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The Status and Economic Activity of Jews in the Venetian Dominions during the Fifteenth Century

Recent studies on the history of Jews in the Venetian Terraferma in the last century of the Middle Ages have expanded our knowledge considerably. An excellent collection of studies by the late Daniel Carpi on Jews in Padua appeared in 2002. A seminar held in Verona in 2003 was dedicated to the cases of Treviso, Verona, Vicenza, Feltre and, beyond the borders of Venice but in its sphere of influence, Rovigo (part of the Veneto only from 1484) and Trieste (in the empire); most of the participants were young scholars who had devoted laurea and doctoral theses to specific cities and areas of the Terraferma¹. As regards the social and economic history of Jews in the maritime provinces, the Venetian *Stato da mar*, the single historian who has contributed most is unquestionably David Jacoby, many of whose articles have been collected in readily available volumes. The largest of the provinces, Crete, as Jacoby affirmed already in 1983, remains even today – for the history of the Jews – the least-studied area with the most voluminous documentation². The present contribution considers the social status and the economic activity of Jews in both regions under the direct governance of Venice.

The status of Jews in Venetian territories

The conventional vocabulary of the majority reflects at first glance the social and legal status of a minority, in Venice as anywhere else. The terms *subditus* and *servus*

¹ *Daniel Carpi*, *L'individuo e la collettività. Saggi di storia degli ebrei a Padova e nel Veneto nell'età del Rinascimento* (Florence 2002); *Ebrei nella Terraferma veneta del Quattrocento*, Atti della Giornata di studio (Verona, 14 novembre 2003), edited by *Gian Maria Varanini* and *Reinhold C. Mueller* (Florence 2005) 149–50 (available also on-line in *Reti Medievali – Rivista*, VI, 2005, 1: www.dssg.unifi.it/_RM/rivista/atti/ebrei.htm). My own contribution to that volume, *Lo status degli ebrei nella Terraferma veneta del Quattrocento: tra politica, religione, cultura ed economia*. Saggio introduttivo, *ibid.* 1–22, constitutes a first attempt to deal with some of the themes of this paper as well as other, wider, issues. My thanks to David Jacoby for his careful reading of an earlier version of the present essay and for his helpful suggestions.

² The best overview is still *David Jacoby*, *Venice and the Venetian Jews in the Eastern Mediterranean*, in: *Gaetano Cozzi* (ed.), *Gli Ebrei e Venezia, secoli XIV–XVIII* (Milan 1987) 29–58, reprinted in: *David Jacoby*, *Studies on the Crusader States and on Venetian Expansion* (Northampton 1989), art. X. See also *idem*, *Recherches sur la Méditerranée orientale du XII^e au XV^e siècle* (London 1979).

had widely different connotations. Letters addressed by the doge to the council in Verona in the later fifteenth century, as reported in a recent study, refer to the Jews residing in that city as Venetian subjects: “*Iudaei subditi nostri*”. The phrase was probably understood to mean that the Jews were subject in the first place directly to the government of the capital city, secondly to the Venetian governors serving *in loco*, and thirdly to local authorities³. It meant that the state assumed the obligation of providing protection for Jews resident in its territories and as such was a sought-after condition. It was very different from the concept of “servitude of the Jews” commonly invoked by medieval kings and emperors, a concept not without an echo in Venice, albeit in expressions not originating from the organs of the republican government.

That the status of the Jews as a minority in the states of medieval Christian Europe was often given expression by calling them *servi regis* or *servi regie camerae* or *servi camerae nostre* (*unsere Kammerknechte*) is well known. It was long thought that the concept was introduced by Frederick II in 1236 but David Abulafia, in his search for the origin and meaning of such proprietary terms in different places and times, has found that the roots in the Mediterranean world lie considerably further back – at least as early as 1176, date of the statute of a town in Aragon – and that France, England and German lands had laws with similar formulations antedating Frederick II. He has shown that the concept involved a kind of “apertaining” to the royal treasury or fisc, a direct (Latin: *immediate*) subjection or dominion that was intended to guarantee protection to the Jews. *Servus*, he affirms, did not mean serfdom or slavery and the unfreedom of the Jew concerned only his relationship to the king or the emperor; at the same time, the term and the reality behind it became more pejorative in the later Middle Ages, beginning with the Angevins in Naples and the Aragonese in Sicily⁴.

Perhaps closer to Venetian experience was the Byzantine tradition, about which, however, very little is known. One particular diplomatic exchange between emperor Andronicus II and doge Giovanni Soranzo in 1319–20 sheds some light on the issue, even if the original Greek texts are not extant. According to the surviving Latin texts, the emperor wrote of the Jews of the Vranka quarter of Constantinople

³ Gian Maria Varanini mentions the phrase *concitare populos contra Iudaeos subditos nostros* in a warning prohibiting any action in the Terraferma city that would incite the people against the Jews, “our subjects”; see his *Società cristiana e minoranza ebraica a Verona nella seconda metà del Quattrocento. Tra ideologia osservante e vita quotidiana in Ebrei nella Terraferma veneta*, in: *idem*, *Reinhold C. Mueller (eds.)*, *Ebrei nella Terraferma veneta* (above, note 1) 149–50. It is worth noting that *lettere ducali* merely transmitted to the authorities of subject territories relevant decisions of the state’s legislative organs.

⁴ *David Abulafia*, *The Servitude of Jews and Muslims in the medieval Mediterranean: origins and diffusion*, in: *Mélanges de l’École Française de Rome – Moyen Âge* 112 (2000) 687–714; *idem*, *Nam Iudei servi regis sunt, et semper fisco regio deputati: Los Judíos en el Fuero municipal de Teruel (1176–7)*, in: *El món urbà a la Corona d’Aragó del 1137 als Decrets de Nova Planta, XVII Congrés d’Història de la Corona d’Aragó*, 3 vols., vol. 2 (Barcelona 2003) 1–10; *idem*, *The first Servi Camere Regie in Sicily*, in: *Mediterraneo, Mezzogiorno, Europa. Studi in onore di Cosimo Damiano Fonseca* (Bari 2004) 1–13 – publications kindly provided by the author.

as “our Jews, legitimate property of the Empire (*nostri Iudei quedam appropriata possessio sunt Imperij*)”. The seemingly “proprietary” relationship was emphasized in connection with the rank trade of tanning hides, in which Jews under both imperial and Venetian jurisdictions were heavily involved. The point of contention was the right of Jews of the Venetian quarter to live where they wished and ply the trade they wished, including tanning, while profitting from the exemption from imperial taxes as Venetians. The contending parties referred to the Jews as “*vestri*” and “*nostri*”: the imperial chancery wrote of those of the Venetian quarter as “*vestri Iudei ut Veneti*” and the Venetians insisted upon imperial recognition that “*Iudei nostri vel alij nostri subditi*” be free to ply the trade of their choice. The possessive pronouns used did not imply servility and the exchange concerned who was *subditus* of whom; the Venetian side gave expression to its obligation to protect its subjects and their interests, which obviously coincided with the interests of the state⁵.

So far only three cases reflecting a certain currency of terms of servitude have been uncovered in Venetian documents. Two are in petitions made to the Venetian government, while the third comes from a sermon. The first was directed in 1441 to doge Francesco Foscari by the Jews of Treviso regarding the tax paid by their banks, in which they refer to themselves as “your most faithful servants (*fedelissimi*

⁵ The texts can be found in translation in Steven B. Bowman, *The Jews of Byzantium, 1204–1453* (University of Alabama 1985) 244–247, docs. 37–39; they are discussed on 22–24. In the Latin texts, in Georg M. Thomas, *Diplomatarium veneto-levantinum*, vol. I (Venice 1880), the wording on the emperor’s side of the dispute is ... *sic respondemus, quod nostri Iudei quedam appropriata possessio sunt Imperij; ... aliqui de vestris Iudeis Venetis ad eos concordati sunt ... cum ipsis nostris Iudeis ...* (142). The doge responded – and had his ambassadors respond – with the same terminology of “ours” and “yours”: ... *quod [dominus imperator] dictos nostros Iudeos permittat ibi stare, sicut steterunt hucusque, et laborare curamen et pellamen ad suam liberam voluntatem, nullam eis propterea molestiam faciendo* (153); ... *quod Iudei nostri vel alij nostri subditi laborent de suis artibus, quicquid volunt* (129). It should be noted that Bowman already in his introduction (7) warns against falling into the temptation “to draw parallels” between the condition of Jews in Byzantium and “the much-discussed question of Jewish status or Jewish serfdom in the Latin West” and he continues: “The Jews, for their part, were citizens (albeit second class) of the Byzantine Empire from its inception and thus were entitled to the rights and privileges of Rhomaioi (Romans), even though they were subject to various restrictions as Jews.” See also Joshua Starr, *Romania. The Jewries of the Levant after the Fourth Crusade* (Paris 1949) 27–32, where the Jewish quarter is called *pelamina*, that is, corresponding to the area of the tanners. For the context and analysis of this controversy, see David Jacoby, *Venice and the Venetian Jews in the Eastern Mediterranean* 38–39; on the status of Venetian Jews in Byzantium, see *idem*, *Les Vénitiens naturalisés dans l’Empire Byzantin: un aspect de l’expansion de Venise en Roumanie du XIII^e au milieu du XV^e siècle*, in: *Travaux et mémoires, Centre de recherche d’histoire et civilisation de Byzance*, 8 (1981), reprinted in: *idem*, *Studies*, esp. 227–228. Starr remarked that in 1414 it was reported to the Senate that the Jews of Negroponte were too poor to pay the tax of 1250 yperperi, *nam pro maiori parte sunt servi sive vilani*, probably meaning only that some worked on the land (Starr, *Romania* 53). Finally, it is worth mentioning a parallel; according to Abulafia the archbishop of Capua had received from Constance, mother of Frederick II, the grant of the *judaica* of Capua, which guaranteed him tax revenues from the dye-shops of the Jews, a trade not dissimilar from that of tanning; see: *The Servitude of Jews and Muslims* 701.

servitori vostri; ... vostri fedel Hebrei)". The second, less equivocal, was made by Salomoncino, the wealthy Jewish moneylender of Piove di Sacco ten kilometers from Padua, when – in 1477 – he called himself, more than once in the same document, "slave and servant of this illustrious government (*schiavo e servidore de questa Illustrissima Signoria*)"⁶. In both cases the petitioners were probably being a bit obsequious, while stating the favor they asked of the government, but they could not have afforded to use such unambiguous language if it did not reflect an understood legal concept, cognizance of which they, as Ashkenazi Jews, might have acquired from their German ancestors. The final case comes from the Lenten sermon preached by a Franciscan, fra Giovan Maria d'Arezzo, at the conventual church of S. Maria dei Frari in 1515, during the discussions about what to do with the many Jews who had taken refuge in Venice from the invading armies of the League of Cambrai. The account comes from Marin Sanudo, in the context of an invective of his own against the Jews who, during Holy Week, were supposed to disappear from sight; that year, he noted, they had not and no one did anything about it, because during this war the state needed them (*"hanno bisogno di loro"*). The preacher, he writes, spoke out against them "concluding that they could be dispossessed and all their goods used for the defence of the state *because they are our servants (perchè sono servi nostri)*"⁷. The Franciscan was probably not a jurist

⁶ Angela Möschter, *Juden im venezianischen Treviso, 1389–1509*, unpublished doctoral thesis (University of Trier 2004) Quellen, no. 29, 433–434. Salomoncino's petition, kindly brought to my attention by Ariel Toaff, was published by Franz Babinger, Ja'aqûb-Pascha, ein Leibarzt Mehmeds II., *Leben und Schicksal des Jacopo aus Gaeta*, in: *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 26 (1951) 87–113, at 196–197, reprinted in his *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen zur Geschichte Südosteuropas und der Levante*, vol. 2 (Munich 1966). On Salomoncino see also David Jacoby, *Les Juifs à Venise du XIV^e au milieu du XVI^e siècle*, in: Hans-Georg Beck, *Manoussos Manoussacas, Agostino Pertusi* (eds.), *Venezia, centro di mediazione tra Oriente e Occidente (secoli XV–XVI): aspetti e problemi*. Atti del II Convegno internazionale di storia della civiltà veneziana, Venezia 1973 (Florence 1977) vol. I, 163–216, reprinted in: *idem*, *Recherches*, art. VIII, at 185, 197–198, 201; and *idem*, *New Evidence on Jewish Bankers in Venice and the Venetian Terraferma (c. 1450–1550)*, in: *The Mediterranean and the Jews. Banking, Finance and International Trade, XVI–XVIII Centuries* (Ramat Gan, Tel Aviv 1989) 154–159.

⁷ Marino Sanuto (also Marin Sanudo), *Diarii, Rinaldo Fulin et al. (eds.)*, 58 vols. (Venice 1879–1903) vol. 20, col. 98: ... *concludendo si pol tuor tutto il suo haver e meterlo a defension dil Stato, perchè sono servi nostri*. Cited first by Ennio Concina, *Parva Jerusalem*, in: Ennio Concina, Ugo Camerino, Donatella Calabi, *La città degli ebrei. Il Ghetto di Venezia: architettura e urbanistica* (Venice 1991) 33 and note 38 (and cf. 34, 43). Other friars in their Lenten sermons had in previous years already insisted on a right to sack the Jews; Sanudo wrote in April 1511 of Dominicans, Franciscans and parish priests who railed against the Jews: *Et atento che in questi zorni fra Rufin Lovato, qual predicha sul campo di San Pollo, havia dito contra li zudei 'et saria bon tuorli tutto quello che hanno et ponerli a saccho', perchè questa terra è piena di zudei fuzitti qui, et eri [1 April] predicoe assai, e dubitando di novità contra di l'horo, in questa matina Anselmo et Viviam, bancheri, fonno a li capi di X, dolendosi di questo. I qual capi andono a la Signoria et fo terminato admonir dito predichador, et cussì quel di frati minori et di San Cassam, che predichano tal cosse, acciò non segui contra ditti zudei qualche cossa*: *Diarii*, vol. 12, col. 98–99 (2 April 1511). For the origins in Augustine of the right assumed by Christians to dispossess infidels, especially Jews, see Giacomo Todeschini, *I mercanti e il tempio. La società cristiana e il circolo virtuoso della ricchezza fra Medioevo ed Età moderna* (Bologna 2002) 239–45.

but he knew both his legal sources and what his audience would understand and Sanudo considered it important to report the phrase that underscored the servitude of the Jews.

If a direct bond between the republican government of Venice and “its” Jews is surprising at first sight, it is the only legal relationship that can explain a series of otherwise anomalous situations. It explains why the charters (*condotte*) negotiated between local authorities and Jewish moneylenders had to be approved by the Senate⁸, as did requests for expelling Jewish moneylenders or the Jews *tout court*, even over the head of the Venetian governor *in loco*. It explains why the charters had almost universally to guarantee exemption of the Jews from local taxes, in order that they could be taxed centrally and as a single community despite the fact that its members operated in many centers. The same holds true for forced loans, both gratuitous and interest-bearing, that could be – and were – requested at any time by the Senate in favor of the central treasury, especially in times of war; even local authorities often had to borrow from Jews in order to meet taxes levied by the next-higher administration. It explains why in so many smaller localities the banks and sometimes the houses of Jewish lenders were located within the castle, a place by definition owned and defended by the government, with a centrally-chosen castellan and a garrison of soldiers, for the protection of the Jews in the interests of the state. This was the case in Mestre, Piove di Sacco, Monselice, Montagnana, Villafranca and yet more fortified towns in the Terraferma⁹. It would explain why many decrees of expulsion of the Jews concerned only the major urban centers, whereas the banks were licensed to operate in localities of the periphery so as to keep alive for the state a vital source of taxes and loans, even though credit in the small towns was more costly to urban clients who were considered foreigners outside their city of residence and whose pawns had to be transported, at further risk and cost¹⁰. Fi-

⁸ Already in the year 1400 a Jew, whose services were requested by the local Wool Guild, agreed to lend in Treviso but only if he received a special license from Venice (Archivio di stato di Venezia, hereafter ASV, Senato misti, reg. 45, fol. 13r, 14 maggio). But it was only in 1424, in a period of heavy pressure against the Jews, concomitant and in the wake of Bernardino da Siena’s preaching in the Veneto, that the Senate, having refused confirmation of the charter negotiated by rectors in Verona with three Jewish bankers, decreed that thenceforth no charter could be made with Jewish lenders without confirmation by the Senate itself: *ibid.*, reg. 55, fol. 7v (30 marzo 1424). It should be noted that this latter provision was signalized in the margin, exceptionally, by some notary or scribe in the chancery with the words, in large letters, *JUDEORUM MORSUS* and a large “O”, in obvious reference to the yellow sign Jews were once again required to wear. An attempt to rescind the law because of the *tedium* it involved was defeated five years later by a large majority: *ibid.*, reg. 57, fol. 123r (1 July 1429).

⁹ For the transfer of banks from cities to nearby towns, see *Carpi*, *L’individuo e la collettività* 33–34, 64. The counts of Porcia and Brugnera in Friuli (part of the Venetian Terraferma since 1420) negotiated charters, approved by the Senate, with Jews who seem to have both lived and lent money in the family’s castles in the fifteenth century. The charter of 1580 explicitly states that the count was to *accettarmi [Abram ebreo] nel predetto suo castello di Brugnera et fenerar et mercantar*: A. de Pellegrini, *Banchi di pegno degli ebrei nei castelli di Porcia e Brugnera (1451–1604)*, *Sposalizio Fanny dei conti Porcia e Brugnera con E. Collarini, Venezia 1920 (Pordenone 1920)* 24, kindly brought to my attention by Benny Arbel.

¹⁰ *Carpi*, *L’individuo e la collettività* 63–64.

nally, the direct subjection was underscored also when litigation involving Jews was withdrawn from the jurisdiction of local courts and reserved for the court of the Venetian governor, as a ducal letter addressed to the podestà of Padua in 1434 shows¹¹. In brief, direct subjection of Jews to the central government guaranteed them protection in return for the chance to tax them and extract loans from them. Whether that status as subjects involved any aspect of “servitude” is less important, although it remains interesting that the latter term was used at all in some contexts.

Citizenship

In spite of the positive elements entailed in the status of *subditi*, it is not surprising that Venice did not grant citizenship privileges to individual Jews, as it did to immigrant Christians, even during those periods when they legitimately resided and kept banks in the city of Venice (1382–1397, 1516–1797). In Romania, the status of *fidelis* and *Venetus albus* for Jewish residents was recognized, but it was useful for protection and for the privileges it entailed only there, not outside of the Romania¹². Even after the onslaught of the Black Death when Venice invented incentives to repopulate not only the capital city but also the maritime colonies and offered citizenship privileges in 1353 to inhabitants and new immigrants to Negroponte, Coron, Modon, Candia, Canea, Rethimno, Sitia and their suburbs, the Senate underscored the exclusion of Jews from the provision: “*non intelligendo in hoc Iudeos*”¹³.

Even though the exclusion was peremptory, Jews occasionally attempted to obtain some kind of privilege that would improve their ability to compete as inter-regional merchants, attempts that involved mere wishful thinking. Eliyahu Ashtor reported a notarial document of 1422 written in Alexandria in which Elia Capsali of Rethimno (Crete), a hosteller and wholesaler of wine, asked a Venetian nobleman and two Jewish merchants to petition the Venetian government in his name to get “some kind of special citizenship privilege (*de gratia spetiali ... quoddam citadinantie privilegium*)”, with clauses similar to those conceded to other faithful citizens (“*sicut aliis fidelibus civibus*”) and with the seal of San Marco. Capsali promised to pay any and all expenses incurred, but he probably never received what he was looking for, that is, treatment as a local citizen as regards customs charges and the law of reprisals. It is a second case that makes one seriously doubt it¹⁴.

Only three years later a countryman of Capsali, “*Cressonus judeus de Rethimno filius Solomonis Lazari de Meir*” was prosecuted and sentenced for having acquired

¹¹ Antonio Ciscato, Gli ebrei in Padova (1300–1800) (Padua 1901, repr. Bologna 1985) 179. Appeals, whether involving Jews or Christians, were heard in Venice by the *Avogadori di comun*.

¹² See Jacoby, Les Vénitiens naturalisés dans l’Empire Byzantin.

¹³ ASV, Commemoriali, reg. 5, fol. 3r; Senato Misti, reg. 26, copia, fols. 245v–246v (21 June 1353).

¹⁴ Eliyahu Ashtor, Ebrei cittadini di Venezia?, in: Studi veneziani 17–18 (1975–76) 145–156.

a false privilege, forged by a notary of the Venetian chancery for a fee of 40 ducats. He had told the notary he needed the letter patent as an international merchant: “*quia erat grossus mercator in partibus Crete et quod tractaretur pro cive in partibus Crete, quia Iudei tractantur pro forensibus*”. The forged patent contained the following phrases:

quod dictus Cressonus, civis, subditus et habitator Rethimi, ad diversas mundi partes se conferat et mittat suos factores cum mercationibus et aliis rebus per mare et per terram; quod ipse Cressonus mercationes et res sue in mari et quolibet loco tractentur et expediantur secure, favorabiliter et benigne,

that is, with the protection and favorable conditions owed to citizens of Rethimno (he did not aspire to Venetian citizenship – it was enough to be proven a citizen of Rethimno). But Cressono was sentenced for having procured a forgery, which means that he knew he could not aspire to the privilege legally. In fact, the forgery said he was a citizen, whereas he himself had admitted that Jews, even if *habitatores* of a city of the Venetian maritime dominion, were treated as *forenses*. Sentenced *in absentia*, he escaped incarceration and seems later to have been quite rehabilitated in Crete¹⁵.

In Italy individual urban governments had the right to grant citizenship even to Jews when they saw fit to do so, as was the case in Perugia, whereas princes simply issued decrees. In Carrara Padua, for example, Francesco I il Vecchio around 1377 granted Paduan original citizenship (*quemadmodum cives originarii Patavii*) via a *decretum civilitatis* to a Jewish medical doctor and banker Abraham and his son. This privilege was renewed by Francesco II Novello in 1394 and again by the new overlord of Padua, Venice, in 1406. But two details characterize the privilege to be *scribantur in numero civium Padue* ...: first of all, normally a grant of citizenship to a Christian did not have to be renewed, as was this one, although it may well be that the Jews had requested the renewal in order to strengthen their position; secondly, the relevant clause in the charter reads that the lender, his employees and his family were “to be had, treated and reputed in all matters just as other citizens of Padua and Piove di Sacco”, with the right to purchase real estate and the obligation

¹⁵ ASV, Avogaria di comun, reg. 3647/II, f. 114 (13 May 1427). In December 1434 Venetian authorities “refused to prosecute Cressone (Gershon), a Jew of Rethymno, for thefts and exactions apparently attributed to him out of malice”: Zvi Ankori, *The Living and the Dead: the Story of Hebrew Inscriptions in Crete* (Part I, *The Lost Record*) in: *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 38–39 (1970–71) 83. The same man, supplier to Venice of almonds, malmsey wine and other Cretan products, was bankrupt in 1450. A civil case regarding him mentions a sentence by the *Provveditori di comun* in 1426 and another case of 1432; see ASV, Giudici di petizion, Sentenze a giustizia, reg. 112, fols. 96v–99v (22 May 1450); the case of 1432 was actually an arbitration by which *Aresone hebreus qd. Salomonis* received *damnum* owed him by Marco di Pietro Muazzo: *ibid.*, reg. 64, fols. 35v–36 (12 Feb. 1432, more veneto). For the case of a notorious spy working for Venice who was to receive tax-exemption in Crete “like Venetian citizens” (he also petitioned successfully for license to purchase real estate in Candia), see David Jacoby, *Un agent Juif au service de Venise: David Mavrogonato de Candie*, in: *Thesaurismata* 9 (1972) 79–80.

to pay taxes on it¹⁶. What Abraham received, at the same time as he opened his banking operation in Piove di Sacco in 1377, was probably a kind of temporary citizenship, according to the category defined by the jurist Onofrio Bartolini of Perugia in 1397, that is, he was to be treated “as other citizens” were treated for the duration of the charter by which he was licensed to lend at usury¹⁷.

In exactly the same years but in a city long under Venetian rule, Treviso, Jews included under the provisions of a charter insisted on their being treated as citizens: *quod per formam ipsorum pactorum debent tractari tamquam alii cives Tarvisii* (1396). This privilege meant protection and some level of equal treatment under the law. In a document of 1409 the relevant clause promising quasi-citizenship read: *ceu proprie alios cives Tarvisini haberetis et prout in similibus vestros homines et cives pertractari*, that is, again they are to be “treated like other citizens and as you treat your citizens”. If this phrase is ambiguous, taken literally, a little further on, when the charter is discussed as a document negotiated *inter cives et ipsos* the ambiguity vanishes: the *cives* are the Christian representatives, while *ipsi* are the other party, the Jews. As Angela Möschter writes, this kind of “citizenship” was not equatable with that of Christians because it was temporary and because it made possible neither employment in the government bureaucracy nor participation in the religious and civic rituals of the city, which were limited to Christians, that is, to *fideles*¹⁸. Even this temporary and incomplete kind of citizenship, however, was no longer offered to the Jews of Treviso after that and studies of other cities of the Terraferma have not brought to light examples of similar treatment. Finally, the nexus between citizenship and the right – or even obligation – to purchase real

¹⁶ *Ciscato*, Gli ebrei in Padova 229–230: ...*habeantur, tractentur et reputentur in omnibus velut alij cives Padue et Plebis Sachi*. Also *Carpi*, L'individuo e la collettività 197–198, and *Francesca Zen Benetti*, Prestatori ebraici e cristiani nel Padovano fra Trecento e Quattrocento, in: *Cozzi* (ed.), *Gli ebrei e Venezia 635–636*. *Ciscato* pointed out that the *toscani*, the Christian moneylenders who operated in Padua before the arrival of the Jews, were obliged by the statutes to purchase a house and a terrain, whereby they became citizens of Padua. When Venice in 1423 gave Jews in all subject territories two years to sell any real estate they owned, the capital city took away any chance to become citizens in this traditional manner: *Ciscato*, Gli ebrei in Padova 17–18, 39. Under Venice, the Jews lost their single most important depositor, the Carrara lords. Francesco il Vecchio, for example, made a deposit of £ 90 000 – some 25 000 ducats – with one Jewish banker in 1372: *Benjamin G. Kohl*, Padua under the Carrara, 1305–1405 (Baltimore, London 1998) 140.

¹⁷ The comune of Perugia had asked Bartolini for an opinion about the legal status of a Jew, who he said could be either *forensis*, *civis per tempus*, or *civis in perpetuum*. See *Ariel Toaff*, Judei cives? Gli ebrei nei catasti di Perugia del Trecento, in: *Zakhor* 4 (2000) 11–36. Abraham's son Joseph, who, as we will see below, was tried before several courts in Padua and Venice on charges of lending illegally, could defend himself against the interference of yet another judge on the basis that the latter did not have jurisdiction *inter cives*; see *Philippe Braunstein*, Le prêt sur gages à Padoue et dans le Padouan au milieu du XV^e siècle, in: *Cozzi* (ed.), *Gli ebrei e Venezia* 661.

¹⁸ *Angela Möschter*, Gli ebrei a Treviso durante la dominazione veneziana, in: *Ebrei nella Terraferma veneta* 75, and her *Juden im venezianischen Treviso*, *Quellen*, nos. 21–22, 426–427. For the “extraneousness” of the Jews in the *civitas christiana*, see, for example, *Giacomo Todeschini*, *Spiritus non habentes*: appunti sulla ‘bestializzazione’ degli ebrei nell’alto medioevo, forthcoming in: *Studi in onore di Enzo D’Alessandro* (Palermo 2006) (my thanks to the author for having made the text available to me prior to publication).

estate, as was normal for Christian immigrants and *novi cives*, was eliminated by the Venetian Senate in 1423 when it prohibited Jews from owning real property¹⁹. This development probably came about under the influence of minorite preaching. However, it may not have constituted a serious limitation to the freedom of Jews to invest money, since in the fifteenth century Jewish bankers had to invest in several and dispersed banking enterprises and keep their investments as liquid and mobile as possible, both by choice and per force, given the increased insecurity and the constant vacillation of the authorities between renewal and termination of licenses to lend.

In brief, in Venetian subject cities and towns, as in Europe generally, the *civitas* was in the essence *christiana*; the *infideles* were *extranei* and could at best be accepted *pro tempore* as *hospites*.

Taxation and forced loans

Most historians would agree with Michael Toch's metaphor comparing the Jews, especially the bankers, to "milk cows", to be taxed almost at will²⁰. In economic terms, however, the concept has to be rendered more precise. First of all, ability to pay an annual tax imposed by the central government depended both on the exemption from local direct taxes and on the mix between the capital meant to be made available in a given locality and the ceilings placed on legal rates of interest. Both were essential elements of negotiation prior to agreement on a new charter. This is clear from the simple arithmetical option offered by the government to the Jews in Venice at the time of the renewal of their charter in 1385. The choice was between maximum interest rates of 10% on collateral and 12% on written instruments (chirographs) plus a tax of 4 000 ducats, or rates respectively of 8% and 10% with no tax. The Jews calculated that the higher rates would not produce the amount asked as an annual tax and opted therefore to lend at the lower rates, on the edge of profitability but unquestionably providing a service for the needy, as the Senate had requested. In 1397, the year of the expulsion of Jews from Venice, the Senate tried to tax the Jews in the province of Treviso for 3 000 ducats. The local governor called in representatives of all the centers involved in order to discuss the matter and the bankers showed, locality by locality, that with the capital they were required – by charter – to make available for loans and the limits imposed on interest rates, they would be unable to raise the requested tax. Figures at hand, they showed that the tax constituted 13.6% of the capital they were required to make

¹⁹ ASV, Senato misti, reg. 54, fol. 147v (26 September 1423). The decree was published various times, not always completely. See *Sime Ljubić* (ed.), *Listine o odnošajih izmedju Južnoga Slavenstva Mletačke republike*, 10 vols. (Zagreb 1868–91) vol. 8 (1886) 253, and *Hippolyte Noiret* (ed.), *Documents inédits pour servir à l'histoire de la domination vénitienne en Crète de 1380 à 1485* (Paris 1892) 297–98.

²⁰ *Michael Toch*, *Die Juden im Mittelalterlichen Reich* (Enzyklopädie Deutscher Geschichte 44, Munich 1998) 49–51.

available in loans, whereas in the major population centers of Treviso and Mestre, which served Venice, the maximum interest rate was only 14 or 15% on collateral. Table 1 makes this clear.

Table 1. Capital in the Jewish banks of the podesteria of Treviso in 1397 and the respective maximum rates of interest

Locality	capital (ducats)	maximum interest rates
Treviso	12 300	14% on pawns (previously 15%)
Mestre	7 400	14% on pawns
Conegliano	1 000	20% on pawns and 25% on chirographs
Castelfranco	700	20% on pawns and 25% on chirographs
Serravalle	700	20% on pawns and 25% on chirographs
<i>total:</i>	22 100	

Note to Table 1: Tax requested: 3 000 ducats, divided by 22 100 ducats = 13.6%.

By negotiation, the amount of the tax requested of the Jews, who asserted they would not be able to continue to lend if that level of taxation were imposed, was reduced²¹.

A further clarification concerns the lowest links of the credit chain which are sometimes overlooked. Loans by Jews to individuals were often necessary to enable them to pay their local taxes, part of which in turn went to the central government (or to the local Venetian *Camera fiscale*). The following example of 1445 is enlightening. The administrators of Legnago in the district of Verona – the Veronese *podestà* and the Venetian *provveditore* of the fortress – seeing that the tax farmer was impounding the belongings of insolvent tax-payers, dispatched the town's unnamed Jew (*"el zudio"*) to Padua to find the liquid capital necessary to keep his lending bank supplied with money and the commune itself afloat (*de tegnir fornido el so banco de denari, massime per satisfar ai debiti de comun*). The Jew was threatened by the two officials that if he were unsuccessful in finding funds he would be terminated, expelled and replaced – hopefully – by another Jew who would promise to meet local fiscal needs (*perchè speremo de atrovare zudio servirà de denari abastanza*)²². At the top end of the credit chain was Venice, the ultimate beneficiary.

Finally, forced loans, generally at interest, paralleled the outright taxes owed by the Jews. So constant was the pressure of taxes and the recourse to loans that the

²¹ The initial document was published by *Giampaolo Cagnin*, *Cittadini e forestieri a Treviso nel Medioevo (secoli XIII-XIV)* (Studi e fonti di storia locale, 7 Sommacampagna, Verona 2004) 152–154 and doc. 74, 485–487, while *Möscher*, *Juden im venezianischen Treviso* 162–166 and the respective Quellen, nn. 10–15, 408–417, puts it in the context of the continued discussion.

²² *Gian Maria Varanini*, *Appunti per la storia del prestito e dell'insediamento ebraico a Verona nel Quattrocento. Problemi e linee di ricerca*, in: *Cozzi* (ed.), *Gli ebrei e Venezia* 620 and 627, n. 27, and in: *idem*, *Comuni cittadini e stato regionale. Ricerche sulla Terraferma veneta nel Quattrocento* (Verona 1992) 287–288.

Jewish pawn bankers of Mestre were permitted to rent houses in Venice in order to facilitate their business with the state, that is, for the payment of their debts to the Signoria and for the collection of credits owed them by the state, a presence permitted nominally for only twenty days per year²³.

Clearly, the expansion of Venice on the Terraferma in 1404–06 brought the capital city suddenly in touch with several Jewish communities, which they learned quickly to “milk” (some of whose members had previously lent in Venice, up to the expulsion of 1397). In 1406 the annual tax levied on the Jews in Padua was raised from 700 to 1 000 ducats²⁴. In 1409 an annual tax of £1 000 (*di piccoli*) was levied on the lenders of both Mestre and Treviso who had been paying no taxes despite earning big profits (*magna utilitas et lucrum*)²⁵. Less than a decade later additional dues of 500 and 1 000 ducats respectively were asked of Jews at the same banks because they were “very wealthy” and did not pay taxes on their patrimony; the Jews of Treviso, also “very numerous”, were said to “have beautiful palaces, real estate and personal property”²⁶. In 1432 the rent for the banks of Mestre, set at £2 000 in the condotta, was raised to £3 000, at which the Jews refused to continue lending; a compromise was attempted at £2 500²⁷. During the war of Ferrara in 1483 the rent on those banks – then £600 each – was farmed out to three noblemen who collected the rents, which became for them a kind of annuity²⁸.

Beginning with Venice’s expansion on the Terraferma, ordinary and extraordinary taxes and forced loans alternated, especially according to military needs, levied sometimes on individuals, sometimes on Jews of a specific city, sometimes on those of the Terraferma or on those of the dominions as a whole. The war against Milan provides various examples. In 1434 a surtax (*ultra illud quod presentialiter solvunt*) of 3 000 and 2 000 ducats was levied on Jews of the Terraferma and those *a parte maris* respectively²⁹. In 1438 a tax of 4 000 ducats had been subdivided arbi-

²³ ASV, Collegio, Notatorio, reg. 10, fol. 112 (28 November 1464), which clearly states that the rented apartments were to be used for those Jews *huc venientibus pro taxatione et modis dandis circa recuperationem solvendarum pecuniarum nostro dominio* etc., as permitted by chapters 14, 19 and 23 of their concession. Almost immediately it was added, however, that the permission to have a *hospitium hebreorum* did not mean that complete synagogue services could be held in Venice – citing a bull of Pius II; *ibid.*, fol. 113. The fiscal intent of the provision does not mean that the accommodations were not also used to facilitate the Jews’ business with private clients living in Venice.

²⁴ ASV, Senato Misti, reg. 47, f. 54 (13 July).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, reg. 48, f. 59 (21 March 1409).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, reg. 52, fol. 2v (18 March 1417) for Treviso, whose Jews *sunt multi numero et valde divites et habent pulcherrimas domos in Tarvisio et alias possessiones et bona multa et numquam sustentent aliquas factiones reales nec personales in casibus necessitatis*; for Mestre: *ibid.*, fol. 88v (18 April 1418).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, reg. 58, fols. 153v (31 October 1432) and 162v (9 December).

²⁸ Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Venice, Cod. Cicogna, 2835 II/2, parchment copy dated 22 September 1483, with an “appendix” of later Senate deliberations. The beneficiaries promoted the important renewal of the charter of Mestre in 1503: *Reinhold C. Mueller*, Charitable institutions, the Jewish community, and Venetian society, in: *Studi veneziani* 14 (1972) 67–68.

²⁹ Bilanci generali della Repubblica di Venezia, *Fabio Besta* (ed.), vol. I (Venice 1912) 105.

trarily by the Signoria among the areas closest to Venice, which prompted the Jews of the towns of Feltre and Belluno to petition the Senate to apply a proper *estimo* or calculation of ability to pay, a suggestion that was promptly accepted. The next imposition, of 9900 ducats, was consequently subdivided as follows: Padua and Treviso 3500 ducats each; Vicenza 1500; Istria and Bassano 500 each; and Feltre and Belluno 200 ducats each, which also gives an idea of the relative size of the communities³⁰. Again, in 1439 the Jew Moses of Mestre was forced to lend to the Signoria 4000 ducats at 12% interest in order that it could pay arrears due to the mercenary captain Gattamelata³¹. In late 1453 the Senate imposed a tax of 16000 ducats, half on the Jews of the Terraferma (including Istria), half on those of the *Stato da mar*, due in two payments in the following year³².

Given delays by the state in paying its mercenary captains, the *condottieri* themselves were often forced to take loans from Jews in order to keep their armies together. Anastasio di S. Angelo, one of the captains killed in a battle against Turkish invaders in Friuli in 1477, turned out to have debts of 545 ducats with Jews, a sum which the Signoria offset (*excomputa*) from the annual tax owed by the Jews, but required restitution of the pawns³³. Late in the century Jewish pawn bankers lent much money to the *condottiere* Tuzio da Costanza to maintain his army; at a certain point he asked that his payments of "usury" be suspended to help him redeem his "many belongings"; a moratorium of seven months was negotiated by the Senate with Samuel of Mestre and Isopo of Castelfranco (where he had his fief) so that the pawns could be redeemed for the principal alone³⁴.

Shortly thereafter, at the start of the maritime war with the Turks in 1499, diplomatic sources learned that the imposition of a tax of 25000 ducats on the Jews was hoped to serve as guarantee for a quick and much-needed advance from the Pisani bank on the Rialto, itself pressed by its depositors during the banking crisis of that year³⁵. A decade later, the war of the League of Cambrai caused many hundreds of Jews of the Terraferma to take refuge in Venice, where some also transferred their

³⁰ See Matteo Melchiorre, Gli ebrei a Feltre nel Quattrocento. Una storia rimossa, in: Ebrei nella Terraferma veneta 89.

³¹ Michael E. Mallett and John R. Hale, The Military Organization of a Renaissance State: Venice ca. 1400 to 1617 (Cambridge 1984) 129, n. 123.

³² ASV, Senato terra, reg. 3, fol. 89v (7 December 1453), passed unanimously; cf. Besta (ed.), Bilanci generali, 125n. The end of the war did not bring the Jews immediate relief: in 1455 an annual surtax for five years was levied, 2000 each from Jews of the Terraferma and from Crete, 1000 from those elsewhere in the maritime provinces (ibid. 130); in 1463 at the outbreak of the war with the Turks a new surtax of 5000 ducats was levied (ibid. 138–139).

³³ ASV, Senato terra, reg. 8, fol. 31r–v (14 December 1478); cf. Mallet and Hale, Military Organization 49, n. 122.

³⁴ ASV, Collegio, Notatorio, reg. 14, fol. 140 (9 June 1496); cf. Mallet and Hale, Military Organization 199.

³⁵ The Milanese ambassador wrote of the imposition on 25 May, adding *et si crede ne sarà servita dal banco de' Pisani sopra questo assegnamento*: Archivio di stato di Milano, Sforzesco, cart. 1271. Two weeks later representatives of the Jews complained that they were having trouble collecting from all the Jews, whether bankers or not: ASV, Collegio, Notatorio, reg. 15, fol. 5v (5 June 1499). For the crisis and the involvement of Mestran Jews as straw men for illegal loans on pawns by

banks. At one point in the year 1512 the Jews were taxed for 10 000 ducats but they refused to pay, saying that they “had pawns but no money” – to which the government replied by imprisoning two bankers and five other heads of the community³⁶.

As we have already seen, forced loans and taxes were extracted also from the Jewish communities in Crete, in an entirely different context, however, since those Jews were not bound by charters, but were permanent residents, some few active as moneylenders but most as artisans and merchants. The extent to which there were formal pawn banks at all in Crete is not completely clear³⁷. But there were enough wealthy Jews to prompt the government to levy taxes and forced loans. In 1408 the Jew Cassano, *habitor Candide* but at that moment present in Venice, a man described as *dives et potens*, agreed to lend 500 ducats to enable the state to get the Candia galleys off. He lent the money *ad cambium*, that is, via a draft on the Venetian government of Crete, payable at term in Candia³⁸. A huge loan of 20 000 ducats was levied on Jews of Crete in 1431, which the government of Crete was prohibited from repaying without specific approval from the Senate³⁹. In 1441 the Jews of Crete taken together were to advance 4 000 ducats necessary to pay the interest due on Venice’s public debt, a loan at 10% interest to meet the 3–4% interest due on the state’s own obligations in the portfolios of its citizens. Quick repayment of the loan, presumably by remittance from the capital city, was called for later so as to limit the accumulation of interest (*usura*) that the state would have to pay to the Jews⁴⁰. After a few years the Jews of Candia, said to be *multi et potentes*, were called upon, as the Jews of the Terraferma had been, to lend 5 000 ducats to expedite the departure of a convoy of seven heavily armed galleys up the Po river against the army of Milan. In order to have the money rapidly, it was gotten by a draft on the government of Crete but payable by the Jews within one month of presentation of the bill of exchange, with penalties – in case of refusal – for all concerned⁴¹. One way or another, by taxes or by loans, funds made available by the Jews of

Florentine bankers, see Reinhold C. Mueller, *The Venetian Money Market: Banks, Panics and the Public Debt, 1200–1500* (Baltimore and London 1997) chapter 6, 240–241.

³⁶ *Sanuto*, *Diarii*, vol. 14, col. 255, 258, 291, 304 (May–June 1512).

³⁷ The wording of two deliberations is not completely unequivocal. In 1447 a loan of 5 000 ducats was requested from *Judei civitatis Candide fenerantes*, and in 1462 there was an accusation against Jews of Candia for exploiting Christians who left pawns as collateral for loans (... *circa factum pignorum que ipsi [Iudei] habent a Christianis in mutuo fenerationis* ...): *Noiret*, Documents 417–18, 479. As regards merchants, it is noteworthy that the Senate reiterated papal threats of automatic excommunication of anyone who took aboard any ship “perfidious Jews” or their goods (1429) or allowed them to serve as brokers (1433), but it is doubtful that such declarations actually impeded commercial transactions between Christians and Jews: *ibid.* 329, 359–61.

³⁸ ASV, Senato misti, reg. 48, fol. 44 (14 November 1408).

³⁹ *Noiret*, Documents 372 (the prohibition to repay is dated 1435).

⁴⁰ ASV, Senato mar, reg. 1, fol. 12v (21 January 1441): ... *restituendo autem subito predictos denarios suprascriptis Judeis ut minus damnum usuarum curat dominio nostro*; the loan seems to have been made two years earlier (see *Noiret*, Documents 387).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, reg. 3, fol. 37v (27 December 1447), in: *Noiret*, Documents 417–18; cf. also *ibid.* 436, 530.

Venice's dominions constituted an important lubricant for the gears of the machines of war.

Economic activity

The topic of economic activity calls for a premise. There was a fundamental difference between the condition of Jews in the Terraferma – some of Italian or Roman heritage, others decedents of immigrants from Germany⁴² – and those in the Venetian maritime provinces, who were largely members of communities that originated from Byzantine settlements of centuries earlier, even though many Jews of Candia were Ashkenazi. The leaders of the communities in the Terraferma were generally the bankers, whose licenses to lend corresponded to their permission to reside – for the time span defined by the charter – in a given locality. The right to ply other arts and trades was generally subservient to the role of the bankers and often tied to the limitations of the same. We know little about most trades, aside from shops dealing in second-hand goods, which will be touched upon below; mere mentions are often the best we can do. For example, in Mestre, among the 27 Jews and their families who rented houses between 1466 and 1507 from the Confraternity of S. Maria dei Battuti, which administered the local hospital, we find one registered as dyer and hat-maker, one was a *scriptor*, one a weaver, one a goldsmith, and the hospital occasionally called in a Jewish doctor to care for the sick⁴³. The much larger community in Treviso had an inn, with an innkeeper (and a *famulus in hospitio*), a stall for the horses (and a *famulus ad stallam*), a carter, a paper maker, a cook, as well as a medical doctor; there are mentions of transporters to Venice of goods, especially perishables (perhaps kosher foods); because of the existence of a jeshiva, besides a rabbi there were other *magistri*, a scribe and a school teacher⁴⁴.

By contrast, Jews in the maritime dominions were active in nearly all private walks of life. They could be long-distance merchants, retailers and artisans – from tanners to goldsmiths; among them there were some professional moneylenders but they were not necessarily leaders of the community; the right of Jews to reside in a given city was therefore not delimited by charters or *condotte*. Although, as we have seen, they were not – with the notable exception of Corfu – considered citizens, Jews were recognized as Venetian *fideles* simply by reason of their residence in a Venetian territory. On the other hand, even that somewhat privileged status

⁴² Ariel Toaff, *Convergenza sul Veneto di banchieri ebrei romani e tedeschi nel tardo Medioevo*, in: Cozzi (ed.), *Gli ebrei e Venezia* 595–613.

⁴³ Alessandra Checchin, *La scuola e l'ospedale di S. Maria dei Battuti di Mestre dalle origini al 1520* (Centro Studi Storici Mestre, Quaderno di studi e notizie 6, Mestre 1996) 59, 100 (table 14); the confraternity also took a small loan from a Jew that allowed them to finish the sacristy of the church.

⁴⁴ Möschter, *Juden im venezianischen Treviso* 128–136. The author identified numerous *famuli*, mostly Jews themselves (128, n. 98).

did not relieve them of the requirement – imposed by Venice around 1325 but harking back to a much earlier situation in Constantinople – to live in defined areas, *ebraiké*, *judaiche* or *giudecche*, which was not the case in the cities of the Terraferma⁴⁵.

Pawn banking is the economic activity of Jews in the Terraferma about which we know most, in part from the charters but also from notarial contracts and testaments unearthed in recent investigations. Three factors seem worth underscoring: a) the relatively small numbers of Jews making up even the largest communities, such as those of Treviso and Padua (with some 150 members each in the early 15th century); b) the fact that their permanence in a given locality was continually at the whim of the authorities, the preachers and the populace; c) the endogamy of this religious and ethnic minority, which protected patrimonies and directed dowries within a small circle of families – all these factors brought the economic leaders among the Jews to resort to what seems to be the most extensive mobility known in medieval Italian entrepreneurship of both human capital and money capital, regardless of political boundaries, through complex networks that can be only partially reconstructed. The active economic role of especially Ashkenazi women, not only as investors but also as owners and managers of banks, is part of the picture⁴⁶. The examples are myriad but I will limit myself – using extreme oversimplification – to only two families revolving initially around Padua during the transition from Carrara lordship to Venetian dominion, without naming the numerous other Jewish partners and investors in each bank and their diverse places of origin⁴⁷.

The Finzi brothers of Ancona, Salomone, Gaio and Manuele, recent immigrants to Padua, dissolved two banking partnerships in 1380, one of them with the very considerable capital of 12 000 ducats, and contemporaneously established a new

⁴⁵ *Jacoby*, Venice and the Venetian Jews 43, 37.

⁴⁶ See *Miriam Davide*, Il ruolo delle donne nelle comunità ebraiche dell'Italia nord-orientale (Padova, Treviso, Trieste e Friuli), in: Ebrei nella Terraferma veneta 31–43, from which it is clear that women of German origin were freer to become directly involved in banking activity than were those of Italian or Roman origin, because of their distinctly different mores. See also the article by Keil in this volume.

⁴⁷ In general on the mobility of Jews and on the familial character of their networks, see especially *Michele Luzzati*, Banchi e insediamenti ebraici nell'Italia centro-settentrionale fra tardo Medioevo e inizi dell'Età moderna, in: Storia d'Italia, Annali, 11, Gli ebrei in Italia, ed. *Corrado Vivanti* (Turin 1996) 175–238, and *Möschter*, subchapter entitled “Netzwerke: Verbindungen trevisanischer Bankiers in andere Städte und Regionen”, in her *Juden im venezianischen Treviso* 128–133. The movement of not only principals but also factors and lesser employees should be kept in mind. Among the Jewish witnesses called to testify about the operations of the banker Joseph di maestro Abraamo, discussed immediately below, Bonaiuto di Bonaiuto said that in the last decade he had not been employed by a bank; Salomon *strazarolus* said that he had worked for Beniamino Finzi up to four years before; Salomon di Abraam that he was *olim factor in bancho Michaletis*; Abraam de Mele that he was *ad presens factor in bancho Beniamini [Finzi] et olim in bancho Bovis*; Mando-lin that he was factor in the bank at S. Lorenzo, while previously he had been factor in that at the Volto de' Negri; Mele Vitale, finally, said he was at the time *famulus* in the bank at S. Lucia, but *olim famulus in nonnullis aliis banchis Hebreorum*: Biblioteca Marciana, Venice, Mss. lat., cl. XIV, 290 (= 4261), fasc. III, fol. 4v (March 1449).

company in Padua – with a capital of 9 000 ducats – together with other partners, none of whom were resident there. In the same act the partners founded a new bank in nearby Montagnana, with a capital of 3 800 ducats. In 1389 they purchased a half interest in a bank in Lendinara (for 2420 ducats). In the 1390s they invested in banks in Badia Polesine, Rovigo, and Este, while maintaining principal ownership and management of the bank in Padua. Even though Salomone, a medical doctor, moved to Bologna where he opened a bank in 1418 and lent money to the commune, in Padua – a city subject to Venice after 1405 – he, Gaio and the heirs of Manuele continued to invest in banks there and outside of the city. Benjamino and Consiglio, sons of Manuele, ran a bank in Vicenza, where Benjamino, who seems to have learned the business at a bank in Rovigo, resided for almost thirty years. He also invested heavily in a second bank in Vicenza, one in Cologna Veneta and one in Modena, until 1445, before returning to Padua to manage yet another bank. At the same time, Gaio and Benjamino remained partners initially in the bank in Lendinara, then in that of Rovigo, managed by yet other partners from nearby Ferrara. Around 1426 Gaio followed his brother and an uncle to Bologna where he obtained the license for a lending bank in 1428, leaving his sons to represent his interests in Padua and Montagnana. Beginning in 1437, after Gaio's death, the latter's sons took over the banks of Lendinara, where Joseph resided, and Rovigo, where Leuccio resided, till 1462 – all the while maintaining interests in banks in Bologna and Ferrara, where the third son, Consiglio, resided⁴⁸.

The second case involves a single person, the above-mentioned medical doctor *maestro Abraham di maestro Aleuccio da Roma*, formerly doctor to pope Innocent VII and “original citizen” of Padua. By 1377 he had a bank in Piove di Sacco, by 1392 he was head also of a bank in Padua in which he, together with a partner, had already invested 6 000 ducats in 1380; both concessions were renewed by Venice in 1406. Before 1401 he had partnerships in six further banks: Este, Bagnocavallo, Soave, Cittadella, Monselice and an unnamed location “in the Trevigiano or Lombardy”. Between 1406 and his death about 1420 Abraham maintained his role in both banks in Piove di Sacco and in Padua and had partnerships in another bank in Padua as well as in banks in Vicenza, Bologna, and Siena⁴⁹.

Abraham's son Joseph (*Joseph quondam magistri Abraam da Roma quondam Aliuzzo*) continued the business as licensed titular head of banks in the small centers of Piove di Sacco and Este, run by factors, while he himself resided in Padua – after 1423 in rented houses – where it seems he invested in one or more local banks. His taxable patrimony was estimated at 10 500 ducats in 1434, 8 000 in 1442

⁴⁸ Carpi, *L'individuo e la collettività*, chap. 1; for Salomone and Gaio Finzi in Bologna, see *Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli*, *I banchieri e la città*, in: *Banchi ebraici a Bologna nel XV secolo*, ed. by *eadem* (Bologna 1994) 105–106; also *Rachele Scuro*, *La presenza ebraica a Vicenza e nel suo territorio nel Quattrocento*, in: *Ebrei nella Terraferma veneta* 110–113; *Elisabetta Traniello*, *Tra appartenenza ed estraneità: gli ebrei e le città del Polesine di Rovigo nel Quattrocento*, in: *Ebrei nella Terraferma veneta* 163–168; and *eadem*, *Gli ebrei e le piccole città. Economia e società nel polesine del Quattrocento* (Rovigo 2004) 72–81, 90–111.

⁴⁹ Carpi, *L'individuo e la collettività* 195–204. Cf. *Kohl*, Padua 272.

and 1445. By comparison, the Paduan *condotta* of 1437 shows an unexplained drop in capital to be made available by the five banks from 25 000 to 15 000 ducats. We know about Joseph's operations because he was accused by a coreligionist of lending illegally in Padua, practically as an interloper, to which he countered a) that the *condotta* permitted lending by more than the five licensed banks, and b) that he had a secret agreement with a licensed banker to begin lending when that bank found itself illiquid. The tension during the court procedure, which lasted years, must have been considerable, also within the Jewish community itself: both the accuser, promised a cut of any eventual fine, and the accused were Jews, and the translator for the court of entries from his account books was a baptised Jew and *strazarolo*. Some witnesses accused Joseph of mistreating the poor and the peasants, but all of them were themselves wealthy⁵⁰.

In light of such widespread and rapidly changing investments in moneylending operations, involving several Jewish partners and investors even from distant regions and across political boundaries, it is understandable that the head of a bank named in a charter might at a given moment move elsewhere. In other words, whole banks could be bought and sold, as could shares in them, even during the validity of a charter. On at least one occasion, in 1447, the municipal council of Padua tried to simplify matters by making an agreement with a single Jewish banker, in this case a Iacop *de Florentia seu de Perusio*, charging him with the task of finding interested parties for the five other banks of the city, as *conductor omnium bancorum Padue*. At the same time, limits might be set in order to promote competition among the banks; in 1435 the charter for Vicenza, which specified that four banks make available 20 000 ducats, stated that they were to be *divisi et separati*, although that might have been wishful thinking⁵¹. If in the larger cities the matter of licensing operations could be rather flexible, so that it was not always necessary to be specifically named in a *condotta*, by contrast, in smaller towns the charter often contained a specific clause granting the chartered bank monopoly rights, to protect the owner or operator from unwelcome competition in a limited market.

Little that is new can be said about the daily operation of banks, given the paucity of accounting documents, but since two known fragments of accounts regarding cities of the Terraferma are extant, it is worth reviewing them briefly.

The above-mentioned legal prosecution of Joseph son of master Abraham of Padua, last studied by Philippe Braunstein, produced extracts from his accounts⁵².

⁵⁰ Braunstein, *Le prêt sur gages à Padoue* 653–663; for the identification of Joseph as son of the medical doctor Abraham, see Carpi, *L'individuo e la collettività* 31.

⁵¹ Carpi, *L'individuo e la collettività* 31, 62, 115–123, 125.

⁵² Braunstein, *Le prêt sur gages à Padoue*; almost all the accounts were published by Antonio Medin and G. Tolomei, *Per la storia aneddotica dell'università di Padova nel secolo XVI*, in: *Atti e memorie della R. Accademia di scienze, lettere ed arti in Padova* (a. 370, n.s., vol. 27, 1910–11) appendix 1, 102–122. I have also consulted the original manuscript dossier in Biblioteca Marciana, Venice, Mss. lat., cl. XIV, 290 (=4261), fasc. III. The accounts were considered by Léon Poliakov, *Les banchiers juifs et le Saint-Siège du XIII^e au XVII^e siècle* (Paris 1965) 134n, 150–51.

These were used as evidence to prove both that he lent money illegally in Padua while being licensed to lend only in Piove di Sacco and Este where he had some of the pawns transferred, and that he sometimes charged compound interest on overdue loans (a charge made against the Jewish lenders of Padua as a whole). As a result, the entries translated for the court reflect occasional loans, made more or less secretly, to the wealthy rather than the daily operation of a normal bank, but they are nonetheless enlightening. The first entries concern a doctor in arts and medicine, *maistro Nicolò di maistro Galeazzo di Santa Sofia*, whose entries for the years 1433 to 1441 show that he continually renewed his loans and his pawns, obviously turning over valuables he did not need but did not wish to sell in exchange for liquidity, for sums ranging from as little as £30 *di piccoli* to as much as 110 ducats. Some pawns were kept for as long as three years for loans paying the legal rate of 20% interest per year, before being redeemed; they were entered on the books of the bank at Este, where the pawns themselves had probably been transferred. Nicolò was one of Joseph's accusers, even though he had been a client for 25 years, continually adjusting his balances and exchanging his pawns. Among the professors and medical doctors was the jurist Francesco Porcellino, who borrowed 90 ducats in 1444 on valuables, while his brother and another Porcellino, also jurists, borrowed 18 ducats each on books (*II letture cum tavola, uno Degesto vecchio*); Joseph registered one loan in Este, the other in Piove di Sacco, but kept the books in his residence in Padua. Among the notable clients of Joseph were at least two Venetian noblemen (Alvise Storlato⁵³ and Piero Badoer), the marquis Taddeo d'Este, mercenary captain in the Venetian army for thirty years, beginning in 1416, his wife Margherita Pio, and Alberto Pio, lord of Carpi, who was represented by Taddeo d'Este's chancellor. Quite a few clients were Paduan noblemen. There were also artisans and shopkeepers, like the three *speziali* who borrowed sums of 79, 50 and 16 ducats; three dyers of the same family took loans of 70–90 ducats in 1438 and again in 1447, on the same pawns, perhaps as renewals; even a Paduan banker (*banchiero, cambiadore*), Giovanni Moreia, in 1428 borrowed £ 110 (21.6 ducats) and renewed the same loan ten years later, on different pawns. Some clients were students, like Giovanni *de Cicilia* who pawned a copy of Avicenna for 6 ducats. Several borrowers exchanged pawns at the time of renewal of their loan. In brief, this court case takes us outside the clauses of the usual *condotta*, which insisted on a fixed maximum term for a loan on collateral, generally one year plus 15 days. Joseph had well-to-do clients who stayed with him for many years, clients who formed part of the Paduan ruling group (Braunstein reports a request for an inter-

⁵³ Procurator of San Marco, twice rector in Padua (podestà in 1435, capitano in 1446), Storlato was married to Maria di Iacopo di Francesco il Vecchio da Carrara: *Medin and Tolomei*, Per la storia 120, n.2. Storlato, who was very wealthy indeed, also pawned jewels in Mestre, as we know from the papers of his estate, administered by the Procurators of San Marco. On 13 July 1459 the latter repaid the Jew Zaccaria, factor of the Jew Cressono, *tenenti banchum usure in Mestre, pro capitali* [30 ducats] *et usure* [6 ducats], that is, at 20% for an undefined period, upon which a mounted ruby (*ballasium in tabula*) was re-consigned. See ASV, Procuratori di San Marco, commissarie, de ultra, b. 265, commissaria Alvise Storlato, reg. 1, fol. 7.

est-free loan for the friend of a client and an anomalous loan made to one of the negotiators for the commune of the then current *condotta*). Even though his lending activity in Padua was in the end ruled illegal and he was finally condemned after having to go from one court to another in both Padua and Venice, he seems not to have been considered an interloper by the licensed Jewish bankers of the city since after sentencing the authorities sequestered the pawns and liquid funds he had deposited at their banks, which the latter had in no way been obliged to accept⁵⁴.

If the accounts of the Paduan pawn banker Joseph were out of the ordinary, those produced during the prosecution of Jews in Brescia a generation later for the same crime – non-observance of the charter – seem more in line with daily practice, even if they cover only ten days. Upon the accusation of a citizen of Brescia in 1488 that Jews were running illegal lending operations there and keeping the pawns in their homes rather than transferring them to their licensed banks elsewhere, an investigation was initiated by the Venetian podestà. Accounting materials – a sheet of paper of Moysé, a small notebook of Lazzaro and two regular accountbooks of some 140 folios each of Vitale and Joseph – were sequestered and the accuser found a Jew who would translate entries for the last ten days of October, under oath but also under protection of anonymity. The entries reflect mostly small loans on relatively poor collateral made to a cross section of members of the populace. Only five loans exceeded 12 lire (the highest was £ 66 5s granted by Moysé to a tailor on pawns of cloth and clothing); quite a few were of £ 1 or less, one for as little as 2s; a bed-sheet or covering (*linzuolo*) brought each of three borrowers 34s, 10s and 8s respectively; nine borrowers were tailors (some of them masters) and one of them had recourse to two lenders; even persons called goldsmiths appear as borrowers of very small sums of money (11s to £ 5). The podestà Giovanni Donà threw out the case as baseless and unjust (*tamquam indebite, injuste et calumniose*), the accuser was forced to promise he would not bring similar charges in the future, and the accounts were returned to the Jewish lenders⁵⁵. Thus, if the accusation against the Jews in Brescia was the same as that against Joseph in Padua, the outcome was just the opposite: rapid justice and a sentence of not guilty.

What is important to underscore here, despite the perfectly correct insistence in recent historiography that attention be given to a more complete social and economic history of the Jewish minority in Christian society, is that Christian society had need of moneylenders. If Jewish lenders closed their banks out of protest against demands made by local authorities, the populace might protest and force the council to come to terms⁵⁶. Examples from the accounts of Joseph son of mas-

⁵⁴ See the dossier cited above, notes 47 and 52, fols. 95v–97r, accounts not published by *Medin* and *Tolomei* in *Per la storia*.

⁵⁵ *Fabio Glissentì*, *Gli Ebrei nel Bresciano al tempo della dominazione veneta. Nuove ricerche e studi* (Brescia 1891) 21–22, 56–61.

⁵⁶ See the examples in *Ciscato*, *Gli ebrei in Padova* 42–46, referring to negotiations held in the 1430s.

ter Abraham clearly reflect the extent to which Jews were necessary, not only to the poor or, in the case of Padua, to impecunious students, mentioned in the documents as prime clients, but also to members of the urban elite. The latter – as long as they dealt with that particular lender – did not have to observe those clauses of the charters that called for repayment of loans within a given time, after which the pawn or pawns were to be sold. Loans to members of the elite could be in the hundreds, even thousands of ducats. There are cases of recourse to Jews for sizeable loans by religious entities – bishops in Padua and Verona, the cathedral chapter of Padua, the major confraternity of Mestre (for the construction of a sacristy), the hospital of Treviso⁵⁷ – as well as by city governments⁵⁸. The Jewish lenders, as long as they were accepted, were part and parcel of the whole urban economic system.

Closely connected to moneylending was the trade in second-hand goods, the *strazzaria* or *pezzaria*, that flourished among the Jews especially in certain urban centers. While Jews in Mestre had to bring unredeemed pawns to Venice for sale at public auction, supervised by the Venetian Sopraconsoli, in order to safeguard the collateral of Venetians and to guarantee that they did not lose any eventual residual balance (*soprabondanza*) above principal and interest, those in Padua and especially those in Vicenza were not so obliged and after a given time the lenders could claim complete ownership of the pawns. These they were then free to keep or to sell at the best price possible, to cover at least the principal and interest of the loans for which they had been collateral and perhaps something more. As a result, the *strazzaria* grew rapidly into a trade that dealt in selling unredeemed pawns, as well as other second-hand – and sometimes even new – goods. Of course that put them in direct competition with Christian second-hand dealers; those of Padua accepted the Jews as members of their guild, with a special “section” of their own and with

⁵⁷ For the loan of 500 ducats made to the bishop Albanio Michiel by four Jews in 1409–11, guaranteed on contributions by the faithful and by sureties who were among the principal citizens of Padua, repaid after two years by the “Paduan clergy”, see *ibid.* 46–47, *Carpi*, L’individuo e la collettività 203, 206, and *Antonio Rigon*, *Clero e città: “fratelia cappellanorum”, parroci, cura d’anime in: Padova dal 12° al 15° secolo* (Padua 1988) 145 (kindly brought to my attention by M. Melchiorre). Zen Benetti mentions as client also Francesco Capodilista, Paduan nobleman, doctor, and bishop of Foligno, as well as an anonymous *dominus episcopus* of Padua: *Prestatori ebraici e cristiani* 649, n. 90. Even Ermolao Barbaro, when named bishop of Verona, had dealings with a local Jew, authorized to make a payment on an episcopal *mandatum*: *Varanini*, *Società cristiana e minoranza ebraica* 159, n. 48. The Paduan cathedral chapter borrowed money from a Jew (probably Leone di Salomone da Costanza) at the bank of the *Volto dei Negri*, on pawns of the *sacrestia*; the loan was repaid with £ 216.6 (38 ducats) in 1449 by the canon Giacomo Condulmer, relative of the recently deceased Eugenius IV; since the pawns were ritual items, as was expressly forbidden by the terms of the *condotta*, the Venetian Senate and the local *podestà* intervened to order their restitution: *Matteo Melchiorre*, *Conti in Cattedrale. Storia economica della Sacrestia del Duomo di Padova nella prima metà del Quattrocento*, unpublished thesis of the “laurea specialistica”, (University of Venice 2006) 201–203. The hospital of S. Maria dei Battuti in Treviso borrowed money from *Jacob Iudeus* in 1414 *ad usuram* in order to pay two outstanding debts: *Archivio di stato di Treviso, Ospedale*, b. 393 (under the year 1414). For Mestre, see above, note 43.

⁵⁸ Vicenza, to give only one example, took loans in 1438 for the purchase of arms and wheat “necessary for the marketplace and for the city”: *Scuro*, *La presenza ebraica a Vicenza* 111.

special privileges, while those of Vicenza seem to have insisted on payment to the guild of the matriculation fee for the right to open shops, without thereby granting them full membership⁵⁹.

The case of Vicenza shows how the *pezzaria* was reinforced after the termination of the license to lend in the city in 1445, a termination caused both by Minorite preaching and by pressure from Christian moneylenders, especially local patriicians, anxious to see their competition leave the city. When local notables took over lending in the city, largely via fictitious contracts, at least one Jewish banker resettled in Arzignano, the major town of the contado. The former employees of the bankers, however, remained in Vicenza without the need of a charter and managed shops offering for sale used clothing and goods, including, in all likelihood, the unredeemed pawns left with the very banks that had been forced to relocate. In social terms, it was the Ashkenazi pawn bankers who retired from the city, while the Italian Jews remained to ply the flourishing trade of the *pezzaria*⁶⁰.

Two special cases: Capodistria and Corfu

Two cases stand out as particularly interesting, the first in the Istrian peninsula, considered sometimes as part of the Terraferma, sometimes as part of the *Stato da Mar*, the other the city and island colony of Corfu⁶¹.

Capodistria

The case of Capodistria is unique to the extent that what is for all practical purposes a charter for the presence of Jewish moneylenders in the city, but without specific names of Jews and without any temporal reference, was included as chapter 76 of Book II of the statutes of the city, dated 1423. In fact, the title of the chapter is *De pactis et conventionibus usurariorum* and it seems that the terms were put to the test in actual *condotte* contracted with Jewish lenders in 1391 and 1409 and only then included in the statutes. The wording is left generic so that it would apply to *quilibet Iudeus vel Iudea* wishing to lend money at usury “to the people, citizens and inhabitants of Capodistria”. He or she would merely have to register at the communal chancery before opening for business. It is a quite flexible and permissive text, dating from the same year that Bernardino da Siena was preaching in the Veneto against those city governments which treated Jews as other than infidels, to be kept strictly apart from the Christian population⁶².

⁵⁹ *Ciscato*, Gli ebrei in Padova 253–260, doc. X (1448), and *Scuro*, La pezzaria ebraica a Vicenza nella seconda metà del Quattrocento, in: *Zakhor* 9 (2006) 13–43.

⁶⁰ *Scuro*, La presenza ebraica a Vicenza 108–115.

⁶¹ In general, see *Benjamin Arbel*, Colonie d’oltremare, in: *Storia di Venezia*, vol. V, Il Rinascimento: società ed economia, ed. by *Alberto Tenenti* and *Ugo Tucci* (Rome 1996) 947–985.

⁶² The statutes, printed in Venice in 1668, were edited by *Lujo Margetić*, Lo statuto del comune di Capodistria del 1423 con le aggiunte fino al 1668 (Rovigno 1993) 92–94 for cap. 76. The most re-

Clauses regarding the status of the Jews are dispersed among those concerning rates of interest and other details of moneylending. No direct concession of citizenship was made, not even temporary, but the ambiguous formulation used in Trevisan charters appears here as well: the Jews were “to be treated and reputed as other citizens and inhabitants of Capodistria are treated, reputed and held”⁶³. Similarly, the Jews were given the same right “to trade, to buy and to sell as other merchants of Capodistria, both movable goods and real estate and also customs farms”⁶⁴. The exact date of the statute is not given, but it is clearly some months prior to the law of 26 September 1423 which forbade Jews in lands under Venetian domination to own real estate, which may have forced the authorities to amend the statute very soon after promulgation. At the same time, the Jewish moneylenders – for the statute regards only them and their extended families and employees – were exempted from paying local taxes, which obviously set them off from “other citizens” or other local “merchants”.

The clauses regarding loans are scattered throughout chapter 76. First of all, the moneylenders were to operate *ad bancum publicum*; if they needed to leave the city on business, they had to find a replacement, who was bound by the same pact or charter. If they left definitively, they could cede their rights to other Jewish moneylenders, but they had to give four months’ notice in order to permit borrowers to redeem their pawns. The total amount to be made available was 1 000 ducats. Loans made to citizens and residents on pawns could earn a maximum of 12.5% per year, loans on written notes 15%; the rate of interest on loans to “foreigners”, on the other hand, was open to negotiation and had no ceiling. Unreclaimed pawns were to be sold at auction to the highest bidder on three successive Sundays.

Given the date of the statute, 1423, that is the same year that Bernardino da Siena was preaching in the Veneto, it is particularly interesting that the Venetian rector (*podestà*) was enjoined to see to it that no *ecclesiastica persona*, inquisitor or cleric, be allowed to molest the Jews, that is neither by legal prosecution nor in the course

cent analysis of chapter 76 in legal terms is by *Dea Moscarda*, *L’area alto adriatica tra sovranità imperiale e autonomia locale*, Deputazione di Storia Patria per la Venezia Giulia (Trieste 2002) 154–164, with bibliography referring also to the earlier *condotte*. This case and the pertinent bibliography were brought to my attention in a term paper written for my research seminar by Julie Florence Dournon, whom I thank for her assent to my using her material. For elsewhere in Istria, see the *capitoli* of 1484 in Piran, published by *Antonio Ive*, *Dei banchi feneratizi e capitoli degli ebrei di Pirano e dei Monti di pietà in Istria*, Italian translation (Rovigno 1881) appendix, and *Janez Persič*, *Židje in kreditno poslovanje v srednjeveškem Piranu* (Jews and credit transactions in medieval Piran) (Ljubljana 1999). *Rita Moretti*, *La presenza ebraica a Rovigno in epoca veneta. Storie nascoste da non dimenticare*, Centro di ricerche storiche, Rovigno, *Atti* 23 (1993) 471–80; the author cites the statutes of neighboring Muggia (1420), which refer to the *castighi che Dio diede alli falsi e perversi Giudei* (479). With the help of the librarians at the Rovigno Centro, I was able to check the statutes for the other urban centers of the Istrian peninsula, without finding anything even vaguely similar to chapter 76 in the statutes of Capodistria; it stands as an *unicum*.

⁶³ *Item quod debeant tractari et reputari sicut tractantur et reputantur et tenentur alii cives et habitatores Iustinopolis.*

⁶⁴ *Item quod dicti Iudei possint mercari, emere, vendere secundum quod alii mercatores Iustinopolis, tam bona mobilia quam stabilia et etiam datia possint emere.*

of sermons. Finally, the Jewish bankers were not required to wear the “O” or any other sign – in direct contradiction to what Bernardino was preaching at that very moment not far away⁶⁵.

Corfu

The condition of the Jews in the city and on the island of Corfu in the Middle Ages is rather unique, for the Jews, who were quite numerous, had rights tantamount to full citizenship and economic freedoms that were nearly complete. Cecil Roth went so far as to say that the treatment of the Jews in Venetian Corfu “was something absolutely unparalleled in the Middle Ages, anticipating to some extent, by many centuries, the emancipation which elsewhere came about only after the French Revolution”⁶⁶.

The mere size of the community is noteworthy to begin with. If Benjamin of Tudela mentions only one Jew, a dyer, in Corfu in the 1160s, the traveller Mešullam of Volterra reported that there were 300 families of Jews in 1481, when he visited the island city, and he noted that some of them were rich and honored. That figure would mean a community of at least 1500 members, a considerable part – easily 15% – of an urban population of some 9–10000 inhabitants. While a Venetian traveler in 1557 said merely that the Jews were “many”, the Corfiote historian Antonio Marmora, who we will meet again shortly, wrote in 1662 that there were some 500 Jewish houses (*case*), constituting perhaps an even higher percentage of the total population of the city than was the case earlier⁶⁷.

⁶⁵ The existence of chapter 76 did not render charters unnecessary or avoid disputes. At various times we find the Jews reminded of their obligation to register (“se scribi”) at the chancery to make a charter valid, and Venice often was called upon to recognize the dispensation of the Jews of Capodistria from the obligation to wear the “O”, both clear reflections of the statute. On the other hand, notification of the law forbidding ownership of real estate was sent in a ducal letter dated 9 november and transcribed into the Liber Niger of the local chancery. Actual rates of interest were much higher than those indicated in the statute. Banks could be bought and sold at will, among Jews. See *Francesco Majer*, *Gli ebrei feneratori a Capodistria*, in *Pagine istriane*, a.9 (1911) 235–246, 272–276; a.10 (1912) 25–32, 182–185, 225–230, 275–279; a.11 (1913) 31–42, 76–84, 129–130, 167–182. The fact that this kind of *condotta* was part of the communal statute probably made it easier for the city to continue to *habere Judeos*; representatives of Capodistria petitioned the Council of Ten to rescind the clause in a set of regulations concerning that city passed by the Senate in 1459 which would have made it impossible for it to keep Jewish lenders; the request seems to have been granted: ASV, Consiglio dei dieci, deliberazioni miste, reg. 15, fol. 186v (5 Sept. 1459).

⁶⁶ *Cecil Roth*, *History of the Jews in Venice* (London 1930, New York 1975) 310–331 (citation on 318).

⁶⁷ For Benjamin, see *Bowman*, *Jews of Byzantium* 75; *Mešullam da Volterra*, *Viaggio in terra d’Israele*, translated by *Alessandra Veronese* (Rimini 1989) 93. Alessandro Magno, the Venetian nobleman, noted in 1557 that the *borgo* of Corfu was inhabited also *da molti hebrei* and mentions that en route between Corfu and Valona the ship was met by Jews in several small boats from whom the travellers bought *diverse robbe*; see *Alessandro Magno*, *Voyages (1557–1565)*, translation and notes by *Wilfred Naar* (Paris, Bari 2002) 589. *Antonio Marmora*, *Historia*

Corfu came under Venetian domination only in 1386, when the city and the island were convinced by the Venetian Captain general of the fleet, Giovanni Miani, to submit to Venice after the death of Charles III of Durazzo⁶⁸. In order to negotiate the text of the so-called dedication, the council of Corfu in May 1386 sent a committee of six representatives or *sindici* to Venice, one of whom was David Sem (or de Semo), a Jew⁶⁹. A Jew sent as formal representative of a subject city to the capital? Indeed, and the fact so disturbed the seventeenth century Corfiote historian Antonio Marmora that he simply suppressed it, giving the names of only five men⁷⁰. When time came to give homage and swear fidelity in the name of the city and island of Corfù before doge Antonio Venier, all six, including David Sem the Jew, were there, *ad prestandum sacramentum*, in all solemnity⁷¹. Sem, a citizen of Corfu, was a plenipotentiary of his native city. But his presence in the delegation had a further significance, since the privileges of the Jewish community (or *universitas*) were to be discussed as part of the general negotiations, because it was obvious, states the preamble to the deliberation of the Venetian Senate that concluded the negotiations, *quod ipsi Iudei sunt utiles tam habitatoribus insule quam civitatis in casibus multis...*⁷².

di Corfù (Venice 1672) 437: “Sono nella Città di Corfù da 500 Case di Giudei, comode e facoltose per gli traffichi e usure ch’esercitano col Levante e co’ Ponentini ...” For the total population, see *George Plumidis*, I paesi greci sotto il dominio veneziano, 1503–1537, (in Greek) (Athens 1974) 41, with data extracted from the Diarii of Marino Sanuto for the years 1505–1534.

⁶⁸ See *Giorgio Ravegnani*, La conquista veneziana di Corfù, in: Venezia e le isole ionie, ed. by *Chryssa Maltezos* and *Gherardo Ortalli* (Venice 2005) 101–112.

⁶⁹ The fact itself is known; perhaps the most recent mention is in *Bowman*, Jews of Byzantium 290–291, doc. 98. To clarify the matter further, it is important to refer to the Venetian documentation. The six *veri, legittimi et generales sindici, yconomi certi et indubitati nunci speciales* sent by the council were three noblemen *Petrus Capice, miles*, *Ricardus de Altavilla*, *Johannes Alexii Cavasule*, then *Antonius de Henrico, notarius*, *Nicolaus de Trachanioti, comitus*, and *David de Semo, Iudeus*: ASV, Commemoriali, reg. 8, fols. 118 (28 May 1386) and 119 (8 January 1387 [modern style]). The first three of the above were among the five Corfiotes made citizens of Venice *de gratia* on the same occasion, on the basis of a promise made to them by the Captain General Miani. The other two Christian representatives and David Semo were not among them: ASV, Grazie, reg. 17, fol. 223 (21 January 1387, the day prior to the deliberation of the Senate marking the conclusion of the negotiations) and the databank www.civesveneciarum.net.

⁷⁰ *Marmora*, Historia di Corfù 231–251, as first revealed on the basis of documents once part of the archive of the Jewish community by *J. A. Romanos*, Histoire de la Communauté Israélite de Corfou, in: Revue des études juives 23 (1892) 3–14, then by *David Kaufmann*, Contributions a l’histoire des Juifs de Corfou, in: Revue des études juives vols. 32 (1896) 226–35, 33 (1896) 64–76, 219–32, and 34 (1897) 263–75. Among the documents published by Kaufmann are authorized translations, made by the chancery of Corfu in the eighteenth century at the request of the Jews, of those documents that named David Sem as member of the delegation and of the privileges registered in January 1387; his role was crucial to their history, as was continually recognized by them and by Venetian authorities in the following centuries. Finally, see also *Eugenio Bacchion*, Il dominio veneto su Corfù (1386–1797) (Venice 1956) 60.

⁷¹ See the document of 8 January cited above in note 69.

⁷² ASV, Senato misti, reg. 40, fol. 59v (22 January 1387).

Two unnamed representatives of the Jews of Corfu, who had clearly accompanied David Sem, asked confirmation of their privileges but also the correction of extorsions and gravamina to which Jews were subjected at home (*a multis extortionibus et gravaminibus que eis illata fuerunt*). The first correction was to see to it that the hanging of criminals no longer be staged in the Jewish cemetery. But major emphasis was placed on rights of citizenship and what that entailed in terms of taxation, which was meant to be just the same as that asked of “other citizens of Corfu” (*ad conditionem aliorum civium civitatis et insule Corphoy*); the kinds of tax were registered as they came up in the discussion:

- the tax for arming the colony’s galley and other ships necessary for defence;
- forced loans of such things as beds and beasts of burden, similarly necessary for defence;
- guard duties (*custodia*), which had been asked of Jews only four times per year, were from then on to be the same for Jews “as for other Christian citizens of Corfu”.
- The right of *lapidatio*, the stoning of Jewish houses and of Jews during Holy Week, was considered in the same context, since in the past, it was said, this practice had been suspended only upon payment of a money fee – actually the extortion of ransom money from potential victims – “which is contrary to humanity (*qui est contra omnem humanitatem*)”; now it was reduced and circumscribed to what was called the minimum necessary for the ritual traditions of orthodox Christians (*iuxta morem et fidem grecorum*), namely the throwing of stones by public officials during recitation of the litany as the procession passed through the Jewish quarter. When the Orthodox asked in 1406 for reinstatement of the custom *de iudeis lapidandis*, the Senate confirmed the prohibition of the practice but as a partial concession, in contrast to the privileges confirmed in 1387, Jews would thenceforth be required to wear the yellow “O”⁷³.

The Jews were perfectly willing, if necessary, even to pay higher impositions – the essential was that they be the same as those asked of “other citizens”, i.e. the orthodox and western Christians, the best way to define legal equality.

⁷³ In recounting the pluri-secular historical context of this Christian ritual in Europe, Cecil Roth recalled also this case of Venetian Corfu; see his The Eastertide Stoning of the Jews and its Liturgical Echoes, in: The Jewish Quarterly Review, n.s. 35 (1944-45) 361-70 (kindly brought to my attention by David Jacoby). Repeated accusations of ritual assassination lay behind these Christian rites, which in Corfu were strengthened to include, in the eighteenth century, the “old custom” of burning on Easter the effigy of a then living Jew, stuffed with fireworks, in the church of the Annunciation; an attempt by the authorities to sequester the effigy in 1760 gave the crowd occasion to sack the houses of the Jews. The situation was very similar in Zante. See Ph. Carrer, Ioudaismos kai Xristianismos (Zakinthos 1891) especially 111-119 (kindly brought to my attention by Marianna Kolyvã).

The question of lending money at usury by Jews in Corfu was set aside for further consideration⁷⁴. When it came up four months later, it was on the basis of a proposal made by the three supervisors (*Provisores*) of Corfu in which there is actually no mention at all of Jews⁷⁵. The proposal set maximum interest rates by type of contract:

- for a loan with personal property as collateral: 12%
- for a loan on real property or on written bond: 16%
- for loans on agricultural products and futures: 20%
- for current loans on old contracts and old pawns, 20% could be asked, but limits were set on how long existing contracts could still run.

The point to be made here is that moneylending was not considered a sector of the local economy restricted only to the Jews⁷⁶. In fact, Corfiote Jews were heavily involved in all aspects of economic endeavour: in commercial ventures, in the export trade and in productive activity both as craftsmen and as manual laborers; only some lent money. In other words, their situation differed sharply from that of their coreligionists then residing in Venice itself and those who would be active later in the Terraferma. These communities were headed by moneylenders and their right to reside was based on temporally limited charters, while the Jews of Corfu were citizens whose standing privileges were recognized and defended by Venice. The Venetian Senate was continually forced to review blanket provisions regarding Jews, such as expulsions, special taxation, and prohibitions, for example to engage in the legal profession, and to exempt Corfiote Jews on the basis of their privileges⁷⁷.

Some of the doubts left open during the negotiations between Venice and the Jews in 1387 were addressed in an embassy of 1406 which produced a “golden bull” for the Jewish community, with such clauses as the following: a) Since the *lapidatio* was to remain illegal, substituted by the obligation of Jews to wear the yellow “O”, the Venetian Collegio offered the Jews an alternative: for a fee of 300

⁷⁴ ASV, Senato misti, reg. 40, f. 59v. The decision to study further the regulation of loans on collateral was preceded by this statement: *Preterea cum in facto dandi ad usuram in civitate Corphoy inter Christianos et Iudeos Corphienses sint certa pacta et conventiones quibus ipsi Iudei valde gravant cives Corphoy in facto ipsarum usurarum, et utile sit super hoc providere de remedio oportuno*. The discussion does not touch the question of Jews being forced to act as executioners, a task bearing the mark of infamy; that Venetians forced Jews to do this in Crete and in Corfu is asserted by *Bowman*, *The Jews of Byzantium* 340–341; on the contrary, see the precedent, recognized by Venice, in the decree of Philip II of Taranto in 1370 which forbade making Jews in Corfu act as executioners, in: *Kaufmann*, *Contributions* vol.33, 65.

⁷⁵ ASV, Senato misti, reg. 40, f. 59v, fol. 77 (29 May 1387).

⁷⁶ According to Cecil Roth, the above steps were taken to protect the inhabitants, including the Jews, from Christian usurers: *Roth*, *History of the Jews in Venice* 319. That there was formal moneylending by Jews later is reflected in a petition of 1680 favouring the 6% interest of the Monte di Pietà against the *strabochevoli e pesantissime usure di 17 per cento del giudaismo*: *E. Yotopoulou-Sicilianou* (ed.), *Ambasciate of Venetian-Ruled Corfu (16th–18th centuries)*. Source for an outline reconstruction of the period [in Greek] (Athens 2002) 633.

⁷⁷ *Kaufmann*, *Contributions* vol.32, 229–30, 233.

ducats per year, the obligation could be suspended. b) Landed property on the island connected with seignorial rights over peasants had to be sold within two years and real estate owned in the city was to be limited to that existing *intra Iudaycham*, although these clauses were probably a dead letter from the start and Roth considered them easily circumvented. c) A committee that exacted taxes was to have one Jewish member, as had been customary in the past. d) Jews were to be free to buy fruit, vegetables and bread on the local marketplace, and draw water from a well – to the construction of which they had contributed – just like Christians. The final petition of the representatives of the Jews regarded threats made on their lives and homes; the rectors were called upon to prosecute guilty parties for any “violence, injury or offence”⁷⁸. Two years later the Jews, presumably taken as a whole, were permitted to own rural land up to a value of 4000 ducats, actually a very large sum⁷⁹.

In the early fifteenth century the Jews still lived on two streets in a *indaica* – located between the old city and the fortress – known as the *mons Iudeorum*; in 1414 it was ordered that the *mons* be included inside a new defensive wall⁸⁰. A final consideration about the habitat of the Jews underscores once again their unique condition. When the Venetian Senate in 1423 – as was mentioned above – forbade the ownership of real property to all Jews of the dominions of both Terraferma and Mar, the Jews of Corfu appealed the decision regarding their own situation and won. The Senate was forced in 1425 to amend the decision since the Jews of Corfu were “citizens and residents of our city of Corfu (*cives et habitatores civitatis nostre Corphoy*)” and as such could own their houses in the two *indaiche* of the city. This final clause formally protected their right of ownership but was meant to limit their freedom of investment⁸¹. In the early sixteenth century the houses of the Jews in the two *indaiche* were razed in order to make room for new defensive works and their residences were per force dispersed throughout the city, among the Christians. This brought a petition by the orthodox majority in 1516, asking that a quarter be set aside so that the Jews would live as before, *separatim*. Hardly four months after Venice’s own decision to relegate Jews to the Ghetto (29 March–1 April), the Collegio granted the petition of the Corfiote Orthodox Christians and called for relocation of the Jews to a quarter of the city called Catto Cafero, where they

⁷⁸ *Constantinos N. Sathas* (ed.) *Documents inédits relatifs à l’histoire de la Grèce au Moyen Age*, vol. II (Paris 1881) 152–54 (the documents from this source were kindly brought to my attention by Nicholas Karapidakis).

⁷⁹ *Jacoby*, Venice and the Venetian Jews 53, note 26.

⁸⁰ *Sathas* (ed.), *Documents*, vol. III (Paris 1882) 45–46.

⁸¹ The prohibition (see above note 19) was passed not long after Bernardino da Siena had been in Venice where he had perhaps preached during Advent (1422) and preached during Lent in Padova (1423): *Alfonso M. Berengo Morte, OFM*, San Bernardino da Siena nelle Venezie (Verona 1945) 32 and 231–233. The prohibition was reinforced the following year, eliminating loopholes and permitting only annual rent contracts for the house actually lived in: ASV, Senato misti, reg. 55, fol. 77 (30 December 1424). The exception for the Jews of Corfu is in *ibid.*, fol. 111 (3 May 1425), printed in *Sathas*, *Documents inédits* vol. III, 286–87.

would be “united and safe” – a rather softer formulation than that used by the same organ regarding the Ghetto in Venice⁸². But many Jews successfully resisted this order and it was another century before a new attempt was made; even when there would be a Jewish quarter, it was not exclusively Jewish and there were no gates to be closed during the night, as in the rigorous Italian ghettos⁸³.

In brief, the social status of the Jews of Corfu constituted a notable exception in the panorama of the Venetian dominions: Jews were full citizens of their city in the Middle Ages; they were represented in the council and could represent the city, as did David Sem in Venice in 1386–87, despite the antagonism of many of their Christian fellow citizens⁸⁴.

If this is the social situation, we can learn something more about the economic activities of the Jews of Corfu by turning to the account book of a small Venetian commercial partnership which had a base in Corfu in the years 1440–1442⁸⁵. The young Venetian nobleman, Zaccaria Giustinian, who ran the agency, had dealings with twelve different Jewish merchants over the two years. In businesses related to the trade of tanning hides, which however is not mentioned in the accounts, were two who dealt in sheepskins and a third was identified as a furrier (*varoter*). One of them was a descendant of David Semo, the representative sent to Venice in 1386–87. The names of these men are listed in Table 2. Four are indicated as Corfiotes, three as from Ioannina on the Greek mainland⁸⁶.

⁸² *Sathas*, Documents inédits vol. V, 261–62: ... *che 'l sii provisto de habitatione ad essi Hebrei in uno loco dicto Catto Cafero che è da la banda del Turrior del ammiraglio ove starano bene uniti et securi*.

⁸³ *Roth*, History of the Jews in Venice 324–325. It is in the context of a discussion of attempts to prohibit Jews from owning real estate that Marmora, in 1672, gives vent to his ingrained anti-semitism: “A gran ragione si privano di stabili quei, che non han fermezza alcuna di fede; e troppo grande scorno sarebbe, se negli edifici, nelle ville e ne’ campi si vedessero apertamente le loro usure. Non è convenevole che se perdettero le loro terre per havere ucciso Cristo, terre acquistino fra’ Cristiani; ed essendo meritevoli di morte, loro non conviene di stabile che il sepolcro”: *Marmora*, Della historia di Corfù 255–256.

⁸⁴ On the occasion of their successful appeal against the blanket expulsion order that followed the Venetian victory at Lepanto, the Jews of Corfu claimed that they had always been considered *per membro et una medesima cosa con essa* [città di Corfù], that before the existence of a *condotta* of Jews in Venice Corfiote Jews, *antichissimi suoi sudditi*, had traded with Venice, and that they would prefer to live in servitude under the protection of Venice than in freedom elsewhere (*essendone sotto le sue ale più gratiosa la servitù che altrove la libertà*). The Venetian rectors supported their claims and reminded the government that the Jews of Corfu *non vivono con altra industria che con la mercantia* and that they paid thousands of ducats in customs duties in Venice: *Kaufmann*, Considerations vol. 33, 20–23.

⁸⁵ *Reinhold C. Mueller*, A Venetian Commercial Enterprise in Corfu, 1440–1442, in: Money and Markets in the Palaeologan Era (13th–15th centuries) (acts of the congress, Chalkis, Greece, May 1998), ed. by *Nikos Moschonas*, Institute for Byzantine Research, National Hellenic Research Foundation (Byzantium Today 4, Athens 2003) 81–95.

⁸⁶ By comparison, in the very much larger account book kept by Giacomo Badoer in Constantinople, 1436–1440, only about thirty Jews are identifiable; cf. *Bowman*, Jews of Byzantium 175.

Table 2: Jewish merchants (*iudii*, *zudii*) and commercial partnerships active in Corfu, 1440–42.

Elia son of Salomon of Ioannina	
Elia son of Samuel of Ioannina	
Guarantors of Elia son of Samuel:	Samuel Cassan, “currently his rabbi” Salomon di Muli, his uncle (<i>barba</i>)
Grisom Seno, “currently living in Corfu”	
Moixè Chastoriano iudio, “who lives in Corfu”	
Mosco of Otranto and Abram son of Salomon Sazerdoto (Abram operated also on his own account)	
Salomon “the furrier” (<i>varoter</i>)	
Samaria de Natael, “who lives here in Corfu”	
Samuel of Ioannina	
Samuel Pizinin of Corfu	

They dealt in low-cost merchandise. The young Venetian merchant sold four German *panni di fontego*, or blanket-material, for 32 perperi to the Jew Elia of Ioannina, who, by barter, promised in return eight *schiavine* – an article of coarse wool used both as a kind of cape and as a blanket by seamen and pilgrims. When Elia paid, the Venetian charged a slight difference (less than 2 perperi) because he was dissatisfied with some of the merchandise (*algune sciavine el me de' in pagamento che le non me piexeva*). Since he did not pay on the spot, Elia had to provide sureties, once his rabbi, once his uncle Salomon di Muli.

Another Jew, Samuel of Ioannina, bought nearly a metric ton of iron from the Venetian, at only 85 perperi per thousandweight. In the same category, plowshares or *gomeri* produced in bulk in the smithies of Styria and Carinthia were sold largely via barter for *schiavine*, mostly to Jews: Elia son of Salomon of Ioannina bought five bales and Moixè Chastoriano four, while one bale each went to Mosco d'Otranto e Abram di Salomon Sazerdoto, partners, Grisom Semo, and Samaria di Natael. The bales, each containing 20–22 plowshares, were valued, for purposes of barter, at 21–22 perperi per bale; from the city they probably were forwarded to markets both on the island and on the Greek mainland.

Exchange commodities were wax, sheepskins and *schiavine*. Elia of Ioannina imported only a small quantity of 200 lbr. of wax, which he bartered for iron, and the partnership of Mosco of Otranto and Abram di Salomon delivered 13 lbr., which probably served to balance a small debt left over after a barter agreement. Sheepskins were brought to the market of Corfu especially by merchants from Kastoria, but the Jews Mosco of Otranto and Abram Sazerdoto, partners, and Elia of Ioannina provided a certain number valued at 14s each. The *schiavine*, finally, were much sought after in Venice. Of the 170 that Zaccaria purchased and loaded onto eight different voyages, half were from Elia di Samuel of Ioannina and a small number from Grisom Semo. Even if the accounts kept by this apprentice merchant involved Jews in low-cost merchandise, they reflect a kind of economic freedom and variety of activity that Jews in the Venetian Terraferma did not know.

Conclusion

It is in fact striking how different the position of Jews on the mainland was from that of Jews in the maritime provinces, even though both were excluded from rights of citizenship – with the notable exception of Corfu. The communities of the former revolved primarily around pawn banking, while commerce in used goods was secondary and other trades and professions were mostly those necessary to support relatively large communities, such as those of Padua and Treviso. The residence of Jews in a given subject city of the Terraferma was regulated by a temporary charter that could as well be terminated as renewed; their protected status as *subditi* lasted only the duration of their *condotta*. On the other hand, in Venice's *Stato da Mar* – especially in Crete and Corfu, where there were Jewish communities ten times larger than those found in Terraferma cities – Jews were considered *subditi* without limitations of the kind found in Italian charters. The Jews of Corfu, moreover, were recognized to be permanent citizens of their city. Despite the secular persistence of Orthodox rituals such as the *lapidatio*, which openly reflected Christian contempt of the Jewish minority, Byzantine traditions generally favored Jews by keeping open to them many branches of wholesale and retail commerce and the crafts. As a result, moneylending *tout court* and pawn banking in particular, often a source of friction in the Terraferma, were minor activities that did not characterize the large island community as a whole. The Jews of Corfu never tired of repeating in the ensuing centuries, when protecting their own historic rights against legal restrictions introduced elsewhere in the Venetian dominions, that their status was different from that of their coreligionists elsewhere; rather than being restricted by temporary charters, they were favored by enduring privileges⁸⁷.

⁸⁷ As late as the late eighteenth century the Inquisitori sopra l'università degli ebrei wrote that the Jews of Corfu were *non compresi nelle condote degl'Ebrei di questa Dominante, ma come privilegiati sudditi nostri, membro unito e congiunto con quella città, cosicchè debbano essere mantenuti nel loro esser in cui sono stati fino di presente, nè molestati contro la forma di detti loro privilegi*: Kaufmann, Considerations vol.34, 268.