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Erith Jaffe-Berg

PERFORMANCE AS EXCHANGE: TAXATION AND JEWISH THEATRE IN EARLY MODERN ITALY

In early modern Italy, an unusual form of exchange between Jewish and Christian communities materialized in Mantua: Jews in Mantua were required to

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perform an annual play as a tribute to their Gonzaga rulers. Elsewhere in the Italian peninsula, far more onerous “performances” were extorted from the Jews during carnival, but in the Mantuan performances, several communities—the ruling Gonzaga family, the Jewish community, and Christian audience members—interacted. I consider these performances a form of taxation because the full cost, which was extensive, was borne by the Jewish community. However, the performances were more than mere payment; they also gave the Jewish community a degree of autonomy and expression and enabled performers to develop their artistic skills, albeit always as the members of the company of “the Jews,” a group that was set apart from the rest of society in early modern Mantua. These theatrical performances can be seen as a public reification of the Jewish community as a distinctively marked but legitimate component of Mantua’s economy and social landscape. This dynamic continued in Mantua even as Jews in other parts of Italy were subjected to extremely harsh conditions during the Counter-Reformation and the Catholic Inquisition.

This article examines the evolution of performance by Jewish artists in Mantua from the 1520s through 1650. At a very productive phase of Jewish theatrical productions, from the 1560s to the early 1600s, the performances evolved into a medium of exchange that had a sociocultural component as well as an economic one. As tensions between Christian and Jewish communities mounted in the decades after the Council of Trent (1545–63), the performances became a crucial component of negotiations between Jews and the Gonzaga dukes: the rulers continued to provide some measure of protection to the Jews of Mantua despite increased pressure from the church to enforce punitive elements of papal bulls, in exchange for which they required theatrical productions as a tribute. In the late sixteenth century, Duke Guglielmo Gonzaga and his successor, Vincenzo Gonzaga, initiated policies that created more restrictions for Jews in order to protect them and assuage Christians by visibly separating the two groups. In exchange, the Jews turned the performances they were mandated to provide into ever-more-costly productions that offered increasingly visible tributes. These performances operated on another level as well: they illustrated to the Christian community, the church, and emissaries from foreign governments what otherwise went unspoken—that the ties between Jews and the dukes of Gonzaga were strong. However, because the performances were mandated by the dukes and because the Jewish community funded them entirely, the productions were in effect a tax it paid in return for its safety. These performances thus offered several

the directorship of Emanuel Colorni. ADCEM materials are referred to as files (*filze*) and documents (*cartelle*) and I use the abbreviations of “F” and “C” for this collection. Most of the documents from ADCEM are available online through an interface with the Teresiana Library in Mantua. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

forms of tribute to the Gonzaga dukes, both financial and political. As prominent Jewish playwright and community leader Leone de' Sommi articulated it, the Jewish community was able to live "under the happy shadow and secure protection" of the Gonzaga.¹

My analysis draws on research by theatre scholars and Jewish studies scholars, who argue that these public performances should be analyzed with the same nuance historians have used in their analysis of the Counter-Reformation. Although the performances were punitive in the sense that they were mandatory and costly, they were a reflection of the implicit, unspoken dialogue that was taking place between Christians and Jews.² To understand the significance of that dialogue, we only have to look at what was happening elsewhere in Italy, where interactions of Christians with Jews were far from respectful. In Rome, there was a tradition called the *giudiata* in which Christians imitated Jewish rituals such as weddings and funerals in a degrading way.³ These enactments, which were staged during the unruly period of the carnival, often incited violence in the audience.⁴ The full significance of the Mantuan performances has not yet been explored. Historians of Jewish history have not considered the importance of theatrical productions to the cultural survival of Jews in Mantua, and theatre historians have not implemented Jewish historical perspectives in their studies of the period. I use both theatre history and Jewish history to illuminate a more nuanced analysis of the late sixteenth-century performances of the Jews of Mantua, one that understands these performances as involving both cooperation and coercion. I draw on theories of money as a form of exchange to explain how performance functioned as a form of taxation, and I argue that performance as tax was a part of the process of "reification" of Jews in Mantua, in which they were differentiated from Christians but were also included as part of the social and economic fabric of the city. The performances of Jews were important for both the survival of the community and the prosperity of the Gonzaga rulers. The fact that Mantuan rulers used such performances simultaneously to include Jews in the local community and to pacify Christian residents of the city provides an important example of intercultural negotiation in the early modern period.

THE JEWS OF MANTUA AND THE COUNTER-REFORMATION

The lively theatrical scene that developed in Mantua in the sixteenth century was part of a larger culture of the arts that was cultivated and promoted by members of the house of Gonzaga, the ruling family of the duchy. Both male and female members of this noble, wealthy family were patrons of the arts, especially music. Jewish theatre was quite stable in Mantua, largely due to the protection of the Gonzaga family. Leone de' Sommi (1527–1592) was a key figure in this theatre and in the Jewish community. He wrote at least fourteen Jewish plays that were performed in a variety of venues: at state events, for the Accademia degli Invaghiti (Academy of the Infatuated Ones; founded by Cesare Gonzaga of Guastalla), at Gonzaga family weddings, and at carnival festivities. Literary scholar Donald Beecher writes that he was "probably involved in most of the Mantuan court productions of the period, as well as in some of the major events

in nearby Ferrara.”⁵ De’ Sommi aspired to construct a public theatre in Mantua to institutionalize theatre production there in ways that anticipated what later developed elsewhere in Europe.

Thus, it is clear that in the sixteenth century, Jews in Mantua were participants in a vibrant cultural scene. But they were not equal participants. They had the freedom to worship and were protected by the Gonzaga family, but they were excluded from many areas of Mantua’s culture and economy.⁶ For example, Jews could not join the *Accademia degli Invaghiti* (although an exception was made for de’ Sommi).⁷ The lives of Mantuan Jews were overshadowed by the Council of Trent and the punitive anti-Semitic policies that issued from the Vatican in the wake of that key moment of the Counter-Reformation. In August 1553, Pope Julius III issued a decree that declared the Talmud to be blasphemous and condemned it to be burned. The next month, on the Jewish New Year of 9 September, Inquisition officials in Rome collected Hebrew books from the Jewish homes of that city, including the Talmud, and burned them in a huge public bonfire. The inquisitors ordered all rulers, bishops, and inquisition officials to do the same throughout Italy. Although not all rulers complied, the Talmud and other Hebrew books were burned in many papal states and in major cities, including Mantua. Thus, although Jews in Mantua were free to practice their religion, the freedom of the Italian Jews around them was severely curtailed, and the shadow of the Counter-Reformation loomed over them.⁸

In 1555, Pope Paul IV (1555–9) issued the now-notorious papal bull “*Cum Nimis Absurdum*,” which forced Roman Jews into a ghetto, mandated that they sell all their real estate to Christians, prohibited Jews from hiring Christians as servants and wet nurses, and forbade Jews to eat meals with Christians and form friendships with them. The only occupation it allowed Roman Jews was that of ragpicker; they could no longer be merchants or sellers of essential goods and services. Pope Paul succeeded in instituting these policies in most of the papal states, and his successor, Pope Pius V (1566–72), also enforced them.

The Gonzaga family was less willing than other Italian rulers to implement the policies of this punitive bull and sought independence from Rome throughout the century. Because of their protection, Jews fleeing from other papal states where harsh measures were enforced found safe haven in Mantua for many decades.⁹ However, in the latter decades of the century, Duke Guglielmo Gonzaga (r. 1550–87) and his successor, his son Vincenzo (r. 1587–1612), finally partially capitulated to pressure from the Vatican and began implementing some of its anti-Semitic measures.¹⁰ In 1577, Guglielmo enforced the clothing requirement: Jewish men in Mantua were required to wear two large, highly visible strips of orange cloth, “half an arm long and a finger wide,” one to be worn alongside the buttons of a frock coat and the other to be worn on a hat. The fine for not wearing these markers was ten scudi for the first offense, twenty scudi for the second, and thirty scudi for the third.¹¹ In 1612, Vincenzo restricted Mantuan Jews to a ghetto. Finally, in 1630, Jews were expelled from Mantua during the War of Mantuan Succession (1628–31).¹² Over the sixteenth century, there was a distinctive change in policies toward Mantua’s Jews from the relatively liberal policies of

the early decades to the increasingly stringent rules and censorship of the late sixteenth century, culminating in forced exile in 1630.¹³

While it is difficult to know when a Jewish community first emerged in Mantua, the Jewish presence there probably dates back to Roman times. The first conclusive evidence of the presence of Jews in Mantua can be traced to 1145, when Mantua resident Abraham Ibn Ezra wrote a book entitled *Tsahut* on Hebrew grammar. In the same year mention is made of another Jew, Samuel of Mantua.¹⁴ The Jews of Mantua survived in the Middle Ages by working as bankers, merchants, book publishers, and artisans. Charters were written up granting the Jews privileges and protection and defining the terms under which they were to conduct business.¹⁵ By the early sixteenth century, the community numbered about 150 or 200 out of a population of 32,000.¹⁶ A hundred more Jews were living in the area surrounding Mantua known as the Mantovano, the “domains” of Mantua, which included Sabbioneta, Bozzolo, Castiglione delle Stiviere, Solferino, Castel Goffredo, Guastalla, Novellara, and Luzzara. In the middle of the century, a significant change in the Jewish population of Mantua developed as Jews sought refuge there from the papal states, Milan, and other parts of Europe. In 1587, the Jewish population in Mantua had grown to 960, and by 1587 there were 1,591 Jews out of a total population of 50,000, with another 253 Jews living in the Mantovano.¹⁷ This growth in the Jewish population occurred during the Counter-Reformation, a period marked by the successive sessions of the Council of Trent (1545–63). Although the council focused on condemning Protestant heresies, it also tightened policies with regards to Jews.

Recently, historians have begun to bring to light the complexity of the Counter-Reformation period. For example, rather than posit the Renaissance as a period when Jewish activity flourished and the Counter-Reformation as a period of decline and coercion, as previous generations of historians had done, Robert Bonfil has instead interpreted the Counter-Reformation as a time of complexity when Jews emulated and shared cultural models with their Christian counterparts in ways that helped them define their own “otherness.” As Bonfil puts it:

The coming to self-awareness of this tiny minority took place in this period, as is indeed everywhere and invariably the case, in terms of the Other, as a result of a process of two-way mirroring: the mirroring of the Self in the Other, as a pole of comparison acting as a catalyst for self-definition; and the mirroring of the Other in Oneself, as an element bearing the essential components of that very self-definition.¹⁸

In the period before and after the Counter-Reformation, policies impacted Jewish culture in ways that were equally complex. Raz-Krakotzkin argues against the prevailing scholarly view that relations between Jewish and Catholic Italians in the Counter-Reformation period are best characterized by the burning of the Talmud, censorship of Jewish texts by Catholic officials, growing Jewish insularity, and restrictive Catholic measures directed at limiting the intermingling of Jews and Catholics. Instead, he suggests that censorship was a conduit for maintaining a dialogue between Jewish and Christian literary figures and thus was an expression

of a paradoxical type of contact between the communities at this point. He notes that during this time Christian scholars were increasingly interested in literature written by Jews, thus posing a threat to the Catholic Church of the Inquisition.¹⁹ Rather than seeing censorship as a mechanism by which the church controlled who could read what, Raz-Krakotzkin sees it as “a means of incorporating Jewish literature into Christian discourse and into the category of permitted knowledge and as a factor that participated in the reshaping of the limits of Catholic orthodoxy.”²⁰

A similar dynamic was at work in the case of theatre performance, even when it contained a dimension of coercion. Negotiations over the terms of performance and payments, as well as deliberations about the content of the performances, made discourse possible even when contact between Christian and Jewish communities was restricted. Furthermore, the Gonzaga family’s insistence that Jews participate in carnival and other performances made the Jews visible, although they were still separate in the eyes of the larger Mantuan community. This participation, which began in the early sixteenth century, continued during the Counter-Reformation and even after Mantuan Jews were forced into a ghetto in 1612.

JEW AND TAXATION IN MANTUA

It is important to remember that the very existence of Jews in Mantua stemmed from a financial relationship. Jews had a papal dispensation to lend money and thus served a social need, especially for the poorer segments of Mantua’s population. They could lend money and charge interest, a function that was prohibited for Christians. In exchange, Jews were “tolerated” and allowed to live in Italian cities.²¹ Banking was not the only service Jews provided in Mantua; Jewish merchants and artisans also contributed to the economy.²² These functions were bureaucratically controlled: Jews were contractually allowed to work as bankers, merchants, and artisans and were protected by the Gonzaga rulers, who levied a tax in exchange. This arrangement in Mantua underwent three phases. Before 1481, the rulers gave charters to individuals, but this changed in the second part of the fifteenth century, when the contracts began to cover larger groups of bankers and merchants.²³ In the third phase, which began in 1511, the Gonzaga family issued only two types of contract: one for bankers or moneylenders and another for merchants and artisans. The second group, referred to as the *Università degli Ebrei* (the community of Jews, or the corporation or guild of Jews), included Jews who lived in Mantua and in the region the Mantuan rulers oversaw.²⁴ The arrangement is evident in the ducal proclamation for 1511:

All the expenditure which will henceforward be made, whether ordinary or extraordinary, taxes or charges which our officials will impose, and other expenditure and taxes of the university [community] of the Jews, shall be divided amongst all the Jews living in Mantua and the Mantovano, whether they be bankers or merchants, middlemen or those engaged in any other occupation, and strangers living under our protection and owing allegiance to us,

will also bear them. Everyone will have to pay the tax which will be determined by three Jews as follows: one on behalf of the bankers lending at interest in the city, the second on behalf of the bankers lending money outside the city, and the other (third) representing the Jews (who are not bankers) in the state.²⁵

For example, Leone de' Sommi wrote to Duke Guglielmo as the *massaro* of the "Università degli ebrei e li Banchieri di Mantova" on 20 May 1578 (Figure 1).²⁶ In Mantua, as in Venice, this agreement enabled the Jews to elect their own officials, determine how to collect the taxes the duke had levied, and deal with anyone who refused to pay.²⁷ The grouping of contracts in Mantua thus reinforced Jewish self-organization and autonomy.²⁸ This arrangement was mutually beneficial to both the dukes and the Jews, because it saved on the cost of processing contracts on both sides.²⁹ In addition, there was another benefit for the Jewish community: bankers would now share the burden of taxation with merchants and artisans, and merchants and artists would gain a voice in shaping decisions made by the community as a whole.³⁰

The Gonzaga Archives in the Mantuan State Archives provide many examples of letters written on behalf of the community to the dukes regarding the tax agreements, which had to be renewed annually. In one such letter from the 1570s, Leone de' Sommi, again functioning as a *massaro*, asked that Mantuan Jews be allowed to administer the collection of their own taxes and that their rights be confirmed by the duke, so that they would not be vulnerable to the whims of those with whom they were conducting business.³¹

The humble Università of the Jews and the bankers of Mantova, being overburdened by many in an unbearable magnitude, both ordinary and extraordinary, would like to divide the taxes and other community expenses among ourselves.³²

Before the sixteenth century, Jews had relied on their bankers to negotiate on their behalf, but after 1511, others in the community gained the ability to shape agreements and conditions. The fact that it was de' Sommi who emerged as one of the chief *massari* for the community symbolically highlights the importance of art and theatre for the economic well-being of the community. After all, de' Sommi was not a banker, a rabbi, or even the most wealthy member of the community. He was a trained scribe who had become a playwright and a director-producer.³³ It is significant that a theatre practitioner conducted the negotiations over taxation; it reinforces the concept that it was important for both the Gonzaga duke and the Jews that monetary negotiations be conducted by people who were also responsible for conducting artistic negotiations. Both scholars of theatre and Jewish historians often overlook the fact that de' Sommi's dual role underscores the primary importance of theatre for the functioning of the Jewish community during the Counter-Reformation.

Ser.^{mo} sig.^{ro} U'

198

511

Humiliss.^a Università de gli' nobi' Et li' Banchieri di Mant.^a sendo oppressi da molte, et insopportabili gravitate, ordinarie et straordinaria, volendo comparir le tasse et le altre spese comuni fra loro, Et Sauendosi per fermo che la mete di V. Alt. ser.^{ma} è che ogni uno porti il suo dovuto carico, si come anco si comprende nel Decreto còcesso loro ultimamente in generale, oue si uede, che tutti gli' Seb' del Duca, hanno a contentire nel pag.^{to} delle Tasse, al che facendosi da alc.^o qualche resistenza, sono sforzati ricorrere a V. Alt. ser.^{ma} Suppl.^a prima deuotam.^{te} a no' uolere concedere ad alc.^o essentione nelle Tasse, a pregiudicio loro, Et appresso restar sentita, di concedere ad essa Università et Banchieri, che in ogni caso di discordia, intorno alle Tasse, et spese comuni, tutti gli' Seb' delle Castella, come anco gli' altri, habbiano a regulari, nel modo, et forma, che comporta la legge, et rito loro, si come sono tenuti essendo Seb'. Et si come si è sempre statato fra essi, non obstanti cosa in contrario. il Se.^{ro}

fide. fidei fidei per suppl.^{to} de' ducissimi concordi in un' ipso, Man. Ser.^{ma} bro.
C. B. G. p. v.

1379. no. giugno

16. Maj. 1666

A di xx di Maggio 1666 Seb' de somi Sommi 1666

Figure 1.

Leone de' Sommi to
Duke Guglielmo
Gonzaga, 20 May
1578, B3389, C198.
Courtesy of the State
Archives of Mantua
(Archivio di Stato
Mantova).

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY AND THEATRICAL PRODUCTION AS TRIBUTE

The theatrical life of the Jews in Mantua has a rich history. Jewish musical performances, dances, and plays were mainstays of local culture, whether they took place within the Jewish community, as in the Purim festivities, or within the broader cultural circles of Mantua, during carnival or other civic events. The first evidence of the participation of Jews in Italian theatre is from 1489, when Jewish actors performed the story of Judith and Holofernes in Pesaro for the marriage of Maddalena Gonzaga to Duke Francesco Maria of Urbino.³⁴ Iain Fenlon notes that this performance was “staged by and at the expense of the Jewish community.”³⁵ In this first known example of Jewish theatrical performance in Italy, we see a combination of factors that continued through the sixteenth century: Jews funded their own productions and provided entertainment at royal and aristocratic weddings. The choice of subject is interesting; the Book of Judith is part of the Septuagint and is accepted by Catholics, but it remains apocryphal for Jews and Protestants. Thus, the performance of the story by Jewish actors may have implicitly projected a capitulation to Catholic power or perhaps a connection between Jews and Christians. The fact that the cost of the staging was borne by the Jews also suggests that the performance was both a tribute to the Gonzaga family and one that required a significant effort from the community. Jewish performances continued to be popular in Mantua, and the Gonzaga rulers continued to enjoy the economic benefit of having the Jewish community pay for the cost of their productions. In fact, Jewish theatre artists became a cultural resource for the region. For example, in 1520, as part of the celebrations honoring the accession of Federico Gonzaga, Federico’s secretary, Mario Equicola, wrote to the Duke of Ferrara asking that Jewish actors from Ferrara be sent to Mantua to participate in a theatre production for the celebrations.³⁶ By 1525, there was an established Jewish troupe in Mantua, and performances were based on works written by Jewish playwrights.³⁷ On 24 February 1525, court secretary Vincenzo de’ Preti informed Isabella d’Este, the marchesa of Mantua, that “tomorrow there will be another comedy presented in the house of the children of Sir Zoanne, that will be recited by the Jews, based on their own composition: and as such we will pass this small Carnival.”³⁸ A few days later, on 27 February, de’ Preti wrote that another comedy was scheduled to be performed in the same house, but he did not say whether the performers were Jewish.³⁹ In another letter to Isabella a week earlier, de’ Preti had remarked that the space was not very big (“no fosse molto grande”), indicating that this was probably a private residence.⁴⁰ Since the children of M. Zoanne do not appear to have been Jewish, this evidence suggests that, in the earlier part of the sixteenth century, Jews could mount performances in Christian homes. Since de’ Preti’s letter on 24 February does not mark the 1525 performance as exceptional, we might surmise that Jewish performances regularly took place in the homes of Christian Mantuans during carnival.

The Jewish community also frequently provided performances in honor of the marriages of members of the Gonzaga family. They mounted lavish spectacles both in 1549—for the marriage of Duke Francesco III Gonzaga to Caterina, the niece of Emperor Charles V of Spain—and in 1554.⁴¹ Theatre historian Alessandro D’Ancona notes that Jews provided music, acting, and inventive

scenic design for the 1549 production.⁴² In 1563, the Jewish Università produced Ariosto's *I suppositi* (The Pretenders) for Rudolf and Ernest of Austria, the young grandsons of Emperor Ferdinand I, who were guests of the Gonzaga dukes. In the account of their voyage from Trent to Milan, it is reported that this production of *I suppositi* "was recited very well, and the musical *intermedi* that were heard were excellent, and above all they viewed a very beautiful set with admirable perspective and lighting."⁴³ *I suppositi* is a play about a man, Erostrato, who pretends to be his own servant in order to woo his love, Polinesta. He is imprisoned by her father but is eventually released when it is revealed that he is actually the son of a wealthy Sicilian.⁴⁴ The fact that the Università chose to perform *I suppositi* demonstrates that the plays this troupe performed were not in any way derogatory toward Jews and were not even necessarily "Jewish."

In other instances, Jews performed plays written by members of their community, notably Leone de' Sommi. The facts that Jews performed each year and their performances had high production values have led Iain Fenlon to conclude that there was a permanent Jewish theatre troupe in Mantua.⁴⁵ Claudia Burattelli also suggests that the Jewish community in Mantua had a relatively stable theatrical group ("una 'équipe' teatrale relativamente stabile").⁴⁶ These productions suggest that the Jewish community was developing a cadre of trained performers—singers, dancers, actors, dance masters, and composers.⁴⁷

During much of the sixteenth century, the Jews of Mantua performed when foreign dignitaries came to the city. They also sometimes traveled with Mantuan dignitaries when they visited other places, as was the case when Jewish performers accompanied a delegation of artists and acting companies for the entrance of Maximilian II, Holy Roman Emperor, in Prague in 1567.⁴⁸ Performances on such occasions sometimes took place in mixed settings in which both Christians and Jews participated. The frequency of performances up to the 1560s and the fact that the Jews performed in a variety of venues, including private homes where non-Jewish troupes also performed, suggest an ongoing exchange between the Jewish and Christian residents of Mantua. Although these performances were always provided as a tribute to members of the Gonzaga family, the range of settings and the mixed company at performance venues contrasts strongly with what emerged later, when performances were more carefully administrated by members of the Gonzaga family and their costs increased.

COMMUNITY TAXATION AND THE COUNTER-REFORMATION

The Council of Trent and the Inquisition brought difficult times for Jews and resulted in different terms for their performances. In the Counter-Reformation period, performances of Jewish theatre were limited mostly to carnival, as Claudia Burattelli has shown.⁴⁹ As ducal coregent, Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga had a more favorable attitude to Jews, but when his nephew Guglielmo took the reins of power in 1556, violence against the Jews of Mantua increased.⁵⁰ In part, this was a sign of the times, symbolized in the burning of the Talmud in 1553 and Pope Paul IV's issuing of the draconian "Cum Nimis Absurdum" in July 1555.⁵¹ In 1568, the harshest phase of the Counter-Reformation, Pope

Pius V expelled Jews from every papal state but Rome and Ancona. His successor, Pope Gregory XIII, sent an emissary throughout the peninsula to see that “*Cum Nimis Absurdum*” was enforced. In 1576, when the emissary visited Mantua, Guglielmo Gonzaga negotiated for an agreement whereby the bull would be published in Mantua but only parts of it would be enforced. In 1584, Guglielmo invited Jesuits to settle in Mantua, a move that changed the climate for Jews. The Jesuits were of course bent on converting the Jews, and their presence in the city added to the harassment and daily pressures Mantuan Jews experienced.⁵²

In his refusal to enforce all elements of the papal bull, Guglielmo was motivated more by a desire to demonstrate the power of the Gonzaga vis-à-vis the church and the Inquisition and a determination, insofar as possible, to remain autonomous from the Holy See than by a desire to protect the Jews of Mantua. Allowing Jewish troupes to perform was one way the Gonzaga duke publicly proclaimed autonomy from the church, according to Claudia Burattelli.⁵³ However, for the Jews, the effects of the bull (1555), Guglielmo’s partial capitulation to the papal emissary (1576), and the arrival of the Jesuits in Mantua (1584) led to mounting difficulties. In addition to forced baptisms, which increased in number in the 1580s, there was also stricter regulation of Jewish marriages (which church officials regarded as clandestine because they were not performed by priests).⁵⁴ On the surface, then, it appears that the burning of the Talmud epitomized the Counter-Reformation as a time when Catholics aggressively sought to suppress Jewish literary productions, when interactions between Jews and Catholics were restricted, and when the insularity of the Jewish community increased as a consequence of these measures.

However, the separation and insularity that we would assume to have resulted from these punitive measures did not necessarily occur in the 1560s–80s. Instead, the Counter-Reformation period was far more complex. In fact, the entire northern region of Italy, and Mantua specifically, emerged as a center for the exchange of ideas between Christian and Jewish scholars regarding Hebraic texts. However, this exchange inadvertently polarized both Jewish and Christian populations, creating a volatile environment that was prone to conflict among the various residents. The result was that the Gonzaga dukes, beginning with Guglielmo and continuing with Vincenzo, increasingly sought to separate the communities from each other except in sanctioned and highly controlled settings. This is how public performances of Jewish theatre came to be restricted to carnival performances.

The move to restrict contact between the populations is evident in an edict Duke Guglielmo issued on 1 March 1576 that expressed his displeasure as to the disorder occasioned by the associations of Jews with Christians and prohibited Jews from living with Christians and consorting with them.⁵⁵ In addition, Jews were prohibited from having windows that faced the church or the Christian cemetery, and were forced to close their windows so that they would not be visible even while they were in their own homes. The following year, on 28 August 1577, Guglielmo issued another edict, one that reaffirmed his toleration of Jews and their right to live in Mantua and her domains but also asserted that they were essentially different from Christians, and that Jews and Christians needed

to be separate from each other.⁵⁶ His proclamation enforced a requirement that Jews mark their identity on their clothing. This visible marker had been required in Mantua in the fifteenth century, and Guglielmo's new enforcement of the requirement specified where the markers should be worn, what color they should be, and how many (two) Jews should wear. He prohibited carnal relations between Jews and Christians and pronounced that the punishment for such relationships would be fifty scudi and a beheading. The dukes of Mantua repeatedly expressed concern about miscegenation, perhaps because Jews in Mantua were not forced to live in a ghetto until 1612, almost a century after Jews were forced into the Venetian ghetto in 1516.

Because of the increasingly harsh attitudes toward Jews during Guglielmo's reign, Jewish actors stopped performing at civic events or in Christian households after 1584. Earlier in Guglielmo's rule there had been opportunities, just as there had been earlier in the century, for Jews to perform at other times. These included performances for the 1549 wedding of Duke Francesco and Caterina of Austria; the performance of *I suppositi* in 1563 for Rudolf and Ernest of Austria; and in a commissioned play from de' Sommi for the wedding of Vincenzo with Margherita Farnese in 1581; and two comedies in 1584.⁵⁷ The contrast is marked after 1584, and with only a few exceptions, performances by Jews for celebrations other than carnival were nonexistent. Burattelli interprets this shift as the result of Guglielmo's capitulation to the spirit of the Counter-Reformation.⁵⁸ What began with Guglielmo deepened with Vincenzo: "The main cause of the progressive reduction of the role of the Jewish community in the context of the Gonzaga spectacles is most certainly found in the incremental carrying out of the Counter-Reformation dictates by Vincenzo, [which was] accelerated by his successors."⁵⁹

Although Burattelli's grouping of Guglielmo, Vincenzo, and their successor dukes as uniformly influenced by the Counter-Reformation could be more nuanced—Vincenzo's policies toward Jews were less harsh than those of Guglielmo before him and the dukes that succeeded him (e.g., he is known to have visited the synagogue in Mantua)—it is true that Vincenzo's policy regarding performance perpetuated Guglielmo's decision to limit Jewish performances to carnival. Notable exceptions took place in October 1601 and the summer of 1604, when performances took place at other times than carnival.⁶⁰ Vincenzo's favorable attitude toward Mantuan Jews was evident even in a climate of growing hostility toward the Jews of Italy. He continued his negotiations with Mantuan Jews and publicly defended them against officials of the Inquisition. He also continued the tradition of issuing annual proclamations of toleration. Vincenzo published an edict on 17 January 1588 that affirmed his protection of the Jews against forced baptisms:

As we wish to ensure that the children of Jews, conforming to the ancient custom of the blessed church, will not be baptized without the knowledge of their fathers and mothers, or at least of one of them, such that the sacrament of baptism will proceed without fraud and that in this city, and its dominions, it will be possible for the Jews, as it is possible for Christians[,] to live safely with their children and their families.⁶¹

Anyone who violated this protection of Jewish children would be fined 300 scudi. Those who could not pay this high fine would be given three whips of the cord (“tre stratti di corda”).⁶² This protection offered a counterbalance to the pressures of the Inquisition and the Catholic Church. However, even though Vincenzo was tolerant in matters of religious freedom, he continued Guglielmo’s policy of limiting the venue for theatrical performance, and the cost of performances while he was duke of Mantua increased, exacting a very high price from the Jewish community.

PERFORMANCE AS TAXATION

To what degree were these performances, which were conducted for carnival or for other events, offered as a type of payment or taxation? The performances of Jews in Mantua have been interpreted from a range of perspectives. Some analysts have idealized them and present Mantua as exceptional, whereas others have been more critical and see them as the result of coercion. Alessandro D’Ancona, the first to publish extensively about Jewish performances in Mantua, idealized the circumstances that led to the cultural production of the Jews of Mantua: “In Mantua, Jews could take part in ventures other than mercantile and money changing, even the most cultivated disciplines.”⁶³ D’Ancona concluded that the presence of a permanent company at the service of the Gonzaga princes illustrates both the tolerance of the dukes and the acculturation of the “Jewish Mantuan family.”⁶⁴ However, d’Ancona’s perspective fails to take into account the reality that performances were demanded of the Jewish community and that they were expensive to produce. The cost of providing sets, costumes, and special effects and hiring musicians, dancers, and actors was considerable, and the community had to impose taxes on its members to meet them. D’Ancona’s inclusive view of Jews as part of a broader Christian–Jewish “family” is challenged by Beecher and Ciavolella’s nuanced interpretation of these performances as both a form of taxation in exchange for protection and a means of currying favor to encourage ducal protection to continue:

We may have some difficulty today in taking a full measure of the importance of the Jewish players in maintaining the autonomy of the community. There is reason to believe that they were under enormous pressure to produce plays in routine fashion for the festive seasons at court, and that this duty was levied upon them almost as a form of taxation in exchange for ducal protection. Of course, the relationship may be stated inversely: throughout the sixteenth century the Jewish community had encouraged a tradition among its own members of furnishing plays to the court as a means for flattering princes and for winning favour.⁶⁵

Beecher and Ciavolella highlight the fact that, before 1584, the Jewish community’s contribution had grown to include an annual comedy as well as spectacles and entertainments for courtly celebrations such as weddings, coronations, and other occasions, “with costs borne by the community, in effect turning these productions into a form of additional taxation.”⁶⁶

Although the word “taxation” does not appear in Gonzaga archival documents in connection with Jewish theatrical performances, the word “tax” (*tasse*) appears in the Jewish community archives in reference to the tax the community needed to impose on itself to pay for the performances. Jewish records indicate that in 1596, the community imposed a tax on itself to pay for the comedy and celebrations that Duke Vincenzo demanded that year, and the same occurred in 1597.⁶⁷ Abundant evidence of the significant expenditures involved in the performances of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries has been preserved in the record kept by the Jewish community. In 1580, Guglielmo commissioned a performance for the impending first marriage of his son, Vincenzo. He paid de’ Sommi (as the *massaro* for the event) seventy-three Mantuan lire, amounting to more than ten scudi.⁶⁸ But when in 1588 the Università performed de’ Sommi’s play *Le tre sorelle* (*The Three Sisters*), the Jewish community raised the equivalent of 250 gold scudi to cover the costs of the production. Ciavolella and Beecher note that “costs for the comedies, often requiring the involvement of up to fifty members of the community, averaged 100 scudi—already a considerable sum.”⁶⁹ Those who saw the performances often remarked on the issue of cost. In a letter to the archduke of Tuscany, ducal secretary Belisario Vinta recounted: “Yesterday was presented a play by the Jewish players, which was not badly recited, and was called *Ingiusti sdegni*, with pleasing intermezzi, but with little invention or cost.”⁷⁰ D’Ancona quotes from a letter Dottore Alberini of Mantua wrote on 7 March 1582 to the duke of Ferrara that mentions a Jewish performance of a play that was “not very nice in itself, but [was] ornamented with lovely *intermedi* and regal scenic devices.”⁷¹ These costly “extras”—scenic devices, costumes, and fireworks—are referred to often in documents about Jewish performances. Simonsohn notes that the performance in 1603 cost 175 scudi (the original budget of 100 scudi being adjusted to cover the cost of the production) and that the Jewish community had to impose a second tax to pay for it.⁷² A performance of the comedy *Accessi de Amor* on 17 February 1605 required many actors and other participants, all of whom needed to be paid. The company borrowed some of the items it needed for this performance.⁷³ Some productions required as many as thirty-eight performers.⁷⁴ The Jewish community archive files include documents such as a receipt for shoes made for a comedy; a receipt for payment for people whose services were used during the comedy (as performers or as backstage help); payments to individuals who carried lights during the night for participants in plays; and many other attendant costs.⁷⁵ Simonsohn documents the costs of costumes and the fee of the *massari*, one of whom, Abraham Sarfati, demanded more than he was receiving.⁷⁶

There were also hidden costs involved in the performances that pertain to the interactions between Jewish performers and the Gonzaga family in preparation for the events. For example, in 1583, Yosef Cohen visited Vincenzo Gonzaga in Ferrara in the intimacy of his bedroom in order to negotiate details about the performance of a play, but at other times, the discussions with Vincenzo were handled more formally and involved some expense.⁷⁷ For example, if Vincenzo visited the Great Synagogue during carnival, which he did in 1588, 1590, 1591, and 1594, he was “wined and dined.”⁷⁸ The community record noted “expenses for the

acquisition of sweets” (“spese per l’acquisto di dolciumi”) when Vincenzo visited the synagogue on 3 March 1590.⁷⁹

Furthermore, in 1592, 1594, 1596, 1597, and 1598, there is evidence that the Jewish community paid twenty-five scudi in lieu of presenting a play.⁸⁰ This payment was most clearly explained in 1597, when performances were canceled because of the death of the duke of Ferrara.⁸¹ Twenty-five scudi was not an arbitrary amount. It corresponds exactly to the fine Duke Guglielmo imposed in a proclamation of 1 March 1576 that outlined the separation to be made between Jews and Christians. In that document, he said, “Guglielmo, by the grace of God, Duke of Mantova, of Monferato and her domains would like to provide that . . . it will not be permitted for Christians to go to the celebrations of Jews nor for Jews to go to the celebrations of Christians, on pain of twenty-five scudi for each who will not obey.”⁸² Therefore, twenty-five scudi was the fine Christians paid for attending a Jewish festivity, including a theatre performance. On years when plays were not performed, the Jews were responsible for the same amount they would have been fined for interacting with their Christian audience. The fine would have been lower than the cost of a production (Beecher and Ciavolella estimate that the average performance cost 100 scudi, but archival evidence suggests that the average was closer to 175–250 scudi).⁸³ Put another way, the Jews were fined for not performing.

THEORIZING MONEY AND TAXATION

One of the first works to study the sociological implications of money and financial exchanges is Georg Simmel’s *The Philosophy of Money*. For Simmel, the ultimate meaning of money is its embodiment of human exchange. Thus, money constitutes a fundamental aspect of human experience.⁸⁴ This relational approach notes that the transfer of money always involves giving and receiving. One can infer from this that using money is a way of acknowledging the existence of two entities. In the exchange whereby theatre performance serves as a form of taxation, the exchange is itself an admission of the existence of each community involved, in this case Jews and Christians. In this exchange, the Jewish community needs the money because it reifies and affirms its place in society, its right to participate in the early modern Christian society of Italy of which it was a part so long as it could participate in the financial exchange. This contrasts with places such as England, where Jews were prohibited from living and thus could not participate in the community, financially or in any other way. Furthermore, the facts that the exchange was not just monetary but was also performative and that Jews literally appeared before the Christian audience reified them in two ways. When the Gonzaga invited dignitaries from other parts of Italy to see the performances, they were in fact asking others to participate in this acknowledgment. The presence of dignitaries from outside Mantua at weddings and celebrations at which Jews performed could be said to confirm tacitly the legitimacy of the decision of Gonzaga rulers to include Jews at such events. Seen in this light, Jewish theatrical performance was a way of making public and visible a hidden exchange that was already happening on a financial level. At the same time, since it was clear that the

performances were those “of the Jews”—and guests from outside the state were thus prepared to see “something different”—they also affirmed Jewish alterity, paradoxically through the highly visible means of performance.⁸⁵ Because Jews were fined twenty-five scudi for performing before Christians, the performance also included a punitive dimension that “put Jews in their place” and appeased a potentially hostile audience. In this sense, the performances were an extension of the signs Jews wore that simultaneously enabled them to participate in the larger culture and marked them as different.

Simmel writes about changing ideas regarding money and monetary exchange in the early modern period. He notes that in the Middle Ages, money functioned as a substance with a concrete value: a coin was worth the value of the metals that it was made of, and that value was measured against the value of what was being purchased. (Coins for apples, for example.) But in the early modern period, this began to change, and money began to take on a more symbolic value. Currency began to be valued for what it could do more than for the actual value of the metal substances of which it was made. The exchange became less direct. A patron of the arts, for example, was exchanging money for much more than the actual performance of new music or a book or a painting. He or she was supporting an artistic community, ensuring that his or her town or city was a center of artistic production, contributing to the local economy, and contributing to the production of beauty. The early modern period is when conceptions of the usefulness of money expanded to include intangible things. (The logical extension of this is the modern credit economy, in which no money changes hands between the buyer and the seller of goods or services).⁸⁶

Simmel argues that monetary transactions are never unidirectional and often take place at different levels for each party to the transaction.⁸⁷ Thus, “exchange is not the mere addition of two processes of giving and receiving, but a new third phenomenon, in which each of the two processes is simultaneously cause and effect.”⁸⁸ The exchange in Mantua took place at multiple levels. The Jews exchanged a costly performance that taxed many members of their community for a measure of protection and religious freedom from the Gonzaga dukes. They also received a measure of recognition and legitimacy from the Christian members of the audience who attended their performances. The status of the dukes was affirmed when the lavish productions were dedicated to them; and they received indirect but public signs of support for their refusal to implement all of Rome’s policies toward Jews when their diplomatic colleagues and counterparts attended the annual performances of the Università. In addition, performance itself is an embodiment of this third phenomenon: it is always difficult to untangle the interaction between audience and performer, since each is simultaneously giving and receiving feedback from the other.

Simmel speaks of monetary exchanges as performances, and his discussion is doubly apt for theatrical performance: “When money and performances are exchanged, the buyer claims only the specific object, the circumscribed performance. The actual performer, on the other hand, requests, or at least hopes in many cases, for more than just money.”⁸⁹ We may then ask: What were the expectations of the Jewish community? Acceptance? Peaceful coexistence in exchange for

money and the performance? Were the performances also a means of legitimizing themselves as members of the larger community of artists in Mantua? Was it a way into the Christian cultural sphere, as D'Ancona's idealizing view of Mantua suggests? In Simmel's conceptualization, the various performers of money-related tasks demand recognition, "a personal acknowledgment, some kind of subjective token from the purchaser that exists quite apart from the agreed money payment and that will be a contributory complement to the full equivalent of his achievement."⁹⁰ The fact that Jews in Mantua paid for protection with performance (until 1650) enabled them to give and receive more than mere currency. The performance was a visible enactment of the fact that an exchange had taken place, but it also provided space for other forms of exchange—laughter, interest, recognition, and emotional responses—that Jews might not otherwise have elicited from the Christian community. This exchange went two ways insofar as the Gonzaga were also "performers." Their role—not as patrons of the arts but as partners of sorts with the Jewish Università—was acknowledged the moment they entered into a negotiation over a performance. This appears to have been a different relationship than the feudal patron relationship; it was an admission of the mutual dependence of these two bodies within the larger world of mercantile capital in which they operated.⁹¹

In the *Theology of Money*, Philip Goodchild extends many of Simmel's theories about money and includes a perspective that embraces religion and criticizes views of money as a purely secular entity.⁹² Goodchild argues that separating the religious or spiritual from the secular and monetary prevents us from engaging with questions of value and belief that are often implicit in monetary transactions.⁹³ He argues that it is difficult to differentiate between money as a way of assessing value and money as an instrument of exchange.⁹⁴ Unlike Simmel, Goodchild emphasizes the fixity of values in the context of exchange.⁹⁵ He argues that Simmel's philosophy of money explains what gives money its value, whereas his own philosophy explores how money itself designates value in "currency" that ranges from psychological states to social relations.⁹⁶ This sheds light on the transactions between Gonzaga dukes and Jewish performers: money is what made the performances possible, thus laying the groundwork for the various and multiple exchanges that took place with each performance. In fact, as we shall see, taxation was never totally congruent with performance, nor was performance only about taxation. During the Counter-Reformation, what had once been a political tribute became a much more cost-driven exchange. The costliness of the performances, the effort and expense they exacted from the Jewish community, and the strong symbolic use the Gonzaga made of performance to reify the Jews of Mantua became more apparent during the 1580s–1620s.

REIFICATION, PERFORMANCE, AND TAXATION

Paradoxically, even as Jews across Italy felt the effects of papal orders such as "Cum Nimis Absurdum" and waves of attacks by the Christian population, Jewish participation in the performing arts continued. In Mantua, as we have seen, successive dukes crafted agreements whereby Jews staged plays as both a

tribute to the ruler and a tax on the Jewish community. This arrangement illustrates many of the dimensions of exchange that Simmel and Goodchild address, and it enabled Jewish performers to continue to practice their craft for a Christian audience, albeit only once a year. For the middle to late sixteenth century, this arrangement seemed to work: each party to the exchange got something they wanted or needed.

The rule of Guglielmo Gonzaga, which effectively began in 1556, unfolded against the backdrop of the implementation in Italy of many of the decisions made by the Council of Trent. His reign was characterized by tension with the Holy See: Gonzaga wanted to retain as much sovereignty as he could for the papal state of Mantua, and negotiated with the Vatican for several years to ensure that Jews would be protected there; but he eventually capitulated and in 1584 agreed to allow the Jesuits to come to Mantua. He gave them the church of San Salvatore, which was located in the center of the Jewish quarter of the city.⁹⁷ The Jews of Mantua were caught between these two powers. On the one hand, they depended on the Gonzaga to safeguard them from the rising fury of the Mantuan populace, spurred by Counter-Reformation zeal ignited by local and visiting Catholic prelates who were on a mission to enforce the deeply anti-Semitic prohibitions of “Cum Nimis Absurdum.” But Jews were an important source of income for the Gonzaga dukes during this period; they provided gifts and financial offerings whenever they were called upon to do so. For example, in August 1579, the Jewish community gave a gift (*dono*) of 1,000 gold scudi to Duke Guglielmo.⁹⁸ This “gift” was a hardship for the community, because immediately after this, the Università issued a special tax (*tassa speciale*) on all those who had not contributed to the *dono*.⁹⁹ Since the fifteenth century and certainly during the Counter-Reformation, the Gonzaga dukes and the Jews were linked by their financial exchanges, which were the conduits by which each guaranteed their own and the other’s prosperity. During the reigns of Guglielmo and Vincenzo and the ensuing members of the Gonzaga family, the mutual reliance of the Jewish community and Gonzaga dukes was symbolized in the negotiations over performances and in the transformation of performance to a tribute that was in essence an indirect tax on the Jewish community.

Whereas Jews had a measure of power, their performances were bounded by necessity. Their productions simultaneously projected an image of integration and reinforced Jewish alterity. Although performance can generally be seen as an exchange between actor and audience, Jewish theatrical activity in Mantua was a more complex exchange than most when we consider that a few of the actors were both the distinctive Jewish performers who were part of the *Università degli Ebrei* and the musicians, dancers, actors, and dramaturges who could be incorporated into secular, non-Jewish productions and exported to other parts of Italy as needed.¹⁰⁰ While we don’t have much historical evidence about the nature of the exchanges that took place in these varied contexts, one can imagine significant amounts of mutual influence and creative interplay.

At the same time, the exchange was restrictive. In addition to being visibly branded by the mandatory orange strips of cloth, Jewish performers were separated from the larger Mantuan community by the fact that they were performing as *gli*

Ebrei—as members of an Other, separate community. And unlike their Christian counterparts, they paid a heavy tax for the privilege of performing for a Christian audience. When they desired too much integration, their requests were denied. This happened in 1567, when de' Sommi requested a permanent Jewish theatre in Mantua.¹⁰¹

Thus, the Counter-Reformation was a complex time in terms of the exchanges that took place between the Jewish and Christian communities. In many ways, the “golden age” of Jewish theatre in Mantua occurred precisely during the years in which the effects of the anti-Semitic bull, the burning of the Talmud in Rome, and other punitive aspects of the Counter-Reformation were felt most acutely in Italy. Although the interest of some Christians in Hebraic texts created a “cultural space in which Jews and Christians worked together on the basis of common principles and common cultural values,” that did not mean that Judaism was any more tolerated than it had been.¹⁰² Rather, “the fundamental Christian ambivalence toward the Jews was redefined, presenting Jews both as carriers of an ancient wisdom and as representatives of an alien culture.”¹⁰³ Jews were acknowledged, but this acknowledgment only highlighted their separation from the Christian milieu. This is certainly true of print culture, but the frame may be broadened to include other branches of Jewish cultural production, including the creation of theatre.

The considerable cost of mounting plays, the large number of participants in them, and the “hidden costs” involved in these productions all amounted to a sizable expenditure. This expenditure recurred on an annual basis, just as a tax would. It sometimes increased, when there was a need for an extra performance, as in the case of a wedding or a visit from a foreign dignitary. In additions, when performances were canceled, a purely monetary fee was exacted. Although performance was never called a tax, that is the most appropriate word for an imposed payment used for a public purpose. This monetary exchange enabled other transactions: for the Jews, a measure of acceptance as “Others” who could live in Mantua; for the Christians, a punitive symbolic act that made it possible to transact with the Jews (who had paid for the right to transact). For the Gonzaga rulers, the performance was a symbol of peaceful, orderly, and sanctioned exchanges within their domain and a visible sign of their independence from Rome.

The seventeenth century marked a dramatic shift for the Jewish community, not least of all because the Jews of Mantua were enclosed in a ghetto soon after its beginning. The century opened with mobs attacking Jews. A so-called witch was burned at the stake in 1600, and in 1602 seven Jews were put to death under the pretext of having put on a “play” in the synagogue that made fun of a Franciscan friar. One of those murdered was Moses Fano, a regular participant in the Jewish theatre troupe.¹⁰⁴ Still, the arrangement between the Gonzaga dukes and the Jewish theatrical community continued, and in 1603 the duke asked the Jews to put on a play, which led to a few productive years of theatrical performance. At least ten plays were staged from 1603 to 1612, the year that the Jews of Mantua were finally ghettoized.¹⁰⁵ However, after Jews were expelled from the city in 1630, “the Jews of Mantua did not any more have it in their hearts to perform.”¹⁰⁶ Even the final attempts to resuscitate the performance tradition eventually died out.

In 1644, Duke Carlo II addressed himself to the community and asked for a comedy. During 1644–9 the Jews provided annual performances, but in 1650, the duke canceled the tradition of staging plays and asked instead for a direct tax.¹⁰⁷ The replacement of the performances with a payment reveals that, all along, the performances had been understood as a tax, albeit one dressed up as an aesthetic, social, and cultural exchange.

The cessation of performances suggests that they no longer served any of their initially intended purposes: they no longer enabled the Jews to curry favor with the Gonzaga, and they no longer sufficiently met the Gonzaga's expectations as a tribute and indirect payment. Performance in early modern Mantua thus had aesthetic value, a monetary value, and (most of all) a symbolic value—it reified the Jews, and, like the sign they were forced to wear, made them visible in the cultural landscape of the city. They were also part of the Catholic calendar when they were enacted during carnival. They served to strengthen the Gonzaga family's independence from the church and to solidify the Gonzaga rulers as unique self-fashioners and patrons of the arts. In Mantua, theatre served as a seismograph for the ebbs and flows of Christian attitudes toward Jews. Theatre was a public event and one of the few in which interdictions on Jewish–Christian relations were otherwise lifted. As relations between Christians and Jews deteriorated, opportunities for performances dwindled until they eventually ceased, first during the circumstances of exile (1630) and later (1650) by mutual agreement of the Gonzaga ruler and the Jewish community.

ENDNOTES

1. In 1590, de' Sommi wrote to ask Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga to intervene against “instigators” (“instigatori”) and persecutors (“nuoi persecutori”) so that, with the duke's grace, the community could live peacefully (“sotto la felice ombra et sicura protezione di quella”). Leone de' Sommi to Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga, 29 July 1590, F3, C28, Archivi della comunità ebraica a Mantova (Jewish Community Archives; hereafter ADCEM), Mantua, Italy.

2. Some historians have argued convincingly that acts such as burning the Talmud and censoring Hebraic texts were expressions of attempts by Christians in the era after the Council of Trent to dialogue with sacred texts rather than attempts to negate their existence. Jewish performances and even performances in Hebrew occurred within the same cultural nexus. See Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, *The Censor, the Editor, and the Text: The Catholic Church and the Shaping of the Jewish Canon in the Sixteenth Century*, trans. Jackie Feldman ([Hebrew orig., *Ha-Tsensor, ha-orech, vehatext* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2005)] Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), esp. 183–4. See also Robert Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*, trans. Anthony Oldcorn ([Italian orig., *Gi Ebrei in Italia nell'epoca del Rinascimento* (Florence: Sansoni, 1991)] Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

3. Although Jews did not perform in the *giudiate*, they were forced to take part in other humiliating and even lethal activities. In Rome, up until 1443, it was customary to roll one of the older members of the Jewish community down from the hills surrounding Rome in a barrel full of sharp nails. The man would generally be dead or dying by the time his body arrived at the city. This ritual was replaced with forced payments toward carnival celebrations that the Jewish community would have to provide. Elio Toaff, “Il Carnevale di Roma e gli Ebrei,” in *Scritti in Memoria di Sally Mayer (1975–1953): Saggi sull' Ebraismo Italiano* (*Sepher Zikaron le shlomo S. Mayer: Kovetz le Toledot Yehudei Italia* (bilingual ed.) (Jerusalem and Milan: Fondazione Sally Mayer, 1956), 325–44. In 1466, Pope Paul II created a

footrace for Jews as part of the carnival celebrations in Rome. Jews had to wear red clothes to distinguish themselves from Christians and they would run a course. Laurie Nussdorfer, "The Politics of Space in Early Modern Rome," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 42 (1997): 161–86, at 171. Later, the Jews' races became more degrading; they would be forced to run with animals or to run naked. Toaf, 231; "Carnival," *Jewish Encyclopedia*, www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/4057-carnival. Simonsohn comments that Jews were forced to take part in carnival celebrations "because of the Christians' desire to bait and maltreat the Jews during their festivities." Shlomo Simonsohn, *History of the Jews in the Duchy of Mantua* (Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1977), 656.

4. For more on the *giudiate*, see Cecil Roth, *The Jews in the Renaissance*, 2d ptg. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1964), 245–6; Lynn M. Gunzburg, *Strangers at Home: Jews in the Italian Literary Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 94; and Kenneth Stow, *Theater of Acculturation: The Roman Ghetto in the Sixteenth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 94–5. See also Nussdorfer, 172–3. For a recent consideration of the *giudiate* in Croatia, see Ivan Lozica, "The Invention of the *Giudiate*," *Narodna umjetnost: Croatian Journal of Ethnology and Folklore Research* 39.1 (2002): 65–74.

5. Donald Beecher, "Leone de' Sommi and Jewish Theatre in Renaissance Mantua," *Renaissance and Reformation* 17.2 (1993) (1993): 5–19, at 14.

6. Simonsohn, *History of the Jews*, 106.

7. Beecher, 15. See also Iain Fenlon, *Music and Patronage in Sixteenth-Century Mantua*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 37.

8. "Talmud, Burning of," Jewish Virtual Library, www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0019_0_19544.html.

9. Susan Parisi writes that "by the beginning of the seventeenth century, Jewish populations were concentrated in the territories of Mantua . . . Venice, and to a lesser degree, in Tuscany." Quoted in Barbara Sparti, "Jewish Dancing-Masters and 'Jewish Dance' in Renaissance Italy: Guglielmo Ebreo and Beyond," in *Seeing Israeli and Jewish Dance*, ed. Judith Brin Ingber (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011), 235–50, at 242.

10. For the less harsh policies of Guglielmo in the early years of his term, see Donald C. Sanders, *Music at the Gonzaga Court in Mantua* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012), 59.

11. Don Harrán, *Salamone Rossi: Jewish Musician in Late Renaissance Mantua* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 25.

12. The Jews were told by Col. Dietrich Stein they were expelled from Mantua on 28 July, 1630 and had to leave within three days. Simonsohn, *History of the Jews*, 54. The Jews petitioned the Emperor to be re-admitted to Mantua, and the Emperor complied on 2 September, 1630. The Jews were to be readmitted to Mantua and were to have their stolen property restored. *Ibid.*, 59. For the Jewish ghetto in Mantua, see Don Harrán, *Salamone Rossi*, 39–44. For other ghettos, see Benjamin Ravid, "All Ghettos Were Jewish Quarters but Not All Jewish Quarters Were Ghettos," *Jewish Culture and History* 10.2–3 (2008): 5–24, reprinted in *The Frankfurt Judengasse: Jewish Life in an Early Modern German City*, ed. Fritz Backhaus *et al.* (Edgware, Middlesex: Vallentine–Mitchell, 2010), 5–22.

The first Jewish ghetto was established in Venice, where the Senate made the following decree on 29 March 1516:

BE IT DETERMINED that, to prevent such grave disorders and unseemly occurrences, the following measures shall be adopted, i.e. that all the Jews who are at present living in different parishes within our city, and all others who may come here, until the law is changed as the times may demand and as shall be deemed expedient, shall be obliged to go at once to dwell together in the houses in the court within the Geto at San Hieronimo, where there is plenty of room for them to live.

This translation, which is Benjamin Ravid's, is reprinted in *Venice: A Documentary History, 1450–1630*, ed. David Chambers and Brian Pullan (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 338.

13. Simonsohn, *History of the Jews*, 106.

14. *Ibid.*, 2–3. Simonsohn feels that the presence of these two Jews indicates that there was a settlement in Mantua at the time.

15. *Ibid.*, 104. For information on Jews and printing, see Paul F. Grendler, *The University of Mantua, the Gonzaga, and the Jesuits, 1584–1630* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 6; and David Amram, *The Makers of Hebrew Books in Italy* (1963; reprint, London: Holland Press, 1988), 32, 322–4.

16. See Grendler, 6. Also, Donald Beecher and Massimo Ciavolella, “Introduction: The Life and Works of Leone de’ Sommi,” in Leone de’ Sommi, *The Three Sisters*, trans. and annot. Donald Beecher and Massimo Ciavolella (Ottawa: Dovehouse Editions, 1993), 7–23. Beecher and Ciavolella’s source for the figure of 200 for the Jewish population is S. W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 2d ed., vol. 14 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 87.

17. Beecher and Ciavolella, 12–13; Grendler, 6.

18. Bonfil, 6. For example, in his play *Tsahoth B’dihuta d’ Kiddushin* (A Comedy of Betrothal, 1550), de’ Sommi superimposed the typical Renaissance comedy of marriage on Jewish characters. The play exemplifies Bonfil’s notion of the mirroring of Christian ideas in a Jewish context, in this case Christian ideas about love.

19. “Rather than being a measure directed against the Jews alone, censorship was initiated precisely because Christians were reading Jewish literature”; Raz-Krakotzkin, 2–3, quote on 2. For general comments about the importance of Bonfil’s work as a revision of previous generations of Jewish scholarship on the Renaissance and Counter-Reformation, see *ibid.*, 183–4. Mantua was a center for the publication of Hebrew texts in the mid-sixteenth century; see Grendler, 6.

20. Raz-Krakotzkin, 2–3, quote on 3.

21. On justifications for the presence of Jews in Italian cities, see Bonfil, 36–44. A Mantuan document from 1540 specifically stipulates “toleration of the Jews” (“tolerauorint mi hac Civitate, et dominio Mantua Hebreos”), guarantees them safety in their synagogues and during religious rituals and ceremonies, and grants them permission to work in Mantua and its domains. The document refers to the fact that since the predecessors of Mantuan rulers had always tolerated Jews in the city and the dominions of Mantua and allowed them freedom to engage in mercantile activities and to pray and attend to their duties, rites, ceremonies, and celebrations, those rights are continued. “Cum Illmi [Illustrissimi] Dmi [Domini] predecessores uri semper tolerauorint mi hac Civitate, et dominio Mantua Hebreos et eos publice versari, negociaq, sua libere agere, sinagogasg [sic], tenero, ac officia, ritus, et cerimonias suas celebrare” (Since our most Illustrious Lord Predecessors have always tolerated Jews in the city and the dominions of Mantua and have allowed them to officially engage, act freely, go to the synagogues, perform their duties, celebrate their ritual ceremonies). The document begins in Latin and continues in Italian, with specific clauses about what goods the Jews could trade. It is dated to the period of Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga’s regency for Francesco III Gonzaga, the eventual duke of Mantua. Cardinal Ercole was known for being favorable to the Jews during his twenty-year regency. Edict of Toleration of Jews (tolerauorint mi hac Civitate, et dominio Mantua Hebreos), 28 October 1540, B3389, C8, Archivio Gonzaga, Archivio di Stato di Mantova (hereafter AG, ASM).

22. Simonsohn, *History of the Jews*, 104. In fact, the Edict of Toleration noted above allows Jews “to be able to buy outside of the city and its dominions woolen cloths, be they garments used for various things or those made of foreign cloth, men’s garments as well as women garments, and to be able to have and sell these freely, without any impediment in the city and her dominions” (Possano comprar fuori dell città, et dominio prefato ni qualunq, luogo panni di lana, cioè vesti usate d’ogni sorte anchor che fassero di panno forastiero cosi da huomo come da donna, et quelli tener, et vender liberamente senza aluno impedimento in la città et Dominio prenotata”). Edict of Toleration of Jews, 28 October 1540. The fact that Jews may have been able to bring in exotic foreign garments may explain why the *mise-en-scènes* they created in their performances were noted as being distinctive. But this speculation remains to be examined more closely in a future essay.

23. Simonsohn, *History of the Jews*, 104.

24. *Ibid.*, 104, 322.

25. Quoted in *ibid.*, 105. Simonsohn translates the term “Università” in Italian as “University” but explains that it means a community that was similar to a guild: “The term ‘university of the Jews’

did not come into use by chance, and it reflects the special character of Jewish communal organization in Italy in this period. The name ‘university’ is given to the Christian merchants’ and artisans’ guilds, that is to say the corporate bodies of Christian society.” Simonsohn, 322.

26. Leone de’ Sommi to Duke Guglielmo Gonzaga, 20 May 1578, B3389, C198, AG, ASM. Simonsohn and Francesca Trivellato identify the *massari* as elected officials who were charged with overseeing community issues and legal disputes. Simonsohn, *History of the Jews*, 340–3; Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 76–7.

The Jewish community in Piedmont was similarly known as the Università. A document from Turin dated 4 December 1582 shows that there were three representatives (*agenti eletti*) who were elected by the Jewish community, which was known as *l’Università delli hebrei* of the Duchy of Piedmont. The document is held in the Archivio di Stato Turin and is reprinted in Renata Segre, ed., *The Jews in Piedmont*, vol. 2: 1582–1723 (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities and Tel Aviv University, 1988), 631.

27. An equivalent situation was found in Venice, which also had a corporation, or Università, for the Jews. There Jews were obliged, among other things, to provide loans to the poor of Venice. Documents reveal that Jews were bound to provide these loans at a rate of interest that was strictly regulated by the Venetian authorities. See the *condotta* (agreement) between Ebrei Tedeschi (German Jews) and the Venetian Senate of 1624 for an example. Chambers and Pullan, 342, 348.

28. As Simonsohn states, it “served as the basis for the autonomy of the Jewish community.” Simonsohn, *History of the Jews*, 105.

29. *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*, 106. In the Venetian charter of the Jewish merchants of 1589 we gain a sense of the benefits that the Jewish community as a whole could gain from such agreements. Daniel Rodriga, a wealthy and powerful Sephardi merchant, petitioned for this charter on behalf of the Sephardi Jewish merchants of Venice. (The Sephardi community comprised Jews who had lived in Spain and were exiled in 1492, during the Spanish Inquisition.) In the charter, Rodriga pledged to bring more merchants and business to Venice (which was competing with Ancona at the time). In exchange, Venetian authorities would increase taxes and excise duties. He also asked for another ghetto to be constructed to accommodate the Jews in Spalato (Split); for security for Jewish residents of Venice; and for Jews to be granted the rights of citizens, freedom of travel, and the ability to leave should the charter be revoked. Venetian authorities reworded the charter and eliminated the clause about granting Jews the rights of citizens. The charter was originally published by Benjamin Ravid and is reprinted in Chambers and Pullan, 346–9.

31. Leone de’ Sommi to Duke Guglielmo Gonzaga, 20 May 1578, B3389, C198, AG, ASM.

32. “L’humilissa. Università de gli heb’ Et li Banchieri di Manta, sendo oppressi da molte, et insopportabil granezze ordinarie et straordinarie, volendo compartir le tasse et le altre spece comuni fra loro.” *Ibid.*

33. Hayyim Schirmann, “Yehudah Sommo,” *Pargod: Bamah Le-Enyane Sifrut ve-Tiatron* [Pargod: Theatre Art and Literature] (June 1963): 9–12, at 9.

34. Beecher and Ciavolella, 13–14. Cecil Roth records this marriage as that of Maddalena Gonzaga, sister of the marchese of Mantua (Francesco II Gonzaga), to Giovanni Sforza, lord of Pesaro. He writes that “the *pièce de resistance* of the resplendent wedding celebrations was a dramatic performance based on the story of Judith and Holofernes, which according to a report sent home by the bride’s brother[,] was staged by and at the expense of the local Jewish community.” Cecil Roth, *The Jews in the Renaissance* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1959), 246.

35. Fenlon, 40. Fenlon was likely drawing on Cecil Roth.

36. *Ibid.*, 40–1; Roth, 248. Fenlon suggests it was Duke Ercole I of Ferrara, but as Ercole died in 1505, it is likely Fenlon meant Alfonso d’Este (1476–1534), son of Ercole I d’Este. Roth records that the two Jewish actors who were requested from Ferrara were “Solomon and Jacob (*Salamone e Jacopo ebrei*).”

37. Fenlon, 40–1. Roth also confirms that by 1525, Jewish performances had become established as a contribution to state performances. Roth, 248.

38. “Domani si farà una altra comedia pur a casa delli figlioli del q.m s.r Zoanne, quale recitaràno li Judei, per esser anche per loro composta: et così spassaremo questo poco Carnevale.” Ducal Secretary Vincenzo de’ Preti to Isabella d’Este, 24 February 1525, B2506, C267, AG, ASM. While the actors are clearly labeled as Jewish, neither Mr. Zoanne, nor his children appear to be, and they are not referred to as “Judei.” (The letter was published in Alessandro D’Ancona, *Origini del teatro italiano, Libri tre con due appendici sulla rappresentazione drammatica del contado toscano e sul teatro montovano nel sec. XVI*, 2 vols. [Turin: Ermanno Loescher, 1891], 2:398. In that version, there is some slight variation in the spelling of some of the words from the spellings that appear in the original document; I have used the spellings from the archival document.) Roth suggests the performance may have been based on a Purim Spiel because the holiday of Purim, during the Hebrew month of Adar, which corresponds to February on the Gregorian calendar, was the one time during the Jewish year when theatrical enactments were allowed. Roth, 248. But Simonsohn suggests that it was an original play. Simonsohn, *History of the Jews*, 657. See also Fenlon, 41n.

39. Ducal Secretary Vincenzo Preti to Isabella d’Este, 27 February 1525, B2506, C269, AG, ASM.

40. Ducal Secretary Vincenzo Preti to Isabella d’Este, 20 February 1525, B2506, C266, AG, ASM.

41. Simonsohn notes that for the 1554 production, Jacob Sulani and Samuel Shalit directed and were heads of community. Simonsohn quoted in Fenlon, 41n88. [Fenlon references Simonsohn’s earlier Hebrew, *Toledot ha-Yehudim bedukhasit Mantova*, 2 vols. (Jerusalem, 1962–4).]

42. D’Ancona wrote, “[G]li israeliti mantovani non rallegrarono soltanto colle musiche la corte de’ Gonzaga, bensì anche coll’arte scenica, come inventori e come attori” (The Jews of Mantova cheered the Gonzaga court not only with music but also with scenic [visual and performative] art, as inventors and actors). D’Ancona, 2:401.

43. “[E] fu dita molto bene, e si sentirono concerti per intermedj eccellentissimi, e sopra tutto si vide una molto bella scena con prospettive mirabili, e carica di lumi.” D’Ancona, 2:402. D’Ancona is quoting from “An Account of the Voyage of the Archdukes of Austria, Their Excellence from Trent to Milan in 1563” (“Relazioni di un viaggio da Trento a Milano fatto nel 1563 dagli Arciduchi d’Austria ecc.”), Trent Archives, Trent. D’Ancona is quoting the source from another source, which he cites as “Mariotti, 1889, anno VIII, pag. 83.”

44. Borrowing from classical sources such as Terence and Plautus, Ariosto produced his signature five-act structure around the Renaissance themes of love, conflict between parents and children, and issues related to marriage. He achieved this with the aid of the favored Renaissance theatrical device of disguise. Ariosto’s play was written in prose in 1509 and performed in Ferrara during carnival. He revised the play into verse form sometime between 1528 and 1531. For more on *I suppositi* and Ariosto, see Peter Brand, “Ariosto and Ferrara,” in *A History of Italian Theatre*, ed. Joseph Farrell and Paolo Puppa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 44–50.

45. Fenlon, 41.

46. Claudia Burattelli, *Spettacoli di corte a Mantova tra Cinque e Seicento* (Florence: Casa Editrice Le Lettere, 1999), 136.

47. As Beecher and Ciavolella state: “However the accent is placed, the record of regular performances by a permanent Jewish troupe, formed as early as the 1520s, is beyond dispute.” Beecher and Ciavolella, 13.

48. “Il primo marzo i signatori della città, i rappresentanti delle arti, gli ebrei, sei compagnie di fanferia hanno accompagnato l’ingresso dell’Imperatore in Praga.” Ducal Secretary Gianfrancesco Anguissola to Duke Guglielmo of Mantua, 3 July 1567, B450, C22, AG, ASM. The duke was in Casale.

49. Burattelli, 167.

50. Guglielmo was too young to assume power in 1550 when his predecessor died, so his mother, Margherita, and uncle, Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga, acted as regents on his behalf until he was ready to assume the reins of power in 1556, at age 18. Various riots against the Jews occurred during the celebrations of Guglielmo’s marriage to Eleanora of Austria in 1561 and during the celebrations for the birth of his son, Vincenzo, in 1562. In these riots, Jewish shops were looted, documents and

promissory notes were burned, and Jewish houses were attacked. Although Guglielmo did not instigate the riots and sent soldiers to defend the Jews, the riots did occur under his rule. Simonsohn, *History of the Jews*, 25.

51. The bull is reprinted in its original Latin with an English translation in Kenneth R. Stow, *Catholic Thought and Papal Jewry Policy, 1555–1593* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1977), 294–8. Parts of the bull are also translated in Bonfil, 67–8. For a recent discussion of the bull and its impact, see Benjamin Ravid, “Cum Nimis Absurdum and the Ancona Auto-da-Fé Revisited: Their Impact on Venice and Some Wider Reflections,” *Jewish History* 26.1–2 (2012): 85–100. I thank the anonymous reader for directing me to this source. The bull began, “As it is completely absurd and intolerable in the utmost that the Jews, who through their own fault were condemned by God to eternal servitude, should now be ungrateful towards Christians” and then announced a series of changes in economic and religious policies toward Jews. At first, the change was most visible in an order that the Talmud be confiscated and burned in Rome in 1553. The confiscation of the Talmud then spread to Venice, Ferrara, and Mantua, centers for the publishing and printing of Jewish books.

52. For example, Guglielmo’s wife established a “house of converts” where Jewish converts to Catholicism could find food and shelter. Simonsohn, *History of the Jews*, 26–7.

53. “L’esibizione dei sudditi ebrei sulla vetrina internazionale del palcoscenico di corte aveva probabilmente costituito, all’epoca guglielmina, uno dei tanti segnali di autonomia del ducato dall’influenza della Santa Sede” (The performance of the Jewish subjects in the international showcase of the court stage probably constituted, in the time of Guglielmo, one of many signs of the autonomy of the duke from the influence of the Holy See). Burattelli, 167.

54. On the regulation of Jewish marriages, see Beecher and Ciavolella, 13; and Beecher, 5. The Catholic Church considered any marriage that was not performed by a priest, with three witnesses, and after the publication of banns to be clandestine. Thus, by definition, all Jewish marriages were “clandestine.” On forced baptism, see Simonsohn, *History of the Jews*, 26–7.

55. “Hebrei, liquali oltre che alle volte sono di scandalo alli Christiani, con la troppo famigliar conversazione e che hanno insieme danno loro occasioni di commettere delli errori” (Jews, some of whom sometimes are scandalous to Christians, with conversation that is all too familiar and who both have given themselves opportunities to commit errors). Decree against Contact and Fine If Such Contact Occurs, 1 March 1576, B3389, C189, AG, ASM.

56. “Volendo noi che gli Hebrei quali per a commodità de sudditi nostri tolleriamo che posanno habitare in questa nostra Città, & Dominio, siano in modo differenti dalli Christiani, che senza esser conosciuti non possano meschiarsi con essi” (We would wish that the Jews whom we tolerate for the convenience of our subjects and are allowed to live in our city and dominion would be marked as different from Christians, who would not commingle with them if they were identified [as Jews]). B3389, C193, AG, ASM. The letter is dated 28 August 1577.

57. Burattelli, 166–7. The list of total performances for carnival is longer. See Shlomo Simonsohn, “Lehakat ha-Teatron Shel Yehudei Mantuva” (The Theatre Troupe of the Jews of Mantua), in *Pargod: Bamah Le-Enyane Sifrut ve-Tiatron* [Pargod: Theatre Art and Literature], ed. Arieh Mark (June, 1963), 13–17, at 14.

58. “Negli anni successivi, invece, l’impiego degli ebrei si limitò alle sole recite carnevalesche.” Burattelli, 167. She also adds that as music became more important to life in Mantua, Jewish actors were increasingly excluded; but she affirms the turn to Counter-Reformation as the true cause.

59. “In seguito la stessa predilezione per il teatro musicale avrebbe contribuito a escludere gli attori ebrei dalle rappresentazioni di maggiore importanza, ma la causa principale di questa progressiva riduzione del ruolo della comunità israelitica nel contesto spettacolare gonzaghesco è quasi sicuramente da cercare nel graduale adeguamento ai dettami della Controriforma avviato da Vincenzo e accelerato dai suoi successori.” Ibid. Burattelli and Simonsohn described the attitudes of Vincenzo and Guglielmo toward Jews differently. Writing from the perspective of Jewish history, Shlomo Simonsohn presents Guglielmo as more punitive than Vincenzo; see Simonsohn, *History of the Jews*, 662–3, on Vincenzo. Writing from a theatre historian’s perspective, Claudia Burattelli

emphasizes (1) that Guglielmo's actions were motivated by his desire for sovereignty from the Holy See; and (2) that Vincenzo was more accommodating than Guglielmo to the Holy See. Burattelli feels that Vincenzo's capitulation to the pope marks the beginning of the decline of Jewish theatre during his reign, a process that led to the end of public performance by Jews in 1650.

60. Simonsohn, *History of the Jews*, 663.

61. "Perciò volendo Noi provvedere, che i figliuoli d'Hebrei, conforme all'antico costume di Santa Chiesa, non siano battezzati, senza saputa delli loro padri, & madri, Ò almeno d'uno di loro, accchioche il sacramēto del Battesimo proceda senza fraude, & anco à fine, che in questa nostra Città, et suo Dominio . . . posiano vivere senza sospetto, così gl'Hebrei, come i Christiani insieme con i figliuoli, & famiglie loro." Edict of Toleration of Jews, 17 January 1588, B3389, C201–2, AG, ASM.

62. Ibid.

63. D'Ancona wrote, "[G]li israeliti poterono in Mantova esercitarsi oltre che al traffico e al cambio, anche alle più culte discipline." D'Ancona, 2:398–9.

64. "Abbiamo qui un fatto nuovo e curioso: le recite di commedie fatte dagli Ebrei mantovani per ordine o col consenso, e ad ogni modo alla presenza della Corte. La *Università* israelitica di Mantova era, a quel che emerge dai documenti, una specie di compagnia comica permanente al servizio de' principi: aveva almeno nel suo seno individui sempre pronti a far da attori. E questo fatto, del quale via via vedremo le prove, raccogliendole tutt'insieme per una serie non breve di anni, attesta insieme la tolleranza de' sovrani e la cultura della famiglia giudaica mantovana" (We have here a new and curious fact: the recitation of comedies by the Jews of Mantua by order and consent and in any case at the presence of the court. The Jewish community of Mantua was, as apparent in the documents, a kind of permanent theatre company at the dukes' service which always had actors at the ready to perform. And this fact, for which we will see more and more proof over a number of years, attests both to the tolerance of the sovereigns and the assimilation and artistic merit of the Jewish Mantuan family). D'Ancona, 2:398.

65. Beecher and Ciavolella, 13. See also Burattelli, 142–4.

66. Beecher and Ciavolella, 13–14. Nonetheless, Beecher suggests that the connection between performance and taxation, however plausible, is still conjectural: "Nowhere do contemporary documents specify directly that the plays were employed as a negotiating tool, or even that they were perceived to be a form of taxation." Beecher, 7.

67. Simonsohn quotes from the community minute book. Simonsohn, *History of the Jews*, 663.

68. Simonsohn records that the organizers of the event, Meir Basan, Shmuel Moshe Meliashirili, and Mordechi Memili, stated that de' Sommi reimbursed the community with these funds because he did not want to take its money for his work in the theatre. Simonsohn, "Lehakat ha-Teatron Shel Yehudei Mantuva," 14.

69. Beecher and Ciavolella, 17. Although de' Sommi wrote the play for the carnival of 1587, that performance was postponed. Beecher and Ciavolella suspect that a performance of this play may have been mounted in 1589 but note that it was definitely produced during the carnival of 1598, when it was directed by Abraham Sarfati.

70. "Hieri si rappresentò una commedia d'istrioni hebrei, che non fu mal recitata affatto, et fu quella degli *Ingiusti sdegni*, con intermezzi piacevoli, ma di poca invention et spesa." D'Ancona, 2:426. The letter is dated 2 May 1584.

71. "Non fu molto bella in sè, ma fu ornata di bellissimo intermedi et di regalissimo apparato di scena." Quoted in *ibid.*, 2:422.

72. Simonsohn, *History of the Jews*, 664.

73. The *massaro* for the performance was Abramo da Udine. The archival record includes a receipt for payments made by Abramo and a note about the items that were loaned for the performance, which included candles (*candeline*). "Lista delle persone che hanno partecipato all commedia 'Accessi de Amor'" (List of the people who participated in the play 'Accessi de Amor' [The Pangs of Love]), ca. 17 February 1605, F9, C1: 3, ADCEM. Elsewhere the file notes that woman in the Jewish community named Zipora was to be reimbursed for a contribution she made to the performances (67).

74. Burattelli, 156.

75. See “Concessione della licenza di ‘andare di notte senza il lume’ per i partecipiani alla commedia” (Concession for a license to walk at night without lights so as to participate in a comedy), 1605; “Ricevuta di pagamento per fabbricare scarpe ad uso della commedia” (Receipt of payment for making shoes for a comedy), 11 January 1606; and “Ordine di pagamento per le persone che prestano servizio durante la commedia” (Payment order for people who work during the comedy), ca. 1605–6, F10, C1: 107, 105, and 111, respectively, ADCEM.

76. Simonsohn, *History of the Jews*, 663.

77. Simonsohn quotes the note sent from Ferrara to Mantova. Simonsohn, “Lehakat ha-Teatron Shel Yehudei Mantuva,” 15.

78. *Ibid.*; and Simonsohn, *History of the Jews*, 662.

79. “Nota delle spese per l’acquisto di dolciumi presso la spezieria del Leone, in occasione della visita del duca di Mantova in sinagoga il 3 marzo 1590” (Note of expenditure for the purchase of candy at the pharmacy of the Lion, during the visit of the Duke of Mantua in synagogue 3 March 1590), F3, C21, ADCEM.

80. D’Ancona wrote that “already on 10 March 1592 there was a precedent established and a special commission created by the Jewish community authorized the spending of 25 scudi for each such occurrence, and this happened again in the years 1594, ’96 and ’97, that being the year in which the duke died, and again in ’98” ([G]ià a’ 10 marzo 1592 erasi stabilita una volta per tutte, che la commissione speciale tratta dal seno della corporazione fosse authorizzata a spendere venticinque scudi per ciascuna di tali occorrenze, e che queste tornarono anche negli anni 1594, ’96 e ’97, ed è l’anno in cui nulla si fece per la morte del duca di Ferrara, e anche nel ’98). D’Ancona, 2:428.

81. D’Ancona quotes from a letter from the ducal secretary Annibale Cheppio: “due to the death of the Duke of Ferrara, I believe his excellence would not want to have plays performed” ([P] erchè per la morte del duca di Ferrara, credo che S. A. non avrà voglia di Commedie). Annibale Cheppio to [the Jewish community], 31 October 1597, quoted in D’Ancona, 2:428. D’Ancona identifies the duke as Alfonso II, the last duke of Ferrara, who died on 27 October 1597.

82. “Guglielmo per la gratia di Dio Duca di Mantova, & di Monferato &c. Volendo Noi Provvedere . . . Che non sia lecito alli Christiani andar sulle feste delli hebrei ne alli hebrei andar sulle feste de Christiani, sotto pena de venticinque scudi per ciascuno che contrafarà questo nostro . . . [words blotted out].” Later in the decree he institutes a fine of ten scudi for mixing with Jews or dancing with, singing with, or teaching Jews. “Che li hebrei no prattichino in Casa de Christiani, massimamēte di dōne cantare, sonar, ò ballare, ovvero per insegnare à cantare, sonare, ò ballare, se non hauranno licenza in scritto da noi, sotto pena di dieci scudi per ogni volta che contrafaranno” (That the Jews do not practice [and take equal part] in the house of Christians by singing, playing instruments or dancing, or even by teaching to sing, play instruments, or dance, unless they have written license from us, on pain of ten scudi for each time that they violate this). Decree against Contact and Fine If Such Contact Occurs, 1 March 1576. B3389, C189, AG, ASM.

83. Beecher and Ciavolella, 17.

84. Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 129.

85. For examples of this distinction, see letters written by two people who attended performances. One was Belisario Vinta, secretary to the archduke of Tuscany, who on 2 May 1584 wrote to the grand duke of Tuscany (Cosimo I de’ Medici) that “Hier si rappresentò una commedia d’istrioni hebrei” (Last night a comedy was presented by the Jewish actors). The second person was Massimiliano Cavriani (majordomo for Vincenzo Gonzaga), who refers in a letter written on 30 January 1576 to “due Comedie nella scena di Castello: una dalli Christiani e l’altra dalli Hebrei” (two plays set in Castello: one by the Christians and another by the Jews). Both quoted in D’Ancona, 2:426.

86. Simmel, 169.

87. “It should be recognized that most relationships between people can be interpreted as forms of exchange. Exchange is the purest and most developed kind of interaction, which shapes human life when it seeks to acquire substance and content.” *Ibid.*, 82.

88. *Ibid.*, 90.

89. Simmel continues: "Whoever attends a concert is satisfied with their money outlay when they hear the expected programme with the expected perfection. The artist, however, is not satisfied with the money; he also expects applause." *Ibid.*, 405.

90. *Ibid.*

91. For Simmel, the exchange remains subjective and relative: "Value develops in the interval that obstacles, renunciation and sacrifice interpose between the will and its satisfaction. The process of exchange consists in the mutual determination of taking and giving, and it does not depend upon a particular object having previously acquired a value for a particular subject." *Ibid.*, 90.

92. Philip Goodchild, *Theology of Money* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

93. *Ibid.*, 203.

94. *Ibid.*, 17, where Goodchild continues: "Money circulates between and participates in all three dimensions. It is an instrument of exchange, a promise of value, and a measure of value."

95. Goodchild disagrees with views that highlight the subjective nature of value: "one cannot presuppose, however, that such subjective choices are independent of the operations of the market." *Ibid.*, 87.

96. *Ibid.*, 265n32.

97. Simonsohn, *History of the Jews*, 27.

98. "Ricevuta di pagamento di mille scudi d'oro come dono dell'università degli Ebrei a Sua Altezza Serenissima" (Receipt of payment of one thousand gold scudi as a gift from the Università of the Jews for His Serene Highness), 28 August 1579, F1, C60, ADCEM.

99. "Ricevuta relativa a una tassa speciale imposta ai 'non contribuenti' dell'Università degli Ebrei di Mantova" (Received from a special tax imposed on "non-taxpayers" of the University of the Jews of Mantua), ca. 1579–80, F1, C62, ADCEM.

100. On occasion, the Jewish performers who excelled at their craft were allowed greater mobility and did not have to wear the branding sign. This was the case for de' Sommi and for Simone Basilea, a character actor who was lauded for his comedic presentation. As late as 1612, the year the ghetto was created, Basilea was allowed to "go and be in whatever city and place in our state, and recite comedies without having a sign on his hat or in another place, as other Jews must do, except in Mantova, where we would like that he will have one single sign" (andare et stare in qualsivoglia città et luoghi dei nostri stati, et recitar comedie senza portar segno alcuno al capèllo o in altro luogo come fanno gl'altri hebrei, eccetto che in Mantova, dove vogliamo che porti il solito segno). Burattelli, 162.

101. De' Sommi wrote, "Leone de Sommi hebreo, assicurato dalla benignità di quella, s'induce a chiederle per singular gratia et favore, un decreto di poter egli solo per anni X dare stanza in Mant.a da rappresentare comedie, a coloro che per prezzo ne vanno recitando, offerendosi egli dare ogni anno a' poveri della Misericordia, sacchi due di formento per mostrarsi in parte grato de l'havuta gratia, overo il prezzo di quello, a chi più piacerà a l'Ecc. V., il che, benchè senza suo merito, per gratia ricerca, a piedi di quella devotamente inchinandosi" (Leone de' Sommi the Jew, assured by the good will [of the duke] brings himself to ask him by his singular grace and favor, for a decree to permit him for only ten years to have a room in Mantua in which to present plays, for a price, and he would offer in exchange to give each year to the poor of the Misericordia two sacks of grain [or wheat] to show some gratitude of receiving this grace, and he is also ready to offer that price to anyone else that would most please your grace, and that is what this one devotedly bowing at your feet, is looking for by grace, though without any merit on his own part). De' Sommi to the Duke, 15 April 1567, quoted in D'Ancona, 2:405.

102. Raz-Krakotzkin, 24.

103. *Ibid.*, 25.

104. Simonsohn, "Lehakat ha-Teatron Shel Yehudei Mantuva," 15.

105. *Ibid.* Simonsohn cites documents in the ADCEM. Details about this first decade of the seventeenth century are found in the file for 1605–6, F10, C1, ADCEM. The file contains various receipts for performances, as "Concessione dell licenza di 'andare di notte senza il lume'" (Concession for a license to walk at night without lights), payment orders for people who took part in the performance of the play, receipts for shoes to be used for the play, list of items such as candles

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needed for a ballet, and information about the specific payments for the *massari* of the various performances.

106. Simonsohn, "Lehakat ha-Teatron Shel Yehudei Mantuva," 16.

107. This is the interpretation Simonsohn takes from Jewish archival sources. *Ibid.*