

THE JEWS IN BYZANTINE SOUTHERN ITALY

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Over the more than 500-year period between the mid-sixth and the end of the eleventh century, various regions of Italy belonged to the Byzantine Empire, though not all at the same time. The Emperor Justinian I recovered Italy from the Ostrogoths during the Gothic War (535–554), but a few decades later the Lombards invaded and occupied extended territories from the north to the south. At the end of the seventh century, only the Exarchate of Ravenna, Rome, Sicily, parts of Calabria, and some ports in Campania and Apulia were still part of the Empire. In 751 Ravenna succumbed to the Lombards, and some decades later Rome and Campania to the Carolingians; during the ninth century Sicily was conquered by the Arabs, but during the last thirty years of the same century Basil I recovered Apulia and Calabria from the Lombards and Arabs. These regions belonged to the Empire until the second half of the eleventh century, when they were conquered by the Normans.

When the Byzantines regained Italy during the Gothic War, significant Jewish communities in the peninsula had been in existence for more than 500 years. They are best known from funerary inscriptions in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew (many of them bilingual) dating from antiquity to the early Middle Ages¹ and from objects decorated with Jewish symbols or Hebrew letters. Even though the majority of these inscriptions can be dated only approximately, many inscriptions provide insights into the social and religious order of the communities with their *gerousiarchai*, *archisynagogoi*,² *apostuli*, and *rebbites*. According

¹ A. E. Felle, "Ebraismo e cristianesimo alla luce della documentazione epigrafica (III–VII secolo)," *La parola del passato* 353 (2007): 148–84. B. Rochette, "Le bilinguisme gréco-latin dans les communautés juives d'Italie d'après les inscriptions (III^e–VI^e s.)," in *Bilinguisme gréco-latin et épigraphie. Actes du colloque organisé à l'Université Lumière—Lyon 2, Maison de l'Orient et de la Méditerranée-JeanPoilloux, UMR 5189 Hisoma et JE 2409 Romanitas, les 17, 18 et 19 mai 2004*, eds., F. Biville, J.-C. Decourt, G. Rougemont (Lyon, 2008), 273–304.

² T. Rajak and D. Noy, "Archisynagogoi: Office, Title and Social Status in the Greco-Jewish Synagogue," *Journal of Roman Studies* 83 (1993): 75–93.

to Jewish tradition transmitted by various mediaeval texts, these communities dated from the time when the Emperor Titus brought Jewish prisoners of war to Italy after the destruction of the Second Temple; Jews, however, had been living in Italy even before then. The largest community, attested by about 600 inscriptions, must have been established in Rome and its ports Ostia and Porto.³ The synagogue of Ostia underwent major renovation in the fourth century and was abandoned during the fifth, in the period of general decline of the city.⁴ In this context it may be worth mentioning the *Actus Silvestri*, a hagiographic legend about Pope Silvester I (314–335), written in Rome at the end of the fifth or beginning of the sixth century. Part of this text, which had an enormous diffusion during the Middle Ages in the Latin original as well as the Greek translation, presents a long and articulate religious discussion between the saintly pope and twelve rabbis in the presence of Constantine and his mother Helena. Even though the text of this *altercatio* is directed to Christian readers and the various topics of discussion are ultimately inspired by arguments raised within the various Christian communities,⁵ I think it is significant that the Roman author decided to present it in the form of a dispute with a large gathering of learned rabbis.

Jewish inscriptions have been found all over Italy, more in the southern than in the northern region, especially in the coastal cities (Naples,⁶ Vibo Valentia,⁷ Reggio,⁸ Leucopetra⁹ e Bova Marina, where the ruins of a synagogue active between the second and the sixth

³ J.-B. Frey, *Corpus inscriptionum Iudaicarum. Recueil des inscriptions juives qui vont du III^e siècle avant Jésus-Christ au VII^e siècle de notre ère*, I. Europe (Città del Vaticano, 1936), no. 1–551; D. Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe*, II. *The City of Rome* (Cambridge, 1995); P. A. Bengtson, “Semitic Inscriptions in Rome,” in *The Synagogue of Ancient Ostia and the Jews of Rome. Interdisciplinary Studies*, eds., B. Olsson, D. Mitternacht and O. Brandt, in *Acta Instituti Romani Regni Sueciae*, ser. in 4^o, LVII (Stockholm, 2001), 151–65.

⁴ A. Runesson, “The Synagogue at Ancient Ostia: The Building and its History,” in *The Synagogue of Ancient Ostia*, 83; D. Pacchiani, “Le origini della presenza ebraica a Roma e nel Lazio,” in *La presenza ebraica a Roma e nel Lazio. Dalle origini al ghetto* (Padova, 2009), 13–87.

⁵ T. Canella, *Gli ‘Actus Silvestri’. Genesi di una leggenda su Costantino imperatore* (Spoleto, 2006), 179–309.

⁶ D. Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe*, I: Italy (excluding the city of Rome), (Cambridge, 1993), no. 25–37.

⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 138.

⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 139.

⁹ F. Costabile, “Testimonianze paleocristiane e giudaiche da Leucopetra,” *Rivista storica calabrese*, n. s. 9 (1988): 255–265.

centuries have been excavated,¹⁰ Taranto,¹¹ Otranto,¹² Brindisi,¹³ and Bari)¹⁴ and in places near the major roads such as Fondi,¹⁵ Capua,¹⁶ and especially Venosa, an important town at the junction of the via Appia with the main public road from Calabria.¹⁷ In Late Antiquity, Jewish communities must have been particularly important in Apulia. According to a constitution of the Emperor Honorius, who in 398 abrogated a previous law according to which Jews were freed from curial obligations, the exemption of people *Iudaicae superstitionis* had seriously damaged the economy of the towns of Apulia and Calabria (Cod. Theod. XII, 1, 158).¹⁸ Moreover, the *Sefer Yuhasin* and some later manuscripts of the *Sefer Josefon* report that some 5000 of the Jewish prisoners brought by Titus to Italy were settled in Oria, Otranto, Taranto, and other Apulian cities.¹⁹

Most of the Jewish catacombs and inscriptions from Sicily are found in coastal towns such as Taormina, Acireale, Catania, Syracuse, Caucana, Agrigento, Lilibeo ed Erice, and on the islands of Lipari and Malta; but they are also present in the grain-growing hinterland in such places as

¹⁰ L. Costamagna, "La sinagoga di Bova Marina nel quadro degli insediamenti taroantichi della costa ionica meridionale della Calabria," *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome. Moyen Âge*, 103–2 (1991): 611–30; Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, I, no. 140; C. Colafemmina, "Gli ebrei nella Calabria meridionale," in *Calabria cristiana. Società, religione, cultura nel territorio della Diocesi di Oppido Mamertino-Palmi* (Soveria Mannelli, 1999), 162–4.

¹¹ Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, I, no. 118–133; C. Colafemmina, *Gli Ebrei a Taranto. Fonti documentarie* (Bari, 2005), [Società di storia patria per la Puglia. Documenti e monografie, 52], 28–44.

¹² Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, I, no. 134; C. Colafemmina, "Di una iscrizione greco-ebraica di Otranto," *Vetera christianorum* 12 (1975): 131–7.

¹³ C. Colafemmina, "Insediamenti e condizione degli Ebrei nell'Italia meridionale e insulare," in *Gli Ebrei nell'Alto Medioevo*, I (Spoleto, 1980) [Settimane di studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, XXVI, 30 marzo–5 aprile 1978], 220.

¹⁴ Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, I, no. 135–136; C. Colafemmina, "L'insediamento ebraico," in *Archeologia di una città. Bari dalle origini al X secolo*, eds., G. Andreassi and F. Radina (Bari, 1988), 513–21.

¹⁵ Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, I, no. 19.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 20.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 42–116; C. Colafemmina, "Gli ebrei fra Tarda Antichità e Medioevo," in *Storia della Basilicata*, 2. *Il Medioevo*, ed., C. D. Fonseca (Bari, 2006), 309–19.

¹⁸ The Roman province Calabria is not identical with the homonymous region of modern Italy, but corresponds to the southern part of Apulia.

¹⁹ R. Bonfil, ed., *The Chronicle of Ahima'az* (Leiden, 2009) (Studies in Jewish History and Culture, eds., H. Tirosh-Samuelson and G. Veltri, 22), 234; Colafemmina, *Gli Ebrei a Taranto*, 7f.

Lentini, Comiso, Sofiana (Piazza Armerina), and Palazzolo Acreide.²⁰ The epigraphical evidence gives the impression that the Jews of Sicily were particularly involved in the transportation of the *annona* from the island to Rome. In fact, Jews and Samaritans appear to have formed special units within the *corpora naviculariorum* (Cod. Theod. XIII, 5, 18).²¹

This aspect of their activities is confirmed by Procopius's description of the Byzantine siege of Naples in 536. On this occasion the Jews promised to provide everything necessary for the nourishment of the population in the besieged town (Procopius, *Bella*, V, viii, 41). Likewise, during the last days of Gothic resistance, they stubbornly defended the city walls facing the sea (*ibid.* V, x, 24f.). Their decision to join the Gothic cause against the imperial invaders may have been prompted by the measures restricting the practice of their religion imposed by Justinian's recent novel 37, "De Africana Ecclesia." Published on August 1, 535, just after the defeat of the Vandals, this decree proclaimed that: *Iudaeis insuper denegamus servos habere Christianos, quod et legibus anterioribus cavetur et nobis cordi est illibatum custodire, ut neque servos orthodoxae religionis habeant neque, si forte catechumenos accipiant, eos audeant circumcidere. Sed neque synagogas eorum stare concedimus, sed ad ecclesiarum figuram eas volumus reformari. Neque enim Iudaeos neque paganos neque Donatistas neque Arianos neque alios quoscumque haereticos vel speluncas habere vel quaedam quasi ritu ecclesiastico facere patimur, cum hominibus impiis sacra peragenda permittere satis absurdum est.*²² Thus Jews had good

²⁰ C. Colafemmina, "Ipogei ebraici in Sicilia," in *Italia Judaica. Gli ebrei in Sicilia sino all'espulsione del 1492. Atti del V convegno internazionale (Palermo, 15-19 giugno 1992)*, (Pubblicazioni degli Archivi di Stato. Saggi 32), (Roma, 1995), 304-29; Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, I, no. 143-167; L. V. Rutgers "Interaction and Its Limits: Some Notes on the Jews of Sicily in Late Antiquity," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 115 (1997): 245-56; Id., "Gli ebrei in Sicilia nel tardoantico," in *Ebrei e Sicilia*, eds., N. Bucaria, M. Luzzati and A. Tarantino (Palermo, 2002), 43-52; S. Simonsohn, "Epigrafia ebraica in Sicilia," *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa*, s. IV, Quaderni 2 (1999): 509-29.

²¹ Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation* (Detroit, 1987), 182, 184; C. Gebbia, "Gli Ebrei nell'impero cristiano. Tolleranza e intolleranza," *Όριος* 2 (2000): 171.

²² Linder, *The Jews*, 381-9. trans., p. 386: We do not allow the Jews, furthermore, to have christian slaves; for they have been warned of this in previous laws, and it is our intention to observe it undiminished, that they shall not have slaves of Orthodox religion, and if they happen to receive catechumens they shall not dare to circumcise them. Yet we do not grant that their synagogues shall stand, but want them to be converted in form to churches. We do not suffer the Jews, the pagans, the Donatists, the

reason to fear that the Byzantine conquest of Italy might worsen their social and religious status.

A similar geographical pattern of Jewish settlement in southern Italy emerges from the letters of Pope Gregory I (590–604). During his pontificate most of the inland territory of Italy was occupied by the Lombards, and places like Venosa, with the greatest number of early medieval Jewish inscriptions, were no longer under Byzantine control. In Gregory's *Registrum epistularum* Jewish and Samaritan communities are mentioned in Terracina,²³ Naples,²⁴ Cagliari,²⁵ and Sicily, especially in Catania,²⁶ Messina,²⁷ Syracuse,²⁸ Agrigento,²⁹ and Palermo.³⁰ The papal correspondence provides interesting and apparently quite reliable insights into the economic activities of southern Italian Jews, demonstrating the enormous social and religious pressure to which they were subjected after the Byzantine reconquest.

For example, the *Registrum epistularum* refers to Jewish merchants,³¹ some of whom were particularly active in the slave trade with southern France.³² They provided a rare merchandise to Italian land owners and Byzantine officials, since many slaves had escaped or had been captured during the continuous wars with the Lombards. This business, however, had become quite risky and frustrating since by law Jews

Ariens, or all other heretics either to have caves or perform as though in an ecclesiastical rite, for it is perfectly absurd to permit impious men to deal with sacred matters.

²³ D. Norberg, ed., *S. Gregorii Magni Registrum epistularum* (Turnhout, 1982) (Corpus christianorum. Series Latina 140) I, 34, p. 42, II, 45, p. 137. (English translation: *The Letters of Gregory the Great*, translated with Introduction and Notes by J. Martyn, I–III (Tornoto, 2004) [Medieval Sources in Translation 40], I, pp. 155, 226f.). Terracina was an important *statio* of the Appian way on the route from Rome to Naples and Sicily: S. Crogiez, "Les stations du cursus publicus de Rome à Terracina," in *La via Appia* (Roma, 1990) (Quaderni del Centro di studio per l'archeologia etrusco-italica, 18), 95–103; A. Esch, *Römische Straßen in ihrer Landschaft* (Mainz, 1997), 18–20; V. von Falkenhausen, "Réseaux routiers et ports dans l'Italie méridionale byzantine (VI^e–XI^e s.)," in *Ἡ καθημερινή ζωή στο Βυζάντιο. Πρακτικά τῆς Α' Διεθνούς Συμποσίου (Ἀθήνα, 15–17 σεπτ. 1988)* (Ἀθήνα, 1989), 724f.

²⁴ *S. Gregorii Magni Registrum epistularum*, VI, 29, pp. 401f., IX, 105, pp. 658f. (Engl. trans.: II, pp. 424, 605f.).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, IV, 9, p. 226, IX, 196, pp. 750f. (Engl. trans.: I, p. 294; II, pp. 662f.).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, VI, 30, p. 402f. (Engl. trans.: II, pp. 424f.).

²⁷ *Ibid.* VII, 41, p. 505 (Engl. trans.: II, p. 496).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, VIII, 21, p. 540f. (Engl. trans.: II, p. 517).

²⁹ *Ibid.* VIII, 23, pp. 543f. (Engl. trans.: II, pp. 518f.).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, VIII, 25, pp. 546f., IX, 38, p. 597, IX, 40, pp. 598f. (Engl. trans.: II, p. 521).

³¹ *Ibid.*, I, 45, p. 59, I, 66, pp. 75f., IX, 40, pp. 598f. (Engl. trans.: I, pp. 171, 182; II, pp. 529f.)

³² *Ibid.*, IX, 105, pp. 658f. (Engl. trans.: II, pp. 605f.).

were not allowed to own Christian slaves and had to release those who were willing to convert to Christianity;³³ thus some Neapolitan Jews appealed to the pope to intervene on their behalf with the local ecclesiastical authorities.³⁴ The safest way for the Jewish merchants to proceed was to have their sons baptized and transfer the slaves to them.³⁵

The pope's main interest was to convert the Jews to Christianity. Officially he disapproved of the fact that in southern France they had been "brought to the baptismal font more by force than by preaching" *vi magis ad fontem baptismatis quam predicatione perductos*.³⁶ On the other hand, he wrote to the *rector patrimonii Siciliensis* (rector of the Sicilian patrimony) asking him to alleviate the corvées and taxes of those Jews living and working on the Sicilian *patrimonia Petri* who decided to convert to Christianity. Knowing that the first generation of new Christians might not excel in fervor for their new religion, the pope put his hope in their descendents who would be more steady in their Christian faith. He added quite realistically: "Nor are we doing this unprofitably, if by relieving their tax burden we bring them to the grace of Christ. For although they themselves come to us with little faith, even so these who are born from them can now be baptized with greater faith. Our profit, therefore, is either themselves or their children." *Nec hoc inutiliter facimus, si pro levandis pensionis oneribus eos ad Christi gratiam perducamus, quia, etsi ipsi minus fideliter veniunt, hi tamen qui de eis nati fuerint iam fidelius baptizantur. Aut ipsos ergo aut eorum filios lucratur*.³⁷ Similarly he wrote to the *defensor* (defender of the Sicilian patrimony) Fantinus in Agrigento, granting permission that those who desired to convert might receive baptism as soon as possible (instead of waiting for Easter, as tradition prescribed), and bestowing upon the poorer aspirants a new garment for the celebration of baptism.³⁸

Several times the pope responded to the appeal of Jews whose synagogues had been confiscated by the local bishop, as in Terracina and

³³ Linder, *The Jews*, 370f., 375–381. This aspect is mentioned in many letters: S. *Gregorii Magni Registrum epistolarum*, III, 37, pp. 182f., IV, 9, p. 226, 21, p. 239, VI, 29, pp. 401f., VII, 21, p. 472, IX, 214, pp. 774, IX, 216, p. 779. (Engl. trans.: I, pp. 260, 294, 303; II, pp. 424, 472, 678, 681).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, IX, 105, pp. 658f. (Engl. trans.: II, pp. 605f.).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, VIII, 21, pp. 540f., IX, 105, pp. 658f. (Engl. trans.: II, pp. 517, 605f.)

³⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 45, p. 59. (Engl. trans.: I, p. 171).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, V, 7, p. 273. (Engl. trans.: II, pp. 327f.).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, VIII, 23, pp. 543f. (Engl. trans.: II, pp. 518f.)

Palermo.³⁹ In these cases he apparently tried to intercede on behalf of the Jewish community, since according to Roman law the Jews were allowed to keep synagogues they already owned, but not to build new ones.⁴⁰ In another instance the pope urged the bishop of Cagliari to restore to the Jewish community its synagogue where Peter, a newly baptized Jew, had deposited an icon of the Virgin, a crucifix, and the garment he had worn for baptism,⁴¹ probably with the intention of transforming the place into a church.

The most important source for Italian history at the end of antiquity and the early Middle Ages, Gregory's *Registrum epistularum*, provides a vivid picture of the situation of Jews in Byzantine southern Italy. There were still numerous wealthy Jewish communities, but they were under strong pressure to convert to Christianity. The prohibition against owning Christian slaves seems to have been an effective means of prompting members of the Jewish upper class to seek baptism, while peasants and members of the lower class were motivated by gifts and the alleviation of taxes and corvées.

Although the Jewish problem is a prominent topic in Gregory's correspondence,⁴² his *Dialogi*, a highly successful collection of edifying legends, contain only one miraculous story involving a Jew which, again, concerns conversion. During a trip along the Appian way from Campania to Rome, a Jew stayed overnight in a pagan temple close to Fondi.⁴³ Before going to sleep he took the precaution of making the sign of the cross, and thus during the night he was able to overhear the conversations of evil spirits boasting of their misdeeds. One of them told how he had made the bishop of Fondi fall in love with a nun, who now lived in his residence. In the morning the Jew went to see the bishop and confronted him with what he knew about his

³⁹ Ibid. I, 34, p. 42, II, 45, p. 137, VIII, 25, pp. 546f., IX, 38, p. 597. (Engl. trans.: I, pp. 155, 226f., II, pp. 521, 568f.).

⁴⁰ Linder, *The Jews*, 398–402.

⁴¹ S. Gregorii Magni *Registrum epistolarum*, IX, 196, pp. 750f. (Engl. trans.: II, pp. 662f.).

⁴² S. Boesch Gajano, "Per una storia degli Ebrei in Occidente tra Antichità e Medioevo. La testimonianza di Gregorio Magno," *Quaderni Medievali* 8 (1979): 26–43; E. Baltrusch, "Gregor der Große und sein Verhältnis zum römischen Recht am Beispiel seiner Politik gegenüber den Juden," *Historische Zeitschrift* 259 (1994): 39–58.

⁴³ A Jewish inscription from Fondi has come down to us, and the Jewish community of nearby Terracina is well attested: cf. notes 15, 23, 39.

inappropriate behaviour, whereupon the bishop dismissed the nun and the Jew was baptized.⁴⁴

Gregory did not invent this story; in fact, he used the plot of an edifying legend from *Collatio* VIII, 16 of John Cassian (published in 426), changing the geography and the associations of the main characters. In the *Collatio* the person who stays overnight in a lonely cave and overhears the evil demons boast of their seductive techniques is not a Jew, but a monk travelling through the desert of northern Egypt. The demon's victim, over the course of fifteen years, is not a bishop, but another monk known for his piety, who in the end decided not only to fornicate with a nun but also to marry her. Nor is the ending of the story in John Cassian a happy one. The monk sets out for Pelusium to warn his brother, but there he learns that in the same night when he overheard the demons the monk left his monastery to lead a sinful life with his girlfriend.⁴⁵ Thus Gregory has reused a well known story to promote his own aims: admonition of incontinent bishops and conversion of the Jews.

Gregory's death in 604 and the end of the *Registrum epistularum* mark a significant break in the documentation of early medieval Italian history. For the following two centuries the sources are scanty, and this also affects our knowledge of the Jewish communities. For instance, the conversion campaign of the Emperor Heraclius, whatever may have been its motivation, was prepared in western Europe by the councils of the Visigothic kings of Spain.⁴⁶ Waged in North Africa,⁴⁷ this campaign is mentioned by Pseudo-Fredegar in connection with the Merovingians;⁴⁸ but with the exception of two lines in the epitaph of Pope Honorius I (625–638): *Iudaicae gentis sub te est perfidia*

⁴⁴ Gregario Magno, *Storie di santi e diavoli (Dialoghi)*, vol. II. Testo critico e traduzione a cura di M. Simonetti, Commento a cura di S. Pricoco, III, 7 (Milano, 2006), 28–34. This story is dealt with also in G. Chiusano, "Gregorio Magno e le diocesi di Fondi, Terracina, Formia e Minturno," in *L'orbis christianus antiquus di Gregorio Magno.*, a cura di L. Ermini Pani, (Convegno di studi, Roma, 26–28 ottobre 2004) (Roma, 2007) (Miscellanea della Società Romana di Storia patria, 51), II, 439–44.

⁴⁵ M. Petschenig, ed., Cassianus, *Collationes*. Editio altera supplementis aucta curante G. Kreuz (Wien, 2004) (*Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, 13), 231–3.

⁴⁶ E. A. Thompson, *The Goths in Spain* (Oxford, 1969), 164–7.

⁴⁷ G. Dagron et V. Déroche, "Juifs et chrétiens dans l'Orient du VII^e siècle," *Travaux et mémoires* 11 (1991): 28–43.

⁴⁸ J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar with its Continuations* (London, 1960), 53f.

victa/sic unum Domini reddis ovile pium,⁴⁹ there is no trace in the Italian sources. However, Heraclius's religious policies against Jews would appear to be reflected in two hagiographic texts from Sicily: the *Vita* of St Zosimus, bishop of Syracuse, the Byzantine capital of Sicily, for thirteen years sometime between 642 and 662,⁵⁰ and the *Passio* of the Lentini martyrs, Alphius, Philadelphus, and Cyrinus, who are said to have died under Licinius (fourth century).⁵¹

According to his *Vita*, St Zosimus was once asked by a Byzantine official to allow the Jews to rebuild their synagogue which had been damaged during a Vandal incursion. The bishop refused with the words of Psalm 139: 21: "Do not I hate them, o Lord, that hate Thee?" This anecdote, true or invented, belongs to the repertoire of case-histories pertaining to the law that forbade the building of new synagogues but allowed the reconstruction of old ones. A similar law seems also to have existed in Islamic countries.⁵²

The *Passio* of Alphius, Philadelphus, and Cyrinus mentions Jews as protagonists of the saints' miracles during their life and *post mortem*. When they were taken as prisoners through the Jewish quarter of Lentini (τῆς τῶν Ἰουδαίων κατοικίας), the saints healed a Jewish child possessed by an evil spirit, whereupon the whole family asked to be baptized and promised to renounce τὴν τῶν Ἰουδαίων μονοθέλητον πίστιν.⁵³ The strange association of Judaism and Monothelism in this passage may be a reason to date its composition to the second half of the seventh century. The same date could be proposed for the more spectacular *post mortem* miracle in the *Passio*, since it presents

⁴⁹ L. Duchesne, ed., *Le 'Liber pontificalis'. Texte, introduction et commentaire* (Paris, 1955²), 326.

⁵⁰ The text has been preserved only in a Latin translation: *Acta Sanctorum Martii III*, 839–43; A. Acconcia Longo, "La *Vita* di Zosimo vescovo di Siracusa: un esempio di 'agiografia storica,'" *Rivista di studi bizantini e neoellenici*, n. s. 36 (1999): 5–17; M. Re, "La *Vita* di Zosimo vescovo di Siracusa: qualche osservazione," *Rivista di studi bizantini e neoellenici*, n. s. 37 (2000): 29–42; D. Motta, *Percorsi dell'agiografia, Società e cultura nella Sicilia tardoantica e bizantina* (Catania, 2004²), 173–87.

⁵¹ A discussion of the various historical and geographical contradictions and inconsistencies in the text can be found in Motta, *Percorsi dell'agiografia*, 305–23.

⁵² R. J. H. Gottheil, "An Eleventh-century Document Concerning the Cairo Synagogue," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 19 (1907): 467–539; S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, II. *The Community* (Berkeley, 1971), 143–5.

⁵³ *Acta Sanctorum*, Maii II, pp. *LVIII D–*LIX A; M. Re, *Il codice Lentinese dei santi Alfio, Filadelfo e Cirino. Studio paleografico e filologico*, [Istituto siciliano di studi bizantini e neoellenici. Quaderni 16] (Palermo, 2007), 55f.

Carthage, which had been conquered by the Arabs in 698, as a Byzantine town. In this lengthy narration Samuel, a wealthy Jew, chief of the Jewish community of Lentini, is suffering from leprosy. Healed by incubation at the tomb of the saints, he converts to Christianity and eventually convinces his sons, relatives, clients, and slaves to accept baptism. In the end, after a violent struggle between the Jews of the town who are desperate at being deprived of their religious leader, and the Christians, as many as 753 Jews convert to Christianity. They change their names, and Samuel and his sons and nephews become priests and deacons of the local church.⁵⁴

In the reign of Leo III (717–741), most of Italy had ceased to be part of the Byzantine Empire. This emperor's campaign against Jews was apparently intended to demonstrate that his Iconoclastic policies were not inspired by Jewish practice, as was generally considered by Iconodules.⁵⁵ The Roman Church did not accept the emperor's Iconoclastic decrees, though some influences of his anti-Jewish measures can be observed in Italy. The Roman synod of 743 prohibited marriages between Christians and Jews and confirmed the prohibition of the sale of Christian slaves to Jews.⁵⁶ There is also another very revealing hagiographic text: the *Life* of Leo, the bishop of Catania. According to the editor, Augusta Acconcia Longo, the protagonist was probably a contemporary of Gregory the Great whose *Bios*, originally written in an iconoclastic key, was later altered and is thus extant only in an incomplete version which concentrates on the miraculous deeds of a certain magician Heliodorus.⁵⁷ In our context it is most interesting that Heliodorus was lured into an agreement with the Devil through

⁵⁴ The text of the miracle is still unpublished, but an important commentary has been written by M. V. Strazzeri, "I Giudei di San Fratello," in "*Ubi neque aerugo neque tinea demolitur.*" *Studi in onore di Luigi Pellegrini per i suoi settanta anni*, a cura di M. G. Del Fuoco (Napoli, 2006), 646–89.

⁵⁵ A. Cameron, "Byzantines and Jews: Some Recent Work on Early Byzantium," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 20 (1996): 267–70.

⁵⁶ Mansi XII, 384.

⁵⁷ A. Acconcia Longo, "La Vita di s. Leone vescovo di Catania e gli incantesimi del mago Eliodoro," *Rivista di studi bizantini e neoellenici*, n. s. 26 (1989): 3–98; ead., "I vescovi nell'agiografia italogreca," in *Histoire et culture dans l'Italie byzantine*, eds., A. Jacob, J.-M. Martin and G. Noyé (Rome, 2006) [Collection de l'École Française de Rome, 368], 134–7; ead., "Note sul dossier agiografico di Leone di Catania: la trasmissione della leggenda e la figura del mago Eliodoro," *Rivista di studi bizantini e neoellenici*, n. s. 44 (2007): 1–38.

the mediation of a Jewish magician, a popular theme in Byzantine literature of the first Iconoclasm.⁵⁸

From what has been said it is evident that the Byzantine sources of the seventh and eighth centuries shed little light on Italian Jews, though they do show that imperial policies towards Jews were—at least to a certain extent—known and applied in the territories which still belonged to the Empire.

In the seventies of the ninth century, just when the Emperor Basil I recovered large parts of southern Italy from the Lombards and the Arabs, Sicily was lost forever to the Byzantines. Syracuse, the administrative capital of the island, fell in 878. Basil's decrees for the conversion of the Jews, described in Byzantine chronicles and discussed by contemporary theologians, are also mentioned in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew sources from southern Italy, where they were apparently applied. For the year 6382 (873/874) the so-called *Chronicon Siculo-Saracenum* says that the Jews were baptized: ἐβαπτίσθησαν οἱ Ἑβραῖοι (or Ἰουδαῖοι).⁵⁹ In 911 the French cleric Auxilius, who then lived between Rome and Naples wrote: *Basilus siquidem imperator, pater imperatorum Leonis et Alexandri multos Iudaeorum per vim baptizari fecit, ex quibus ammodum pauci parvo post tempore spontanei prae-buerunt assensum credendi in Christum et evangelica mandata pariter-que apostolica documenta, ut moris est, custodire libenter professi sunt, attamen nemo eorum iterum baptizatus est.*⁶⁰ In the *Sefer Yuhasin*, written by Ahima'az Ben Paltiel in 1054, the same imperial initiative is recounted from the Jewish point of view, in a rather hagiographic form, as one of the most glorious events in the life of the author's ancestor Rabbi Shefatiah of Oria. According to Ahima'az, through discussion with the emperor and a miracle which he performed at the imperial court in Constantinople by liberating the emperor's daughter from an evil demon, the rabbi saved his local community from being baptized.⁶¹ Obviously, the anti-Jewish politics of Basil I were deeply rooted in the collective memory of southern Italian Jews. It

⁵⁸ Acconcia Longo, "La Vita di s. Leone," 82–5; H. Gauer, *Texte zum byzantinischen Bilderstreit. Der Synodalbrief der drei Patriarchen des Ostens von 836 und seine Verwendung in sieben Jahrhunderten* (Frankfurt am Main, 1994), 90–4; 106, 114, 134–7, 142f.

⁵⁹ P. Schreiner, *Die byzantinischen Kleinchroniken*, I (Wien, 1975) [Corpus fontium historiae Byzantinae XII, 1], 333.

⁶⁰ E. Dümmler, *Auxilius und Vulgarius* (Leipzig, 1866), 109f.

⁶¹ *The Chronicle of Ahima'az*, 76–8, 260–70.

is interesting to observe, however, that in the acts of the local synod celebrated by bishop Theodosius of Oria in 887/888, no Jews or Jewish customs are mentioned.⁶²

In subsequent centuries, until the Norman conquest in the second half of the eleventh century, the geographical setting of the Jewish communities in southern Italy does not appear to have changed very much. The Neapolitan deeds mention a *sinagogam Hebreorum* and *vicus Iudeorum* which was close to the *Porta S. Ianuarii*,⁶³ and Jewish communities are attested in the capitals of the Lombard principalities Benevento,⁶⁴ Capua,⁶⁵ and Salerno.⁶⁶ As for the territories directly under Byzantine rule, the local Jewish communities are in general poorly documented, although we know more about Apulia, especially through Jewish sources, than about Calabria and the Basilicata. Occasionally, however, the far richer sources of Norman times can help fill in some of the *lacunae* of the previous period.

As we have said, it is a well known *topos* in medieval Hebrew literature that the Jewish settlements in Apulia go back to the prisoners of war abducted from Jerusalem to Italy by the Emperor Titus.⁶⁷ For the Byzantine period one gets the impression that Jews generally preferred to live in the major administrative centers, such as Bari and Rossano,

⁶² *Spicilegium Casinense*, I (Montecassino, 1888), 377–81.

⁶³ B. Capasso, ed., *Monumenta ad Neapolitani ducatus historiam pertinentia* II, 1 (Naples, 1885) nr. 243, p. 152 (a. 984–985), nr. 316, p. 194 (1002); N. Ferorelli, *Gli Ebrei nell'Italia meridionale dall'età romana al secolo XVIII* (Torino 1915), (reprint: Bologna, 1980), 24f; G. Lacerenza, "Memorie e luoghi della cultura ebraica," in *Napoli nel Medioevo. Segni culturali di una città* (Galatina, 2007), 59–75.

⁶⁴ Funerary inscriptions from Benevento (VIII/IX cent.): P. Rugo, *Le iscrizioni dei sec. VI-VII-VIII esistenti in Italia*, IV: *I ducati di Spoleto e Benevento* (Cittadella, 1978), nos. 25, 26, 51–52, 54, 56, 59, 60, 62; *The Chronicle of Ahima'az*, 244, 282, 322.

⁶⁵ *The Chronicle of Ahima'az*, 310, 348. In 1041 Prince Waimar gave eleven Jews, residents of Capua and belonging to two different families, together with their descendants and all of their movable and immovable properties *et scole eorum hebraice*, to his relative the *comes palatinus* Grimoald and his heirs. Thenceforward they were required to pay to Grimoald the taxes and deliver the corvées which until then they had owed to the prince: P. M. Tropeano, *Codice diplomatico Verginiano*, I. 947–1102 (Montevergine, 1977) no. 47, pp. 180–3; H. Taviani-Carozzi, "Les Juifs dans les cités lombardes d'Italie du Sud (X^e–XII^e s.)," in *Villes et sociétés urbaines au Moyen Âge. Hommage à M. le Professeur Jacques Heers* (Paris, 1994), [*Cultures et civilisations médiévales*, 11], 269–80.

⁶⁶ The local *iudaica* is mentioned several times: M. Morcaldi, M Schiani and S. De Stephano, eds., *Codex diplomaticus Cavensis* II (Milan, 1875), no. 442, p. 323 (a. 991); IV (Milan, 1877), no. 567, pp. 46f. (a. 1004), no. 651, pp. 196f. (a. 1012); V (Milan, 1878), nr. 841, pp. 211f. (a. 1031); VII (Milan, 1888), no. 1231, pp. 298f. (a. 1056).

⁶⁷ Note 19.

or in the more important ports which connected the southern Italian provinces with Constantinople, such as Otranto and Taranto. But according to some early Norman documents they also settled in towns like Melfi and Troia⁶⁸ which had been founded on the major thoroughfares by the Byzantine catepan in the twenties of the eleventh century.⁶⁹

In his *Sefer Yuhasin* Ahima'az Ben Paltiel refers to a fictitious conversation between his ancestor Rabbi Paltiel and the emir al-Mui'z which allegedly took place after the Arab conquest of Byzantine Oria in 977. In a dream the emir had seen three stars which he thought signified the three southern Italian cities he would conquer after Oria: Taranto, Otranto, and Bari. The rabbi however tells him that he will become the ruler of three countries: Sicily, Ifrikiya, and Egypt.⁷⁰ Al-Mui'z, who by the way never set foot in Italy, did indeed conquer the three countries, but perhaps Ahima'az considered the four towns, Oria, Taranto, Otranto, and Bari, as the most important Jewish settlements in Apulia. Since the highly fragmentary documentation does not provide much insight into the life and civilization of the Jews in Byzantine southern Italy, I shall try in the following pages to present the Jewish communities of these cities as case stories.

Oria had been an important Byzantine stronghold during the years 834–871 when parts of Apulia, especially Bari and Taranto, constituted an Arab emirate. In this period Otranto was the only Byzantine port in Italy which connected Constantinople with Sicily, and Oria played an essential role in the defence of its hinterland. For reasons of security the bishop of Brindisi had moved his residence to Oria. In the eighties of the ninth century the bishop Theodosius deposited the relics of St Barsanuphius in a chapel close to the *porta Hebraica* or *porta Hebraea*.⁷¹ The local Jewish community is mostly known through funerary inscriptions and the *Sefer Yuhasin* of Ahima'az ben

⁶⁸ A. Mercati, "Le pergamene di Melfi all'Archivio segreto Vaticano," in *Miscellanea Giovanni Mercati*, V (Città del Vaticano, 1946) [Studie Testi 125], no. 9, p. 305, no. 2, p. 274; Benjamin da Tudela, *Libro di viaggi*, a cura di L. Minervini (Palermo, 1989), 47; N. Kamp, *Kirche und Monarchie im staufischen Königreich Sizilien. I. Prosopographische Grundlegung: Bistümer und Bischöfe des Königreichs 1194–1266. 2. Apulien und Kalabrien* (München, 1975), 487, 508.

⁶⁹ V. von Falkenhausen, "Between Two Empires: Byzantine Italy in the Reign of Basil II," in *Byzantium in the Year 1000*, ed. P. Magdalino (Leiden, 2003), 148f.

⁷⁰ *The Chronicle of Ahima'az*, 314.

⁷¹ "De S. Barsanuphio Solitario," in *Acta sanctorum, Aprilis II*, 26 A–D.

Paltiel. Although the author mentions the Jewish prisoners of the Emperor Titus as the founders of the town, the tradition of his own family starts only in the ninth century with his ancestor Rabbi Amitai “a wise man [—] in Torah, a poet and logician, who mastered the Law of God, an intelligent person among his people.... And he had sons fair and honest, wise and intelligent, learned persons and poets, educators and teachers to decent pupils. Princes and lords, who understand mysteries, composers of rhymed verses, adept in the mysteries, wise watchers, intelligent observers, astute authors of prayers, learned in the *Book of Righteousness*, observers of the *Mystery of the Chariot*. The first was Rabbi Shephatiah, who engaged in the salutary Law; the second was Rabbi Hananel, who meditated on the Law of God brought down by Yekutiel; the third was Elazar, who speculated on that which was given in the third (the Torah).” About Shephatiah’s son Amittai, a renowned poet of *piyyutim*, the same text says that God “strengthened his *yeshivah* with the wise men of his academy.”⁷² There might be some exaggeration in the author’s pride in the excellence of his ancestors’ religious scholarship and poetry, but apparently the Jews of Oria cherished high standards of learning. When in 925 Oria was conquered by the Arabs, the Latin chronicle reports to the massacre of part of the male population and the abduction of the rest into slavery.⁷³ The Arabic sources boast of the rich booty.⁷⁴ The Jewish texts, however, lament the loss of scholars: “Ten learned and pious rabbis... were slain.”⁷⁵ Moreover, two young Jews who on that occasion were captured by the Arabs went on to outstanding scholarly careers: one was the then twelve-years-old Shabbetai Donnolo, the well-known doctor and astrologer,⁷⁶ the other may have been Mūsà ben El’āzār, a famous physician, astrologer, and politician at the Fatimid court, founder of a dynasty of court physicians who has been tentatively identified with

⁷² *The Chronicle of Ahima’az*, 234–236, and note 59.

⁷³ Lupus Protospatharius [MGH, *Scriptores V*], p. 53: *capta est Oria a Sarracenis mense Iulii et interfecerunt cunctos mares, reliquos vero duxerunt in Africam eos venundantes*.

⁷⁴ “Kitāb ‘al Bayān ‘al Mugrib,” in *Biblioteca arabo-sicula. Versione italiana*, II, ed., M. Amari (Torino, 1881), 27f.

⁷⁵ Shabbetai Donnolo, *Sefer Hakhmoni*. Introduzione, testo critico e traduzione italiana, annotata e commentata a cura di P. Mancuso (Firenze, 2009) [Biblioteca ebraica italiana], 47. The English translation is quoted from J. Starr, *The Jews in the Byzantine Empire, 641–1204* (Athens, 1939) [Texte und Forschungen zur byzantinisch-neugriechischen Philologie, 30], no. 87, p. 149.

⁷⁶ Shabbetai Donnolo, *Sefer Hakhmoni*, 8–18.

Paltiel, descendent of the Rabbi Amittai mentioned above.⁷⁷ After the Arab conquest Oria lost its importance as a center of Jewish culture. Some of the survivors moved to Bari or Otranto.⁷⁸

The Jewish community of Bari also traced its origins back to the Emperor Titus,⁷⁹ and Jewish inscriptions from Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages have been preserved.⁸⁰ But when in 894 Bari (in the wording of Ahima'az: "metropolis which is facing the sea")⁸¹ became the capital of Byzantine southern Italy, first of the *thema* of Langobardia, then of the catepanate, and residence of the governor, first the στρατηγὸς Λογγιβαρδίας and later the κατεπάνω Ἰταλίας, the town became an important observation point. From the end of the ninth to the second half of the eleventh century, Bari was the center of Byzantine politics in Italy, the place where one could approach the highest Byzantine authorities in the country, and where official news from Constantinople arrived first, as for instance, according to Ahima'az, the communication of Basil I's death: "the writ too arrived, for the kings of Constantinople followed their custom, that when a king would die they would send a written announcement to Bari, and they would write the day and hour of the king's passing."⁸² At the end of the reign of Romanus I, when an anti-Jewish pogrom was organized, "the fire was first kindled in our town," wrote a Jew from Bari to Hasdai ibn Shaprut, chief minister of the caliph of Cordova. Thus there was time enough to warn the co-religionists in Otranto—and presumably also in other places—who could hide the Torah.⁸³ Bari was also the setting for the only other likely case of anti-Jewish persecution in Byzantine southern Italy, known to me: in 1051, when Argyros, the new Byzantine governor, entered the city, the Jewish quarter was burnt for unknown reasons.⁸⁴ But since the *iudeca* was situated close

⁷⁷ B. Lewis, "Paltiel: A Note," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 30 (1967): 177–81; C. Colafemmina, "Un medico ebreo di Oria alla corte dei Fātīmīdī," *Materia giudaica. Rivista dell'Associazione italiana per lo studio del giudaismo* 11/1–2 (2006): 5–12.

⁷⁸ *The Chronicle of Ahima'az*, 324–34; Starr, *The Jews*, 150, 153.

⁷⁹ Starr, *The Jews*, 110.

⁸⁰ Note 14.

⁸¹ *The Chronicle of Ahima'az*, 320.

⁸² *Ibid.* 306.

⁸³ J. Mann, "Hisdai ibn Shaprūt and his Diplomatic Intervention on Behalf of the Jews in Christian Europe," in *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature*, ed., J. Mann (Cincinnati, 1931), 12–6.

⁸⁴ *Anonymi Barenis Chronicon* (Milan, 1724) [Rerum Italicarum Scriptores, 5] 151: *zalavit ipse* (the duke Argyrus) *Iudeam*.

to the sea-shore and the palace of the catepan,⁸⁵ and the political climate in the town was tense and close to civil war, the fire might also have been a coincidence.

The continuous political and administrative interplay between Constantinople, Bari, and the other major towns of southern Italy encouraged trade. Since the end of the tenth century, we know of commercial activities between Bari and Byzantium in which Jews may have participated.⁸⁶ Among the documents of the Genizah there is a letter of Jacob b. Amram, Nagid of Fustat, who “arranged for a big collection for a Rumī relative who had been robbed while travelling between Salerno and Bari.”⁸⁷

Among the five funerary inscriptions from Bari datable to the ninth century there is one of a man with the title of *strtygws* (στρατηγός),⁸⁸ whatever this means in a Jewish context. He was perhaps a leader of the community. It would appear significant, however, that Elias b. Mosè used the same title as the governors of Byzantine themes. In the forties of the tenth century the head of the Jewish community of Bari, Abraham b. Sason, was a physician, which was normal in all Mediterranean countries, Islamic or Christian.⁸⁹ There was in the town a well-known rabbinical court to which Hananel, the son of the vizir Paltiel, applied to recover the family’s property which had been taken during the Arab raid of Oria.⁹⁰ A *responsum* of this court concerning marriage arrangements has been preserved and may be dated to the end of the tenth or early eleventh century.⁹¹

The only Latin deed from Byzantine southern Italy known to me which explicitly mentions a Jew was drawn up at Bari. In the first half

⁸⁵ L.-R. Ménager, *Recueil des actes des ducs normands d’Italie (1042–1127)*, I. *Les premiers ducs (1046–1087)*, (Bari, 1981) [Società di storia patria per la Puglia. Documenti e monografie, 45], no. 44, pp. 143f.: In 1084 Robert Guiscard grants to Ursus, archbishop of Bari, the donation given by the Empress Theodora (1055–1056) to one of his predecessors, archbishop Nicholas (attested between 1035 and 1061), consisting of *magnam curtem dominicam sive de catapano prope mare cum omnibus edificiis* which was situated *prope iudecam*. Even though Robert Guiscard’s diploma is a fake, there is no reason to believe that the topographical indications were not correct.

⁸⁶ E. Ashtor, “Gli Ebrei nel commercio mediterraneo nell’alto Medioevo (sec. X–XI),” in *Gli Ebrei nell’alto Medioevo. 30 marzo–5 aprile 1978* (Spoleto, 1980) [Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull’alto Medioevo, 26], 433.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁸⁸ Colafemmina, “L’insediamento ebraico,” 514.

⁸⁹ Starr, *The Jews*, 154; Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, II, 240–7.

⁹⁰ *The Chronicle of Ahima’az*, 320.

⁹¹ Starr, *The Jews*, 172f.; Colafemmina, “L’insediamento ebraico,” 515.

of the eleventh century—the exact date of the document, which is in very bad condition, cannot be established—*Manache ebreo filio Moisen de civitate Bari* sold a property with olive trees to a local Christian.⁹² There is, however, no way to estimate the size of the Jewish community in Bari, for when Benjamin of Tudela travelled through Apulia the town had just been destroyed by William I (1156) and nobody was living there.⁹³

Again, learning and poetry were very important in the community of Bari. Cesare Colafemmina has published and dated to the ninth century the funeral inscription of Mosè b. Elia teacher and poet.⁹⁴ Another poet, Elia b. Shemaiah, author of at least forty *piyyutim*, has been tentatively identified with one of the members of the rabbinical court at end of the tenth century.⁹⁵ More revealing is the legend of four rabbis, eminent scholars, who in the second half of the tenth century, during their journey from Bari to Alexandria, were kidnapped by pirates and after having been ransomed in three different cities became the heads of the rabbinical academies at Fustat, Kairawan, and Cordova.⁹⁶ There must have been good reason for the motto coined in the twelfth century by Rabbi Jacob b. Meir of Troyes: “For out of Bari shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Otranto.”⁹⁷

Conversion of Christians and Jews went both ways in Bari. According to a diploma of Sikelgaita and her son Roger Borsa from March 1086, an ancient synagogue in the *iudeca* had been previously—perhaps before the Norman conquest—transformed by the sons of *Offus* into a church dedicated to the saintly popes Silvester and Leo.⁹⁸ The dedication to the two popes is quite indicative: as we have said, Silvester was famous in the Middle Ages for his legendary religious discussion with twelve rabbis, whereas Leo I has always been considered a stronghold of orthodoxy. On the other side there was Andrew, archbishop of Bari (1061–1066), who may have converted to Judaism when he was in

⁹² V. De Donato, “Aggiunte al codice diplomatico barese. Pergamene dell’archivio della Cattedrale,” *Archivio storico pugliese* 27 (1974): 210f.

⁹³ Benjamin da Tudela, 47.

⁹⁴ Colafemmina, “L’insediamento ebraico,” 519f.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 515.

⁹⁶ A. Sharf, *Byzantine Jewry from Justinian to the Forth Crusade* (London, 1971), 167.

⁹⁷ Sharf, *Byzantine Jewry*, 168.

⁹⁸ Ménager, *Recueil des actes*, no. 47, pp. 171f.: *locum Sinagoge in quo ecclesiam dedicare fecerunt filii Offi in honore sancti Silvestri et sancti Leonis pape, quam mihi olim ipsi Judei dederunt cum omnibus eius pertinentiis stabilibus et mobilibus*. The donation is confirmed by Roger Borsa in June 1087: *ibid.*, no. 61, pp. 215–219.

Constantinople, from where he is said to have moved to Cairo. We owe this information to the autobiographical papers of John-Obadiah, a Norman cleric of Oppido in the Basilicata, himself a convert to Judaism in 1102, who says he heard about the conversion when he was a child.⁹⁹ Since Andrew left for Constantinople in 1066, shortly before the Norman conquest of Bari, and then disappears from the Italian scene and sources, one cannot exclude slander here with the intention of destroying the memory of an unpopular bishop. In a like manner, Andrew's successor Ursus, a Norman partisan, was said to have converted to Islam, which is certainly untrue.¹⁰⁰ But there are good reasons to believe in Andrew's conversion to Judaism: the intellectual life in Byzantine southern Italy was uninspiring. Except for some poor chronographical texts and Greek hagiography, the literary production of the Christians in that area was zero. Maybe the archbishop had been attracted by the more stimulating intellectual climate among the Jewish scholars in his diocese.

According to the Jewish tradition recorded in some of the manuscripts of the *Yosippon*, the Emperor Titus had settled 5000 prisoners from Jerusalem in Otranto and Taranto.¹⁰¹ When Benjamin of Tudela visited Otranto in the late sixties of the twelfth century, the local Jewish community consisted of about 500 members. This is the highest number he mentions in any town of the former Byzantine territories in southern Italy. Otranto is situated in the southern Salento, at the point closest to the other side of the Adriatic, and during the Byzantine period it was by far the most important harbor connecting the southern Italian provinces with Constantinople and the eastern Mediterranean. After the Norman conquest and during the Crusades other, especially larger Apulian ports were used as well, but Otranto never lost its importance. The medieval archives of the town have not survived; no legal deed of the Byzantine period exists. Thus we know almost nothing about the local history of that time.¹⁰² Thanks to its geographi-

⁹⁹ C. Colafemmina, "La conversione al giudaismo di Andrea arcivescovo di Bari," in *Giovanni-Ovadiah da Oppido, proselito, viaggiatore e musicista dell'età normanna*. Atti del convegno internazionale di Oppido Lucano, 28–30 marzo 2004, a cura di A. De Rosa e M. Perani (Firenze, 2005), 55–65.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 60–2.

¹⁰¹ Colafemmina, *Gli ebrei a Taranto*, 27f.

¹⁰² V. von Falkenhausen, "Tra Occidente e Oriente: Otranto in epoca bizantina," in *Otranto nel Medioevo tra Bisanzio e l'Occidente*, ed., H. Houben (Galatina, 2007), 13f.

cal position Otranto was an ideal place for commercial activities. Mar Elijah, “an upright man who was a merchant,” was killed during the pogrom at the end of the reign of Romanus I.¹⁰³ During the same persecution “the holy congregation of Otranto has lost three leaders...: R. Isaiah, a prominent and learned man; R. Menahem, a pious and scrupulously observant scholar whereas there survived R. Hodaiah and his son, both learned men.”¹⁰⁴ In fact, the learning of the Jews of Otranto was proverbial in the Middle Ages, if one remembers, for instance, the famous motto of R. Jacob b. Meir of Troyes quoted previously. Several unconnected pieces of information appear to confirm his statement. Shabbetai Donnolo, the great physician and astrologer, might have stayed there, for he recommends the honey of Otranto for medical purposes.¹⁰⁵ Many highly productive religious poets from the Salento are known, among them Menachem Corizzi of Otranto who has been studied by Isai Sonne.¹⁰⁶ According to Luisa Cuomo, the glosses to the Mishnah in the vernacular of the Salento preserved in a Hebrew manuscript of the Biblioteca Palatina of Parma (cod. 3173, De Rossi 138) can be dated to the tenth or eleventh century.¹⁰⁷ And fragments of several Hebrew manuscripts copied in the Salento, presumably at Otranto, during the last decades of the eleventh century have been identified.¹⁰⁸ Finally, it may not be just a coincidence that in post-Byzantine times one of the great Greek intellectuals of Otranto, the γραμματικός Nicolaus who became abbot of the monastery of Casole under the name of Nectarius (1155/1160–1235), wrote a ponderous treatise against the Jews (Κατὰ Ἰουδαίων).¹⁰⁹ This

¹⁰³ Starr, *The Jews*, 153.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 164.

¹⁰⁶ I. Sonne, “Alcuni osservazioni sulla poesia religiosa ebraica in Puglia,” *Rivista degli studi orientali* 14 (1933/1934): 68–77.

¹⁰⁷ L. Cuomo, “Antichissime glosse salentine nel codice ebraico di Parma, De Rossi, 138,” *Medioevo romanzo* 4 (1977): 185–271, especially 227f.

¹⁰⁸ M. Perani and A. Grazi, “La scuola dei copisti ebrei pugliesi (Otranto?) del sec. XI. Nuove scoperte,” *Materia giudaica. Rivista dell’Associazione italiana per lo studio del giudaismo* 11 (2006): 13–34.

¹⁰⁹ J. M. Hoeck – R. J. Loenertz, *Nikolaos-Nektarios von Otranto, Abt von Casole. Beiträge zur Geschichte der ost-westlichen Beziehungen unter Innozenz III. und Friedrich II.*, (Ettal, 1965) [Studia Patristica et Byzantina, 11], 88–109; M. Chrontz, ed., *Νεκταρίου, ἡγουμένου μονῆς Κασούλων (Νικολάου Ὑδρουντίου) Διάλεξις κατὰ Ἰουδαίων* (Athens, 2009).

kind of religious literature is quite common in Byzantium,¹¹⁰ but no other comparable text was ever written in Byzantine Italy. Nicolaus-Nectarius is known to have had theological discussions with learned Jews in Thessalonica, Constantinople, and Boethia during his journeys to the Latin Empire of Byzantium. Since he appears to have had some knowledge of Hebrew he could have learned in his native city, though in his treatise he never refers to local Jews.

The Jewish community of Taranto boasted of the same ancient Roman origins as Oria, Bari, and Otranto. For the period from the fourth to the ninth century, Colafemmina lists twenty funerary inscriptions from Taranto, the older ones (fourth to fifth century) in Greek, the others (seventh to ninth century) in Latin and Hebrew or bilingual.¹¹¹ Two Greek deeds from Taranto (1033 and 1039) mention the Jew Theophylactus, called also Chimarias (Θεοφύλακτον τῷ γένει τῶν Ἑβραίων, τὸν λεγόμενον Χιμαρίαν), who buys two large contiguous vineyards for the price, respectively, of five or three *nomismata* from Leo, son of the *komes* Ischanakes.¹¹² The documents, which follow the normal legal procedure of Byzantine contracts, reveal that Theophylactus was a relatively wealthy person and give evidence that Jews owned property beside their Christian compatriots. In some Greek deeds of the last decades of the twelfth century, there is mention of a πόρτη or πύλη ἑβραϊκή close to the sea-shore, next to the monastery of St. Bartholomew.¹¹³ According to Benjamin of Tudela, in the late sixties of the twelfth century some three hundred Jews lived in Taranto, some of whom were learned men. Moreover, he says that the inhabitants of the town were Greeks. This is not entirely true, for although until the end of the twelfth century most of the legal deeds of Taranto were written in Greek, and the most important monasteries were Greek,¹¹⁴ the local bishops, and later archbishops and the clergy of the cathedral were,

¹¹⁰ A. Külzer, *Disputationes Graecae contra Iudaeos. Untersuchungen zur byzantinischen antijüdischen Dialogliteratur und ihrem Judenbild* (Stuttgart, 1999), [Byzantinisches Archiv 18].

¹¹¹ Colafemmina, *Gli ebrei a Taranto*, 28–44.

¹¹² F. Trinchera, *Syllabus Graecarum membranarum* (Naples, 1865), no. 26, pp. 29–31, no. 31, pp. 36–38. The Greek name Theophylaktos is the translation of the Jewish name Chimarias.

¹¹³ G. Robinson, ed., *History and Cartulary of the Greek Monastery of St. Elias and St. Anastasius of Carbone*, II, 2 (Rome, 1930) [Orientalia Christiana XIX, 1], 93 (an. 1177), 133 (an. 1198)

¹¹⁴ V. von Falkenhausen, "Un inedito documento greco del monastero di S. Vito del Pizzo (Taranto)," *Cenacolo*, n. s. 7/19 (1995): 10–4.

however, Latin even during the Byzantine period.¹¹⁵ Perhaps the Jewish community was Greek-speaking, an hypothesis which might be confirmed by the fact that the title of the president of the community was *protus* (πρωτος).¹¹⁶

Since Benjamin of Tudela did not visit the Jewish communities of Calabria on his journey to the eastern Mediterranean, we have no reliable source for the twelfth century. Nevertheless, we know that in the Norman period Jews were well established in several towns in Calabria. During the last decade of the eleventh century, the Norman duke Roger Borsa and his mother Sikelgaita gave eight Jews and, subsequently, the Jewish *tinctoria* to Nicholas archbishop of Rossano;¹¹⁷ and during the twelfth and thirteenth century the Jewish community in the town is well attested.

In Byzantine times Rossano was an important military and cultural stronghold in northern Calabria. In contrast to most Calabrian cities, including the former capital Reggio, Rossano was never raided or occupied by the Arabs. Though many Greek manuscripts written in the so-called script of Rossano have survived, as also in Otranto, no legal document of the Byzantine period has been preserved. However, the *Life* of Saint Nilus, a well-educated Greek monk, born in Rossano around 910, who lived there until 980 and died in Grottaferrata, near Rome, in 1004, offers interesting insights into the relationship between Jews and Christians in Calabria. This text was written in the early twenties of the eleventh century by an anonymous Greek monk who had followed the saint from Calabria to Latium and shows a pronounced anti-Jewish tendency. Although the author is generally well informed about the historical events in southern Italy during Nilus's lifetime,¹¹⁸ one has to take into account that he does not want to write history, but hagiography. Thus each episode must be considered as an *exemplum* intended for the edification of the pious reader.

¹¹⁵ Ead., "Taranto in epoca bizantina," *Studi medievali*, s. III, 9 (1968): 152–60.

¹¹⁶ D. Girgensohn und N. Kamp, "Urkunden und Inquisitionen der Stauferzeit aus Tarent," *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 41 (1961): 189.

¹¹⁷ W. Holtzmann, "Papst-, Kaiser- und Normannenurkunden aus Unteritalien," *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 36 (1956): 27f. The diplomas have not been preserved, but were confirmed later by Roger II and Frederic II.

¹¹⁸ V. von Falkenhausen, "La Vita di s. Nilo come fonte storica per la Calabria bizantina," in *Atti del Congresso internazionale su s. Nilo di Rossano (28 settembre-1° ottobre 1986)*, (Rossano-Grottaferrata, 1989), 271–305.

Four episodes concerning Jews are related in the text. The first one is the often discussed and disconcerting story about a Jewish merchant who, returning from a fair, was robbed and killed by a young delinquent from Bisignano. Since the murderer escaped, the local judges got hold of his father-in-law in order to hand him over to the Jewish community so that they might crucify him. When Nilus was informed of this he sent one of his monks, George, an aristocrat of Rossano, to submit a letter of protest to the judges. He told them, as the law (νόμος) prescribed, that for every Christian killed seven Jews had to be put to death; and if the murderer's father-in-law was indeed crucified, they would have to execute six more Jews. In the case that the judges decided not to obey the law, instead of the delinquent's father-in-law they should kill the messenger. When asked by the judges, George, who had not known the contents of the letter, happily accepted Nilus's proposal. But in the end the prisoner was released and the monk returned to his monastery.¹¹⁹ Needless to say, such a law never existed either in Byzantium or in Italy. According to Cesare Colafemmina, Nilus recognized only biblical law and referred in his statement to *Genesis* 4:15, where it is said that he who kills Cain should be punished seven times.¹²⁰ Obviously, the spiritual significance of the story is to demonstrate George's humility and obedience. But for a Greek reader from Calabria the existence of Jewish merchants in the small town of Bisignano on the *via Popilia*, one of the major thoroughfares of Calabria, would have appeared plausible.

According to another Jewish episode related in the *Vita Nili*, a Jew from Rossano once asked Nilus to speak to him about God. Nilus invited him to take the Holy Scriptures and to come to his hermitage and stay there and read for as long as Moses had stayed on Mount Sinai. After this he would speak to him about God. The Jew did not dare to accept the invitation, for he feared to be thrown out of the synagogue and stoned by his co-religionists.¹²¹ So ends the story which is told to demonstrate the saint's wisdom.

More revealing are the two episodes which relate the encounters between Nilus and Donnolo, who is acknowledged as a scholar

¹¹⁹ G. Giovanelli, Βίος καὶ πολιτεία τοῦ ὁσίου πατρὸς ἡμῶν Νείλου τοῦ Νέου, (Badia di Grottaferrata, 1972), 80f.

¹²⁰ C. Colafemmina, "San Nilo di Rossano e gli ebrei," in *Atti del Congresso internazionale su s. Nilo di Rossano*, 126–130.

¹²¹ Giovanelli, Βίος, 93f.

of the law and expert in medical science (νομομαθὴ καὶ ἰκανὸν περὶ τὴν ἰατρικὴν ἐπιστήμην. According to the *Vita Nili*, the future monk and the Jewish scholar were well acquainted since their youth, but when Donnolo offered Nilus certain medicaments to help him endure his extreme ascetical exercises, the latter refused them with anger, saying that God was his doctor and nobody should say that Nilus took drugs from a Jew, which might be interpreted as pro-Jewish propaganda. The two met again at the deathbed of an eminent Byzantine official at Rossano: one as a doctor, the other as a spiritual guide. On this occasion Donnolo is witness to the official's final repentance and conversion.¹²² Unlike other Byzantine hagiographical texts which deal with the encounters of saints and Jews, the *Vita Nili* never mentions any attempt of Nilus to convert Donnolo to Christianity, nor is there any hint that Donnolo was condemned to the fire of hell. He just remains the respected physician who admires the spiritual rigour and power of the saintly protagonist.

We know very little about the adult life of Donnolo, but after having been ransomed from the Arabs in Taranto, he apparently continued to live in the Greek-speaking part of Byzantine southern Italy. In his *Sefer Ha-Yaqqar* he refers to the honey of Otranto, Oria, and Mirto, close to Rossano.¹²³ Thus it is generally thought that he lived in Rossano.¹²⁴ Except for the *Vita Nili*, Donnolo is never mentioned in contemporary Christian texts—Latin or Greek—from southern Italy. In our context it is irrelevant whether Nilus really knew Donnolo, but for the hagiographer, Donnolo was such an important person in Rossano that it was essential to connect him with the saint.

Although there is no further documentation about Jews in Byzantine Rossano, the figure of Donnolo demonstrates the high level of Jewish culture in the town, which was apparently continued by his students. Piergabriele Mancuso has shown that a passage of the *Sefer Hakhmoni* is quoted in the *Sefer Rossina*, a commentary of the Torah written by Samuel of Rossano at the end of the eleventh or the beginning of

¹²² Ibid., 93, 98.

¹²³ Starr, *The Jews*, 164.

¹²⁴ G. Fiacadori, "Donnolo, Shabbetai bar Abrāhām," in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* 41 (Rome, 1992), 215; F. Luzzati Laganà, "La figura di Donnolo nello specchio della Vita di s. Nilo di Rossano," in *Sabbetai Donnolo. Scienza e cultura ebraica nell'Italia del secolo X*, ed., G. Lacerenza (Napoli, 2004) (Univ. degli studi di Napoli "L'Orientale." Dipartimento di studi asiatici—Ser. Minor, 66), 69–103; Shabbetai Donnolo, *Sefer Hakhmoni*, 9f.

the twelfth century.¹²⁵ Furthermore, at the end of the twelfth century one of the major intellectuals from southern Italy, the Cistercian abbot Joachim of Fiore, who was born and educated in northern Calabria, wrote an important treatise against the Jews.¹²⁶ Joachim's *Exhortatorium Iudeorum*, normally dated in the decade from 1187 to 1196/7,¹²⁷ is based on the information given to the author by Peter Alfonsi, a converted Jew, and by a *peritissimo Hebreo*.¹²⁸

CONCLUSION

Bits and pieces of scattered information cannot provide a coherent panorama of Jews and Jewish life in Byzantine southern Italy. The Jews apparently continued to live, as before, in the more important administrative centers or in well-connected ports or towns. Concerning their professions, the Hebrew texts put a certain emphasis on rabbis and religious scholars, but there are also doctors, merchants, and landowners. Beginning with the eighties of the eleventh century, Norman diplomas mention the *tincta et celandria Iudeorum* in many cities,¹²⁹ whereas the documents of the Byzantine period never refer to dyers. But here a conclusion *ex silentio* would be a mistake, for this is simply a case of missing documentation. How could the Normans have established Jewish dyeing businesses in all the major cities of southern Italy in such a short time?

For the most part, the Jews seem to have used the language spoken or written by the majority of their Christian compatriots: Latin in northern and central Apulia, Greek in Salento and Calabria. Donnolo, who moved from the Salento to Calabria, refers to his research on Greek scientific literature,¹³⁰ whereas the author of the Josippon, who

¹²⁵ Shabbetai Donnolo, *Sefer Hakhmoni*, 266f., note 123.

¹²⁶ A. Patschovsky, ed., Joachim abbas Florensis, *Exhortatorium Iudeorum* (Roma, 2006) [Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo. Fonti per la storia dell'Italia medievale, 26].

¹²⁷ Joachim abbas Florensis, 44–61. The oldest extant manuscript (Padua, Bibl. Antoniana, 322) was written in Calabria during the 13th century: *ibid.* 62–116.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 158, n. 133.

¹²⁹ Ménager, *Recueil*, no. 61, p. 218.

¹³⁰ Shabbetai Donnolo, 49; G. Sermoneta, "Il neo-platonismo nel pensiero dei nuclei ebraici stanziati nell'Occidente latino (riflessioni sul 'Commento al Libro della Creazione' di Rabbi Šabbetai Donnolo)," in *Gli Ebrei nell'alto Medioevo. 30 marzo–5 aprile*

did not know Greek, worked on Latin texts, most probably in the area of Naples.¹³¹ Translated from a Latin original, a Hebrew catalogue of Roman and Byzantine emperors from Julius Caesar to Nicephorus II with brief annotations on Italian events was published by Adolf Neubauer in 1887.¹³² Several similar Latin compilations have been preserved in various manuscripts from southern Italy, for example the catalogue in cod. Cassin. 175 which is very close to the Hebrew text.¹³³

The translation of the catalogue of emperors shows that the Byzantine Jews in southern Italy were interested in the history of the Eastern Roman empire. Some of them were well informed about Byzantine habits and institutions. Ahima'az mentions the practice of sending news of an emperor's death to the capital of the *thema*; and he knows, with reference to his ancestor R. Hananel, that one needed an official sealed document (*σινίλλιον*) to travel undisturbed through the various provinces of the empire in order to recover lost or illegally alienated property.¹³⁴ Without such a passport, one could easily be held up as a spy. A similar and almost contemporary *sigillum* was issued in 956 by Marianos Argyros, the Byzantine governor of the Italian provinces, to the abbot of Montecassino, allowing him to move undisturbed by imperial officials through southern Italy, in order to recover the abbey's scattered possessions.¹³⁵

On the whole it seems that there were no great problems in the interrelationship of Jews and Christians. The rareness of explicit references to Jews in southern Italian documents might well be an indication of normal social communication. Rabbi Hananel in Oria was on good terms with the local bishop,¹³⁶ and Nilus of Rossano is said to have been well acquainted from his youth with Donnolo. Jews, however, had no access to the higher ranks in politics and administration. Ahima'az refers to various members of his family who rose to eminent

1978 (Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo, 26), (Spoleto, 1980), 867–935. On Donnolo's dependence on Greek sources especially: 929f.

¹³¹ Lacerenza, "Memorie e luoghi," 65–9.

¹³² A. Neubauer, *Medieval Jewish Chronicles and Chronological Notes*, I (Oxford, 1887), 185–6.

¹³³ MGH, *Script. rer. Lang. et Ital.*, 485f. According to S. Gero, "Byzantine Imperial Prosopography in a Medieval Hebrew Text," *Byzantion* 47 (1977): 157–162, the Hebrew version was translated from a Greek original, but the Latin texts are much closer.

¹³⁴ *The Chronicle of Ahima'az*, 320.

¹³⁵ Trinchera, *Syllabus*, no. 6, p. 5.

¹³⁶ *The Chronicle of Ahima'az*, 284–90.

positions in the Fatimid caliphate¹³⁷ and the principality of Capua.¹³⁸ Perhaps his family pride made him exaggerate. In Islamic countries the distinguished careers of Jews are well documented, but in Byzantium this would have been possible only after baptism.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 66–76, 316–20, 324–34.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 348.