more appropriate to their vision of the world and their abilities.”⁴²

So, did the ethical and moral biblical teachings represent an additional formula of compromise between conflicting tendencies?

Within the family the common bond was renewed and it “ensured the continuity of the group.”⁴³ Jewish tradition, codified in religious law, provides relevant information about it. Precise Talmudic regulations rule both individual and community life, as in the case of the levirate (Deut. 25: 5: “When brothers live together and one of them dies without a son, the widow of the deceased shall

not marry anyone outside the family; but her husband's brother shall go to her and perform the duty of a brother-in-law by marrying her"). Consequently, the *Chalitzah* appeared as an exception in Italian-Jewish society during the modern age. In a deed written at Messina in January 1415, Sambuca, a Jewish widow without children, and her husband's brother, Musha de Catania, declared to the Christian notary that they didn't want to apply the law of levirate. Musha stated that the woman wasn't young, and therefore she couldn't have any children. It's the only document of this kind from the archives of Sicily.⁴⁴

In conclusion, the historical vitality of the Jews from the earliest times to the present day seems to be the expression of a "cultural DNA," as remote as the conception of YHWH. The Torah, since the beginning, was at the foundation of the private and social life of every Jew, because it derives or, better, it *flows* from the vision of an active God who created the world, mankind and human knowledge. Rabbi Nieto noted that "the source of the sciences went out from us, and our holy Torah includes them all" (*Kuzari Helek Sheni*, London, 1714).⁴⁵ Furthermore he wrote (*Esh Dat*, London, 1715): "There is not a single creature . . . that does not show in some form of its constitution the impress of God."⁴⁶

Thanks to a daily imitation of God (Lev. 19: 1–2: The Lord said to Moses, "Speak to the whole Israelite community and tell them: be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy"), Judaism has to conform to the way of the Halakhah, the moral law, that is, the "path of precept." Every man, therefore, was able, through his loyalty and religious salvation, "to ensure the presence of the Torah in the world and within the group." The religious and social way of life represented the link between the individual and the community, providing through its forms "an important channel of communication and cooperation between its members." In ghetto life the traditional knowledge, the ethics and the rituals were directed "to reaffirm the loyalty of each member to the larger group and to the family." Thus, the Jewish society protected itself against the individualism of the species, *codifying its expressions*, religious life and material survival. In this way the Torah, and its interpretation in a specific context, also deceived the *selfish-gene strategies*.⁴⁷

In human individuality, at the basis of the social structure and of the social motivations to act, there is a wide range of needs. They have regulated the organization of life after the mechanism of survival defined the same needs during human evolution. The fear of death, of which man is aware for himself, for his relatives and for the rest of mankind, allowed him to survive and to develop a belief in eternal life.⁴⁸ Each religion, firmly built on a legal system of rules governing needs within an existential strategy, became authentically productive and shared.⁴⁹ This was also the truthful expression of the Mosaic Law in Judaism as a historical phenomenon.



Notes

1. Cited in Yosef H. Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto: Isaac Cardoso. A Study in Seventeenth-Century Marranism and Jewish Apologetics* (Washington: University Press, 1971) (Italian ed., Milan: Garzanti, 1991, 323). Rabbi Figo's book also includes some sermons based on *Avot*, and gives special attention to charity and education. This work became very popular among the Eastern-European Jews.
2. Cited in *ibid.*, 324
3. See Alberto Castaldini, "Evoluzione/Rivelazione: Per una antropologia della Torah," *Anuac 2* (2012), 77–86 (online) (<http://ojs.unica.it/index.php/anuac>).
4. See Charles D. Darlington, *The Evolution of Man and Society* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969) (Italian ed., Milan: Longanesi, 214 sqq.).
5. See Claude Tresmontant, *Les premiers éléments de la théologie* (Paris: OËIL, 1987) (Italian ed., Brescia: Queriniana, 1990, 26–27).
6. Castaldini, "Evoluzione/Rivelazione," 79. See also a passage (17, 9) of the Syrac, a book not accepted into the *Tanakh*: "He has set before them knowledge, a law of life as their inheritance" (Catholic version).
7. Tresmontant, 40.
8. Cited in Yerushalmi, 321.
9. See on this topic: Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988) (Chapter 8).
10. Cited in Gershom Scholem, *Über einige Grundbegriffe des Judentums* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970) (Italian ed. Genoa: Marietti, 1986, 100).
11. Cited in Alfredo M. Rabello, *Introduzione al diritto ebraico: Fonti, matrimonio e divorzio, bioetica* (Turin: Giappichelli, 2002), 229.
12. *Ibid.*, 228.
13. See Maurizio Mottolose, *Dio nel giudaismo rabbinico: Immagini e mito* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2010), 375–376; Castaldini, "Evoluzione/Rivelazione," 79.
14. Gustav Dreifuss, *Maschio e femmina li creò: L'amore e i suoi simboli nelle scritture ebraiche. Una prospettiva junghiana* (Florence: Giuntina, 1996), 24.
15. Castaldini, "Evoluzione/Rivelazione," 79.
16. Cited in David B. Ruderman, "The Impact of Science on Jewish Culture and Society in Venice," in *Gli Ebrei e Venezia secoli XIV–XVIII*, ed. Gaetano Cozzi (Milan: Edizioni Comunità, 1987), 432.
17. See Edmund O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975) (Italian ed., Bologna: Zanichelli, 1979, 568).
18. Castaldini, "Evoluzione/Rivelazione," 80.
19. See Erich Fromm, *Das jüdische Gesetz: Zur Soziologie des Diaspora-Judentums* (Weinheim–Basel: Beltz Verlag, 1989) (Italian ed., Milan: Rusconi, 1993, 11).
20. See Roberto Bonfil, *Gli Ebrei in Italia nell'epoca del Rinascimento* (Florence: Sansoni, 1991), 127–154; 185–200.
21. Louis Wirth, *The Ghetto* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1928) (Italian ed., Milan: Edizioni di Comunità, 1968, 14).

22. Peter L. Van den Berghe, in *Sociobiology and Human Nature: An Interdisciplinary Critique and Defense. Proceedings of a Conference Held at San Francisco State University on June 14–15, 1977*, eds. M. Gregory et al. (London: Jossey-Bass 1978) (Italian ed., Turin: Einaudi, 1980, 109). Castaldini, “Evoluzione/Rivelazione,” 81.
23. *Ibid.*, 80. See also A. Castaldini, *L'ipotesi mimetica: Contributo a una antropologia dell'ebraismo* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2001), 35–54.
24. See David B. Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 310–330.
25. This book was maybe present in Baruch Spinoza's library. Cf. Patrizia Pozzi, *Visione e parola: Un'interpretazione del concetto spinoziano di scientia intuitiva. Tra finito e infinito* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2012), 57.
26. Ruderman, “The Impact,” 437–438.
27. Cited in *ibid.*, 433.
28. *Ibid.*, 436–437.
29. *Ibid.*, 433.
30. Cited in *ibid.*
31. Cited in Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery*, 319.
32. Castaldini, “Evoluzione/Rivelazione,” 83.
33. David P. Barash, *Sociobiology and Behavior* (New York: Elsevier, 1977), 314.
34. We could say that was the sign of a true self-referential social system.
35. S. Siegmund, “La vita nei ghetti,” in *Gli Ebrei in Italia: Storia d'Italia. Annali IX*, ed. C. Vivanti, col. I (Turin: Einaudi, 1996), 892.
36. “Cum nimis absurdum et inconveniens existat ut iudaei, quos propria culpa perpetuae servituti submisit, sub praetextu quod pietas christiana illos receptet et eorum cohabitationem sustineat, christianis adeo sint ingrati, ut, eis pro gratia, contumelian reddant, et in eos, pro servitute, quam illis debent, dominatum vindicare procurent: nos, ad quorum notitiam nuper devenit eosdem iudaeos in alma Urbe nostra e nonnullis SRE civitatibus, terris et locis, in id insolentiae prorupisse, ut non solum mixtim cum christianis et prope eorum ecclesias, nulla intercedente habitus distincione, cohabitare, verum etiam domos in nobilioribus civitatum, terrarum et locorum, in quibus degunt, vicis et plateis conducere, et bona stabilia comparare et possidere. . . § 1. Volentes in priemissis, quantum cum Deo possumus, salubriter providere, hac nostra perpetuo valitura constitutione sancimus quod de cetero perpetuis futuris temporibus, tam in Urbe quam in quibusvis aliis ipsius Romanae Ecclesia civitatibus, terris et locis, iudaei omnes in uno et eodem, ac si ille capax non fuerit, in duobus aut tribus vel tot quot satis sint, contiguus et ab habitationibus christianorum penitus seiunctis, per nos in Urbe et per magistratus nostros in aliis civitatibus, terris et locis praedictis designandis vicis, ad quos unicus tantum ingressus pateat, et quibus solum unicus exitus detur, omnino habitent. § 2. Et in singulis civitatibus, terris et locis in quibus habitaverint, unicam tantum synagogam in loco solito habeant, nec aliam de novo construere, aut bona immobilia possidere possint. Quinimmo omnes eorum synagogas, praeter unam tantum, demoliri et devastare. Ac bona immobilia, qua ad praesens possident, infra tempus eis per ipsos magistratus praesignandum, christianis vendere” (*Bullarium Romanum*, Aloysius Tomassetti,

Augustae Taurinorum, Seb. Franco, H. Fory et Henrico Dalmazzo editoribus, 1857–1872, vol. 6, 498–500).

37. See on the topic: Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli, *Verso l'epilogo di una convivenza: Gli ebrei a Bologna nel XVI secolo* (Florence: La Giuntina, 1996).
38. M. Perani and B. Rivlin, eds., *Vita religiosa ebraica a Bologna nel Cinquecento: Gli statuti della Confraternita dei Solerti* (Florence: La Giuntina, 2000), 77.
39. *Ibid.*, 93.
40. *Ibid.*, 118.
41. *Ibid.*, 62 and n.
42. *Ibid.*, 8 (preface by R. Bonfil).
43. Castaldini, “Evoluzione/Rivelazione,” 82.
44. See Viviana Mulè, “Nuovi documenti sulle comunità ebraiche della Sicilia orientale: Messina, Catania, Siracusa,” *Materia Giudaica* 9/1–2, (2004): 240.
45. Cited in Ruderman, “The Impact,” 431.
46. *Ibid.*, 433.
47. Castaldini, “Evoluzione/Rivelazione,” 85. For a sociological point of view about biological determinism and social mechanisms, see Sabino Acquaviva, *La strategia del gene: Bisogni e sistema sociale* (Rome–Bari: Laterza, 1995).
48. *Ibid.*, 96–99.
49. *Ibid.*, 100–101. See also Castaldini, *L'ipotesi mimetica*, 51–52.

Abstract

Italian Jewish Society and Torah during the Modern Age:
Notes for an Anthropological Perspective

The biblical narration and the Talmudic teachings have a sociobiological and anthropological background. For this reason the Torah and Halakhah can be seen as a sort of representation of the historical-evolutionary path of the Jewish people and society, as well as of the construction of Jewish identity. The cultural and theological debate in the Jewish Italian community during the 17th–18th centuries, and the impact of a new vision of Nature on God's image, give us an original perspective on this topic.

Keywords

Bible, science, Jewish society, rationalism, ghetto, Diaspora, Italy