THURSDAY, MAY 3, 2012

(1st session) – Italian Jews in the Mediterranean World (Chair: Marco Di Giulio, Franklin & Marshall College)

(a) Igor H. de Souza (PhD candidate, University of Chicago): "Jewish Philosophy in 13th-Century Italy: Between Isolation and Collaboration"

Two Jewish thinkers of the 13th century, Moses of Salerno (d.1279) and Zerahya Ḥen (active 1277-1291) exemplify two opposing trends in 13th century Italian-Jewish thought. Zerahya, who lived in Rome, was isolated from the surrounding Latin philosophical climate. He preferred to nurture an attachment to Aristotelian sources in Arabic translation, the knowledge of which he had brought with him from Barcelona, and seems to not have known Latin. Moses of Salerno, on the other hand, worked under the patronage of Frederick II in Sicily, and unlike Zerahya, he was quite receptive to outside influences. He was aware of contemporaneous trends in Latin philosophy and collaborated closely with a "Christian scholar," whom he names Niccolà da Giovinazzo; together they studied an important Jewish philosophical treatise in Hebrew and in Latin translation. This paper explores these two different circumstances--between intellectual isolation and collaboration, between looking to the past and looking to the future. All Zerahya's students took the path of collaboration and were heavily influenced by the surrounding environment, indicating that Moses of Salerno's career foreshadowed what would eventually become the norm in Italian-Jewish thought.

(b) Vadim Putzu (PhD candidate, Hebrew Union College; Visiting Instructor, Franklin & Marshall College): "The Leviathan... may be digested through wine: Menachem Azariah of Fano's Symbolism of Wine between Safed and Italy"

Prominent among the Italian kabbalists of the late 16th-early 17th centuries, Menachem Azariah of Fano is considered one of the main representatives of Safedian mysticism in the boot-shaped peninsula. However, one who focuses on Fano's references to wine in his works will find that the complex and somewhat disturbing enoic images crafted by Cordovero and Vital have barely left a mark on the Italian kabbalist. Fano says very little about this commanded-yet-feared liquid, bearer of both joy and sin. Yet when he does talk about wine, he seems to leave out the ominous connections characterizing much of its symbolism for the sake of positive evaluations and lesser known references. In my paper, I will argue that Fano's approach to wine, insofar as it is different from his Safedian masters', may be seen as a reflection of his own particular mentality as well as of the specific cultural context of Italian Jewry. Fano's attitude represents a case in point of what I have called "cultural enology of Judaism", which contends that given wine's ubiquitousness in Jewish life and its ambivalent symbolism, attitudes about this beverage may contribute to elucidate broader ideological and existential postures maintained by a Jewish individual or social formation.

(c) Pamela J. Dorn Sezgin (Associate Professor of Anthropology and History, Gainesville State College): "Los Frangos: Italian Jews as Agents of Modernity in the Late Ottoman Diaspora"

Italian Jews were a distinct minority within a minority, and also, an integral part of the Sephardic world in the Eastern Mediterranean throughout the Ottoman Empire's existence. Rather than there
being just one wave of migration from Italy, certain Italian Jewish families, like the Alatinis from Salonika, went back and forth to the Italian peninsula in a kind of transnational diaspora, maintaining their ties to Italy for several centuries while establishing themselves in Ottoman urban and commercial centers. Called, "Los Frangos" (the Europeans) in Judeo-Spanish by their Sephardic brethren, the Italian Jews maintained distinctive cultural institutions in the Ottoman Empire that became gradually integrated into the Ottoman Jewish millet, the multi-religious social system implemented by the Sublime Porte. In the nineteenth century, though, big changes occurred with the creation of a separate Italian-Jewish millet in 1866, the year of the Third War of Independence in Italy when Venice was successfully added to the emerging Italian nation-state. During il Risorgimento, the unification of independent states on the Italian peninsula (circa 1815-1871), a growing sentiment of connection to Italy emerged among Los Frangos as evidenced by their political activities with the Italian consulate in Constantinople, their interactions with the Levantines (descendants of Italian Catholics who remained in the Ottoman Empire and whose ancestors date back to Venetian and Genoese traders in the Byzantine Empire) and their active lobbying for recognition from the Ottoman state as "Italian Jews," rather than just as part of the Sephardic community. The late nineteenth century is also the time period in which Italian Jews surged to the forefront of the nascent industrialization of the Ottoman Empire, and were known as innovators of new forms of architecture, engineering, educational institutions and city-planning. Data for this discussion comes from primary source materials such as memoirs, local histories, consular records, newspapers, and architectural monuments.

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(2nd session) - Jews in Italy between Pride and Prejudice (Chair: Jonathan Druker, Illinois State University)

(a) Marco Di Giulio (Assistant Professor of Hebrew, Franklin & Marshall College): "Reclaiming Hebrew Studies: Language and National Pride in Nineteenth-Century Italian Scholarship"

In the early nineteenth century, the rise of the comparative-historical study of Semitic languages fostered by Christian scholars offered new insights into the nature and the origin of Hebrew. Lacking academic training, most Jewish intellectuals found themselves unprepared to engage in this emerging critical trend. However, Samuel David Luzzatto (1800-1865) set out to gain the authority that had long been held by Christian scholars of Hebrew by offering an alternative to their theories. In this paper, I will argue that Luzzatto’s linguistic research is not to be viewed merely as an intellectual endeavor, but ultimately as an act of Jewish self-assertion at a time when Jews strove for social and cultural validation. Luzzatto challenged the view popularized through Christian scholarship (first and foremost by A. Schultens) that Arabic was the most archaic and purest of the Semitic dialects, and therefore key to understanding the origin of the Hebrew language. By arguing that Aramaic rather than Arabic was the immediate progenitor of Hebrew, Luzzatto sought to restore the prestige of the ‘Jewish’ languages over other Semitic competitors. Such research carried cultural consequences, entering contentious debates over the genealogy of languages and nations around which much of the later scholarly discourse would revolve. Paying attention to a hitherto unnoticed polemic yields a new appreciation of the way linguistics—and not only language—was used as a sophisticated agent of national self-definition.

(b) Risa Sodi (Yale University): "Fascism and the Italian Roots of Racialism"

When the Fascist regime of Italy embarked on an official policy of racialism in the mid-1930s, it reversed a decade of vacillation. It turned to a stable of propagandists, journalists and politicians to
publicize and, in some cases, lend purported scientific credence, to its claims. A spate of books and articles appeared on the national scene expressing the emerging official contention that Jews in general, and the Jews in Italy specifically, were responsible for Italy's ill fortunes. Six authors in particular formed a cadre of publicists for Fascism's racialist campaign. By looking at works by Giovanni Preziosi, Giulio Cogni, Giacomo Acerbo, Roberto Farinacci, Julius Evola and Paolo Orano, one can see the internal consensus-building that took place in fits and starts (and not without internal dissension) in crafting a uniquely Italian racialist policy. Often, this policy explicitly sought to distinguish itself from Germany's biologically-based racialist thought by stressing the "spiritual," "ideological" or "philosophical" bases of Italian racialism. At the same time, it sought to promote the Aryan heritage of the Italian people. The evolution of Fascism's — and Mussolini's — attitude toward the Jews was complex and often contradictory. This paper will provide an analysis of discussions by specialists and historians of the time, especially De Felice, Michaelis, Toscano, Caffaz, Zuccotti, and others, and will briefly trace the outlines of the personalities, policies and attitudes that, in the eleventh hour of the Fascist regime, ultimately led to the deportation of one-fifth of Italy's Jews.

(c) L. Scott Lerner (Professor of French and Italian, Franklin & Marshall College): "The Narrating Architecture of the Catholic-Jewish Relation"

I am presently completing a book tentatively entitled *The Narrating Architecture of Modern Italy: the Popes, the Jews and the State, 1860-2010*, which examines three poles of modern Italian identity and nation-formation. Initially I reflected on the "narrating architecture" of the monumental Jewish synagogues that were built "over the ruins" of the old ghettos in the early years of the new state, with particular attention to the cases of Rome and Turin (first pole: Jews and the state). I then wrote about modern Italian subjectivity in the era of *Roma capitale*, focusing on the legacy of the commemoration of *XX settembre* in juxtaposition to the legal and social conflict over the crucifix in public schools. The final part of the book will address the third pole—Jews and the Church. Here, I will be looking closely at the historic visits of John Paul II and Benedict XVI to the Great Synagogue of Rome, which was built over the ruins of the old ghetto and serves as a paradigm of the "narrating architecture of emancipation" in this project. Specifically, I will examine the speeches and writings of pontiffs, rabbis and scholars on these and other occasions, with attention to the ways in which the Great Synagogue continues to serve as the symbolic frame for what is increasingly becoming a theological as well as an intercultural dialogue with profound implications, unprecedented in the two thousand-year relation of these communities. Each side is reconceiving the relation of Catholicism and Judaism at the intersection of their formal spaces and narratives, producing challenges and controversies along the way. At the conference, I would present a part of this final section of my project.

+ Concert: “Voices of the Italian Holocaust”
Caroline Helton (University of Michigan), soprano
Kathryn Goodson (University of Michigan), pianist

Songs by Italian-Jewish composers Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Vittorio Rieti, Guido Alberto Fano, and Leone Sinigaglia. This concert, produced by the Frankel Center for Judaic Studies with the research collaboration of Aloma Bardi (ICAMus and the University of Florence), premiered in 2011 at the University of Michigan School of Music.

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FRIDAY, MAY 4, 2012

(3rd session) - Musical Portraits of Jews in Fascist Italy (Chair: Gabriele Boccaccini, University of Michigan)

(a) Jesse Rosenberg (Associate Professor of Musicology, Northwestern University): "L’ebraismo sulla scena operistica in Italia nel ventennio fascista"

During the years of the fascist regime, Italy saw the premieres of some dozen operas which made some use of Jewish characters or themes. The list runs from Pizzetti’s opera Débora e Jaéle (1922) to Franco Margola’s Il mito di Caino (1940). In their musical and theatrical depictions of Hebraic elements, the composers and librettists of these works present a cross-section of Jewish images current during this period. These range from a still-linger ing Christianized "typological" analysis of Hebrew scriptural narrative (Pizzetti’s La sacra rappresentazione di Abramo e Isaac, after Feo Belcari) to works which, either explicitly or implicitly, juxtapose Jewish and Christian characters; this group includes Vittadini’s Nazareth (opposing the child Judas Iscariot to the child Jesus), two operas on Mary Magdalene, and a third work by Pizzetti, Lo straniero. Most of the operas under consideration are inspired by scripture, while two exceptions occupy opposite extremes: Lodovico Rocca’s Il Dibuk (1934), after Anskey’s play, presents a sympathetic musical portrait of the inhabitants of the mythical shetl of Brinitz, while Mario Peragallo’s Ginevra degli Almieri, libretto by Mussolini’s friend Giovacchino Forzano, trades in old stereotypes with its presentation of an unscrupulous peddler. The presented survey will include musical examples to elucidate how composers’ varied use of style reflected different concepts of Jewish identity.

(b) Aloma Bardi (Director, ICAMus - International Center for American Music; Adjunct Professor of American Music, University of Florence, Italy): "Musical Exoticism of Jewish Folklore in Il dibuk by Renato Simoni and Lodovico Rocca (1934)"

Setting to music a powerful libretto by Renato Simoni (1875-1952) after the drama by Shelomoh An-Ski (1863-1920) based on Jewish folk traditions, loyal fascist composer Lodovico Rocca (1895-1986) wrote the opera Il dibuk that premiered at the Teatro alla Scala in 1934, and later the same year was published by Ricordi in the vocal-piano score. Il dibuk remained popular and was repeatedly staged until the early 1950s, but has since fallen into oblivion, despite a 50th-anniversary reprise in Torino in 1984. In the late 1920s, following the acclaimed Ha-Bimah tour of the An-Ski play, the intensely evocative drama was also planned as an opera by Alban Berg and George Gershwin, but their projects remained unaccomplished because it was Rocca who secured for himself the rights to an operatic version. The opera, whose subject matter are the mysterious forces beyond death, features Jewish folklore, motivating a frequent choral presence on stage. According to the early 20th-century artistic trend, Il dibuk presents Judaism largely as musical exoticism, a "difference" characterized by eclectic style and dense orchestration, where a continuous use of melodic resemblance and allusion avoids actual musical borrowing. Exoticism is revealed in the Dibuk as one of the most distinctive trends of fascism, and at the same time as an ambiguous indicator of surprisingly wide creative horizons. Rocca’s opera is a noteworthy case of Music and Judaism, on the background of Italian racist policy. Significantly, the composer did not incorporate existing Jewish music into his opera. Focusing on musical influence, such as from Russian opera, as well as on original invention and stylistic modeling without direct quotation, this study includes numerous examples from the score, from the libretto, and from a historic archival recording of Il dibuk.

(c) The two papers will be followed by a panel discussion with the performers of the concerts.
(4th session) - Zionism, Judaism, and the Holocaust Survivors (Chair: Risa Sodi, Yale University)

(a) Giuseppe Prigiotti (PhD candidate, Duke University): "Zionism in La Civiltà Cattolica during Fascist Ventennio (1922-43)"

The Jesuit Journal *La Civiltà Cattolica*, strictly tied to the Vatican, published five articles on Zionism during the Fascist Ventennio, tying together diplomatic and religious issues. There has been a critique focused on anti-Semitism and Anti-Judaism in *La Civiltà Cattolica*. However, no attention has been paid to the parallel claims of Vatican and Zionist movement to obtain, for the latter, and to preserve, for the former, both spiritual universal recognition and a territory to exercise a national power. This power is perceived as inextricably connected to their universal role. Through a close analysis of the five articles published in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, I will move critical attention from a racial and doctrinal anti- or philo-Semitic perspectives, to the symmetric process inside both Judaism and Catholicism to re-shape their communitarian identities, a process which, despite the difficulties it would entail, could result eventually in a mutual dialogue between the two cultural and religious communities.

(b) Wiley Feinstein (Professor of Italian, Loyola University Chicago): “Alaska Rather Than Palestine: The Problem of Italian Jewish Aversion to-Zionism in Major Narratives of the Shoah”

The study will provide an overview of the problem of the aversion to Zionism that is in evidence in the major protagonists in the most influential Italian narratives of the Shoah. In the first section, there will be a textual study of how the narrators in the Giardino dei Finzi-Contini and in Primo Levi’s *Se questo è un uomo* both emerge as enlightened cosmopolitans who feel no attraction whatsoever to any notion of a shared, collective Jewish sense of community based on Jewish culture, religion or the Hebrew language. This section will also emphasize the how the universalist cosmopolitanism of the narrators emerges more and more as the narratives enfold and how the possibility of any heartfelt sympathy for Jewish particularism and the appeal of the cultural and political national Jewish revival is cut off. The study will then consider Bassani’s and Levi’s lack of interest or aversion to Zionism as problematic in the 21st century project of establishing the field of Italian Jewish studies and determining the precise nature of Italian Jewish studies. The contention will be made that any significant Jewish studies project must consider the wholeness of Jewish experience in its essential aspects - including Zionism conceived in a wide and positive sense as the expression of shared Jewish cultural memory and culture experience. If in final analysis, Bassani and Levi are more Italian than Jewish writers, we need to create a space to examine both authors’ “non-Jewish-Jewishness” or even ASHamed Jewishness critically - - and also to examine critically the special appeal of Primo Levi and his writings to contemporary anti-Zionists – both Jewish and not.

(c) Jonathan Druker (Associate Professor of Italian, Illinois State University): "On Levi’s Alterations to the Second Edition of Se questo è un uomo: Integrating Testimony and Commemoration"

Few readers of Primo Levi’s *Se questo è un uomo* realize that they have in hand the second edition of this canonical memoir, published in 1958, and that its account of life in camps, while extremely brutal, is less uniformly bleak than the story told in the first edition, published in 1947. This paper highlights some of the later version’s most important additions, and shows how these changes introduce a note of optimism into a book that still exerts a strong influence on the thinking of both Holocaust scholars and non-specialists. I argue that the second edition registers a small but
significant shift in Levi’s focus, from a nearly exclusive interest in documenting Nazi crimes against humanity to a bifurcated approach that also incorporates more autobiographical elements and commemorations of individuals who passed through the camp with him. The most important additions, amounting to thousands of words, include several humane encounters and notable instances of altruistic friendship that stand in marked contrast to the Darwinian aspects of Auschwitz emphasized in the first edition. This paper is part of a larger project that seeks to unsettle the tendency to read Levi’s oeuvre as monolithic and internally consistent by demonstrating that some of his ideas and concerns changed appreciably over time. Researchers who have compared the two editions of Levi’s memoir—Tesio and Belpoliti—find no important differences. While they note that Levi filled out some details in the new edition, and developed several brief portraits of distinct individuals, neither of the two scholars remark upon the uplifting tone produced by these additions, nor on the resulting consequences for interpretation, which, I contend in this paper, are significant.

In the second edition, for example, Levi added an entirely new chapter, titled “Initiation.” Primo’s heartening exchange here with the unforgettable Steinlauf, while somewhat adversarial, is thought by many readers to contain one of the essential lessons offered by Se questo è un uomo: “appunto perché il Lager è una gran macchina per ridurci a bestie, noi bestie non dobbiamo diventare; che anche in questo luogo si può sopravvivere, per raccontare, per portare testimonianza” (35). In this newly added passage, and many others like it, Levi momentarily checks the camp’s dehumanizing function to offer a touching homage to an individual, a human with a face and a name. At the same time, Steinlauf’s recollected speech challenges the nihilism asserted so forcefully a few pages earlier by the SS man who said “qui non c’è perché” (23). Lacking this chapter, the first edition is certainly a darker book than the one familiar to us. The circumstances that impelled Levi to expand and thus alter his second edition are many. Some of them are biographical and have been dealt with by his biographers, Thomson and Angier. Here, I wish to make the case that the revision—that is, the more thorough integration of memory with testimony—reflects the evolution of Holocaust memory in Italy in the first dozen years after the war. Books by Antelme, Rousset and Anne Frank were translated into Italian during this period, and, in 1955, the tenth anniversary of the end of the war was marked in Turin with an exhibit about the Italian deportees. By 1957, the bare facts of the concentration camps were known to educated Italians—the indictments had been heard. Levi’s revision seems to register these new circumstances by trying to put individual human faces on the victims, and by offering a slightly more redemptive account of Auschwitz that is a little more optimistic about the possibilities for gaining knowledge from this atrocity.

SATURDAY, MAY 5, 2012

(5th session) - Memory and Contemporaneity of Judaism (Chair: L. Scott Lerner, Franklin & Marshall College)

(a) Mattia Beghelli (PhD student, University of Michigan): “La tragicità della sopravvivenza: Se questo e’ un uomo, Shoah e Il portiere di notte”.

La situazione dei sopravvissuti all’Olocausto dimostra come le loro esistenze siano rimaste profondamente segnate da questa tragica esperienza. Per questo motivo, non risulterebbe appropriato riferirsi a loro come sopravvissuti ma piuttosto come vittime. Infatti, il termine ‘sopravvissuto’ sembra privare questi individui della possibilità di essere considerati alla stessa stregua di chi non è riuscito a sfuggire alla morsa nazista nei campi di concentramento. Tutto ciò è riscontrabile attraverso l’analisi di due pellicole, Shoah (1985) e Il portiere di notte (1974), e del romanzo autobiografico di Primo Levi intitolato Survival in Auschwitz (1947). Queste tre opere artistiche hanno per protagonisti dei sopravvissuti, i quali rendono palese quanto quella espressione non sia adatta a causa della loro traumatica situazione psicologica. In particolare, i protagonisti dei due film e del romanzo condividono due aspetti che supportano questa tesi. Il primo riguarda la
Presenta o meno di un “double”, ossia un altro io a cui si affidano le traversie dei campi di concentramento nella speranza di vivere una vita normale. A questa soluzione ricorrono ad esempio tre personaggi di Shoah (Simon Srebnik, Michael Podchlebnik e Abraham Bomba) i quali però non riescono, nel momento in cui sono chiamati a ricordare, a dimostrare l’efficacia della loro scelta poiché il passato continua ad avere effetti terrificanti su di loro. Il secondo prende il nome di Traumatic Dasein e comporta la totale identificazione con l’io del passato causando una rottura destabilizzante della barriera spazio-temporale. Per queste ragioni è possibile definire vittime coloro i quali vengono comunemente e semplicemente denominati sopravvissuti.

(b) Luca Peretti (PhD candidate, Yale University): "Identità, memoria e spazio urbano nel Ghetto di Roma: dalla Morante e Özpetek fino a monumenti e targhe commemorative"

Davide (Massimo Girotti), sopravvissuto di Auschwitz, all’inizio de La Finestra di Fronte (Ferzan Özpetek, 2003) vagava smemorato su ponte Sisto a Roma, nei dintorni del Ghetto ebraico, dove più avanti nel film lo vedremo ricordare il suo passato rivedendolo davanti ai suoi occhi. Ida, ne La Storia di Elsa Morante, si ritrova sorpresa su Ponte Garibaldi accorgendosi che sta andando verso il Ghetto per consegnare un biglietto avuto da uno dei deportati della razzia del 16 ottobre. Due esperienze di smarrimento mediate in qualche modo dal quartiere ebraico di Roma, un luogo denso di storia e di memoria, e segnato dal trauma della Shoah. Partendo da questi due testi cercherò di illustrare come il Ghetto ha messo in scena negli ultimi anni il suo passato traumatico, attraverso targhe commemorative, “pietre d’inciampo” e piccoli monumenti che popolano adesso lo spazio urbano del quartiere – il tutto negli anni che precedono l’apertura di un Museo della Shoah a Roma e in un periodo che ha visto l’apertura di moltissimi ristoranti Kosher: le poche strade del Ghetto sono state così riempite da questi diversi elementi che rendono impossibile anche per il visitatore disattento non notare una forte marcatura ebraica.

(c) Melissa Coburn (Assistant Professor of Italian, Virginia Tech): "Metaphors of Identification and of Otherness: Antisemitism and the Double in Umberto Eco’s Il cimitero di Praga"

Is it useful to consider antisemitism a narrative construction? This is what Umberto Eco argues in defending his provocative novel, Il cimitero di Praga, 2010. There would be many ways to approach this question. In constructing a response, the present study will focus on the role of the narrative device of the “double” in Eco’s novel. In the novel, this device of the double functions as one of the bases used for creating categories of identification and otherness, and thus as a basis for constructing and presumably undermining antisemitism. In doing so, I will incorporate definitions of antisemitism, discussions of metaphorical language in political discourse, and look at other examples of the political use of the metaphor of the double in race discourse in the period in which the novel is set. Finally, I hope to develop the questions of how and whether this device is effective as a tool to undermine antisemitism in Eco’s novel.

+ Lecture-Recital (as an additional session) - "Leaves of Grass: The Whitman Songs by Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco"

John Champagne (Bard College), lecturer
Salvatore Champagne (Oberlin College), tenor
Howard Lubin (Oberlin College), pianist
World Premiere of Walt Whitman's songs, set to music by Italian-Jewish composer Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco in 1936 (from unpublished manuscript at the Library of Congress, Washington, DC).