

# BARBARIANS AND JEWS

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4

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# BARBARIANS AND JEWS

## Jews and Judaism in the Early Medieval West

*Edited by*  
*Yitzhak Hen and Thomas F. X. Noble*



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Giancarlo Lacerenza

BETWEEN OLD AND NEW BARBARIANS:  
THE JEWS OF SOUTHERN ITALY  
DURING THE 'DARK AGES'

The period from the fifth to the ninth century witnessed profound changes that provoked a substantial shift in the role of Jews in European society. As is well known, this evolution had its roots in the Christianization of the Roman Empire in the late fourth century, especially under Theodosius I (347–95), which led to the marginalization of Jews in the budding Christian society. Anti-Jewish attitudes soon manifested themselves even outside the strictly religious sphere, impacting the very status of the Jew in society. Initially, this was accomplished through the instrument of legislation. Our understanding of the subsequent period, however, is clouded by a daunting scarcity of sources. I aim to outline the aforementioned historical changes as they occurred in peninsular southern Italy. A brief overview of the juridical context will provide a frame of reference for evidence that we will discuss in greater detail further on.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, in Jeremy Cohen, 'Roman Imperial Policy toward the Jews from Costantine until the End of the Patriarchate', *Byzantine Studies*, 3 (1976), 1–29; Alfredo Mordechai Rabello, 'The Legal Condition of the Jews in the Roman Empire', in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, ed. by Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase, II.13 (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1980), pp. 662–762; Amnon Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987); Linder, *The Jews in the Legal Sources of the Early Middle Ages* (ibid., 1998); Linder, 'The Legal Status of the Jews in the Roman Empire', in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, IV. *The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period*, ed. by Steven T. Katz (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 128–73.

## The Legal Framework

About a hundred years after the issuing — and rapid failure — of the Milan Edict of 313, and almost sixty years after the banning of paganism in 380, the promulgation of the *Codex Theodosianus* in 439 bears witness to a changed perception of the Jews in the now confessional and Christian empire. This is particularly well reflected in section 16.8, entitled *De iudaeis, caelicolis et samaritanis*.<sup>2</sup> Despite an abiding attitude of relative tolerance, on juridical and social grounds the Jews found themselves labeled as a *nefaria secta* and trapped in a paradoxical situation that I have elsewhere defined as ‘subordinate integration’.<sup>3</sup>

In the time of Antoninus Pius, Jews were granted limited permission to hold public office, notably to *honores* such as municipal offices. Now, Jews are again mentioned in Constantinian legislation, this time with reference to their exemption from *munera*. The patriarchs and the *presbyteri* paid full *munera* while the *hieriei archisynagogi* and *patres synagogarum* were subject only to *munera corporalia* (CTh 16.8.2,4). Under Theodosius I, while the Jews maintained their right of association, which no law had ever prohibited — *Iudaeorum sectam nulla lege prohibitam satis constat* (CTh 16.8.9) — they were still required to attend town *curiae*. At the same time, there was an increase in measures aimed at separating the Christian from the Jewish world, such as through the prohibition of mixed marriages.<sup>4</sup> The imperial authority had sought for some time to prevent conversion to Judaism, most notably by introducing the crime of apostasy. Christians who converted to the Jewish faith had already been at least partly prosecutable through the laws against circumcision. Now, in the age of Theodosius II (401–50), they were further

<sup>2</sup> Klaus Dieter Reichardt, ‘Die Judengesetzgebung im Codex Theodosianus’, *Kairos*, 20 (1978), 16–39; Marianne Dacy, ‘The Jews in the Theodosian Code’, *Australian Journal of Jewish Studies*, 16 (2002), 52–76; Hagith Sivan, ‘Canonizing Law in Late Antiquity: Legal Constructs of Judaism in the Theodosian Code’, in *Homer, the Bible, and Beyond: Literary and Religious Canons in the Ancient World*, ed. by Margalit Finkelberg and Guy G. Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 213–55.

<sup>3</sup> Giancarlo Lacerenza, ‘I precedenti delle leggi razziali nel mondo antico: analogie, differenze’, in *Atti delle Giornate di studio per i settant'anni delle leggi razziali in Italia* (Napoli, 17 e 25 novembre 2008), ed. by Giancarlo Lacerenza and Rosanna Spadaccini, Archivio di Studi Ebraici, 1 (Napoli: Centro di Studi Ebraici — Università ‘L'Orientale’, 2009), pp. 37–45.

<sup>4</sup> On the Jews and town *curiae*, Giovanni de Bonfils, *Omnes ... ad implenda munia teneantur. Ebrei curie e prefetture fra IV e V secolo* (Bari: Cacucci, 1998); on the mixed marriages, Alfredo Mordechai Rabello, ‘Il problema dei matrimoni fra Ebrei e Cristiani nella legislazione imperiale e in quella della chiesa (IV–VI secolo)’, *Atti dell'Accademia Romanistica Costantiniana*, 7 (1988), 213–24.



threatened with confiscation of property and the loss of rights, including testamentary capacity. In 429, in Galilee, the institution of the patriarchate also came to an end, despite the prestige and privileges it still enjoyed during the early years of Theodosius' rule.<sup>5</sup> Leaving aside several contradictions, Christian imperial legislation concerning Judaism focuses on progressively depriving the Jews of their autonomy and privileges, and restructuring their scope of action to answer the needs and scruples of the majority. An example of this thrust is the prohibition (of 425), addressed especially to the Jews, of attending shows on the holiest days of the Christian calendar — Easter, Pentecost, Christmas, and the Epiphany. A more severe measure, issued shortly thereafter, was the prohibition on erecting new synagogues. Only the restoration of previously existing synagogues was allowed, *ne qua iudaica synagoga in novam fabricam surgat, fulciendi veteres permissa licentia, quae ruinam minantur* ['in order that no new synagogues shall be built, just permitting to restore those threatening to fall into ruins'; *CJ* 1.9.18, year 439].

Strangely, the harsh norms against the Jews enforced early in the reign of Justinian (527–565) — including the definitive abrogation of Jewish autonomy in the managing of religious affairs (cf. already *CJ* 1.9.8) — do not seem to have drawn strong opposition or even to have left an enduring impression, either in the eastern or the western Jewish world.<sup>6</sup> The last phase of the age of Justinian, however, was especially significant for Jewish history, since some of the new laws issued after the *Codex Iustiniani* — the so-called *Novellae* — directly concerned the Jews. Among these, *Novella* 146 (year 553) was especially important. In the name of the general and apparently liberal objective of permitting the use of Greek in synagogal liturgy — or of any local idiom allowing the biblical text to be better understood — the *Novella* prohibited the use of texts or teachings that could lead to divergent interpretations of the Scriptures. Thus, while it did not ban the use of Hebrew, it explicitly forbade the teaching of the oral tradition — the *deuterōsis*, as it is called in the text. Consequently, the whole apparatus of rabbinic exegesis of the biblical text, which was based on the transmission of an adogmatic

<sup>5</sup> Lee I. Levine, *The Rabbinic Class of Roman Palestine in Late Antiquity* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1990); Richard Kalmin, *The Sage in Jewish Society of Late Antiquity* (London/New York: Routledge, 1999); Giovanni de Bonfils, *I Patriarchi della legislazione tardo antica* (Bari: Cacucci, 2006); David Goodblatt, 'The Political and Social History of the Jewish Community in the Land of Israel, c. 235–638', in *CHJ*, IV, pp. 404–30.

<sup>6</sup> Alfredo Mordechai Rabello, *Giustiniano, Ebrei e Samaritani alla luce delle fonti storico-letterarie, ecclesiastiche e giuridiche* (Milano: Giuffrè, 1987–88).

and non-conclusive superimposition of opinions and maxims, was outlawed.<sup>7</sup> The *Novellae* 45, 131, and 146 (respectively issued in 537, 545, and 553) confirmed previous prohibitions and introduced new ones, notably concerning the possibility for Jews to purchase former Church property. They also reintroduced obligations, such as, once again, that of accepting onerous offices in local administrations, notwithstanding the fact that Jews had long been excluded from all honors connected to those offices.

On the strength of the general legislative orientation, local ecclesiastical authorities often felt authorized to impose upon Jewish communities residing within their territories obligations that in some cases became norms. These included the requirement that Jews attend homilies on festive days or to observe silence in the performance of synagogal rites, on pain of the transformation of the synagogue into a church; or, again, the prohibition of appearing in public during the Easter period. Such abuses were not infrequent, and on several occasions induced civil justice to take action against religious authorities and sometimes even against the heads of the clergy. Pope Gregory I the Great's (591–604) warnings addressed to Italian bishops who molested the Jews have been well researched; shortly, we will examine an example of such abuse. Laudable as these actions in defense of the Jews were, however, they were inevitably coupled with conversionary aims. Moreover, such behavior was quite exceptional.

### Italy: Fifth–Eighth Centuries

Tracing the Jewish situation through the more obscure centuries of the Middle Ages, among peoples who were not simply 'Greeks', 'Romans', or even 'Egyptians', is an arduous task. As is well known, this period is very poorly documented. Significant documentary evidence for Italy, Provence and, later, the Rhine region appears only around the ninth century.<sup>8</sup> This picture is not true, however, for the Euro-Mediterranean

<sup>7</sup> Vittore Colorni, 'L'uso del greco nella liturgia del giudaismo ellenistico e la Novella 146 di Giustiniano', in Colorni, *Judaica minora. Saggi sulla storia dell'ebraismo italiano dall'antichità all'età moderna* (Milano: Giuffrè, 1983), pp. 1–66; Leonard V. Rutgers, 'Justinian's Novella 146 Between Jews and Christians', in *Jewish Culture and Society under the Christian Roman Empire*, ed. by Richard Lee Kalmin and Seth Schwartz (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), pp. 385–407.

<sup>8</sup> Bernhard Blumenkranz, *Juifs et chrétiens dans le monde occidental, 430–1096* (Paris: Mouton, 1960).

area, where from the fifth to the eighth centuries a number of written and archaeological testimonies have survived, especially from southern Italy, Sicily, and Spain. In this peculiar context of dynamic co-existence and socio-legal conflicts among various political forces acting contemporaneously on the same ground, these precious testimonies of Jewish life enable us to see, even through a cloudy mirror of scattered evidence and Genizah silence, how the Jews were changed and changed themselves (or resisted change) before different kinds of authorities and cultural pressure.<sup>9</sup>

In general terms, and given the ties between Judaea and Rome, dealing with Italy means first of all that we may be confronting the oldest Jewry of the western diaspora.<sup>10</sup> The 'Rome' referred to in ancient and late antique sources, however, is not always to be identified with the urban space at the center of Italian peninsula. Indeed, since the first century CE, the inflow of Jewish slaves in Roman Italy boosted the Jewish population not only of Rome but also of the vast southern

<sup>9</sup> Due to its specific status, even in the 'barbarian' ages, given the presence of the popes, Rome shall not be considered here. It must be observed, however, that — strangely enough — despite the evidence available, to date few attempts have been made to describe the Jewish presence in Rome in the period between the last stage of Late Antiquity and the High Middle Ages. At its best, a partial picture is available till the sixth century, thanks to a few funerary inscriptions, among the latest of the local Jewish catacombs and burial places. On this documentation, largely limited to fourth to fifth century, see Harry J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1960); Leonard V. Rutgers, *The Jews in Late Ancient Rome: Evidence of Cultural Interaction in the Roman Diaspora*, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World, 126 (Leiden: Brill, 1995; repr. 2000); David Noy, *Foreigners at Rome: Citizens and Strangers* (London/Swansea: Duckworth — Classical Press of Wales, 2000), esp. pp. 255–67; Noy, 'Immigrant and Jewish Families at Rome in the 2<sup>nd</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> Centuries', in *Les frontières du profane dans l'antiquité tardive*, ed. by Éric Rebillard and Claire Sotinel (Rome: École Française de Rome, 2010), pp. 199–211.

<sup>10</sup> As introductory readings, Heikki Solin, 'Juden und Syrer im westlichen Teil der römischen Welt', in *ANRW*, II.29.2 (1983), pp. 587–789, 1222–49; Fergus Millar, 'The Jews of the Graeco-Roman Diaspora between Paganism and Christianity', in *The Jews among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire*, ed. by Judith Lieu and others (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 97–132; Martin Goodman, 'Jews and Judaism in the Mediterranean Diaspora in the Late-Roman Period: The Limitations of Evidence', *Journal of Mediterranean History*, 4 (1994), 208–24; James M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 B.C.E.–117 C.E.)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996); *Studies on the Jewish Diaspora in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods*, ed. by Benjamin Isaac and Aharon Oppenheimer (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University — Ramot, 1996); Leonard V. Rutgers, *The Hidden Heritage of Diaspora Judaism* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998); Margaret H. Williams, *The Jews among the Greek and Romans: A Diasporan Sourcebook* (London — Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

Italian area, where important productive activities, mainly agricultural in nature, had long been concentrated. Ancient sources provide only generic information about this demographic increase, which is described more explicitly only in early medieval sources, such as the *Sefer Yosippon*. But various archaeological, and especially epigraphic finds from Campania and Apulia, point to a sizable Jewish presence in southern Italy in late Roman times.<sup>11</sup> In quantitative terms, the most abundant evidence comes notably from the girdle between the present-day regions of Campania and, passing through northern Calabria with the Apulian-Lucanian area, the extreme borders of the Salento peninsula. Considering all the available evidence, it has been noted that in the first few centuries CE, southern Italy already had a resident Jewish population of considerable size.<sup>12</sup> The antiquity and diffusion of these settlements might account for the apparently exaggerated claim of the *Yosippon* about the number of captives from Judaea carried by Titus into Italy soon after the destruction of the Temple, allegedly established between Taranto and Otranto.<sup>13</sup> Hence, it is no surprise that during the darkest period of Jewish history in Europe, around the seventh and eighth centuries, some believed that southern Italy — the Jewish *Magna Gracia*, or *İtalyah šel Yawan* — could be regarded as a kind of new promised land, identifying it with the ‘fat land’ of Jacob.<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, this fertile country was a magnet for powers in different periods. Already in the sixth century, southern Italy entered into a peculiar situation. Its division into East and West, with the pope at the borders, led to a variety of approaches in dealing with the Jews. The Goths, early ‘barbarians’ who, for a period of time, controlled territories there, initially practiced toleration towards the Jews. When a good part of their territory fell under the control of Byzantium, however, they were suddenly affected by the harsh legislation imposed by Justinian (527–565). Nonetheless, in the remaining territories controlled by the Lombards — and subsequently in the *Langobardia minor* in general — the climate

<sup>11</sup> Giancarlo Lacerenza, ‘Le iscrizioni giudaiche in Italia dal I al VI secolo: tipologie, origine, distribuzione’, in *I beni culturali ebraici in Italia*, ed. by Mauro Perani (Ravenna: Longo, 2003), pp. 71–92.

<sup>12</sup> David Noy, ‘Jews in Italy in the 1<sup>st</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> Centuries C.E.’, in *The Jews of Italy: Memory and Identity*, ed. by Bernard Cooperman and Barbara Garvin (Potomac: Maryland University Press, 2000), pp. 47–64; Leonard V. Rutgers, ‘The Jews of Italy, c. 235–638’, in *CHJ*, IV, pp. 492–508.

<sup>13</sup> *The Josippon [Josephus Gorionides]*, ed. by David Flusser (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1978–80; 1981<sup>2</sup>), I, pp. 432–33.

<sup>14</sup> See *Berešit Rabbah* 67.6 (on Genesis 27.28).

remained more relaxed. And even there, when in Lombard territories the hand of the Church of Rome made itself felt, local religious authorities had more influence on Jewish living conditions than the Lombard dukes themselves.<sup>15</sup> Another element of interference was the authority of the Roman-Byzantine imperial juridical corpus — that is, the *Codex Iustiniani* and the *Novellae* — which made itself felt well beyond the areas directly or indirectly controlled by Byzantium. This is evident, for instance, in the prohibition for Jews to purchase ecclesiastical property (*Novella* 131). Below, we portray a few moments of Jewish social and cultural life in these territories and demonstrate the ways in which different ambient instances influenced the Jews in these highly attractive but also difficult and disputed territories.

## Naples

In 476, the last of the Roman emperors of the West, Romulus Augustulus, was exiled far from Rome to a fortress surrounded by the sea known as the *Castrum Lucullanum*, today Castel dell'Ovo, in the bay of Naples. The city, at the centre of the region still called *Campania felix*, was taken over by the Goths, along with the rest of Italy, but remained under their control for only fifty years. In 536 it was indeed

<sup>15</sup> In general, Ottorino Bertolini, 'Longobardi e Bizantini nell'Italia meridionale. La politica dei principi longobardi fra Occidente e Oriente dai problemi della "renovatio" dell'impero in Occidente con Carlo Magno alla sua crisi con Carlo III "il grosso" (774–788)', in *Benevento, Montevergine, Salerno, Amalfi. Atti del III Congresso Internazionale di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo* (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 1959), pp. 103–24; Vera von Falkenhausen, 'I Longobardi meridionali', in *Storia d'Italia*, 3. *Il Mezzogiorno dai Bizantini a Federico II*, ed. by Giuseppe Galasso (Utet: Torino, 1977), pp. 249–364; Stefano Gasparri, 'L'Italia meridionale contesa tra Bizantini, Longobardi, Franchi e Saraceni', in *Storia della società italiana*, 5. *L'Italia dell'Alto Medioevo* (Milano: Teti, 1984), pp. 169–97; Paolo Delogu, 'La giustizia nell'Italia meridionale longobarda', in *La giustizia nell'Alto medioevo (secoli IX–XI)*, Settimane del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 44 (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 1997), pp. 257–308. Among the few studies on the Jewish presence in Lombard Italy, see Gian Piero Bognetti, 'Les inscriptions juives de Venosa et le problème des rapports entre les Lombards et l'Orient', *Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 1954, pp. 193–202 (also in Bognetti, *L'età longobarda*, Milano: Giuffrè, 1967, III, pp. 507–18); Cesare Colafemmina, 'Insediamenti e condizione degli Ebrei nell'Italia meridionale ed insulare', in *Gli Ebrei nell'Alto Medioevo*, Settimane 26 (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 1980), pp. 197–227. See also Samuele Rocca, 'The Impact of the Barbarian Invasions on the Jews of Roman Italy: New Perspectives', *Scripta Judaica Cracoviensia* 14 (2016), 41–56.

conquered by the Byzantines, who succeeded in maintaining control of the city for centuries. Eventually, Naples even became an autonomous Byzantine dukedom, managing to successfully hold out against pressure from the much vaster surrounding area dominated by the Lombards. This dukedom only fell in the twelfth century, more precisely in 1137, when all the Italian South was gradually taken over by the Normans.<sup>16</sup>

In the transition from Arian-Gothic to Byzantine domination, the Jewish population of Naples experienced a significant worsening of its condition, from a situation of relative prosperity to one marked by crises and sudden changes. In the early Imperial age, the local community was probably connected to the flourishing Alexandrine colony. The Alexandrines resided in the *Vicus Alexandrinorum* along the lower *decumanus*, in a neighborhood accordingly called *Regio Nilensis* (the Nile region: so named because a river traversed it). In this period, the Jews must also have lived in this area, more specifically near the stretch of the town walls looking out towards the sea, as indicated by several clues. Notably, several passages in Procopius' *Gothic War* (1.8.41, 10.24–26), and some medieval sources mention in the same place a synagogue, which seems to have been active for several centuries.<sup>17</sup> It is likely that at the time of the Vandalic incursions, in the fifth century, the Jewish population of Naples was boosted by an influx of fugitives from unfortified surrounding areas, notably the nearby town and ancient harbour of Puteoli (Pozzuoli). In that period, moreover, Puteoli, which had hosted an old and prosperous Jewish community mentioned several times by Philo Alexandrinus and Flavius Josephus, was in the process of disappearing under water as its coasts subsided under the effect of bradyseism.

Finds within the ancient urban perimeter confirm the presence of Jews in Naples in late ancient times, but several documents bear witness to the presence of Jews in various other cities of Campania, such as Capua and Abellinum, and especially in the Nocera-Sarno plain, an agricultural environment, which has yielded several epitaphs in Greek.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Barbara M. Kreutz, *Before the Normans: Southern Italy in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996); Paul Arthur, *Naples: From Roman Town to City-State* (London: British School of Archaeology in Rome, 2002); Amedeo Feniello, *Napoli: società ed economia (902–1137)*, *Nuovi Studi Storici*, 89 (Roma: Istituto Storico per il Medio Evo, 2011).

<sup>17</sup> Giancarlo Lacerenza, 'La topografia storica delle giudecche di Napoli nei secoli X–XVI', *Materia giudaica*, 11 (2006), 113–42.

<sup>18</sup> For a general overview of these inscriptions, see Elena Miranda, 'Iscrizioni giudaiche del napoletano', in *Roma, la Campania e l'Oriente cristiano antico*, ed. by Luigi Cirillo and Giancarlo Rinaldi (Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 2000), pp. 189–209. The corpus I shall refer to for Jewish epigraphic material is David Noy,



We shall discuss one of them<sup>19</sup> here because it mentions a *rebbi* Abba Mari, 'the honoured one', who was, as his name suggests, probably of Palestinian origin. This inscription belongs to the fifth century, and it is difficult not to recognize in Abba Mari a religious leader of the local community, given his titles and the use of Greek in an almost totally Latin cultural context.<sup>20</sup> It seems not without significance that two other texts found in the same Nolan area, near the ancient town of Nuceria Alfaterna, are both in Greek and commemorate respectively a scribe (*grammateus*) Pedonius and his wife Myrina, *presbytera*: literally, 'priestess'.<sup>21</sup> In late ancient times, this area was marked by a strong Christian environment — many palaeo-Christian monuments testify to this situation to this day — and arguably, Jews were subject to varying levels of compulsion to convert.

The Jews of Naples and its surrounding areas were not unaffected by the Theodosian laws of 438, which drastically curtailed the Jews' social status and impacted on conversions in the western Mediterranean. In this light, we ought to consider that, in 444, when describing the funerary cortege of John I, bishop of Naples, the presbyter Uranius mentions the presence of a great number of *neophyti* (*cum ingenti neophytorum pompa*, 'with a large retinue of neophytes'). Considering the period, these must have been converted Jews, not pagans.<sup>22</sup> In any case, the

*Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe*, I. *Italy (Excluding the City of Rome), Spain and Gaul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993; hereafter, *JIWE I*); and Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe*, II. *The City of Rome*, *ibid.*, 1995; *JIWE II*).

<sup>19</sup> *JIWE I*.22 (found in Brusciano, maybe belonging to Nola).

<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, it seems that not every ancient inscription mentioning a 'rabbi' is a record of rabbinic positions. Of about sixty texts mentioning a 'rabbi' considered by Shaye J. D. Cohen, 'Epigraphical Rabbis', *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 72 (1981), 1–17, very few would refer to effective rabbinical figures. The term is simply used as honorific title. This seems not to have been the case, however, of the Abba Mari epitaph and of other southern Italian texts mentioning 'rabbis' (also from Naples and Venosa). On this evidence, see Giancarlo Lacerenza, 'Rabbis in Jewish Inscriptions of South Italy from Late Antiquity to the High Middle Ages', in *Diversity and Rabbinisation: Jewish Texts et Societies between 400 and 1000 CE: International Conference, Paris, 24–26 June 2015*, ed. by Gavin McDowell, Ron Naiweld, Judith Schlanger, and Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra (forthcoming).

<sup>21</sup> David Noy, 'Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe: Addenda et Corrigenda' in *Hebraica hereditas. Studi in onore di Cesare Colafemmina*, ed. by Giancarlo Lacerenza, Series Minor, 70 (Napoli: Università 'L'Orientale', 2005), pp. 123–42 (p. 128, nr. 41a–b). As for *presbytera*, various interpretations have been advanced to explain titles of this kind applied to women: the widest discussion is still in Bernadette J. Brootten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogues* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1982). Personally, I am convinced that in most cases this title — sometimes applied to infants — denotes a sacerdotal rank of *kohanim* and not a religious function.

<sup>22</sup> Uranius, *Ad Pacatum*, 11 (PL 53, 866).

Ostrogoth Theodoric's later takeover of Campania (494–526) marked a reversal of this anti-Jewish trend. Direct testimony in this regard is provided by inscriptions from an above-ground cemetery found in an area that was suburban at the time.<sup>23</sup> The epitaphs, which bear no date, have been attributed to between the fourth and the sixth century. In the epitaph of a certain Barbarus (*JIWE* I.27) we read, however, a 'sixth indiction', which would place all these texts — all of which but one are formally consistent — between the end of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth century, hence, within the period of Gothic domination. All the inscriptions found in this once isolated place are in Latin — except for one, which is in Greek — and draw on a formulaic repertory similar to that of coeval Christian epitaphs. However, they also display typical Hebrew expressions such as *šalom*, *šalom 'al m'nuḥateka*, *amen*, *sela*. In one case, the name of the deceased (Numerius) is transcribed in Jewish characters, and the dead man is qualified as *ebreus*. Notably, only three out of ten of the individuals mentioned in these epitaphs are qualified as 'Jews', and none of them as *iudaei*, but *hebraei*. This includes the aforementioned Numerius, *ebreus*; Criscentia, daughter of Pascasus, *ebrea*; Flaes, *ebreus*.<sup>24</sup> No satisfactory explanation has yet been given for the shift from the commonest designation of 'Jew' to 'Hebrew', which also appears several times in Rome, where a 'synagogue of the Hebrews' (*tōn hebreōn*) existed.<sup>25</sup> If the hypothesis that its bearers were speakers or users of Hebrew and Aramaic, is correct — as it seems to me — then we should consider in Naples the presence of Jews, among the other provenances, of Palestinian origins as well, as the honoured Rabbi Abba Mari of Brusciano probably also was. Moreover, the recipient of the only Greek epitaph in the group (*JIWE* I.30) also appears to hail from Palestine. This was Binyamin of Caesarea, a community leader (*prostatēs*) further distinguished because the other deceased carry only Latin names. In his short epitaph, he is called *kaesareus*, the use of Greek pointing to the Palestinian city, Caesarea — where, according to some Talmudic sources (such as Talmud Yerušalmi, *Berakhoth* 3.1.6a), the synagogal liturgy was also celebrated in Greek — rather than

<sup>23</sup> Elisabetta Serrao, 'Nuove iscrizioni da un sepolcreto giudaico di Napoli', *Puteoli* 12–13 (1988–89), pp. 103–17; *JIWE* I.27–35; Miranda, 'Iscrizioni'.

<sup>24</sup> Respectively, *JIWE* I.33, 35, and 37. The association of the Flaes epitaph — now at the Jewish Museum in New York — to this bundle of texts has been demonstrated in Giancarlo Lacerenza, 'Frustula iudaica neapolitana', *Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli*, 58 (1998), pp. 334–46 (120–21).

<sup>25</sup> Although it is mentioned in Greek epitaphs a bit earlier, dated to the third-fourth centuries (*JIWE* II.2, 33, 578–79).



to Caesarea in Mauritania (Africa). From a possibly coeval text from Naples, of unknown provenance, we also learn about the existence of a *Rebbi* Abundantius. Under the epitaph of his daughter Venus, two lines in Hebrews characters can be read, partially translating the Latin text.<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, it is fairly certain that this group of Jews buried in late Gothic Naples was effectively of mixed provenance since a North African origin for at least a couple of the deceased — notably Gaudiosus, *civis Mauritaniae*, and possibly Erena, whose name was common at Cyrene — can be identified. Furthermore, others were ‘Italian’ but not Neapolitan: namely, the above-mentioned Barbarus, from Venafrum (northern Campania), and the young Hereni, with her father Thelesinus, from Rome (*JIWE* I.28). It is surprising, and probably also significant, that such a limited piece of evidence can show us how composite was the Jewish community of Naples in the late Gothic age. If a conclusion can be drawn from these data, it is that the city was regarded — at least in those decades — as a safe place to live, despite the obvious risks connected with the Christian institutions.

For the subsequent period, we have a fairly vivid picture of Naples on the eve of the Byzantine conquest (536) thanks to Procopius of Caesarea, who in his *Gothic War* gave an account of the Roman-Byzantine ‘re-conquest’ of Southern Italy.<sup>27</sup> Procopius relates that when the town authorities met to decide if the city should surrender to the imperial army, as many other areas in southern Italy already had, or — as a minority argued — resist and support the Goths, it was the Jewish community that tipped the scales in favor of the minority side. The Jews guaranteed grain supplies to the city during the siege and offered to man the most dangerous stretch of the walls, the one facing the sea. Clearly, then, we are dealing here with a demographically strong and politically influential Neapolitan Jewish community which also played an important economic role. It is likely the Jews who were most engaged in the *peregri- rina commercia* (foreign trade) that Cassiodorus tells us were conducted

<sup>26</sup> *JIWE* I.36; for the Hebrew text, Lacerenza, ‘Frustula’, pp. 339–41, nr. 5.

<sup>27</sup> Procopius, *De Bello Gothico*, I.viii.41, x.24–26. Procopius, *History of the Wars, Books V and VI*, ed. by Henry B. Dewing, Loeb Classical Library (London/Cambridge MA: Heinemann — Harvard University Press, 1953), pp. 68–107; Ludovico Gatto, ‘L’Italia meridionale ne *La guerra gotica* di Procopio di Cesarea: gli aspetti militari, politici ed economico-sociali’, in *Incontri di popoli e culture tra V e IX secolo. Atti delle V Giornate di studio sull’età romanobarbarica* (Benevento 1997), ed. by Marcello Rotili (Napoli: Arte Tipografica, 1998), pp. 31–58.

along the coast of Campania in those years.<sup>28</sup> Procopius reports that during the twenty days of the siege, the Jews fought strenuously and laid down their weapons only after the city had been captured, using a stratagem from a whole other direction. The whole account shows the degree to which the Jews feared a transition from the Gothic regime — which espoused the relatively liberal attitude of Arianism — to the orbit of Byzantium. Justinian's attitude towards Judaism had already become manifest, especially in Africa, in the immediately preceding years. Indeed, Naples did follow a similar pattern, the Byzantines adopting harsh measures against those who had supported their rivals. In all likelihood, the Jews were among the principal victims of the massacres carried out in the city in the wake of the invasion both by the Byzantine general Belisarios<sup>29</sup> and by the Neapolitan citizens themselves, who reserved a cruel treatment for Pastor and Asclepiodotos, the two Christian leaders of the pro-Gothic minority faction.<sup>30</sup>

For some decades after these events, no further information is available. At the beginning of the seventh century, however, the letters of Pope Gregory the Great again shed light on the lives of the Jews of Naples. These missives indicate that in a short time, the Jews' condition had undergone several changes. In those years, Gregory was busy dealing with conflicts that were igniting everywhere between local ecclesiastic authorities — which frequently were in fact regarded as the principal authority — and the Jewish population. Thus, his correspondence tells us a great deal about these clashes.<sup>31</sup> As regards Naples, Gregory repeat-

<sup>28</sup> Cassiodorus, *Variae*, IV,5 (ed. Mommsen, p. 117): 'Atque ideo devotio tua praesenti auctoritate cognoscat omnes navicularios Campaniae, Lucaniae sive Tusciae fideiussoribus idoneis se debere committere, ut cum victualibus speciebus tantum profiscantur ad Gallias, habituri licentiam distrahendi sic ut inter emptorem venditoremque convenerit' ('Having heard that there is [a] dearth in our Gaulish Provinces we direct your Devotion to take bonds from the shipmasters along the whole western coast of Italy — Lucania, Campania, and Thuscia — that they will go with supplies of food only to the Gauls, having liberty to dispose of their cargoes as may be agreed between buyer and seller'; transl. Hodgkin 1896). As for the Jewish role during the siege of Naples, cf. Nicola Ferorelli, 'La partecipazione degli Ebrei alla difesa di Napoli contro Belisario', *Il Vessillo Israelitico*, 63 (1915), 146–47; Eliodoro Savino, 'Ebrei a Napoli nel VI sec. d.C.', in *Hebraica hereditas*, pp. 301–15.

<sup>29</sup> Procopius, *De Bello Gothico*, I.x.28–29.

<sup>30</sup> Procopius, *De Bello Gothico*, I.x.46–47.

<sup>31</sup> Sofia Boesch Gajano, 'Per una storia degli Ebrei in Occidente fra Antichità e Medioevo. La testimonianza di Gregorio Magno', *Quaderni Medievali*, 8 (December 1979), 12–43; Ernst Bammel, 'Gregor der Grosse und die Juden', in *Gregorio Magno e il suo tempo. XIX Incontro di studiosi dell'antichità cristiana, Roma*

edly mentions the economic activities of the local Jews, some of which appear to have had an international scope. Thus, despite the feared Byzantine domination, the community still included members involved successfully in foreign trade. Notably, Gregory mentions the key role of Neapolitan Jews in maritime trade, and especially in the importation of slaves, whom they purchased from other merchants in Gaul.<sup>32</sup> This commerce was especially beneficial for Byzantine officials (who are explicitly mentioned as buyers), since most of the slave workforce, and above all the rural slaves, was outside the dukedom, and hence under the control of their enemies, the Lombards.

This role of Jewish merchants as go-betweens raised a juridical-religious problem since Jews were not allowed to own Christian slaves. It is worth dwelling on a case on which Gregory was consulted in 599 by the then-bishop of Naples, Fortunatus. According to the bishop, a Neapolitan Jew named Basilius, some of whose sons had converted to Christianity, had taken advantage of their conversion to fictitiously donate some slaves to them, so that even should these slaves, who were pagans, convert to Christianity they could continue to serve in his home. In this case, Gregory urged Bishop Fortunatus to limit himself to making sure that the slaves were baptized and that Basilius' sons did not send them to work in their father's house.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, bishops in Naples as well as elsewhere in Italy sought every occasion to make life difficult for the Jews. Gregory's last recorded intervention concerning the Neapolitan Jews, in the year 602, concerned yet another conflict arising from religious controversy. This time, however, it was the Neapolitan Jews themselves who turned to the pope. They complained that several citizens, encouraged by the Bishop Paschasius, regularly interrupted, sometimes violently, the performance of Jewish rites on Christian holidays. In this case, Gregory intervened in defense of the Jews. He wrote directly to the bishop to remind him that Neapolitan Jews had long been granted (*longis retro temporibus*) the

1990 (Roma: Institutum Patristicum 'Augustinianum', 1991), II, pp. 283–91; Lisania Giordano, *Giustizia e potere giudiziario ecclesiastico nell'epistolario di Gregorio Magno*, Quaderni di *Vetera Christianorum*, 25 (Bari: Edipuglia, 1998).

<sup>32</sup> Gregory the Great, *Epistulae*, (ed. Norberg) IV.9 (year 596). On these activities, see Giancarlo Lacerenza, 'Attività ebraiche nella Napoli medievale: un *excursus*', in *Tra storia e urbanistica. Colonie mercantili e minoranze etniche in Campania tra Medioevo ed Età moderna*, ed. by Teresa Colletta, *Storia dell'Urbanistica / Campania*, 8 (Roma: Kappa, 2008), pp. 33–40.

<sup>33</sup> Gregory the Great, *Epistulae*, IX.36 (35) and IX.61.

right to perform religious ceremonies even on Christian festive days. The pope's closing words to Paschasius are worth quoting here:

Qui sincera intentione extraneos ad christianam religionem, ad fidem cupiunt rectam adducere, blandimentis debent, non asperitatibus, studere, ne quorum mentem reddita plana ratio poterat provocare, pellat procul adversitas. Nam quicumque aliter agunt et eos sub hoc velamine a consueta ritus sui volunt cultura suspendere, suas illi magisquam Dei probantur causas attendere.<sup>34</sup>

For the following period and until the ninth century, our sources for Naples grow increasingly silent: but this is not without reason. We know that the city witnessed a general demographic decline as a consequence of several epidemics and that it was torn by the conflict between the iconodules and iconoclasts, concluded with the city's definitive casting off of the authority of Byzantium under the bishop-duke Stephanus II (768–800). Throughout this period, however, we have reason to believe that the Jewish community lived on uninterruptedly since an act stipulated in Naples in February 984 mentions a *sinagoga hebreorum* right below the ducal palace.<sup>35</sup> This synagogue building must have been the same one of the Roman period, and certainly prior to 439, when — as seen above — the erection of new synagogues was prohibited by Theodosius II. Recent archaeological investigations have shed new light on economic activities in this neighborhood between the sixth and eighth century, showing that in the area just below the synagogue a small glass factory and possibly dye-works were established. While this can only be regarded as circumstantial evidence, between Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, both glassmaking and dyeing were activities usually performed by Jews.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> 'Those who with sincere intent wish to bring to the true faith all who are alien from the Christian religion should do so with pleasant words, not harsh ones; lest they be driven away by a hostile attitude, rather than appealed to by calm reasoning. Thus, whosoever act otherwise and would suspend people from their accustomed rites with such behavior, appear to be intent on their own cause rather than on God's' (transl. Barmby, 1898); Gregory the Great, *Epistulae*, XIII.13 (15).

<sup>35</sup> Lacerenza, 'La topografia', pp. 120–23.

<sup>36</sup> Daniela Giampaola, 'Dagli studi di Bartolommeo Capasso agli scavi della metropolitana: ricerche sulle mura di Napoli e sull'evoluzione del paesaggio costiero', *Napoli Nobilissima*, 5<sup>th</sup> series, 5 (2004), 35–56 (pp. 45–46, 50–52); Lacerenza, 'La topografia', p. 117 fn. 24.

## Venosa

In an area only slightly more to the south of the Campania region, we find that the transition from Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages determined there quite different living conditions for the Jews. The area in question lies in the modern region of Basilicata; in its middle is the most important and best-known site in the archaeology of southern Italian Jews: Venosa, in Roman age included in *Apulia*. The ancient *Venusia* is especially remarkable for its celebrated Jewish catacombs, discovered in 1853, which have yielded a rich epigraphic documentation.<sup>37</sup> The main Jewish cemetery stood very close to the Christian catacombs in an area outside the town. This consisted of several superimposed tunnels, only a small part of which has been explored. More than seventy epigraphs were found here, mostly painted or scratched on the plaster used to seal the tombs. The only one bearing a date, the epitaph of Augusta, is from the year 521. The others seem to date from the fourth century to the late sixth.<sup>38</sup>

Apparently, from Roman times to the Middle Ages, Venosa housed a large Jewish population. The inscriptions from the catacomb, some of which are quite elaborate, indicate that Jews were well integrated in local society and many of them even enjoyed high status, as various mentions of public offices bear out. The influence of Judaism on the local community is confirmed by the presence of proselytes — or at least ‘God-fearers’ — in another cemetery in the same hill, the so-called ‘Lauridia hypogeum’.<sup>39</sup> The community offices included, as in Rome and elsewhere, presbyters, gerusiarchs, archisynagogoi, and *patres synagogae*; a bilingual Greek-Hebrew epitaph (*JIWE* I.48) mentions a *didaskalos Iakobōs*, a teacher. In the Latin-Hebrew epitaph of the young girl Faustina (*JIWE* I.86), there are mentioned *duo apostuli et duo reb-bites*, two apostles and two rabbis, who sang dirges for the deceased girl: ‘rabbis’ must be considered here as a religious title.<sup>40</sup> In its strange

<sup>37</sup> Epitaphs in *JIWE* I.42–112; for the history of these discoveries, Giancarlo Lacerenza, ‘Le antichità giudaiche di Venosa. Storia e documenti’, *Archivio Storico per le Province Napoletane*, 116 (1998), pp. 293–418.

<sup>38</sup> For the epitaph of Augusta, see *JIWE* I.107 and below. For the chronology of the remaining inscriptions, Noy, in *JIWE* I, pp. xviii–xxi; Noy, ‘The Jewish Communities of Leontopolis and Venosa’, in *Studies in Early Jewish Epigraphy*, ed. by Jan Willelm van Henten and Pieter Willelm van der Horst (Leiden: Brill, 1994), pp. 162–82.

<sup>39</sup> *JIWE* I.113–16 and p. xvii.

<sup>40</sup> As for the apostles, many scholars identified them as envoys of the Palestinian patriarchate to Gothic-Byzantine Jewish communities in Italy, passing by Venosa at

mixture of late Latin, Greek words and letters, and Hebrew expressions, the text reads as follows:<sup>41</sup>

Hic cisqued Faustina filia Faustini pat(ris), annorum quattuordecim>, μηνsurum quinque, que fuet unica pare[n]turum. Quei dixerunt ττηnus duo apostuli e[t] duo rebbites. Et satis grande(m) dolorem fecet parentebus, et lagremas cibitati.

משכ>ב>ה ש[ל] פווסטינה נוח נפש שלום

Que fuet pronepus Faustini pat(ris), nepus Biti et Acelli, qui fuerunt maiures cibitatis.

Here rests Faustina, daughter of Faustinus the father, aged fourteen years five months. She was her parents' only child. Two apostles and two rabbis spoke the dirges for her, and she made great enough grief for her parents and tears for the community.

(*Hebrew*) Resting-place of Faustina. May her soul rest! Peace.

She was the great-granddaughter of Faustinus the father, granddaughter of Vitus and Asellus, who were leaders of the community.

Such inscriptions signal the change in social status of the members of the Venosa Jewish community between the fifth and the sixth century. But to appreciate this change, we need to know that ever since the thirties of the sixth century, the territory of Venosa was disputed between the Goths and Byzantines. After 570, the town officially came under the control of the Lombards, more specifically of the duchy of Benevento. Now, Faustina's epitaph — which in my opinion can be dated, on paleographical grounds, not before the late sixth century, and hence in the late Byzantine or early Lombard phase — provides an explicit clue as to the decline of her family, the *Faustini*, namely, the enumeration of

the time of Faustina's death. The patriarchate in Galilee, however, was suppressed in 425, and the text is certainly later. I have argued elsewhere that the term *apostuli* here could simply refer to local representatives of the assembly during the synagogal liturgy, that is, the *seluḥei šibbur*: Giancarlo Lacerenza, 'Ebraiche liturgie e peregrini apostuli nell'Italia bizantina', in *Una manna buona per Mantova. Man Tov le-Man Tovah. Studi in onore di Vittore Colorni per il suo 92° compleanno*, ed. by Mauro Perani, Accademia Nazionale Virgiliana di Scienze Lettere e Arti, Miscellanea, 14 (Firenze: Olschki, 2004), pp. 61–72. Presently, however, I am not convinced even of this hypothesis: see Lacerenza, 'Rabbis in Jewish Inscriptions' (forthcoming).

<sup>41</sup> My reading along with David Noy's translation in *JJWE*.

the past honors of her ancestors, who had been town administrators; a dignity that, in the time of our text, legislation forbade to Jews.<sup>42</sup> The inscription's insistence on ancestors' high positions and their *honores* — as well its silence regarding the present situation — appears to merge with the commemoration of the dead girl in a single nostalgic sentiment: a longing for lost times.

Another noteworthy sign of the changes that occurred between the seventh and eighth centuries, this time cultural in nature, concerns the language employed in funerary epigraphs. As is well known, the Venosa catacomb inscriptions provide clear evidence of a gradual rediscovery of Hebrew in religious contexts and are among the earliest examples of its revival in the liturgical practices of the western diaspora.<sup>43</sup> While the earlier inscriptions are all in Greek, there is a gradual switch to Latin. Hebrew initially makes its appearance only in the usual stereotypical formulas, but later becomes increasingly common. The epitaph of the old presbyter Secundinus, written mostly in Greek in Hebrew characters, bears this out, so giving us one of the earliest examples of Judaeo-Greek (*JWE* I.75; my translation):

שלום על משהבו · טפוס סהקונדינו פרסוביטרו · קימיטי אן ירינא · אטון אוג-  
דואנטא

*šalom 'al miškabo / tafos Sekoundinou presbyterou / (e)koimēthē en eirēnē / etōn ogdoēnta*

Peace on his resting place. Tomb of Secundinus (the) elder, who fell asleep in peace, aged eighty.

<sup>42</sup> Pieter Willelm van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs. An Introductory Survey of a Millennium of Jewish Funerary Epigraphy (300 BCE–700 CE)* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1991), p. 100; *JWE* I, p. 119; Francesco Grelle, 'Patroni ebrei in città tardoantiche', in *Epigrafia e territorio. Politica e società. Temi di antichità romane*, ed. by Mario Pani (Bari: Edipuglia, 1994) III, pp. 139–58 (p. 152) (same article in *Studi in ricordo di A. F. Panzera*, Bari: Cacucci, 1995, III, pp. 1427–45); Margaret Williams, 'The Jews of Early Byzantine Venetia: The Family of Faustinus I, the Father', *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 50 (1999), pp. 38–52.

<sup>43</sup> Graziadio Isaia Ascoli, 'Iscrizioni inedite o mal note, greche, latine, ebraiche, di antichi sepolcri giudaici del Napolitano', in *Atti del IV Congresso Internazionale degli Orientalisti (Firenze 1878)* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1880), I, pp. 239–354 (p. 276); Shlomo Simonsohn, 'The Hebrew Revival among Early Medieval European Jews', in *Salo W. Baron Jubilee Volume*, ed. by Saul Lieberman and Arthur Hyman (Jerusalem/New York: American Academy for Jewish Research - Columbia University Press, 1974), II, pp. 831–58; David Noy, 'Writing in Tongues: The Use of Greek, Latin and Hebrew in Jewish Inscriptions from Roman Italy', *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 48 (1997), 300–11.



After the end of the sixth century, the catacomb was no longer in use, and there is a short gap in documentation. There is a fragment from the seventh or eighth century, however, showing that in this period the Jews had shifted to the use of Hebrew, perhaps exclusively.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, when the texts become numerous again — no longer in the catacomb, but in a ninth-century burial ground (the earlier epitaph is of 808, the most recent of 848) — we no longer find traces of Greek and Latin: Hebrew is the only language.<sup>45</sup> What happened in the meanwhile? This significant cultural mutation can be understood in several ways. Undoubtedly, however, the fact that the Jews in their inscriptions dropped the use of the local epigraphic languages, Latin and Greek, indicates that they no longer wanted, needed to, or could represent themselves as integrated in the surrounding social context. In other words, their cultural identity was felt as irreversibly different.

By the time of the ninth-century Venosa inscriptions, we are in the full Lombard age, albeit with constant Byzantine interference. We have but a sketchy idea of this conflict and of the Lombard dukes' attitude towards the Jewish presence, which at the time was still significant in southern Italy.<sup>46</sup> One could interpret the emerging, in this area, of Jewish culture and the use of Hebrew between the eighth (or late

<sup>44</sup> Cesare Colafemmina, 'Hebrew Inscriptions of the Early Medieval Period in Southern Italy', in *The Jews of Italy*, pp. 65–81 (p. 81 fn. 23).

<sup>45</sup> These ninth-century inscriptions, most of which were re-employed in medieval burials, churches and edifices, are still scattered through many publications: some are collected in Ascoli, 'Iscrizioni'; and in Umberto Cassuto, 'Ha-ketovot ha-ivriot šel ha me'ah ha-teši'it be-Venosa', *Kedem*, 2 (1945), 99–120 (Hebrew; 'The Hebrew Inscriptions of the ninth century in Venosa'); others appear in various articles of Cesare Colafemmina, 'Un'iscrizione venosina inedita dell'822', *Rassegna Mensile d'Israel*, 43 (1977), 261–63; Colafemmina, 'Tre iscrizioni ebraiche inedite di Venosa e Potenza', *Vetera Christianorum*, 20 (1983), 443–47; Colafemmina, 'Una nuova iscrizione ebraica a Venosa', *Vetera Christianorum*, 21 (1984), 197–202; Colafemmina, 'Iscrizione ebraica inedita di Lavello', *Vetera Christianorum*, 23 (1986), 171–76; Colafemmina, 'Tre nuove iscrizioni ebraiche a Venosa', *Vetera Christianorum*, 24 (1987), 201–09; Colafemmina, 'Epigraphica hebraica Venusina', *Vetera Christianorum*, 30 (1993), pp. 353–58. An early inscription of 808 in Giancarlo Lacerenza, 'L'epitaffio di Abigail da Venosa', *Henoch*, 11 (1989), 319–25. A comprehensive survey of great part of these epitaphs can now be found in Giancarlo Lacerenza, 'L'epigrafia ebraica in Basilicata e Puglia dal IV secolo all'alto Medioevo', in *Ketav, sefer, miktav. La cultura ebraica scritta tra Basilicata e Puglia*, ed. by Mariapina Mascolo (Bari: Edizioni di Pagina, 2014), pp. 189–252.

<sup>46</sup> Stefano Palmieri, 'Mobilità etnica e mobilità sociale nel Mezzogiorno longobardo', *Archivio Storico per le Province Napoletane*, 20 (1981), 31–104; Palmieri, 'Le componenti etniche: contrasti e fusioni', in *Storia del Mezzogiorno*, III. *Alto Medioevo*, ed. by Giuseppe Galasso and others (Napoli: Edizioni del Sole, 1990), pp. 43–72; Palmieri, 'Ebrei e cristiani nell'Italia meridionale fra Antichità e Medioevo', *Annali dell'Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Storici*, 27 (2012–13), 835–1010; and 28 (2014–15), 101–280.



seventh) and ninth century, in various ways. Without question, however, alongside the civic and social regression of the Jews, this period witnessed a distinct — and possibly unprecedented for the time — flourishing of Jewish culture. We must conclude that this change — which we observe as much in the Byzantine-controlled areas as in the Lombard ones — was stimulated by the resumption of relations with representatives of eastern Judaism sent to the West; not just from Palestine, as had up to then been more often the case, but also from Babylonia. We find a sign of this influence — already claimed in literary traditions, such as those transmitted in the *Megillat Ahimaʿaš* — in a funerary inscription of the late eighth century discovered at Lavello (not far from Venosa). The inscription attests knowledge of rabbinical literature, even quoting, according to some scholars, at least two passages from the Babylonian Talmud (*Berakoth* 17a and 58b; maybe also *Hullin* 131a), the earliest to have come down to us from the Latin West.<sup>47</sup>

### The Salento

Our last exploration centers on the Puglia region and, more specifically, the Salento peninsula (which was long called *Calabria*, not to be confused with the region today bearing the same name). Here, we are no longer in a politically disputed area, but in one that had solid ties to the Byzantine Empire and whose only external enemies were, from a certain period onward, the Muslims.<sup>48</sup> In this context of greater political stability, disturbed between the seventh and ninth centuries only by frequent Muslim incursions, the explicit attitude towards the Jewish population was one of hostility and growing intolerance. Surprisingly, however, bearable forms of coexistence were reached. Indeed, the local Jews managed to establish a cultural and religious climate that for centuries was hardly rivaled in Europe.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Cesare Colafemmina, 'Una nuova epigrafe ebraica altomedievale a Lavello', *Vetera Christianorum*, 29 (1992), pp. 411–21; Colafemmina, 'Hebrew Inscriptions', pp. 71–77.

<sup>48</sup> Jules Gay, *L'Italie méridionale et l'empire byzantin depuis l'avènement de Basile I jusqu'à la prise de Bari par les Normands (867–1071)* (Paris: Fontemoing, 1904); André Guillou, 'L'Italia bizantina dalla caduta di Ravenna all'avvento dei Normanni', in *Storia d'Italia*, 3, pp. 1–126. More specifically, *Ad Ovest di Bisanzio. Il Salento nel medioevo*, ed. by Benedetto Vetere (Galatina: Congedo, 1990).

<sup>49</sup> Roberto Bonfil, 'Tra due mondi: prospettive di ricerca sulla storia culturale degli Ebrei dell'Italia meridionale', in *Italia Judaica. Atti del Convegno Internazionale*

The Jewish communities of Puglia had centuries-old roots in this area. As mentioned by the author of the *Sefer Yosippon*, local Jewish leaders believed that they had been the first of their faith to become established on Italian soil. It is likely that at least during the early Roman principate, a Jewish community existed at Brundisium (present-day Brindisi), an important port of trade with the Orient and reportedly a destination for ships from Judaea. There is no definitely dated evidence, however, of a Jewish presence in Puglia before the year 398, when the first western emperor, Honorius, issued a decree obliging the Jews of many towns of *Apulia* and *Calabria* (that is, the whole Puglia region as it is known today, a portion of Basilicata there included) to fill the office of decurion. As we have seen, the general obligation to *munera* had been abolished by Constantine, but it was reintroduced by Valentinian II in 383 (*Cod. Theod.* 12.1.158). Thus, as had been ruled long before, under Septimius Severus, the Jews were again required to participate in town *curiae* and assume all the associated duties, both religious and economic. Honorius' decree indicates that in *Apulia Calabriamque* there must have been towns where part, if not the majority of the leisure class was Jewish. It further attests to the presence of Jews among the *maiores* of several towns of late antique southern Italy, confirmed by epigraphic evidence — as we have seen in Venosa, on the borders of this same territory.

Yet, to date, the importance of the Jewish element has not been reflected, at least for an earlier period, in archaeological and epigraphic documentation. Otranto (ancient Hydruntum), which was for centuries an important Jewish center, has yielded a single epitaph dated to the third century (*JJWE* I.134). At Lupiae (present-day Lecce), the presence of Jews in Late Antiquity is only indirectly attested by the above-mentioned epitaph from Venosa of 521, which mentions the deceased Augusta's grandfather Simon from Lecce: she is said indeed to be *nepus Symonatis p(atris) Lypiensium* (*JJWE* I.107). At Taranto, it appears that the necropolis of Montedoro, datable between the fifth and sixth century, housed both Christian and Jewish graveyards, and two inscriptions feature typical Jewish names in Greek shape — Azaryah, Daudatos (Nethan'el), Elias, Jacob, and Susanna. The *verso* of the epitaph of Daudatos, son of Azaryah (*JJWE* I.118), carries a Hebrew text — one of the earliest and longest known epigraphs of this kind — is among the earliest bearing eulogies, including the characteristic תנוח

נפשו בצרור החיים 'may his soul be bound up in the bundle of life' (from I Samuel 25.29).

We do not know much about the living conditions of local Jews under the Byzantine emperor Leo III (717–741). However, from the end of the eighth century onward, we possess information about the Salento area, thanks to extant evidence from important and active communities, such as those of Taranto, Oria, Brindisi, and Otranto. These communities experienced a cultural floruit that was to have repercussions for centuries, prompting the famous aphorism by the Provençal glosser Ya'aqov ben Me'ir (or Rabbenu Tam, c. 1100–71): 'From Bari comes forth the Torah and from Otranto the word of God', a paraphrasing of Isaiah 2.3. In the same period, Avraham ibn Daud, in his *Sefer ha-Qabbalah*, presented the legend according to which three of the most important Jewish study centers of the Mediterranean (Fustat, Qairawan, and Cordoba) had their origin in the fortuitous dispersion of as many Apulian wise men, who had set sail from Bari towards Mesopotamia but had been kidnapped and sold into slavery by Andalusian Muslims.<sup>50</sup> It is far from coincidental, then, that it is this part of southern Italy which yields epigraphic evidence showing, among other things, how quickly the local Jews absorbed and adapted the cultural models developed elsewhere, creating something new. Such cultural creativity during the so-called 'Dark Ages' is well illustrated in the epitaph of a woman named Hannah, who probably died in Oria towards the end of the seventh century. An elaborate, though quite small, memorial stone features an inscription in rhymed acrostic Hebrew verses that is more accurately written and far more poetically conceived than the shorter Latin text roughly carved on its top:<sup>51</sup>

ic requiescit d(omi)na<es> Anna filia r(ebbitis) Guliu etate LVI a(n)  
ni<ni> LVI

שוכבת פה אשה נבונה

<sup>50</sup> On this story see, among the others, Gerson D. Cohen, 'The Story of the Four Captives', *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, 29 (1960–61), pp. 55–131; Moshe Gil, 'The Babylonian Yeshivot and the Maghrib in the Early Middle Ages', *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, 57 (1990–91), pp. 69–120 (pp. 90–97).

<sup>51</sup> With slight modifications, text and translation from *JJWE* I.195, both derivate from the reading of Cesare Colafemmina, 'Note su di una iscrizione ebraico-latina di Oria', *Vetera Christianorum*, 25 (1988), pp. 641–51. In acrostic (on the stone) it can be read the name שמואל, Shemuel. For a new reading and interpretation, Mauro Perani, 'A proposito dell'iscrizione sepolcrale ebraico-latina di Anna figlia di Rabbi Giulio da Oria', *Sefer yuhasin*, n.s. 2 (2014), pp. 65–91.

מוכנת בכל מצוות אמונה  
 ותמצא פני אל חנינה  
 ליקיצת מי מנה  
 זו שנפ>ט>רה חנה  
 בת נ"ו שנה

(Latin) Here rests Lady Anna, daughter of Rabbi Julius, aged 56.  
 (Hebrew) Here lies a prudent woman  
 Ready in all the precepts of faith,  
 May she find the face of the mercy God  
 At the awakening of who will count [Israel].  
 She who has died is Hannah  
 Aged 56.

The social climate and high cultural standards that prevailed in the region between the eighth and tenth centuries would be evoked in the *Megillat Aḥima'as* or *Sefer yuḥasin* (Book of Genealogies), written by Aḥima'as ben Palṭiel in the eleventh century.<sup>52</sup> Ben Palṭiel's family, originally from Oria, had moved to Capua in Campania (the Lombard zone). This was a typical move for southern Jews around the end of the ninth century, spurred by the conversional persecutions introduced first by the Byzantine emperor Basil I in 873, and then, about fifty years later, by his successor Romanus Lecapenus.<sup>53</sup> Such migration was also motivated by the growing threat of Islamic incursions in coastal areas. Thus, within a few decades, a significant number of Jews had relocated from the Byzantine south to areas in the Lombard dukedom, where many took up residence. Many more, however, kept moving up the Italian peninsula, revitalizing old Jewish communities or founding new ones, for example at Lucca and Ravenna. Central and northern Italy, however, do not seem to have offered propitious circumstances for the settling of these immigrants.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Of which a new critical edition is now available: Robert Bonfil, *History and Folklore in a Medieval Jewish Chronicle: The Family Chronicle of Aḥima'az ben Palṭiel*, Studies in Jewish History and Culture, 22 (Leiden: Brill, 2009). Valuable informations can also be found in the Italian translation ed. by Cesare Colafemmina, *Aḥima'az ben Palṭiel. Sefer Yuḥasin. Libro delle discendenze. Vicende di una famiglia ebraica di Oria nei secoli IX–XI* (Cassano delle Murge — Oria: Messaggi — Comune di Oria, 2001).

<sup>53</sup> Joshua Starr, *The Jews in the Byzantine Empire, 641–1204* (Athen: Verlag der 'Byzantinisch-neugriechischen jahrbücher', 1939), pp. 34–35; Valerio Massimo Minale, 'Il diritto bizantino contro gli ebrei: a proposito della legislazione macedone', *Sefer yuḥasin*, n.s. 3 (2015), 7–29.

<sup>54</sup> Attilio Milano, *Storia degli ebrei in Italia* (Torino: Einaudi, 1963), pp. 57–58.

It is only beyond the Alps, in the Rhine valley, and notably at Mainz and Speyer, that the descendants of the refugees from southern Italy — including members of the renowned Kalonymos family from Lucca, but originally from Oria — finally managed to reestablish an organized Jewish society. In doing so, they laid the ground for the flourishing of Askhenazi communities and the dissemination of early kabbalist speculations from East to West.<sup>55</sup> These communities of southern Italian origins managed to live in relative tranquility until their peace was once again violently disrupted, this time not by the barbarians but by the First Crusade.

<sup>55</sup> Joseph Dan, 'The Beginnings of Jewish Mysticism in Europe', in *The World History of the Jewish People, XI. The Dark Ages: Jews in Christian Europe, 711–1096*, ed. by Cecil Roth and I. H. Levine (Israel/New Brunswick, NJ: Jewish History Publications — Rutgers University Press, 1966), pp. 282–90.