

Alain Nedjar, Gilles Boulu, Liliane Nedjar & Raphaël Attias

**REGISTRES DE KETUBBOT DE LA NATION JUIVE DE LIVOURNE**  
**(1626-1890)**

**PREFACE**

by **Michaël Gasperoni**

Historian, reseach follow at the CNRS

**A great step forward for the history of the Jews of Livorno**

Livorno is certainly an extraordinary political and economic phenomenon in modern history. When, at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Grand Duke Ferdinand I of Medici granted merchants "of all nations" (and in particular Jewish merchants) a series of privileges guaranteeing both freedom of establishment and that of conscience and worship, the city was still only a small port without significance. Subsequently, Livorno quickly experienced remarkable demographic and economic growth, becoming one of the most important ports in the Mediterranean. While ghettos were established in many cities in the center and north of the Italian peninsula - first in Venice (1516), followed by Rome and Ancona (1555) then Florence and Siena (1571) - Livorno gradually became a veritable "oasis" for the Jews. Unlike Florence or Siena, no ghetto was ever established in Livorno.

The exceptional history of Livorno and its, or rather its Jewish, populations has of course aroused the interest of historians, who have devoted many works to the topic for almost thirty years, and some of them have largely contributed broadly to the renewal of a more general historiography. But now this important work, written by Alain Nedjar, Gilles Boulu, Liliane Nedjar and Raphaël Attias, has made fundamental progress from what had previously been achieved. It is of great benefit to scholars and genealogists, who will find within it substantial and precious information concerning Jewish families in Livorno, whilst it also provides fresh insight for historians of Italian and Mediterranean Judaism.

Exploring the history of the family has long been a gateway, indeed a key, to reading Italian Jewish historiography. To study the internal dynamics of Jewish

societies: their economic and social environment, mobility and migration, religious practices or even the phenomena of conversion and relations with the indigenous society, then the reconstruction of ties and kinship relationships, is indeed fundamental. However, sources are not always accessible. Scattered, composite and often incomplete, the archival documentation concerning the Jewish populations is as rich as it is underused, particularly when it comes to sources produced by the communities themselves. Although historians have largely exploited the notarial archives, which are full of acts allowing the reconstruction of both families and their trajectories - dowries, post mortem inventories, wills, division of property, and so forth - other Jewish sources, which require particular linguistic and paleographic skills, still have many secrets to reveal to us. This work, built from and around the Ketubbot registers of the Livornese Jewish Nation for a period spanning more than two centuries, and kept at the Archivio Storico della Comunità Ebraica di Livorno, is a perfect testimony to the wealth of such sources.

It should immediately be said that this book, which is based on an incredibly rich documentary corpus and without equivalent in Italy and Europe for the modern period, constitutes a colossal achievement and, like the community it proposes to study, stands outside the norm. It is colossal, principally because the authors were not satisfied merely to transcribe and translate the entirety of the acts (written in Hebrew) of these registers - in itself a major feat - but explored still further, transmitting to us the memory of these families and whole swathes of their history. Out of the ordinary, too, because these four authors, who worked tirelessly and as a team, turned into archivists-paleographers, translators, philologists, genealogists and historians all at the same time. They endeavoured to both restore and analyze the historical context in which these families led their lives, using the extraordinary registers of ketubbot, registers which they dissect meticulously and with pedagogy; a remarkable achievement. Indeed, although the ketubbot are sources well known to historians, there are few works that have taken such trouble to simultaneously explain their context of development, their form and their content.

The genealogies and routes undertaken by families are the subject of an entire chapter, which makes it possible to closely follow, over several centuries, the movements of thirty Livornese Jewish families. Reading these particularly rich and useful prosopographic files, we discover how these families followed the rhythm of the Mediterranean, in the North as in the South, in the West as in the East. This made Livorno a major hub, and a gateway connecting the Christian

West and the Ottoman Empire. Livornese Jews appear here as dynamic cultural and commercial players and mediators in the Mediterranean.

Finally, the authors provide us with a veritable “onomastic dictionary” of the Livorno Jewish community. This dictionary is more than merely descriptive, since it provides in detail the history and evolution of names and surnames, while giving us effective tools to better navigate through the Jewish anthroponymic universe in Livorno and beyond: Italian, Sephardic and Mediterranean. We can therefore only rejoice that anthroponymy and onomastics, related sciences having occupied an important place in Jewish history and historiography in most European countries, are at the heart of this work, once again presented with unusual clarity and pedagogic vigour.

The authors of a remarkable work on “The Portuguese Jewish community of Tunis known as Livornese or Grana” (Paris, Cercle de Genealogy Juive, 2015), Gilles Boulu and Alain Nedjar, now accompanied by Liliane Nedjar and Raphaël Attias, are extending their authoritative, world class studies, now focusing on Livorno. This book has so many good qualities that it is now time for impatient readers to indulge in the pleasure of immersing themselves in its pages with passion and interest. The fruit of a remarkable collective intelligence, this work commands admiration for its methodological rigour and its scope; by its commitment to be accessible to a large audience. This is not only thanks to an extremely sophisticated, clear and precise style; but also to its decision to employ bilingualism, French and English, which will undoubtedly allow the book to travel around the world... just as these Jewish merchants of earlier times travelled when, starting from Livorno, they crossed the Mediterranean to the borders of Asia.

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