

Emanuele D'Antonio, *La società udinese e gli ebrei fra la Restaurazione e l'età unitaria. Mondi cattolici, emancipazione e integrazione della minoranza ebraica a Udine 1830-1866/70* (Udine: Istituto Pio Paschini per la Storia della Chiesa in Friuli, 2012), pp. 284.

by Carlotta Ferrara degli Uberti

This very good work by Emanuele D'Antonio has not received the attention it deserves. It is not a mere analysis of local dynamics. On the contrary, the volume is a good example of how the accurate reconstruction of a specific scenario can shed light on broad methodological and interpretative issues. Moreover, it adds an important piece to the history of Italian Jewry/ies in the pre-Emancipation and pre-Unification period, and it does so in a moment when Italian Jewish scholarship is certainly not flourishing (at least when the nineteenth century is concerned). After two/three very productive decades, begun in the late 1980s, the Italian debate has come to a point of stagnation, where only Fascism and the racial persecution seem to attract some interest. I am pleased that we can now add this book to the not very long list of in-depth studies of Jewish communities in nineteenth century Italy (pre- and post-Unification). This list is made of a set of works very varied in terms of chronology, methodology, sources, scholarly value, thus not easily comparable with one another. Nonetheless, every addition is welcome.

The book is divided in two parts, dedicated respectively to *La Chiesa udinese e gli ebrei fra l'età della Restaurazione e l'Unità* [The Church of Udine and the Jews between the age of the Restoration and the Unification] (pp. 39-150) and *La società udinese e la "questione ebraica" 1848-1866* [Civil society and the "Jewish question" in Udine 1848-1866] (pp. 151-233). Brief conclusions (pp. 235-237), an appendix (pp. 239-247), a few images and a detailed bibliography close the book, that is prefaced by Maddalena Del Bianco Cotrozzi (pp. 13-19). The periodization frames forty years when the Jewish presence in Udine can be considered relevant in demographic, social, economic and cultural terms. The annexation of the Veneto to the Kingdom of Italy in 1866 represented a turning point: the Jews were granted full legal emancipation and a new phase opened for the Catholics of Friuli, that changed their «traits, their social base, their political and religious positions»¹ (p. 35).

¹ Translations from the book are mine.

The point of departure of the analysis is presented in the first page, and is, in its simplicity, relatively new: the study of the relation between the majority society and the Jews in Udine “requires a focus on Catholicism” (p. 23). This statement is based on the idea that until the 1860s “in Udine the great majority of society sees Catholicism as a pillar of the collective — both “Italian” and local — identity” (pp. 23-24). This assumption develops into a reconstruction of the dynamic relation between the attitude of the local Church towards Judaism/the Jews, intended both as a socio-economic reality and as a theoretical/ideological opponent, and the integration of the minority in the life of the city. D’Antonio very rightly reminds us that the Church is not a monolithic entity but a complex structure whose ideologies and practices evolve with time, and that there is a dialectical relationship between the centre (Rome) and the periphery/ies. Local Churches need to negotiate their operative practices with the Papacy, but first and foremost with their specific socio-economic and cultural environments and with political authorities, which in the case of Udine meant Venice, Vienna and later the Italian government. Throughout the text, the author manages to effectively link these dynamics to the evolving relationship between the Church and the Jews, reading the latter as one of the possible keys to understand Catholic reactions to modernity. He accomplishes this task by analyzing a series of issues (conversions and the debates on the emancipation among others) and specific episodes. In this review, I chose to focus on a few examples to give an idea of the book’s methodology, strengths and weaknesses.

After the Restoration, Austrian authorities pursued their policy of subjecting ecclesiastical institutions to the control of civil power, and of tolerating non-Catholics and non-Christians. In agreement with such a policy, the Venetian government decided to maintain civil marriage: one of the most important symbols of a new balance between civil and religious power, that was met with great hostility by the clergy in Udine. D’Antonio unfortunately does not expand on this point, but I think that an in-depth analysis and comparison between Catholic and Jewish reactions to this decision would be illuminating. Conversions and conversionism — a different but by no means less important topic — are on the contrary studied and used to highlight the changes in the relationships between Rome and the local Church, between the Udinese clergy and the Jews. D’Antonio does not limit his analysis to official statements, very aware that practices are often more complex and nuanced than public declarations. In the first part of the timeframe considered the clergy of Udine — always a supporter of a strict separation between Catholic and Jewish societies and ferociously disappointed by the policy of toleration adopted by Austrian

authorities even after the Restoration — did nonetheless allow neophytes to keep their Jewish surnames and to stay with their Jewish family even after baptism. These practices have not been adequately studied by a historiography that, when considering conversions, has focused mostly on separations, lacerations, and anti-Semitism. D’Antonio states that at the time the integration of the Jews in the majority society was deemed by the clergy to offer «ample proof of their moral integrity» (p. 136): a convincing argument, but one that would have benefited from further development because it highlights a striking contradiction between official positions and practices. He concludes that overall «the Church of Udine during the period of the Restoration was neither a medium of anti-Jewish hostility, nor a relevant obstacle to the integration of the Jews» (p. 66). For «reasons of political and social opportunity» (p. 67), it did not discourage the formation of inter-religious networks among members of the urban bourgeoisie. The Jewish élite, after all, took active part in the economic and social life of the city, and did not hesitate to support Catholic philanthropic associations and to be involved in various initiatives led by Catholic institutions. The failure of the brief revolutionary interlude of 1848 resulted in the decline of the neo-Guelph movement and in the condemnation, on the part of the clergy of Veneto, of Austrian emancipationist policies (see decrees 25 April 1848 and 4 March 1849). Afterwards, Catholic conversionist activities underwent a profound change, according to D’Antonio. Once a very private occasion, the religious ritual became increasingly public, part of the fight brought by a weakened Church against social and political modernity. Analyzing the local Catholic periodicals and reading them in the context of the most influential Catholic publications — such as “La Civiltà Cattolica” — the author highlights the radicalization of anti-Jewish rhetoric after the Unification of Italy, and more so after the conquest of Rome in 1870. The imagined Jew evolves into an intrinsically and immutably negative figure, whose evil characteristics inhibit the salvific and regenerative power of conversion.

At the level of social interactions, the official hostility between the Church and the Jews did not prevent individual clergymen from building or maintaining very close connections to individual Jews, typically members of the urban bourgeoisie with whom they formed long-lasting collaborations in fostering philanthropic activities. In other instances, controversies opposing bourgeois Jews and the local Church could generate an inter-religious solidarity between Jewish and non-Jewish members of the local élite, especially when the defence of private property was concerned. I am thinking in particular of a case described by D’Antonio (pp. 80-97) and regarding the Venturas, a Jewish family that in 1836 purchased a villa

in Moruzzo, in the vicinities of Udine. The property comprised of a small church: a Catholic church had from that moment a Jewish owner. In the debate and legal battle that followed, the Venturas managed to «mobilize the solidarity of their peers, even Catholics, against the ecclesiastical institutions” (p. 92). This kind of solidarity was nourished by a shared way of life, and by a familiarity built through the daily encounters in the same *salons*, circles and theatres. Through the analysis of specific episodes, we are presented with a very vivid picture of the complexity of the minority/majority interactions, and we are confronted with the necessity to rethink (once again) the categories of emancipation and integration.

In the context of this analytical framework, the chapter about an alleged case of ritual murder is particularly relevant (pp. 187-208). In June 1855 a peasant woman from Badia Polesine declared that she had been kidnapped by a Jewish merchant together with a girl, that they had been repeatedly tortured and their blood drawn multiple times, and that only the intervention of a Christian servant had saved them from certain death. The Jewish merchant was put to trial but declared completely innocent, while his accuser was condemned for her false accusations. On the one hand, this episode shows that the public discussion of the case in a civil tribunal allowed a rationalization of the event and guaranteed justice, but on the other hand it can be considered as the proof of how widespread the myth of ritual murder was in that time and place. To add a further layer of analysis, D’Antonio offers an interesting collection of various sources, mostly literary, that contain references connected to the blood libel imagery.

The research behind this volume is undoubtedly very rich and multi-layered, supported by a wide and varied range of sources, both archival and printed, and by a thorough knowledge of the relevant historiography. A more explicit conceptualization of the author’s interpretative stance, in dialogue with the Italian and international debate, is the only missing element in an otherwise valid contribution to the scholarship on Italian Jewry between the Restoration, the Risorgimento and national Unification.

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