

**An Italian Journey (1)**  
**by S. Kirschstein**

*Kirschstein S.[aly]: Eine italienische Reise (1), in: Menorah. Jüdisches Familienblatt für Wissenschaft, Kunst und Literatur, vol. 7, no. 1 (January 1929), pp. 50–62*

Approximately 42,000 Jews live in Italy; with an overall population of over 40,000,000, they constitute one tenth of the population.

When in March of last year I wished to travel with my wife to Italy, all I knew about my brothers in faith of this country was what one had learned about the general history of countries and peoples; I knew from books on the history of culture and the arts and from travel books that one had to have seen its wonderful nature, the antique buildings, the art works on streets and squares and in museums in Milano, Venice, Florence, Rome, Naples. Yet, no literature on the Jews of Italy to speak of exists, and the little one finds in Graetz: *Geschichte der Juden*; in Berliner: *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Juden in Italien* and *Geschichte der Juden in Rom*, and recently in Vogelstein-Rieger: *Geschichte der Juden in Rom* is inadequate for the present day, and the little Cassuto and Blumstein have written is in Italian and thus hardly relevant for Jews outside of Italy. A short overview is provided by Prof. Dr. Ermano Löwinoohn [sic!], Rome, on the Jews in Italy. (He is a brother of Ms. Henriette Mai-Berlin, who is preeminently active in the Jewish women's movement, and a native of Germany.)

This was my equipment on the Italian journey. I was not at risk of missing Maria della Grazie, anything in the Uffizi, in the Palazzo Medici, and in the Palazzo Pitti. All this was mentioned in the Baedeker, with or without \*. Even the plain fact of a synagogue in Florence and Turin is mentioned in the Baedeker as is the existence of the Ghetto Vecchio and Nuovo in Venice, otherwise Baedeker does not know anything about the Jews in Italy, and I had to set out on a discovery journey as if in an uncharted country in the African wilderness.

And yet, I knew that Jews have been living in Italy for over 2,000 years and that their traces, one might assume, could not disappear in eons. After all, they have provided this country of their soul with direction, they, too, have put their mark on the culture of this country despite the Huns, Mongols, Lombards, and they or at least their followers have smashed the deities of the Romans and brought them the "divine teachings," the religion of monotheism, and given them the Bible.

III. page 51: Hannukah candelabrum, Italian 17th and 18th century

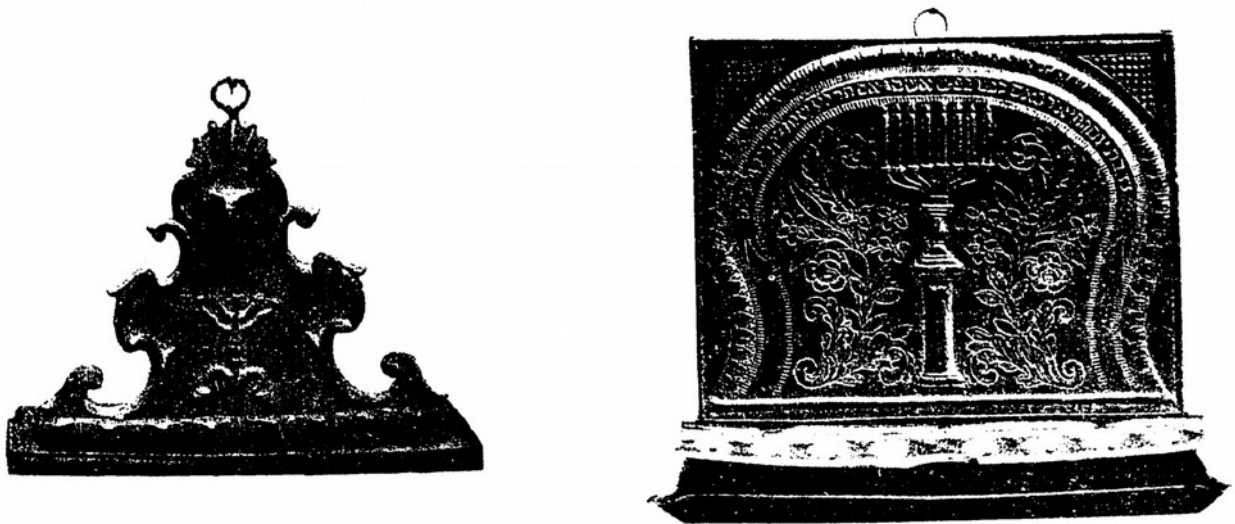
I wanted to get to know the remains of this great past and the descendants of those Jews from Palestine, Alexandria, and Babylonia.

Already before the Common Era, one to two hundred years previously, Jews have been residing in Rome, in Italy. However, only after the victories of the Romans over Judaea in 63 were they brought en masse to the capital, and the triumphal arch in Rome (I have not been to Rome) is a vivid testimony to how our ancestors were received by the Romans at the time. In the first century CE, the Jewish community that soon formed following their release after having been brought to Rome as slaves, was approximately as large as in 1925, approximately 10,000 souls; and already Cicero was apparently able to talk in his oration "Pro Flacco," which he gave in the year 69, about the number and power of Jews. Based on rather plausibly transmitted information, the Jews in Rome and also in other settlements in Italy, as long as Christianity had not come to power, were able at the time to unimpededly carry out their religious activities, build synagogues, and even collect money on behalf of the firstlings and send it to Jerusalem in support of the Temple. They were allowed, as especially Flavius Josephus is able to prove with the help of records and edicts, to organize themselves as a corporate body and gather for the purpose of exercising their cult.

Within the scope of my remarks, I have no reason to elaborate in greater detail on the political status

of the Jews at the time, on their expulsion in the course of the first centuries, on the oppression and persecution to which they were subjected, on the separation between Jews and Christians in the Roman Empire as it was gradually occurring. The Romans' fight against the Christians was more severe since this was a religious conflict; the Jews, as Tacitus reports, were viewed as the Jewish nation, and their subjugation as such tempered the fight against them. Yet, nothing much, be it on the inner life of the Jews at the time or on the communities, can be found in Jewish or Roman writings that could provide information and convey historic knowledge. Only the inscriptions on Rome's Jewish tombs provide quite significant contributions to the history of the time; the inscriptions of approximately 150 tombs have been deciphered; it was possible to identify name and age of the deceased and partially their profession as well. Besides a special obituary that emphasizes the favorable qualities of the deceased, one finds illustrations of the shofar, lulav, etrog, oil vessels, particularly often lampstands and palm leaves, bird and beehive; the inscriptions are occasionally in Greek, often in Latin with Greek characters, mostly with Latin characters. Not a single inscription is extant in Hebrew, a fact that is highly indicative of the Jews' attitude at the time toward Roman culture.

On the way to Milano, I was able to let the subsequent thousand years pass by in my mind, scant are the reports about this period. Goths and Vandals wreaked havoc in the 4th and 5th century, and not even the laments of a Roman have been transmitted to us, so dreadful were the destructions in these terrible times. It seems that under the Ostrogoths and Lombards, Jews fared somewhat better: while Gùdemann reports that Italy's provinces in the 5th and 6th century are destroyed and that in this time one does not even find complete knowledge of the Holy Scripture, the information transmitted from the 9th, 10th, and 11th century is more abundant. The relationship between Jews and Christians seemed to be not unfavorable, and in Lucca, in Milano, in Pavia and Pisa, centers of Jewish scholarship were established that were also able to influence French and German Jews. After all, at the time, the Jews in Rome were permitted to participate in



**Hannukah candelabra, Italian 18th century**

papal coronations along with other religious communities and cults while carrying their Torah scrolls; and it is indicative of the good relations among the religious communities when the records attest that in 1190, Pope Clement III decreed: "Nobody should break into the Jews' God's acre or excavate their buried corpses for money." (If only there was a pope also today who would issue a decree against the desecration of cemeteries.) In any case, it is notable that around this time of tomb desecrations, Nathan Ben Yechiel introduced the shrouds since this simple burial cloth would render the spoliation of the graves unprofitable.

It seems that the Jews in Italy were spared the horrors of the crusades: scholarship and literary activity found greater recognition, and the Jew Emanuel Ben Salomo, poet and exegete, could pride himself on his intimate friendship with Dante.

Particularly in the commercial towns, Jews attained increasing prosperity, wealth, power and influence. The immigration of those expelled from Spain and Portugal—they had brought with them scholarship and high culture—contributed to the Jewish communities' overall rise in intellectual life.

When Benjamin di Tudela traveled from Lucca to Rome—at the time, this was a six-day journey—he reports “that approximately 200 Jewish families stand in such high esteem there that they do not pay taxes, several of them are officials of Pope Alexander who is at the head of the entire religion of Edom. And here, there are great sages among the Jews themselves, at the top Reb Daniel and Reb Yehiel, who is an official of the pope and manages his household and assets. He is the son of Reb Nathan who has authored the book *Arukh* and its commentary, and there is Reb Salamo Ben Menachem who is the head of the academy. Princes and popes retain Jewish personal physicians, in Rome, in Venice, Bologna, Ferrara, Padua, Ancona, probably thanks to their proficiency, but also since they were not worried that they might engage in poisoning them, which at the time was a popular weapon of political parties.”

Since the Jews who had been expelled from Spain and Portugal not only escaped to Northern Italy and to the coastal towns but also to Turkey, which at the time was among the most powerful empires so that in Salonica one of the wealthiest and most influential Jewish communities came into existence, almost the entire Levantine trade passed into the hands of the Jews, which enabled the emergence of strong Jewish communities in Venice, Bologna, Senegalia [sic!], in Ravenna, Ancona, Rimini, who accrued besides great wealth also political power.

Alongside this plenitude of power, alongside the flourishing of the sciences and schools of scholarship, the stakes were ablaze, the prisons filled with Marranos persecuted because of their faith, and thousands sent as martyrs to their death; nevertheless, the terrible Middle Ages had been overcome, a new era dawned, and at its gates we again find, like at the start of today's time reckoning, the intellectuality of this country's Jewry. Even under the most terrible oppression, Torah and Talmud had found the love, work, and interpretation of the best of our tribe. And when the reality of existence poured all its terrors, as in Dante's Hell, over the Chosen People, they found refuge in mysticism, the Zohar, and Kabbalah, which created for them the divinity of a new and very own transcendence over the misery of this world.

A new era had begun. The art of book printing had been invented, and I was equipped with a register of all sites where Jews practiced this new art, the “divine art,” to be able to carry anew the Torah into the world, with their former ardor and their unabated fervency. Hebrew books were printed in Mantua, Sonzino, Brescia, in Fano, Pesaro, in Genova, Venice, Rimini, Bologna, Ferrara, Sabionetta, Cremona, Padua, Verona, Livorno, Florence, from 1463 [?] 1550, and already in the first decade of the 16th century, the printing of the first complete Talmud edition begun in Venice.

In these places, I was certain to still find this ancient Jewry. How stalwart are the 40,000 Jews who live in Italy today as loyal sons and grandsons of a great past?!

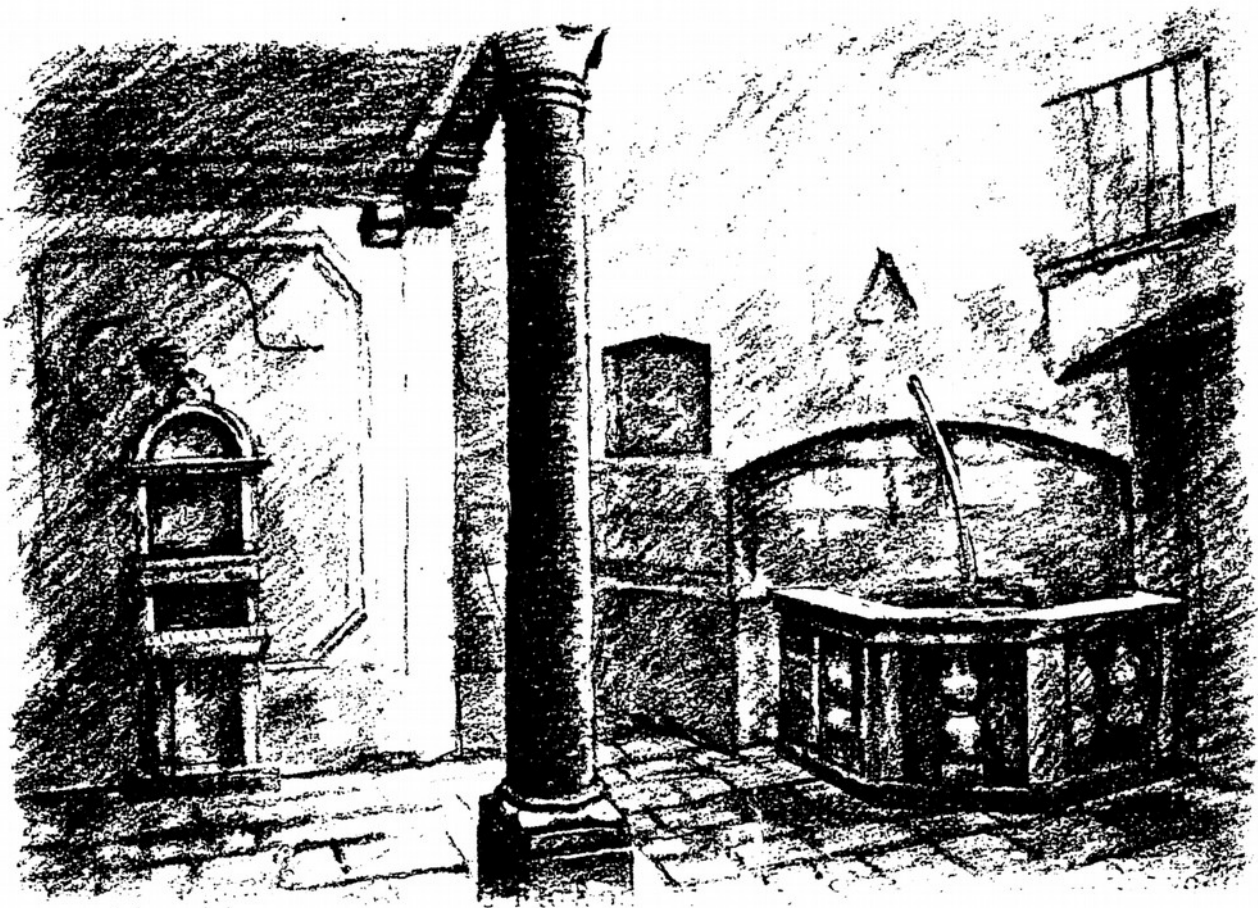
Our train continuously moved toward the southern spring, the snow-covered giants of the Swiss mountains, the valleys resplendent in their budding green with their rivers and creeks passing by us in eternal beauty; the proudly towering might of the Gotthard Massif has been overcome by human hands and the Alpine world of Northern Italy opened up before our eyes. How often in two millennia have our brothers in faith migrated along this path in deepest distress, expelled from their ancestors' dwellings, chased away because of religious hatred and self-interest. How often have they migrated from South to North and from North to South along this path as economic trailblazers, as carriers of spirituality, as the nations' teachers of God's majesty.

Milano. A childhood dream fulfilled. The Cathedral, the radiant, luminiferous, the white-marbled, resplendent with its spires and pinnacles, built hundreds of years ago. Thousands of individuals have dedicated their life's work to this divine work of art, to serve humans' religious notion that has been effective for thousands of years. How differently do I look at it today from the time of my dreams when I had just started contemplating; Moses and Aaron greet me, all the prophets, alechem shalom, who have led and guided Israel on the way through the desert of its existence were memorialized here, a memorial that the Jews have carried solely in their heart. Through the portal awash with light, we entered into the semi-darkness of the house of worship, and from the depth of the looming vault, the murmuring mysticism of the era of its construction arose. And above us, through the story-telling panes, can be seen the flashing and beaming of heaven's light that is drawn to the magic gold the soaring cross projects into the darkness. And hanging in its spread-out arms was the Jew of Nazareth whom the Romans crucified because of his faith and whom they subsequently turned into their God. Oh, he was not to be the last one Rome and this country's children and grandchildren would send prematurely to eternity for the sake of God. Untold droves of brethren in faith and tribal kinsmen of that crucified man have burned at the stake, bled to death in torment like him on behalf of that same teaching's sublimeness—his sacrifice could not save the deeply faithful, his death has failed to bring pure love to humankind and yet, he did not die in vain. There, in the chapel rests his corpse from white marble, pallid, his eyes defunct, and bent over him his mother with torn eyes, yet inspired hands raised toward the Heavenly Father. Like this, myriads of Jewish mothers have lain over the corpses of their children and still remained stalwart in their faith.

This was my first experience as a Jew in Italy.

In the evening, we received guests at the hotel: a fellow lodge member, Dr. B., former president of the Ottoman lodge, who has been living in Milano for years and to whom I had a recommendation from the Grand Lodge, Professor C., and a friend of the latter. We talked about the Jews in Italy, about the freedom they enjoy in this country, about their equality with all the other citizens of this country. The special status they have here as opposed to that in other countries is partially based on their numerical relationship to the Christian population. As I already noted at the beginning of my remarks, they constitute in the entire country only one-tenth percent of the total population. A statistical assessment according to religious confession is difficult since it was not obligatory to reply to this question in past censuses, and many have availed themselves of this freedom by leaving the relevant rubric on the census form blank. If one omits all those who do not observe their Jewish religion, one could subtract at least 10,000. Abolition of the ghettos brought Jews not only personal freedom, political, economic, social freedom, but also the freedom to sever their religious ties from those with whom they had been connected in the ghetto. A large number of communities with previously animated Jewish spiritual life have ceased to be. In many places they march toward certain decay; and also in those larger cities where there are still big communities and synagogues of yore, interest and concern is constantly waning.

In Milano there are 900,000 inhabitants, approximately 4,000 Jews and of them, almost 3,000 have no idea what's what in Judaism. After all, Milano has ceased to be a Jewish center ever since the expulsion of the Jews from Lombardy, since the times of Spanish hegemony in Italy. Here, tradition seems to be definitely absent, missing here are—this found clear expression in our conversation—leaders. "If we had personalities such as Prof. Elbogen like you have in Berlin"—in Italy, this scholar in particular is spoken of with enthusiasm. My guests' great hope is Zionism.



Front yard of the Scuola Spagnuola in Padua

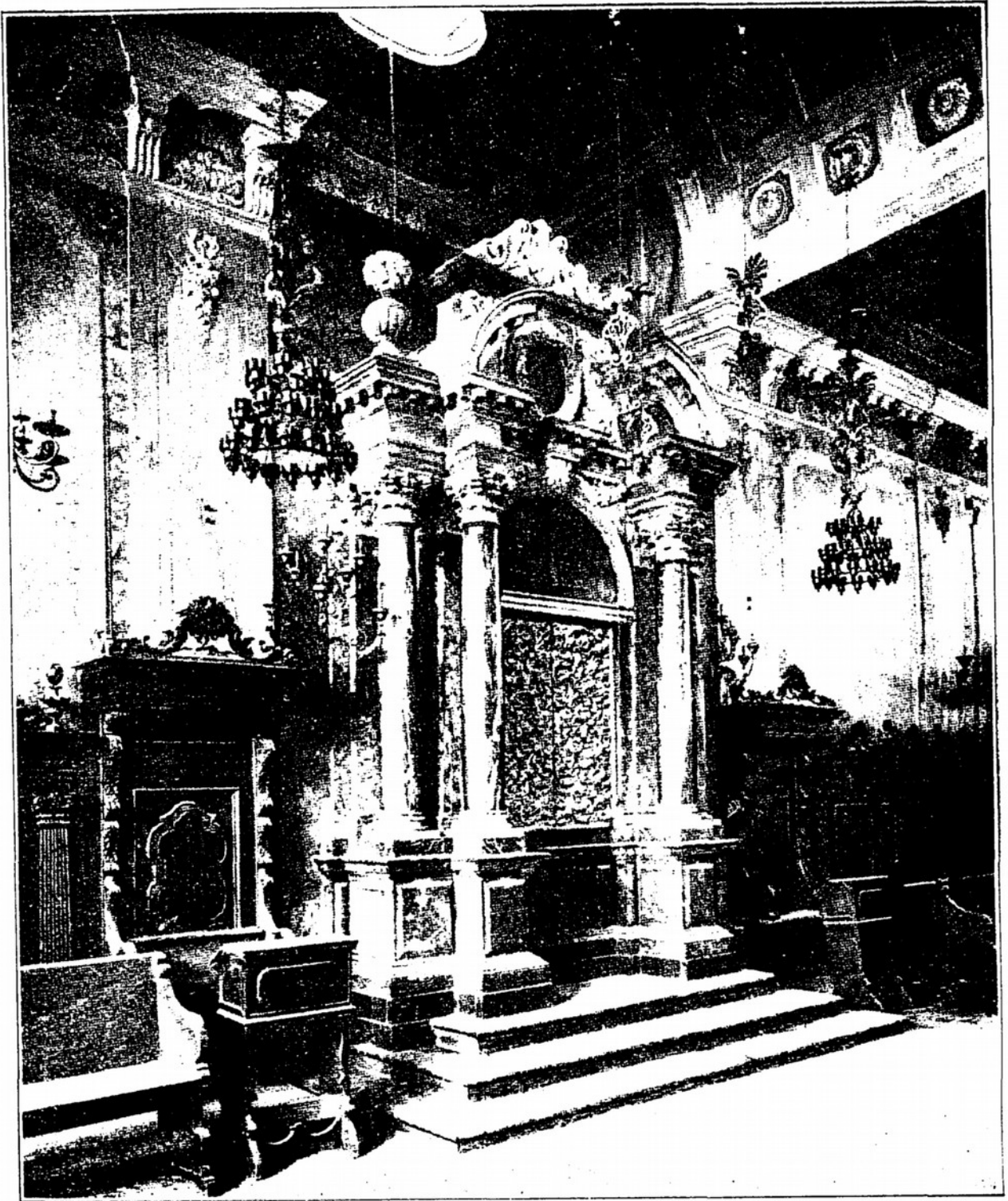
The next morning I visited the synagogue or rather the “Tempio Israelitico.” Something like the Fasanenstraße Synagogue: here too, the spirit of modern Jewry. Esthetic prayer service; nothing was to be found from the old Jewry; unfortunately, I was short of time and unable to work more thoroughly. We still had to visit several churches and museums, had to go see Leonardo da Vinci... Even if I hadn't brought any of my possessions to Italy, this image “The Last Supper” by Leonardo da Vinci, this was my spiritual possession. Each Seder eve I have experienced until now, this image has been before my eyes; and in the old Haggadoth, especially in the Amsterdam edition, these old Jews are sitting in like manner around the table, and the Passover lamb is in the center, and the unleavened breads and the cups of wine in front of the men, and they talk about God's deeds and about God's word—and about freedom. And already the sofrim must have painted such pictures in the old Haggadoth since after Leonardo's Last Supper, every Jew would have considered it a desecration to have this image in the Passover book, and the others would have considered it blasphemous had a sofer figuratively imitated the gathering of the disciples. And now we were standing in this old empty room that looked like a barn, yes, that barn where this Jewish child is supposed to have been born, and on the wall of the cross, a divinely gifted man had painted humankind's warning: thirteen individuals around the Passover table, for the last time before setting out to the promised land of freedom. Two marked men in this circle, one walking toward death on behalf of humankind, the other toward eternal life—in common parlance, he is called the “Eternal Jew.”

Toward evening we arrived in Padua. Padua is an old, quiet city. For a while, we still ambulated in the clean and peaceful streets; here on the main street, the streets and buildings are not a reflection of a city of 90,000 inhabitants. Neither do they show its wealth. After all, this is, supposedly, the country's wealthiest city besides Rome. Nine hundred Jews live in Padua; this means that both in Rome as well as here, they constitute one percent of the population instead of the countrywide percentage of one-tenth percent. Could it be that this is the reason Rome and Padua are among the country's wealthiest cities?

The following morning we went to the synagogue. On the way there, we visited the university; in the front halls, at the stair walls, and in the auditorium (a splendid room from the 15th century), thousands and thousands of coats of arms of those who had studied here over the course of the centuries, among them numerous German names. Might the Jews who have erstwhile attended this university also have their coats of arms displayed here? I owned a Haggadah, bound in parchment, a doctoral diploma for the Hebrew Emanuel Heifron, Padua 1786. We then visited the Madonna del Arena Chapel with Giotto's frescoes telling Joshua of Nazareth's background story, without interruption Old and New Testament—without interruption where the Old ended and the New began.

Then we went through lanes and narrow alleys past several second-hand dealers—we addressed one, he was the right one—he became our guide to the old “Tempio Israelitico.”

Not far from his store, the old man stopped in front of a house that outwardly did not particularly differ from other buildings on this street. An old, beautiful door from carved wood, a wide flight of stairs leading to the first floor. A moderately large, very high room, the “Scuola Italiana,” the walls covered with heavy, dark, wooden panels, the ceiling wood-paneled, the middle part expanded into a barrel vault interrupted at the center by a circular cupola, with windows that provide women with a scant view of the synagogue.



THE SCUOLA ITALIANA IN PADUA  
Torah ark and chairs for rabbi and hazzan



Elsewhere, upon entering a synagogue, we are used to perceive the Holy of Holies, the Aron HaKodesh, opposite the entrance; here, however, it is located on the right side wall. It is a magnificent one, from the 16th century, from massive dark timbers, abundantly coronated columns, without a curtain in front of the Ark, but with doors featuring gilt-plated metal inserts, on the arch above the door, the Tablets of the Law with gilt-plated inscription. On both sides of the structure there are abundantly carved stalls, also made solely from dark wood; first, the indeed splendidly decorated seat for the rabbi and on the other side, an equal one for the hazzan. On the side wall facing the Aron HaKodesh, entirely different from the way we are used to have in our synagogues, there is a far-projecting structure with columns from the same wood, to which ten-step staircases are leading up, the Almemor [reading desk], where the hazzan conducts his service and the Torah is read. Here, too, the stalls for the community members are adjacent to the structure.

Yet, no Torah in the Holy Ark, the doors demolished, most old candelabra broken, a large part of the stalls vandalized—an image of destruction in this holy room.

A small pogrom had taken place here several weeks ago, thus our guide reported under utmost confidentiality. Fascist students had come to the Jewish quarter, broken into the synagogue, and caused this devastation. “Oh, our Italians are not anti-Jewish, Romanian students have incited them and brought them here, the government intervened immediately and expelled the offenders from the university, from Padua.”

From the same 16th-century period is the Scuola Spagnuola, which we visited afterward. In the courtyard a stone cistern, certainly even one or two centuries older, in the column-supported open front hall on the right wall there is a wash basin made from stone. Through this hall, we entered the house of worship. Here, too, the arrangement of the Aron HaKodesh and Almemor is the same as at the Italian temple; copious architectural structures assembled from the finest types of timber, with delicate intarsia, with the luscious colors of the centuries-old material. The synagogue is no longer in use, for four centuries a rallying point of religious devotion, now abandoned, nothing but a testimony of vanished splendor.

At the great synagogue of the Scuola Tedesca (the German) in Padua, the Jewish community’s wealth has an even stronger impact than at the Spanish and Italian.

The Aron HaKodesh with sculptural ornaments on its stone ark, with scrollwork and pendants, with its pillars and columns, with silver crowns, lamps and candelabra, with sumptuous curtains, gold with stone-studded embroideries and with the most superb, artistically executed inscriptions on old fabrics—all this has an all the more overwhelming effect as one does not expect such luxuriant an interior behind the simple façade of the external building; the numerous probably one meter long lights [?] in the candelabra, grouped in their abundance around the hazzan’s desk, reinforce the impression of a strong emulation of church altar furnishings.

I had not yet seen anything of the precious manuscripts of the Jews of yore and of the prints from the old printing houses; some still remain in the archives and definitely many more are in libraries; much is still undiscovered beneath the rubble. However, enormous treasures, cultural assets, have definitely been destroyed at the stakes of the 14th, 15th, and 16th century. Much has been lost as a result of negligence and carelessness; the second-hand dealers, mostly Jews, have large quantities of objects from churches and monasteries, both artistically valuable as well as worthless items. Yet, they have not done anything for the preservation of our Jewish cultural assets; this was not marketable merchandise. Today, when some interest to preserve this heritage is finally displayed, it is oftentimes too late. The Esther scrolls and the Haggadoth, the ketuboth and the Omer scrolls with their magnificent writings and wonderful pictures could have told us plenty about the experiences of the Jews of these eras and about their skills.

(To be continued)

**An Italian Journey (2)**  
**by S. Kirschstein**

*Kirschstein S.[aly]: Eine italienische Reise (2), in: Menorah. Jüdisches Familienblatt für Wissenschaft, Kunst und Literatur, vol. 7, no. 2 (February 1929), pp. 76–85*

(continuation and end)

Toward the evening we reached Venice. Only many, many years ago when I traveled to Helgoland and eagerly waited to see the red island arise from the sea, just as eagerly I waited here to behold Venice. With a thousand lights, the city emerged in fairytale-like beauty from the sea. We arrived at the hotel by gondola, over narrow, gurgling water beneath small bridges, with old buildings and ruins lining both sides, past dimly lit squares.

Venice has 185,000 inhabitants, not as many as in the 15th century when it was the largest, wealthiest, and most powerful mercantile city. St. Mark's Basilica is of that time, the Byzantine style is of that time, the old mosaics and the old pictures with their gold and their blaze of colors; the entire place, tightly enclosed, is the parlor of an exceedingly wealthy man who has amassed all these treasures from the Orient and the Occident and from previous centuries; and the mysterious magic of the resplendent buildings, small bridges, lanes, small squares in the midst of the city's jumble of houses, all this must have mightily appealed to the Jews of the Middle Ages and elicited in them a sense of home. They certainly lived in the lagoon city already in the 11th and 12th century if not even centuries earlier, were certainly very wealthy merchants who kept brisk business associations with the Spanish and Portuguese Jews, with the Levant and the Orient, they certainly resided along the Canale Grande and the shores of the Adriatic Sea. The Abravanells, Donna Gracia, and the Duke of Naxos—his civilian name was Joseph Nasi and he influenced Southeastern Europe's political situation for many years—have certainly negotiated with the Doge of Venice as equal, free citizens. Then came the times when the church and its holders of power stoked religious hatred out of religious zeal and despicable greed, the time of the witchcraft trials, and the persecutions of the Jews; and the Republic of Venice became the first city in Europe that created a compulsory ghetto in 1541 and—besides the yellow patch and the Jewish hat—locked the Israelites like lepers behind iron gates isolating them from other people. We visited this Jewish quarter from the 16th century on the second day of our stay in Venice; as then also today, one takes the small black bark over the Canale Grande, past the palaces, past the ruins of bygone grandeur, the churches and chapels, these silent yet eloquent witnesses of great times. Yes, stones do talk. After we had alighted and walked several hundred paces toward our destination, we saw on the back of one of the palaces along the canal a marble plaque: "Richard Wagner died here in 1883." He would have perfectly suited the Venetians of the 16th century with their hatred of the Jews.

We kept asking several times: Ghetto Vecchio? However, we soon arrived at a dreary place, at its center a water well where children were playing; mighty houses, 5, 6, 7 floors high, partially built on top of each other, paupers' flats; the laundry, the landmark of Italian residential quarters, did not hang as picturesquely from the windows as in the narrow lanes—all this, nothing but a gray old face. Rather swiftly we happened upon a Jew who provided us with information; he guided us to one of the weather-beaten houses, through a barnlike corridor, along the brittle staircase into the Sephardic temple. Gray light entered the small room through the colorful panes of the small windows above the stalls; a mixture of old dark timbers, silver candles and crowns tarnished by age. I was completely dazed by this bizarre, mystic appeal this room emanated; I was not aware of the individual elements, rather, I saw these old Jews in their yellowed tallisim with wide black stripes enveloping their entire body from head to toe, I heard the hubbub

of their prayers, their wailings before the throne of the Lord of Hosts, their “al chet shechatanu l’fanecha,” I could hear them beating their chests and pray for forgiveness—yes, in this house, they still used to pray.

We then saw also the Levantine temple and the large shul—the German temple, which is located in the Ghetto Nuovo. For lack of funds, this venerable building, which dates back to around 1500, fell into such decay that a public collection became the last resort to protect it from collapse. It is much simpler furnished than the synagogues in the Old Ghetto though it does not lack artistic design, which, unfortunately, is increasingly decaying.

Upon reemerging on the square, we learned from our guide that the majority of Jews do not reside in the ghetto, neither in the old nor, even less so, in the new, especially not the affluent and wealthy ones. Some of the palaces from where the doges used to rule in the past now belong to the descendants of the “ghetto children.”

On the way to the steamboat station (our guide became our loyal companion thanks to the small contribution we gave him of our own accord, and we have seen none of the notorious beggars), he also led us to the bottom floor of a house, and we had the opportunity to see an Italian matzoth bakery in operation, also had to taste from the freshly baked matzah, and I asked for another one for keepsake. They are different from ours, and we heard that in Italy great importance is placed for the unleavened Passover bread to be plenty and available for every Jewish family.

Also something else made us aware that we were in the ghetto in Venice after all. These days, one finds on houses the image of Mussolini and “Eviva Mussolini” everywhere in Italy, but here the walls and barns displayed “Eviva Purim”. For the Jews, Messiah had not yet arrived after all, they were still awaiting him: Eviva Purim.

Two days later we were in Ferrara. A wide, shadeless, apparently new road leads into the city; at the end of the road, quasi as an emblem that here old Ferrara begins, arises a castle with four towers surrounded by a moat, and right away, we are in the old streets, 13th, 14th, 15th century. At the time, the House of Este used to rule here, Lucretia Borgia, Ariosto, Titian, and later Torquato Tasso; and in 1477, the first Hebrew work was printed by Levi Ben Gerson, this was a site of the old Jewry.

It was around noon and the streets in all their width were teeming with people. We were told that both people from the rural surroundings as well as townspeople conducted all their business affairs here at the open market.

We dined at a hotel where the host obligingly provided us with information: Were there any Jews in this town? Jews no, but when I asked for Hebrews, I was told that there were one or two families here. And a Tempio Israelitico? After an awkward pause: “There probably must be an old one extant, but no longer in use,” and he sent us with a boy to guide us there. The latter took us along wide, long streets with four-, five-, six- storied buildings until we reached one that we would never have identified as a house of worship, neither by its exterior nor by any specific features. Immediately, a servant appeared who guided us up the broad staircase and wished to announce us to the professor and rabbi. We were exceedingly graciously received. Rabbi Prof. Armando Sorani<sup>1</sup> spoke Italian and only a little French so that it was largely up to my wife to conduct the conversation. He personally showed us the synagogues in this building—the Italian synagogue of marvelous splendor, its walls and ceilings with copious wooden panels, apparently 15th century. The Aron HaKodesh, a terrific structure with wooden inlay, old chandeliers, hanging lamps, and the eternal light, gilt-plated and from heavy silver, on the opposite side the Almemor, the wood-carved columns, even more copious the embroidered covers on the hazzan’s desk and those suspended from the balustrades, preciously embroidered in gold and colors. The Spanish synagogue in the same building is even more magnificently appointed and probably even older. The walls and the Holy of Holies from splendid black and white marble, the door massively gilt-plated silver with raised leaf ornaments, the Torah scrolls in preciously embroidered

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<sup>1</sup>Unfortunately, death wrested him from his community and from Jewish scholarship after this article was written.

covers, a heavy coffered ceiling, the Almemor from the same marble, filled with silver- and metal tools, and on the walls, rows of candlesticks in commemoration of the deceased. In his study, on the walls, old pictures of Jews and Hannukah candelabra, the rabbi then showed us the most magnificent Torah curtains from his own possessions (they originate from his wife's family), embroideries as they probably still exist in equally rare examples only in museums, and one such curtain from old, blue Venetian velvet, preciously decorated.

In our conversation, I pointed to the hotelier's information regarding Jews in Ferrara. Ferrara has 76,000 inhabitants, approximately 1,400 Jews, the mayor is Jewish, the university's procurator is Jewish, influential posts are staffed by Jews, except that the population is not aware of this, Christians and Jews are in best agreement since no emphasis is placed on the Jewish aspect.

Moreover, under the influence of this rabbi, there is still Jewish life here, there is still a beth din (a Jewish court), we were allowed to see this room, appointed like a real courtroom, for the first time since, to the best of my knowledge, such a thing is no longer extant in Germany. There is an archive—the professor is proud of it—has it already been researched? The rabbi was kind enough to show us the Levantine synagogue (several streets from here) as well—similar to the Spanish, just smaller, definitely also from the 15th century.

With sincere gratefulness, we departed from our distinguished guide.

On the way to Bologna, I am constantly preoccupied with the question of nationality of the Jews in this country. For hundreds, no, for thousands of years, Jews who are closely, very closely bound by a common religion, a common faith, have been living in Italy; they have suffered the same oppressions, the same persecutions, they have jointly borne all the suffering, all the misery for the sake of the same faith—and even today, they still distinguish themselves from each other according to their origin as they have done ever since their first settlement in Rome, in Italy. The Palestinians, those who had arrived from Byzantium, Alexandria, from Turkey, in short, the Levantine Jews, those from Spain, Portugal, Morocco, that is, the Spanish Jews, those who originate from Germany, Poland, Russia, Galicia, the Ashkenazic Jews, and then those who originate from Italy, from Roman times and from the first centuries CE, the Italian Jews.

They are, like I said, all of one religion, they are Jews and yet, of different nationality, they have one faith, but are from different cultural communities. Each community has its own synagogue, its own cultus and charitable institutions; they are separated to the extent that they do not even marry among each other.

Bologna is a large, a beautiful city with 185,000 inhabitants, about 1,500 Jews; of them, just under 500 officially profess their Judaism, and during the High Holidays, allegedly no more than 200 individuals still participate in the religious service. In 1537, a Hebrew religious-philosophical work was written and printed here. A flourishing community existed here in the 15th century; in ca. 1450, Italy's Jewish communities gathered here for the first time for consultations to jointly counter the attacks of the Christians—and now ... . The synagogue built in the 80s of the last century is of noble austerity like a Protestant church, white and bare walls, the Aron HaKodesh, the place of the hazzan—all displaying a lack of style that is not evocative of the old models from the 14th and 15th century, nothing that considers the mystical, the transcendent.

In vain did I look in this city—where so many buildings, churches, and chapels, old fortresses and castles testify to a great, prosperous past—for the old Jewry, I have not found anything here: though it was a Shabbat and I was at the religious service; organ, hazzan, and community, almost like at Johannisstraße [synagogue] in Berlin. I talked to the rabbi who is apparently not interested in cultural history, he does not seem to know most of the city's Jews.

On Sunday we were in Florence. Since the Middle Ages, Florence has been at the center of the development of intellectual life until the modern period. The creation of the Italian language and literature originated from



here, Italian art prospered and evolved here. In this city's streets and squares, in the buildings and sculptures, the world is reflected. This is still the intellectual center of Italian Jewry, not just Florence—where among 250,000 inhabitants there are ca. 3,000 Jews—but the former Grand Duchy of Tuscany (whose capital is Florence) as a whole: Livorno with ca. 3,000 Jews, Pisa with more than 500, and Siena with ca. 200 Jews are part of it. In Florence, there is a rabbinical seminary whose secretary most willingly provided me with information. To my great regret, I was unable to personally speak with the meritorious director of the institute, Chief Rabbi Dr. Margulis. Because of this seminary, the issue of the next generation of rabbis—very important to Italy's Jewish communities—is resolved also here in Florence, thanks to the avid efforts of said Chief Rabbi Dr. Margulis. Through him, this Collegio Rabbinico has exceptionally flourished, through him, cooperation and division of work with the seminary in Livorno has been achieved, and through this academy for Jewish studies, it has become possible to stand up to the Catholic universities that otherwise would have a complete hold over Oriental and Jewish scholarship; this is particularly needed considering the lack of interest in Jewish scholarship on the part of today's Jewish population in Italy.

And on the premises where the seminary is located, the new large synagogue was built from 1882-1884, freely accessible from the street. A stately building with a large cupola, flanked by two small cupolas, Oriental style; it is rather similar to our synagogue on Oranienburger Straße.

Also the interior's structure is similar to that synagogue, except that it is even more preciously equipped and testifies to the wealth and willingness to sacrifice on the part of the Jews of this community. In Italy, there is, *de facto*, no coercion to call on Jews for community taxes.

But where is the old Jewry, where the prosperous Jews of the 14th, 15th, and 16th century, in this capital, where is the ghetto that was erected, here too, in 1571? After visiting this synagogue (see illustration), I aimlessly wandered through the streets (not entirely aimless since I was looking for the ghetto) and addressed, as is my wont in foreign cities, individuals I assumed to be coreligionists; one who definitely did not seem to be a native of Florence: Where is here the old synagogue—the Temple Ebreo?? He replies in Italian, broken French—so I dared: “Shalom alechem” and immediately the greeting was returned: “Alechem shalom.” We then communicated in poor German.

He is from Russia, attended yeshiva, wanted to—should have— become a rabbi, then came the war; he went to Palestine as halutz where he worked hard for six years and studied law at the same time; he has been in Florence for one and a half years, already speaks passably Italian, tutors Hebrew in middle-class families, earns around 50 Lire (approximately 10 RM) per month, continues to study law, and hopes to take his state examination in a year from now (a Jewish fate).

I asked him whether he has seen something of the old Jewry here. Oh, sure! He had old Hebrew books and megilloth, and I should visit him. In a narrow street, we climbed three, four, it could also have been five flights of stairs. His small room looked “to him somewhat homelike.” “You are not in a wealthy man's house,” he said, which I had not expected anyway—but old Hebrew books he definitely had more than many a rich man, and he willingly gave me several of them: never before did he have so much money.

In the afternoon, we visited the likely most important bookseller and antiquarian in Florence (I might even say in Italy). He originates from the northeastern corner of our homeland. He invited us to his house to show us his library. In the hall he had erected on his premises in the remote, elegant residential area of Florence, we saw the finest illuminated manuscripts one can behold, of Dante, of Petrarca, Torquato Tasso, the most wonderful Bible manuscripts, the New Testament—also the Mediceans' prayer book, the rarest incunabula, the most marvelous book covers—also two Torah scrolls, from the 15th and 16th century, on the finest parchments. Otherwise, even this lucky owner of these exquisite treasures has nothing of the old Jewry. Yet, a guestbook he does own, into which kings and princes, the biggest financiers of both worlds, the most eminent artists, writers, and collectors have inscribed themselves. However, even this definitely

exceedingly well-informed man to whom we were sincerely grateful for the great pleasure of having been able to see his collection failed to know anything about the Jewry of yore, neither did the museum directors or antiquity dealers—nothing.

Only at the hotel, I learned more details from the old concierge, a native of Florence. “In 1882, the ghetto was demolished; we are right now standing here on its terrain, all the palaces in this quarter, today the—most exclusive—center, are standing on ghetto walls. When here in front of the door, a few months ago, the water pipe was renewed, it was still possible to see parts of the old Jewish quarter, it is buried down here. Buried! After all, the palaces will not be pulled down to excavate the ghetto. At the time, in the early 80s, the new temple was built instead of the synagogues that are here underneath.” And it would still be possible to write the history of the Jews in Florence, their cultural history. In the archives and monasteries, there are still numerous treasures not yet investigated as are in museums. We were at the Uffizi, Palazzo Pitti, we saw Michelangelo’s David, Filippo Lippi, Botticelli, Raffael. I do not intend to tell here about these paintings, many people have seen them on their journey to Italy or heard or read about them. But I did notice one thing. When looking at these marvels, walking through the galleries of paintings, several of the portraits seemed to be so familiar to me as if I had already seen them somewhere in the circles of my coreligionists. This portrait by Paolo Veronese must definitely depict a distinguished wealthy Jew from Florence??? The label said: “Person depicted unknown.” And this picture is certainly a bearded Jew, I know these eyes—this is a painting by Jacopo Tintoretto. The title says: Venetian Scholar (no name). And also in the other rooms, among the marvels of the 15th and 16th century, almost each portrait featured the name of the depicted, except for seven or eight, precisely those I held to be Jews, all those were labeled: “Unknown.” It is not improbable that, like nowadays, these respected, erudite, and affluent Jews had themselves painted by the great masters of their time—they probably had the close and often costly connections. Where among the Jewish researchers is one who will write the history of the Jews of Florence???

About Pisa, Genoa, and Turin, I will report another time. Here, just the following.

We Jews in Germany certainly display quite an amount of indifference, yet, even after the above-said, we still cannot fathom the degree of religious disinterest displayed by the population in Italy. In a country where since 1848 and 1859, Jews were given increasing economic and political freedom, where since 1870, any differential treatment had ceased, where Ernesto Nathan was elected three times mayor of Rome, where General Giuseppe Ottolenghi was minister of war, Senator Giacomo Malvano president of the council of state, a Jew Leone Wollemborg finance minister, Salvatore Barzilai the leader of the democrats, and Claudio Treves the leader of the Socialists, and the moderate conservative Jew Luigi Luzatti prime minister in 1910/11, in a country where twelve Israelites sit in the kingdom’s senate (the senators are appointed by the king for life) and where there are about sixty full and associate professors who did not need to have themselves baptized, in such a country where there is no anti-Semitism, Jewry will be able to exist solely based on the power of its religious strength. In the first centuries of the Common Era, in ancient Rome, we saw as the Jews would annually, on behalf of the firstlings, send their donation to Jerusalem to rebuild and maintain the Temple in the Holy City; today, Italy’s Jewish youth again collects the Shekel for Zion. They are mostly Zionists out of necessity and distress, not anti-Italian—no! They are glowing patriots, but what their soul links to past generations and what in the depth of their hearts is budding hope for the future—these are (even unconsciously) the deep reasons for all morality and the ultimate sources of good, the sense of its solemn dignity and the insight into its sublimity and augustness revealing a world purpose for the sake of humans’ bliss that ends their search—is, after all, the religion of Judaism.