

# *The Livornese Slaves in Algiers*

## The Jewish Question and Political Theatre in Late Eighteenth-Century Tuscany

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**The bulk of historical research** on Jews at the time of the Enlightenment has tended to focus on France, Prussia, and the German-speaking Habsburg domains. Yet there is much to be gained by shifting our attention to a different geography of the eighteenth-century Jewish question. The Tuscan port city of Livorno, a busy hub connecting the western and eastern shores of the Mediterranean, is an ideal vantage point from which to explore public discourse about the Jewish condition in the 1780s. Adopting a more deliberate Mediterranean perspective reveals that the issue of Jewish civil integration did not only intersect with classic concerns about their economic role and incorporation into the body politic, as highlighted by historians focusing on northern Europe. Instead, a Mediterranean viewpoint alerts us to the nexus between processes of Jewish emancipation and debates about abolitionism and the ransom of captives, an area in which Livornese Jewish merchants were particularly active. By training our gaze specifically on Livornese Jews of North African descent, usually ignored in histories of civil inclusion, we can illuminate intra-Jewish frictions and add a layer of complexity to the narrative of Jewish emancipation.

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Livorno's large Jewish community (also known as *nazione ebrea*) was atypical compared to those in other parts of Italy or Europe, since it was protected by generous privileges enshrined in the "Livornina" charters. First issued by Ferdinand I de Medici in 1591 and 1593, as Jews on Italian soil were being increasingly confined to ghettos, these laws were routinely confirmed until 1859, when Tuscany joined the Kingdom of Italy and Jews were officially emancipated.<sup>1</sup> These unusual conditions affected the perception and self-perception of Livornese Jews. As is well known, the Jewish condition in western Europe came under scrutiny in the second half of the eighteenth century. Jews became the object of lively debates about their necessary "improvement" both in Prussia, with the publication of Christian Wilhelm Dohm's *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden* (On the civil improvement of the Jews) in 1781, and in France, where in 1785 the Metz academy launched a *concours* entitled "Are there means to make Jews happier and more useful?"<sup>2</sup> In the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Jews became the subject of emancipatory policies conceived to make them "useful and serviceable to the state" thanks to Joseph II's *Toleranzedikt* (Edict of Toleration) of 1782.<sup>3</sup> Livorno's *nazione ebrea*, however, played another role completely on the stage of public discourse: with its members singled out as excellent traders by foreign observers and the Habsburg-Lorraine administration alike, and considered meritorious for promoting Tuscan economic growth, the relative peace and prosperity enjoyed by Livornese Jewry were proffered as an example of already successful integration.<sup>4</sup>

Within Livorno itself, however, the situation was more complex than the idealized image presented in well-meaning Enlightenment depictions—such as the fictional Hebrew travelogue *Igerot Meshulam* by Isaac Euchel<sup>5</sup> or Giuseppe Gorani's

1. On the Livornina charters, see Renzo Toaff, *La nazione ebrea a Livorno e a Pisa (1591–1700)* (Florence: Olschki, 1990), 41–51 and 419–35 for the text of the 1591 and 1593 charters; Bernard Dov Cooperman, "Trade and Settlement: The Establishment and Early Development of the Jewish Communities in Leghorn and Pisa (1591–1626)" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1976), 248–378; Lucia Frattarelli Fischer, *Vivere fuori dal ghetto. Ebrei a Pisa e Livorno, secoli XVI–XVIII* (Turin: Silvio Zamorani, 2008). On ghettos in Italy, see Michaël Gasperoni, ed., "Le siècle des ghettos. La marginalisation sociale et spatiale des juifs en Italie au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle," special issue, *Dix-septième siècle* 282, no. 1 (2019).

2. Christian Wilhelm Dohm, *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden* (Berlin: F. Nicolai, 1781). On Dohm's treatise, see Robert Liberles, "From Toleration to *Verbesserung*: German and English Debates on the Jews in the Eighteenth Century," *Central European History* 22 (1989): 3–32. On the Metz academy competition, see Ronald Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews: Representations of Jews in France, 1715–1815* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 82–95 and 126–31; Pierre Birnbaum, "*Est-il des moyens de rendre les Juifs plus utiles et plus heureux?*" *Le concours de l'académie de Metz (1787)* (Paris: Éd. du Seuil, 2017).

3. The bibliography on the debate over Jewish emancipation is enormous. For a recent reinterpretation of the process, see David Sorkin, *Jewish Emancipation: A History across Five Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

4. Francesca Bregoli, *Mediterranean Enlightenment: Livornese Jews, Tuscan Culture, and Eighteenth-Century Reform* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 208–38.

5. Isaac Euchel, "Igerot Meshulam ben Uriyah ha-eshtemoi," *Ha-Measef* 6 (1770): 171–76 and 245–49.

elaborate praise of the *nazione ebraica* in his *Memoires*<sup>6</sup>—that used Livornese Jewry as a foil for broader discourses about toleration. In the port city, the Catholic elites looked askance at the perceived privileges of the Jewish community, which comprised around ten percent of the population, while the lower classes harbored deep-seated anti-Jewish hostility fueled by long-standing religious aversion and economic resentment. The exotically garbed North African Jewish merchants, in particular, drew the suspicion of Livornese Christians and of the local government for their links to Algerian and Tunisian interests, and were sometimes accused of being spies.<sup>7</sup>

For all these reasons, a Livornese perspective—approaching the Jewish question in a Mediterranean key—serves as a corrective to the Germano- and Franco-centric focus of the historiography and complicates our understanding of minority-majority relations as Enlightenment debates on toleration and Jewish integration flourished in western Europe. To deprovincialize and expand the scope of the inquiry, we adopt a trans-Mediterranean focus, considering the relations between Livorno and Algiers and how the real and imagined role played by North African Jewish merchants in the Mediterranean slave trade factored in Livornese debates (and social uprisings) around Jewish inclusion. By considering the Mediterranean reach and ambition of the *nazione ebraica* we emphasize the unique situation of the Tuscan free port even within the inhomogeneous context of Italian Jewry.

In what follows, we claim that theatre was a crucial vehicle to contend with the Jewish question in Tuscany. Literary analysis joins historical reconstruction to more fully assess the range of representations of the Jewish ruling class that aspired to participate in Livornese public life. By carefully contextualizing *Les esclaves livournois à Alger* (The Livornese slaves in Algiers, 1786), a newly discovered French play by François Gariel that sought to intervene in the debate on the status of Jews in Livorno, we interrogate the relationship between literature and history.<sup>8</sup> This relationship is, as ever, slippery and paradoxical, especially given that the play was a failure. Written at a time when the Catholic Livornese elites were intent on excluding Jews from the city's theater and its collective management, *Les esclaves* was most likely never performed and does not seem to have had any lasting effect on the destinies of Livornese Jews. As we will see, the Livornese case destabilizes

6. Joseph Gorani, *Mémoires secrets et critiques des cours, des gouvernements, et des mœurs des principaux États de l'Italie* (Paris: Buisson, 1793) 3:120–25; the text reflects Gorani's sojourn in Livorno in 1788.

7. This accusation had particular currency in the late seventeenth century. See *The Case of Many Hundreds of Poor English-Captives, in Algier: Together with Some Remedies to Prevent Their Increase, Humbly Represented to Both Houses of Parliament* (London: s. n., 1680); *Avvisi italiani, ordinarii e straordinarii, dell'anno 1687* (Vienna: Gio. Van Ghelen, 1687), vol. 4, no. 66, August 17; Pauline Rocca and Andrea Addobbati, "Le rachat de l'esclave: les mésaventures livournoises d'un jeune subrécargue durant la guerre anglo-algéroise de 1669–1671," forthcoming.

8. François Gariel, *Les esclaves livournois à Alger. Comédie en deux petits actes... par l'auteur du Dialogue au Caffé du Grec* (Livorno: Jean Vincent Falorni, 1786). We discovered the play in the Biblioteca Labronica F. D. Guerrazzi in Livorno, where the only two known extant copies are held today.

a linear interpretation of the passage from civil inclusion to full emancipation.<sup>9</sup> The ostensibly privileged position of Livornese Jews did not work in their favor in the 1780s; despite some limited gains in the political sphere, discrimination persisted, and they were actively kept out of public culture—specifically, the city’s important theatrical scene.

## Theatre and Emancipation

The Jewish question entered the Livornese public sphere in the 1780s, in the wake of a reform seeking to entrust the city’s administration to political personnel on the basis of their taxable property rather than social rank. Instigated in the context of ambitious changes brought in by the grand duke of Tuscany, Peter Leopold, the reform of 1778–1780 was poorly received. Granting political rights to property owners meant letting Jewish proprietors, who owned a quarter of the city’s real estate, into the municipal administration, an eventuality that the Christian oligarchy made sure to avert. As it was, civil equality as sanctioned by the Livornina charters was already considered too generous a concession. The possibility that Jews might occupy the benches of the municipal council aroused the fiercest resistance. In the end, the grand duke had to accept a compromise. Jews and Christians would not become political equals; rather, the former would be represented on the council by a single deputy chosen by the grand duke from a list of ten names submitted by the *massari*, the leaders of the *nazione ebrea*.<sup>10</sup>

After entering the municipal council, even through the back door, the Livornese Jewish elite sensed the change in political climate and, trusting in the protection of the prince, began to claim the right to participate more fully as active members of civil society. Theatre, to which Livornese Jews had made a decisive contribution, was the chosen ground for launching a cultural battle. Many members of the Livornese Jewish community were known for cultivating lively artistic and cultural interests, and in the second half of the eighteenth century several had obtained managing roles in the city’s theatrical scene.<sup>11</sup> It was in this particular context that the first Italian translation of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s play *Die Juden* appeared in 1786, thanks to unidentified Jewish patrons seeking to draw public

9. This interpretation is associated with the “port Jew” model. See David Sorkin, “Port Jews and the Three Regions of Emancipation,” *Jewish Culture and History* 4 (2001): 31–46. Sorkin has recently nuanced his analysis relative to Livorno: Sorkin, *Jewish Emancipation*, 33.

10. Bregoli, *Mediterranean Enlightenment*, 225–32; Francesca Gavi, “La disputa sull’ingresso del deputato della ‘Nazione’ ebrea nella comunità di Livorno, lettere e memorie,” *Nuovi studi livornesi* 3 (1995): 251–71; Marcello Verga, “Proprietà e cittadinanza. Ebrei e riforma delle comunità nella Toscana di Pietro Leopoldo,” in *La formazione storica della alterità. Studi di storia della tolleranza nell’età moderna offerti a Antonio Rotondò*, vol. 3, *Secolo XVIII*, ed. H. Méchoulan et al. (Florence: Olschki, 2001), 1047–67. On the municipal reforms more generally, see Bernardo Sordi, *L’amministrazione illuminata. Riforma delle comunità e progetti di Costituzione nella Toscana leopoldina* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1991).

11. See the discussion below.

attention back to the theme of emancipation, deprovincializing the debate.<sup>12</sup> The circulation and re-elaboration of this German classic of Enlightenment toleration, originally published in 1754, reveal unexpected intellectual trajectories.

The Italian edition, published with the title *Gli ebrei*, contained an invitation addressed to Pietro Andolfati, the artistic director of the Cocomero theater in Florence, to include this Italian version of Lessing's work in the company's repertoire.<sup>13</sup> At the time, Lessing was unknown to Italian audiences and it seemed as if the translation of his old play could contribute to the battle for Jewish rights.<sup>14</sup> Within the Jewish community itself, however, Lessing's play set in motion contrasting reactions. Some of these were recorded by Gariel, a little-known playwright then residing in Livorno, who published two comedic pamphlets of his own in response to the translation.<sup>15</sup> Gariel, who liked to dub himself a *citoyen de Paris*, claimed to have arrived in the Tuscan port in 1785, in the retinue of King Ferdinand of Naples and his spouse, Queen Maria Carolina of Austria, who had been touring northern and central Italy that year.<sup>16</sup> Finding what he believed to be an extraordinarily tolerant environment, thanks to the wise government of the grand duke Peter Leopold, he settled in the city for a period of time. If in the rest of the world different religions competed with and hated each other, Gariel enthused, Livorno's nations "live[d] in the most perfect union," animated by a fraternal spirit that sprung from the "favorable speculations of commerce."<sup>17</sup> This cosmopolitan belief infuses all of his extant writings.<sup>18</sup>

12. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Gli ebrei, commedia in un atto del Sig. Lessing tradotta dal tedesco in francese e dal francese in italiano* [1754], trans. Pietro Miglioresi (Livorno: Gio. Vincenzo Falorni, 1786). The play had been translated into French five years earlier: Lessing, *Les Juifs. Comédie en un acte*, trans. J. H. E. (Paris: s. n., 1781).

13. Lessing, *Gli ebrei*, 3–4.

14. In fact, even in 1754 the publication of Lessing's *Die Juden* had left a trail of controversy because of its dramaturgical fragility and emancipationist content.

15. Copies of these pamphlets, published in quarto, are preserved in the Biblioteca Labronica. The first is *Les Juifs. Dialogue entre M. Jérémie Pouf, et M. Jonas Gay au Caffé du Grec, à l'occasion de la publication de la Comédie des Juifs originairement en allemand par Monsieur Lessing. Traduite en français, et dernièrement en italien* (Livorno: Jean Vincent Falorni, 1786). The second is *Les esclaves livournois à Alger* (see note 8 above).

16. François Gariel, *Réflexions sur l'utilité des voyages* (Livorno: Carlo Giorgi, 1785), iv.

17. *Ibid.*, 12.

18. Although the name François Gariel (which, as far as we know, may even be a pseudonym) can be clearly associated only with *Réflexions*, *Les Juifs*, and *Les esclaves*, two other pamphlets of doubtful attribution may also be linked to this figure. The first is the anonymous *Examen des causes destructives du théâtre de l'Opéra et des moyens qu'on pourroit employer pour le rétablir; ouvrage spéculatif, par un amateur de l'harmonie* (Paris: Veuve Duchesne, 1776), a plea to support opera in Paris through public subsidies. A handwritten annotation on the copy held in the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris attributes it to a certain "Gariel," although the *Nouveau dictionnaire des ouvrages anonymes et pseudonymes* by Edmond-Denis de Manne (Lyon: N. Scheuring, 1868) lists a "Joseph Gabriel from Bordeaux" as its author. The second is the *Remerciement d'un bon piémontais à monsieur \*\*\* avocat en parlement de plusieurs académies de France & des Arcades de Rome, auteur de Lettres écrites de Suisse, d'Italie, de Sicile, & de Malthe... Avec la description de la réception des comtes du Nord à Turin, de l'opéra donné à cette occasion, &*

We do not know if the Italian translation of Lessing's play, and Gariel's responses, were ever staged; but all of these works sought to amplify the debate, inviting audiences to reflect on a clearly controversial theme. The plot of *Die Juden* is well known. A thoughtful Traveler, who will be revealed as Jewish at the denouement, saves a prejudiced Prussian Baron from two thieves pretending to be Jews and teaches a lesson about toleration to his host. The unexpected confession of the Traveler's Jewishness was designed to leave the audience speechless and force it to reconsider its own biases. Lessing had wanted to see "what kind of effect it would have on stage if one were to show virtue to the public where they least expected to find it."<sup>19</sup> Prussian critics such as Johann David Michaelis, however, did not appreciate *Die Juden's* pedagogical intent and panned the play, claiming that it lacked verisimilitude. The story was improbable, and a virtuous and cultivated Jew just too unlikely.<sup>20</sup> Later apostles of Jewish emancipation were to run into similar difficulties as those encountered by Lessing: according to the axiom of *Verbesserung* (improvement), Jews were expected to first lift themselves up, culturally and morally, in order to become worthy of civil inclusion.

Gariel, who termed himself *Le Tolérant*, published his pieces in 1786.<sup>21</sup> The first of the dramatic pamphlets, a single act in French entitled *Les Juifs*, presents an ironic dialogue between two fictional Jewish café patrons—Jérémie Pouf and Jonas Gay—who vehemently criticize the recently published translation of *Die Juden*. *Les Juifs* underscores the negative reception of Lessing's plea for toleration among Livornese Jewry and their non-Jewish supporters, providing a counterpoint to

*du séjour & départ de ces princes pour la France* (Venice: Valvasense, 1783), a response to Jean-Marie Roland de La Platière's *Lettres* (Amsterdam, s. n., 1780) by a "François Gaziel Citoyen de Turin." The appendix, which concerns operatic performances staged in Turin during the visit of the heir to the Russian throne, Pavel Petrovich, and his wife Maria Feodorovna, resembles the later *Réflexions sur l'utilité des voyages*, while the main body of the *Remerciement*, dated "Paris, February 8, 1782," is similar to Gariel's Livornese production. The tone of the work, whose frontispiece is inscribed with Horace's motto *Ridendo dicere verum, quid vetat* ("A man can speak the truth with a smile"), is satirical; its form is epistolary, and the main text is preceded by a *Dialogue entre l'auteur et le colporteur* that mocks authors who write "Italian travelogues from their offices." Its signature, "the Good Piedmontese," is pseudonymous—perhaps even doubly so. All this, together with the frequent references to the writings of Francesco Algarotti, also cited in the *Réflexions*, and more generally its literary style, suggests that Gaziel and Gariel may be the same person.

19. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Lessings Werke*, 15 vols., vol. 7, *Vorreden*, ed. Julius Petersen and Waldemar von Olshausen (Berlin: Deutsches Verlagshaus Bong & Co., 1925–1935), 41.

20. Ritchie Robertson, "'Dies hohe Lied der Duldung'? The Ambiguities of Toleration in Lessing's *Die Juden* and *Nathan der Weise*," *Modern Language Review* 93 (1998): 105–20, here pp. 110–11.

21. So Gariel signs the preface to *Les Juifs*, 3. His two pieces were published the same year as the translation of Lessing's play, by the very same publisher: Giovan Vincenzo Falorni. Falorni worked for Marco Coltellini, from whose presses emerged the volumes of Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* and the works of Cesare Beccaria and Pietro Verri. At the end of the 1770s, after starting his own business, he specialized in editions with Hebrew characters: Susanna Corrieri, *Il torchio fra "palco" e "tromba."* *Uomini e libri a Livorno nel Settecento* (Modena: Mucchi, 2000).

European discourses about Jewish integration and *Verbesserung*.<sup>22</sup> Livornese Jews, as portrayed by Gariel, reacted to Lessing's parable of the virtuous Jew with incredulity and indignation. It was not the character of the Traveler that was improbable, as the German critics had maintained. Rather, it was the surprise the other characters expressed at the existence of Jewish virtue that lacked verisimilitude—and was an outrageous insult to boot.

A Northern European, non-Jewish audience considering the Jewish question within the *Verbesserung* framework would have found the genuine outrage expressed by Jérémie Pouf and Jonas Gay so paradoxical as to be instructively entertaining. However, such an overturning of expectations made perfect sense within the context of Livorno, in light of the material and cultural conditions of its Jewry. Gariel meant to impart a consoling lesson: The enemies of new principles were wrong to imagine they would lead to a fierce and inevitable conflict. Under Peter Leopold's enlightened and tolerant government, Livornese Jews did not suffer any sense of inadequacy; rather, they held tightly to the comforting discrimination guaranteed by their privileges, and mistrusted the presumed advantages of juridical equality.

Gariel's entertaining sketch delightfully skewers the preconceived ideas that the Christian majority may have held about Jews, while simultaneously offering an unconditional panegyric to the reforming government of the grand duke. It is the only work by Gariel that has drawn scholarly attention—but this playwright had more to say on the topic of Jewish inclusion. Immediately after *Les Juifs*, he published a comedy in two acts, *Les esclaves livournois à Alger*, which, as its title suggests, takes us from Livorno to Algiers, from a European to an Orientalist stage.<sup>23</sup> This text should be understood as Gariel's own dramatic response to *Die Juden*, stemming from the critiques presented in *Les Juifs* but also in dialogue with Lessing.

As was clear in *Les Juifs*, for Gariel anti-Jewish prejudice unwittingly pervaded Lessing's text.<sup>24</sup> In his tirades, Jérémie Pouf had pointedly decried the notion that honest Jews were few and far between<sup>25</sup>; in turn, *Les esclaves* rebutted that idea by presenting virtuous, confidently enlightened Jewish protagonists as a matter of fact, avoiding any allusions, even well-meaning ones, to anti-Jewish stereotypes. At the same time, the inscription on the play's frontispiece—*Sunt bona mixta malis, sunt mala mixta bonis* (good is mixed with evil, and evil is mixed with good), a Latin

22. Its subtle irony, literary references, and textual allusions are detailed in articles we have published elsewhere: Andrea Addobbati, "Jérémie Pouf e Jonas Gay. Ricerche in corso sulla nazione ebrea di Livorno e la prima traduzione italiana de *Gli ebrei* di Lessing," *Nuovi studi livornesi* 16 (2009): 171–212; Francesca Bregoli, "'Two Jews Walk into a Coffeehouse': The 'Jewish Question,' Utility, and Political Participation in Late Eighteenth-Century Livorno," *Jewish History* 24 (2010): 309–29; Bregoli, *Mediterranean Enlightenment*, 209–22. See also Yaël Ehrenfreud, "Les représentations de personnages juifs au théâtre: tradition française et réception de l'*Aufklärung*," *Dix-huitième siècle* 34 (2002): 479–96.

23. Gariel, *Les esclaves*. On Orientalism as a stage, see Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 63 and 67.

24. For a modern analysis of the ambiguity of Lessing's message of toleration, see Robertson, "'Dies hohe Lied der Duldung?'"

25. Gariel, *Les Juifs*, 25.

maxim used for comic purposes in two of Carlo Goldoni's plays<sup>26</sup>—likely refers not only to humanity's existential condition, but also to a line spoken by the Traveler in Lessing's play: "I believe that all [Nations] have good and bad in them; and so among the Jews, just as among others."<sup>27</sup> This maxim, we venture, deliberately alludes to a further complicating factor in Gariel's theatrical creation. The hero of *Les esclaves* was a member of the most despised Jewish group in Livorno, a North African merchant who owned Christian slaves and dabbled in ransoming captives.

The protagonist of Gariel's *comédie* is Abraham Benkiber. This virtuous Jewish merchant based in Algiers is a pragmatic *marchand-philosophe* who preaches toleration for all peoples and religions and happens to greatly admire the grand duke of Tuscany. He is accompanied by a devoted and competent wife, Sara, a respectful son, Jacob, and a vivacious but obedient daughter, Abigail. The plot revolves around the sale and ultimate liberation of Dorothee and Étienne, Livornese slaves captured by Abraham's neighbor Osman, a cunning yet good-hearted Muslim corsair. Romance makes an appearance, with three marriages to seal the play's happy ending, as does the theme of cosmopolitanism: in the last scene, Abraham's family prepares to leave Algiers for Livorno, where Jews can live in peace and prosperity under Peter Leopold's protection.

Like Lessing's Traveler, Abraham is morally outstanding—but what reactions would his display of virtue have provoked on the Livornese stage? Gariel's comedic flair is open to multiple interpretations. Would Abraham have amused or even shocked the less educated Christian audiences of Livorno, ill-prepared to accept the paradoxical figure of a slave-owning, enlightened Jewish merchant? A prejudiced anti-Jewish reader could have seized on Abraham's sense of cosmopolitan toleration as a source of hilarity and a rebuke to Livornese Jewish pride. To a Jewish audience and its supporters, by contrast, Gariel's limpid depiction of a most honorable Jewish merchant would have served as a vindication. Ultimately, we read Gariel's play as an effort that gently sympathizes with Livornese Jews, to be understood in light of the author's established commitment to toleration and continued praise of Peter Leopold.

The plot of *Les esclaves* was not entirely original. It was in part inspired by a moralizing French play, *Le marchand de Smyrne* (The merchant of Smyrna) by Nicolas de Chamfort (1741–1794).<sup>28</sup> Chamfort's piece, a well-liked comedy first staged in 1770 and much performed in ancien régime France, revolves around an honorable and sympathetic *Turc* named Hassan. The play opens with the protagonist, a former Muslim captive, recounting to his wife, Zayde, how he was set free in Marseille by an anonymous French benefactor, moved by his love for Zayde and his despair at their separation. From that moment on, Hassan could no longer

26. Goldoni used the motto, originally from Pliny's *Natural History* (27.9), in *Il Moliere* (act 3, scene 4) and *La conversazione* (act 1, scene 7).

27. Lessing, *Gli ebrei*, 15.

28. For the text of the play and an introduction, see Martial Poirson and Jacqueline Razgonnikoff, eds., *Théâtre de Chamfort. La jeune Indienne (1764), Le marchand de Smyrne (1770), Mustapha et Zéangir (1776)* (Vijon: Lampsaque, 2009), 122–67.



hate Christians; reunited with his beloved, he expressed his gratitude every year by buying a Christian slave and setting him free. In a lucky twist, Hassan is able to return the favor to his former savior. After Dornal (as the man is called) is captured by Hassan's neighbor, the greedy Armenian corsair Kaled, he is brought to Smyrna, where Hassan finds him and saves him from captivity. The equally generous Zayde, in turn and unbeknownst to her husband, frees Amélie, the Frenchman's betrothed. The play ends with the two couples celebrating mutual understanding between enlightened Muslims and Christians, amidst much merriment.

*Le marchand de Smyrne* offers a celebration of cosmopolitan friendship and toleration, while satirizing contemporary French mores and conveying a forceful anti-slavery message through the Orientalizing lens made popular by Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*. If the Ottoman setting allowed Chamfort to ridicule his countrymen from a safely exotic distance, Gariel set his action in the much more familiar environs of Algiers and replaced the Muslim hero—the distant Orientalist mirror held up to European hypocrisies—with an uncomfortably close Jewish one. Besides references to, and a few direct loans from, Chamfort's work, *Les esclaves* is also full of ironic hints at current events and more or less subtle allusions to other classics of French Enlightenment literature, such as Voltaire's *Candide* (1759) and the *Lettres cabalistiques* (1737–1741) by the marquis d'Argens.<sup>29</sup> In sum, Gariel's play offers an extraordinary treatment of the Jewish question in a Mediterranean key. Once its many allusions are decoded and its layers peeled back, *Les esclaves* takes us to the heart of Tuscan political debates about Jewish participation in the public sphere—and specifically the theatre. It also probes anxieties about Jewish power, intertwined with ambivalence about the prominent role of Jews in the commerce and ransom of captives, as well as the complex relations between North African Jewish immigrants and the Livornese community. We will begin by looking at the extensive Jewish involvement in the Livornese theatrical scene.

## Jews and the Theatrical Scene in Livorno

Although the curtain of *Les esclaves* falls on its characters praising the ruling Habsburg dynasty and inviting the audience to join in toleration and mutual understanding, the spirit of toleration, if it had ever really existed in Livorno, had been on the wane for quite some time. The grand duke was to a large extent responsible for this decline, as his reforming action, though well-intentioned, had clashed with the old habits,

29. Voltaire, *Candide, ou l'optimisme* [1759] (Paris: G. Boudet, 1893); Jean-Baptiste de Boyer, marquis d'Argens, *Lettres cabalistiques, ou Correspondance philosophique, historique et critique, entre deux cabalistes, divers esprits élémentaires, & le seigneur Astaroth*, 6 vols. (La Haye: Chez Pierre Paupie, 1737–1741). The work was reissued several times, in 1754, 1766, and 1769–1770. On the marquis d'Argens, see Newell Richard Bush, *The Marquis d'Argens and His Philosophical Correspondence: A Critical Study of d'Argens' Lettres juives, Lettres cabalistiques, and Lettres chinoises* (Ann Arbor: Edwards Brothers, 1953); Jean-Louis Vissière, ed., *Le marquis d'Argens: actes du colloque international de 1988* (Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'université de Provence, 1990).

privileges, and prejudices of the city's residents, including those of the lower classes. The latter complained about economic liberalization and the abolition of the office in charge of provisions and victuals, which had caused higher prices for bread and basic goods.<sup>30</sup> They also deplored ecclesiastical innovations, which they felt had stripped religion of its aura of mystery and perhaps even of its power to save, not to mention the fatal blow that the suppression of the lay confraternities had inflicted on popular sociality.<sup>31</sup> But even the ruling class, which in this mercantile city owed its preeminence to vast resources accumulated through trade, disapproved of the grand duke's policies. His physiocratic reforms had aroused understandable enthusiasm among landowners, but had not warmed the hearts of Livorno's merchants, who, if anything, were nostalgic for the old mercantilist policies.

By undermining traditional hierarchies and the corporate structure of society itself, the grand duke's modernizing despotism inevitably provoked tensions between the Christian majority and the Jewish minority, with the latter torn between accepting the tempting offer of greater integration into public life and the fear of possible retaliation if the grand duke's projects were to fail. After the municipal reforms, the dispute shifted to the political control of the theatrical scene. In particular, Livorno's Sephardic elite, which owned a significant number of boxes in the city's theater, claimed the right to have a say in the programming of plays.

Peter Leopold was aware of the educational function that theatre could perform, if only it were cured of the vulgar baseness that had instead made it a place of corruption. Since the first years of his reign, the grand duke had made clear that he would not let civil society run Tuscany's theaters as it wished. In the early 1780s he issued a series of directives meant to regulate theatrical openings, reduce opportunities for idleness and dissipation, maintain the strictest public order during performances, and prevent artists from perverting morals with their bad example. Countryside theaters were closed, and performances were allowed only in Florence, Livorno, Pisa, and Siena, provided that the seasonal program was respected. Foreign companies of actors were banned with the exception of those from France, who were in tune with the tastes of the most refined section of the Tuscan public. Without renouncing its right to preventive censorship, the government also empowered and rendered accountable the academies that owned the theaters, such as the Pergola or the Cocomero in Florence, treating them as full participants in its reformist action.<sup>32</sup>

30. Mario Mirri, *La lotta politica in Toscana intorno alle "riforme annonarie" (1764–1775)* (Pisa: Pacini, 1972).

31. Carlo Fantappiè, *Riforme ecclesiastiche e resistenze sociali. La sperimentazione istituzionale nella diocesi di Prato alla fine dell'antico regime* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1986); Diana Toccafondi, "La soppressione leopoldina delle confraternite religiose tra riformismo ecclesiastico e politica sociale," *Archivio storico pratese* 61 (1985): 143–72.

32. Maria Ines Aliverti, "Breve storia di un progetto leopoldino (1779–1788)," *Quaderni di teatro* 3 (1981): 21–33; Antonio Tacchi, "La vita teatrale a Firenze in età leopoldina. Ovvero, tutto sotto controllo," *Medioevo e Rinascimento*, n. s. 3 (1992): 361–73; Tacchi, "Della regolata vita teatrale fiorentina" (PhD diss., Università di Firenze, 1994).

In Livorno, a mercantile city without a real aristocracy, the government's partner for theatre politics was Pier Gaetano Bicchierai, the owner of the city's theater, the San Sebastiano. Bicchierai was a playwright and a great cultural promoter, although today he is remembered principally as one of the editors who in 1770–1778, under the auspices of the Tuscan government, published the third edition in French of Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*.<sup>33</sup> Since 1767 he had intervened in the vexed question of the utility of the theaters by dedicating two tragic compositions to the young Peter Leopold, preceded by a theoretical essay in which he outlined a complete plan for the moralization of performances and suggested many of the measures that the prince would later adopt.<sup>34</sup> As the master of the Livornese theatrical scene, Bicchierai had the intelligence not to abuse his position, but to share the decision-making with the city's literary circles and with the owners of the theater boxes, a quarter of whom were Jewish. Such inclusive conduct, whether due to his character or to the renowned charisma that led him to adopt attitudes of enlightened paternalism, became indispensable in 1778.

In that year, it became necessary to replace the old San Sebastiano theater, which was becoming run down, with a more modern and spacious building.<sup>35</sup> The project required that all the box owners, without exception, join forces to meet the expenses. Bicchierai, who was its main promoter, recruited two advisors to manage the operation in a politically savvy way: Gasparo Chiesa, a wealthy shipbuilder, would represent the Christian box owners, and the merchant and coral industrialist Jacob Aghib, the Jews.<sup>36</sup> It was Chiesa and Aghib who identified the right site for the project. The firms Recanati, Ergas, Leone, and Miranda jointly owned the abandoned “warehouses of the mummies,” located on a very central site next to the church of the Armenians; they were happy to sell them to the box owners' group, which would demolish them to make room for the new theater.<sup>37</sup> The construction was completed in 1782, three years before Gariel arrived in Livorno. *L'Adriano in Siria* (Hadrian in Syria), one of Pietro Metastasio's most acclaimed librettos, was

33. Ettore Levi Malvano, “Les éditions toscanes de l'*Encyclopédie*,” *Revue de littérature comparée* 3 (1923): 228–45; Carlo Mangio, “Censura granducale, potere ecclesiastico ed editoria in Toscana. L'edizione livornese dell'*Encyclopédie*,” *Studi settecenteschi* 16 (1996): 201–19.

34. Pier Gaetano Bicchierai, *La Virginia e la Cleone* (Florence: Stecchi & Pagani, 1767).

35. Stefano Mazzoni, “Il teatro degli Avvalorati,” in *La fabbrica del “Goldoni.” Architettura e cultura teatrale a Livorno (1658–1847)*, ed. Duccio Filippi (Venice: Marsilio, 1989), 91–106; Elvira Garbero Zorzi and Luigi Zangheri, eds., *I teatri storici della Toscana. Grosseto, Livorno e provincie* (Florence: Giunta regionale toscana, 1990), 199–247; Vivien Alexandra Hewitt, “I teatri di Livorno tra Illuminismo e Risorgimento. L'imprenditoria teatrale a Livorno dal 1782 al 1848,” *Quaderni della Labronica* 59 (1995): 13–15.

36. Archivio di Stato di Livorno (hereafter “ASLi”), *Comunità*, 183, fols. 543 sq. On Jacob Aghib and his memorable marriage, see Frattarelli Fischer, *Vivere fuori dal ghetto*, 203–204; Bregoli, *Mediterranean Enlightenment*, 15–16. On the Aghib family, originally from Tunis, see 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), 61 and 67.

37. ASLi, *Governo*, 19, no. 1, petition of March 20, 1779, approved on April 17 provided that the old theater was demolished; ASLi, *Comunità*, 183, fol. 558, “Rappresentanza del S.r Bicchierai relativa al Nuovo Teatro.”

staged on April 1 for the inauguration, orchestrated with brand new music by Luigi Cherubini, a talented young composer who showed great promise.<sup>38</sup>

The Jewish-Christian cooperation that had led to the new theater did not last long, however. The Christian box owners did not seem to appreciate the theatrical entrepreneurship demonstrated by the Jewish elite: one can imagine that the translation of Lessing's *Die Juden* did not aid in establishing a serene conversation about the Jewish role in the city's cultural institutions. Within this context of deteriorating relations, Gariel's publication of *Les Juifs* and *Les esclaves* was probably meant to temper mounting tensions. The exotic, Orientalist setting of *Les esclaves* certainly catered to the taste of Livornese audiences, but was not without rationale. For the narrative of the play to work, the virtuous Jew whom Gariel placed at its center had to display those exterior traits which usually provoked Christian distaste. And among the Livornese Jews, the most despised were undoubtedly those who did not hide their North African origins.

To fully understand the reality of eighteenth-century Livornese Jewry, it is necessary to look not only north, towards France and the German-speaking lands, but also south, towards North Africa. Relations between the two shores of the Mediterranean, dense and frequent, spanned the commercial and familial spheres, and were not without friction. In the course of the eighteenth century a number of prominent Algerian and Tunisian Jewish merchants, such as the Busnach, Coen Bacri, and Franchetti families, relocated to Livorno, where they officially joined the *nazione ebraica* and became Tuscan subjects. The significant Algerian and Tunisian presence within the *nazione ebraica* and the ongoing exchanges between Livorno and North Africa distinguished Livorno's Jews from other western Sephardic communities, as well as other communities on the Italian peninsula. In order to publicly reflect on the Jewish condition in Tuscany, for Gariel it was imperative to consider Livorno's ties with the Maghreb. Much has been written about the significance of those relations in defining the peculiar character of Livornese Jewry.<sup>39</sup> But how were those ties perceived by well-established members of the *nazione ebraica* and by the non-Jewish population of Livorno?

## Salomon Coen Bacri

In the second half of the eighteenth century, many North African Jews moved to Livorno, just like the Benkiber family in *Les esclaves*.<sup>40</sup> Although born in Algiers, Tunis, Tripoli, or Tétouan, many of these immigrants had preexisting ties of kinship

38. Hewitt, "I teatri di Livorno," 34.

39. Jean-Pierre Filippini, "Livourne et l'Afrique du Nord au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Revue d'histoire maghrébine* 7/8 (1977): 125–49; Filippini, "Juifs d'Afrique du Nord à Livourne dans la seconde moitié du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Revue des études juives* 141 (1982): 459–60; both now in Filippini, *Il porto di Livorno e la Toscana (1676–1814)* (Naples: ESI, 1998), 3:49–60 and 61–180. For a contemporary account, see Gorani, *Mémoires secrets*, 3:120.

40. As well as the references in the previous note, see Jean-Pierre Filippini, "Gli ebrei e le attività economiche nell'area nord africana (XVII–XVIII secolo)," *Nuovi studi livornesi* 7 (1999): 131–49.

and business with Livornese families. They were also part of the western Sephardic diaspora, a branch of which had settled in the North African regencies during the seventeenth century. If in Livorno they were considered Africans, in Algiers and Tunis they were known as *grana*, that is, “Livornese,” or even as “Frankish” (European) or “Christian” Jews. They dressed in the European style, enjoyed the protection of the French consul, and aspired to distinguish themselves from local Arabic-speaking Jews who had settled in the region much earlier and were subject to heavily discriminatory rules. The *grana* were exempted from these restrictions due to their role in international maritime trade and the credit services they offered to the Muslim political authorities and the shipping and privateering sectors.<sup>41</sup>

This continuous migratory flow changed the composition of Livorno’s Jewish community to such an extent that by the early nineteenth century the new arrivals had become a large and highly recognizable group. Estimates based on available records of *ballottazione* (the procedure that granted membership of the *nazione ebrea* and access to its privileges) suggest that North Africans constituted at least eleven percent of the Jewish families residing in the port.<sup>42</sup> In fact, the numbers must have been significantly higher, as only the wealthiest North African Jewish merchants sought official admission into the *nazione ebrea*, while the majority retained the mobile character of a transient population.<sup>43</sup> Their level of integration in Livornese society is unclear; many maintained an attachment to Judeo-Arabic and North African customs, and some even displayed a suspicion of Livornese mores. Political integration had certainly increased by the 1780s, when North African Jews started holding office as *massari*.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, profound divergences remained and, if anything, could increase in times of crisis. In 1805, rabbi Jacob Nunes Vais asked his Algerian colleagues to dissuade their coreligionists from seeking refuge from anti-Jewish persecutions in Livorno, due to “differences in language and customs.”<sup>45</sup>

Abraham Benkiber is first and foremost a literary figure, but there are good reasons to believe that Gariel drew inspiration for his character from a real person—an Algerian Jew who had recently migrated to Tuscany with his family and was renowned for obtaining the release of two captains of Tuscan merchant ships held

41. H. Z. (J. W.) Hirschberg, *A History of the Jews in North Africa*, vol. 2, *From the Ottoman Conquests to the Present Time* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 14–15; Lucette Valensi, *On the Eve of Colonialism: North Africa before the French Conquest 1790–1830* [1969], trans. Kenneth J. Perkins (New York: Africana, 1977), 61–65; Minna Rozen, “The Leghorn Merchants in Tunis and Their Trade with Marseilles at the End of the 17th Century,” in *Les relations intercommunautaires juives en Méditerranée occidentale. XIII<sup>e</sup>–XX<sup>e</sup> siècles*, ed. Jean-Louis Miège (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 1984), 51–59; Sadok Boubker, *La régence de Tunis au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Ses relations commerciales avec les ports de l’Europe méditerranéenne, Marseille et Livourne* (Zaghuan: Ceroma, 1987); Richard Ayoun, “Les négociants juifs d’Afrique du Nord et la mer à l’époque moderne,” *Revue française d’histoire d’outre-mer* 87 (2000): 109–35.

42. Toaff, *La nazione ebrea*, 415.

43. Filippini, *Il porto di Livorno*, 3:49 and 65–66.

44. *Ibid.*, 3:67–68.

45. Gabriele Bedarida, “La nazione ebrea di Livorno e i profughi algerini del 1805,” *Rivista italiana di studi napoleonici* 19 (1982): 115–86, here pp. 122–23.

captive in Algiers for some time.<sup>46</sup> Salomon Coen Bacri belonged to the Busnach-Coen Bacri clan, whose influence on Hassan, the dey of Algiers, was well known at the time. Today, we also know that from 1795 the clan maintained an important business relationship with revolutionary France, whose war effort against various enemy coalitions was made possible among other things by large supplies of Algerian wheat.<sup>47</sup> In 1785, Salomon headed the Livorno-based branch of the family firm, which was directed by his brother Joseph and had outposts in trading hubs such as Marseille, Genoa, Naples, Tunis, and Alexandria. His decision to advance money for the ransoms of the Tuscan captains naturally drew the attention of Livornese public opinion, provoking mixed reactions. On the one hand, it was undeniable that without the intervention of this wealthy Jewish merchant the two slaves would have had great difficulty in regaining their freedom. On the other hand, his merit was counterbalanced by the high price of the ransoms and the fact that the crews of the two ships, also held as captives, had been excluded from the negotiations.<sup>48</sup>

Salomon Coen Bacri's questionable relations with the Algerian corsairs meant that he was a controversial figure, even for a Jew. Even setting aside his decisive role in the story of the redeemed captains, he and his family made an impression: they were too rich and exotic to go unnoticed. In 1787, the presence in nearby Pisa of David and Jacob Coen Bacri, two of Salomon's nephews, was the unintentional cause of a violent popular uprising. The timing was crucial. The National Synod of Bishops, which Peter Leopold expected to ratify the Jansenist and anti-curialist reforms that would have made the Tuscan Church more independent from Rome, was about to take place. But as mentioned above, the faithful did not approve of the novelties the grand duke was seeking to introduce, especially those concerning sacred images. Particularly controversial was his direction that sacred images should no longer be veiled or hidden from view, a reform intended to strip them of mystery and to counter the superstitious mentality of the people, of which the most backward and obscurantist clergy took advantage. It was in this highly charged atmosphere of anticipation, the prelude to one of the grand duke's most crushing defeats, that Salomon's nephews decided to visit the Campo dei Miracoli in Pisa,

46. The newspapers of the time highlighted the liberation operation: *Gazzetta universale* 17 (February 26, 1785), 135; 29 (April 9, 1785), 231; *Gazzetta di Parma* 9 (March 4, 1785), 72; *Diario di Roma*, Ordinario 1090 (June 11, 1785), 18–19. On this specific episode, see Andrea Addobbati, "Il prezzo della libertà. Appunti di ricerca sulle assicurazioni contro la cattura," *Nuovi studi livornesi* 8 (2000): 95–123. More generally, on the relations between Tuscany and the African Regencies, see Calogero Piazza, *Schiavitù e guerra dei Barbareschi. Orientamenti toscani di politica transmarina (1747–1768)* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1983).

47. Morton Rosenstock, "The House of Bacri and Busnach: A Chapter from Algeria's Commercial History," *Jewish Social Studies* 14 (1952): 343–64; Françoise Hildesheimer, "Grandeur et décadence de la maison Bacri de Marseille," *Revue des études juives* 136 (1977): 389–414; Jean-Pierre Filippini, "Una famiglia ebraica di Livorno tra le ambizioni mercantili e le vicissitudini del mondo mediterraneo. I Coen Bacri," *Ricerche storiche* 12 (1982): 287–334, now in Filippini, *Il porto di Livorno*, 3:181–235; Hirschberg, *A History of the Jews*, 2:30–51; Julie Kalman, *Orientalizing the Jew: Religion, Culture, and Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century France* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 91–118.

48. Addobbati, "Il prezzo della libertà," 99.

along with three other North Africans—a Jew and two Muslims. While they were admiring the famous leaning tower, a troublemaker, who later managed to escape justice, spread the rumor that those strange tourists had dared to spit on the images in the Duomo and throw stones at a crucifix. On hearing this news, the populace, already agitated by the proposed reforms, began to riot. The five men managed to escape the violence, but the crowd's fury did not abate until they found a poor North African Jewish peddler near the synagogue, who was ferociously massacred.<sup>49</sup>

Gariel's literary intervention appeared just a few months before this tragic incident, about a year after Solomon Coen Bacri's transfer to Livorno. Gariel must have known that Abraham's appearance on stage would have immediately reminded the audience of that much-talked-about Algerian Jewish immigrant. The intriguing connection between theatrical invention and factual events raises a number of questions for the historian. Before turning to a close analysis of *Les esclaves*, a few words are thus in order about our methodological reliance on intertextuality, as well as the challenging paradox at the heart of this essay.<sup>50</sup> In the section that follows, we identify and unpack Gariel's literary references to events and individuals, which taken together offer a complex picture of the western Mediterranean in the 1780s. We do so by turning primarily to a late eighteenth-century intertextual archive that includes contemporary gazettes and other literary creations, which we use to supplement modern historiography. It is important to recognize that we are seeking to write history based on a previously unknown work by a forgotten author, indeed quite possibly a theatrical failure. As is clear by now, we know little about Gariel's life and work. Nor can we be sure that *Les esclaves* was ever staged—at least, it does not seem to have had any verifiable impact on public discussion of the Jewish question in Livorno. On the one hand, by proposing a historicist reading of this play we resolutely advocate for the value of any work of literature as a historical source, if judiciously interpreted, no matter its fortune or reception. On the other, the fiasco itself deserves our attention: it is the very fact that *Les esclaves* was written just when the Livornese Christian elites were determined to keep the Jews out of the theater that needs to be reinscribed into the historical record.

### The Text: *Les esclaves livournois à Alger*

The first act of *Les esclaves* opens in the home of Abraham Benkiber. Benkiber is a fictitious, almost ludicrously “Jewish-sounding” name. It would have been familiar to readers of the *Lettres cabalistiques* by Jean-Baptiste de Boyer, better known as

49. Roberto G. Salvadori, “Un tumulto xenofobo a Pisa nel 1787,” *Bollettino storico pisano* 49 (1990): 149–57.

50. On the uses of literature by historians, see Étienne Anheim and Antoine Lilti, introduction to “Savoirs de la littérature,” ed. Étienne Anheim and Antoine Lilti, special issue, *Annales HSS* 65, no. 2 (2010): 253–60; Francesco Orlando, *Gli oggetti desueti nelle immagini della letteratura. Rovine, reliquie, rarità, robaccia, luoghi inabitati e tesori nascosti* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993).

the marquis d'Argens (1703–1771), one of the best-selling skeptical *philosophes* of the eighteenth century. In this satirical work, two imaginary kabbalists—Abukibak (another preposterously named Jewish character) and his pupil, Ben Kiber—debate philosophical questions that have little to do with actual kabbalah, let alone Judaism.<sup>51</sup> Just as, for the marquis d'Argens, kabbalah offered a “generalized rubric encompassing all aspects of the supernatural, impossible, and absurd,”<sup>52</sup> the names Abukibak and Ben Kiber likewise evoke an exotic Jewishness. Gariel adopted both in *Les esclaves*: a Livornese Jewish merchant who appears later in the play is named Salomon Abukibak.

*Nomen omen.* Abraham—like the biblical patriarch—is married to Sara—like the biblical matriarch. The Benkiber children carry the classically Jewish names of Jacob and Abigail. And the literary allusions do not stop there. In the first scene we also meet Osman, an Algerian *raïs*.<sup>53</sup> He is just back from a lucky capture: he has taken a Tuscan *orca* (a large commercial ship) flying the Jerusalem flag,<sup>54</sup> with a booty that will largely compensate him for the losses suffered after his own capture by a “republican” (that is, Genoese) galley three years earlier.<sup>55</sup> The name Osman—evoking the founder of the Ottoman dynasty, Osman Ghazi (1258–1326)—would very likely have resonated with the Livornese public. Characters called Osman recurred in a number of successful eighteenth-century “Turkish” plays and operas, starting with Louis Fuzelier’s *Le Turc généreux* (The generous Turk) of 1735.<sup>56</sup> The name Osman telegraphed either the idea of extraordinary, unexpected generosity on the part of a Muslim character, or the strange, brutal world of the Ottoman harem.<sup>57</sup>

51. Jean-Baptiste de Boyer, marquis d'Argens, *Lettres cabalistiques* [1737–1738], ed. Jacques Marx (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2017). For an analysis of d'Argens's relation to Judaism, see Adam Sutcliffe, *Judaism and Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 209–12.

52. Sutcliffe, *Judaism and Enlightenment*, 212.

53. *Raïs* refers to a Muslim corsair captain. On early modern Mediterranean corsairing, see Wolfgang Kaiser and Guillaume Calafat, “Violence, Protection, and Commerce: Corsairing and *Ars Piratica* in the Early Modern Mediterranean,” in *Persistent Piracy: Maritime Violence and State-Formation in Global Historical Perspective*, ed. Stefan Amirell and Leos Müller (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 69–92.

54. This expression referred to ships flying the flag of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, that is, Malta. By the late eighteenth century, the Jerusalem flag was also being flown by non-Maltese captains as a flag of convenience.

55. Gariel, *Les esclaves*, 7.

56. *Le Turc généreux* is the first act of *Les Indes galantes, ballet héroïque représenté pour la première fois, par l'Académie royale de musique* (Paris: De l'imprimerie de Jean-Baptiste-Christophe Ballard, 1735), an opera by Jean-Philippe Rameau with a libretto by Louis Fuzelier.

57. The positive connotation of the name first appeared in *Le Turc généreux*, inspired by the historical figure of Topal Osman, an Ottoman grand vizier known for his generosity in dealing with captives. On the other hand, in Voltaire's most successful drama, *Zaïre* (1732), Osman was the name of the jealous sultan's son, who caused the death of the heroine before taking his own life.



Gariel's Osman, despite his profession, does not lack heart. He feels for the "beautiful youths" that he has captured but needs to sell them since "they all have to eat, and what appetites they have!" Still, given that "in Tuscany, with whom we have free trade, there are no slaves of our [Muslim] Nation," he is at pains to "place them well."<sup>58</sup> Abraham offers to buy two: the sole woman in the group, a beautiful eighteen-year-old, to serve Sara and Abigail, and a Livornese youth to help Bernard—the slave already in his service, also from Livorno—remarking that "ordinarily the Livornese have many talents."<sup>59</sup>

The opening of the play provides hints of current events that situate the action precisely in 1786. When asked by Abraham how he was liberated from his captivity, Osman cryptically praises French help and "our good patriarch" Louis XVI.<sup>60</sup> This is likely an allusion to a much publicized, comprehensive redemption effort launched by Louis XVI, which freed all 315 French captives still held in Algiers in 1785—with the comedic implication that the fictional Osman was also liberated on that occasion. While Mercedarian and Trinitarian friars had largely orchestrated previous redemptions, the 1785 effort was organized by the French state. The operation, which cost a staggering 573,094 *livres*, prompted numerous pamphlets, illustrated broadsides, and processions.<sup>61</sup> Contemporary songs and sermons accused the Algerians of barbarism, inhumanity, and incivility for trading slaves; humanity and civilization were in turn associated with Christian France.<sup>62</sup> The ironic twist would not have been lost on educated readers of Gariel's play familiar with the French rhetoric.

At the same time, an attentive Tuscan reader might also have recalled a short dispatch from Paris in the Florentine *Gazzetta universale* of November 1785. There, an anonymous slave just redeemed from Algiers favorably compared the situation of French captives in North Africa with that of black sub-Saharan slaves in the Americas. It would be inaccurate, he claimed, to state that the slaves held in the kingdom of Algiers were the unhappiest human beings alive. While black slaves worked the plantations to enrich masters who oppressed them to obtain ever-greater profits, the ransom of Barbary captives was always a distinct possibility.

58. Gariel, *Les esclaves*, 8. This statement was not exactly true. The Grand Duchy of Tuscany and Algiers had signed a peace treaty in 1748, but some Muslim slaves remained in Livorno after that date even though the city's *bagno*, where captives had traditionally resided, was indeed closed in 1750. See Cesare Santus, *Il "turco" a Livorno. Incontri con l'Islam nella Toscana del Seicento* (Milan: Officina Libraria, 2019); Guillaume Calafat and Cesare Santus, "Les avatars du 'Turc.' Esclaves et commerçants musulmans à Livourne (1600–1750)," in *Les musulmans dans l'histoire de l'Europe*, vol. 1, *Une intégration invisible*, ed. Jocelyne Dakhliya and Bernard Vincent (Paris: Albin Michel, 2011), 471–522; Giulia Bonazza, *Abolitionism and the Persistence of Slavery in Italian States, 1750–1850* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 135–40.

59. Gariel, *Les esclaves*, 8.

60. *Ibid.*, 9.

61. For an overview of France's relation with Mediterranean slavery, see Gillian Weiss, *Captives and Corsairs: France and Slavery in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

62. *Ibid.*, 113–14.

For this reason, every North African master ensured the “conservation” of his slaves and treated them “with humanity.”<sup>63</sup> In *Les esclaves*, Abraham provided the ideal embodiment of such “humane” masters.

Osman has not only found a great patron in Louis XVI, but adds that “now, here we are, friends of the Castilian monarch as well.”<sup>64</sup> This reference alludes to the Hispano-Algerian peace treaty of June 14, 1786, meant to put an end to warfare between the two countries. The treaty was, in effect, unilaterally imposed by Spain on the dey of Algiers after repeated bombardments of the city in 1783 and 1784; its clauses benefited Spanish interests and were meant to crush Algerian piracy.<sup>65</sup> The complex negotiations between the two kingdoms (as well as the ongoing acts of piracy that threatened to derail the peace process) were discussed in detail in several reports from Madrid and Livorno published in the *Gazzetta universale* throughout 1785.<sup>66</sup> Once again, this context is presented in our play with a comic spin. With the friendship of France and Spain assured, Osman is more than ready to take advantage of a safer Mediterranean: “From now on, we are going to make so many captures!” Algiers, the corsair muses, will become the center of all of Europe’s riches.<sup>67</sup>

Throughout the play, aside from allusions to current historical developments, several clues alert us that Abraham is a model of virtue and enlightened spirit despite his implication in the slave trade. After Abraham and Osman part, we are introduced to Bernard, the Livornese slave who has been serving the Jewish merchant for several years. Saddened by the news of Osman’s capture of his compatriots, Bernard is particularly alarmed to hear that the prisoners include a young woman. His sister recently embarked on a journey from Livorno to Marseille; could this girl be her? Abraham reassures him: if the captive is indeed his sister, this will bring great solace to his household and Sara and Abigail will cover her in affection.<sup>68</sup> Yet other details highlight Abraham’s generosity. Though he cannot buy all of the male captives, he tells Bernard, he will purchase one and make sure that the rest are placed in good homes, thus saving the Livornese from greater dangers. Once alone,

63. *Gazzetta universale* 91 (November 12, 1785), 721. The entry is dated October 25, 1785.

64. Gariel, *Les esclaves*, 9.

65. Eloy Martín Corrales, *Muslims in Spain, 1492–1814: Living and Negotiating in the Land of the Infidel* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 230–32.

66. *Gazzetta universale* 65 (August 12, 1785), 513; 70 (August 30, 1785), 553; 75 (September 17, 1785), 594; 81 (October 8, 1785), 641 and 648; 95 (November 26, 1785), 753; 99 (December 10, 1785), 785; 101 (December 17, 1785), 801; 102 (December 20, 1785), 810. The treaty was published in its entirety in the *Gazzetta toscana* 87 (October 31, 1786), 689–90; 88 (November 4, 1786), 698; 89 (November 7, 1786), 705–706.

67. Gariel, *Les esclaves*, 10. In a later scene, Osman also refers to the protracted Russo-Turkish war to justify the comically exaggerated six-hundred percent increase in the price of Circassian and Georgian women destined for the sultan’s harem: since Georgia and Circassia were at that time under the protection of Catherine the Great, the “merchandise” had become very rare in Constantinople, where it commanded much higher prices (ibid., 29).  
68. The comment is underscored by Abigail’s reaction in the next scene: rejoicing at the news that she will receive “a pretty slave” who will serve her and keep her company, she promises that she will make her forget her captivity (ibid., 13).

Abraham explains his rationale: the virtuous Livornese enjoy a sweet and peaceful government, where Jews are loved and respected nearly as much as the Christian majority. It will give him great satisfaction to help them in return.<sup>69</sup>

Abraham is not just a generous man, Gariel implies; he is also an honest Jew. Before he takes his leave to meet the corsair and discuss his purchase, Abraham entrusts his business at hand to his wife Sara: "If Hamet brings two thousand Dutch golden ducats, receive them and issue him a receipt in my name; if he is not satisfied, let him wait a moment, I will not be long at Osman's," he instructs.<sup>70</sup> These few lines, apparently unconnected to the play's main plot, in fact resonate with one of the key exchanges in Lessing's *Die Juden*. In scene six, the Baron reveals to the Traveler his deep-seated anti-Jewish prejudice, based on his unfortunate experience with a cunning moneylender who tricked him into repaying his debt not once, but twice. In his reply, the Traveler himself has to admit that he has heard these complaints more than once.<sup>71</sup> This exchange must have incensed the Jewish mercantile elite in Livorno when the play was translated into Italian.<sup>72</sup>

As suggested above, one of the prominent themes in *Les esclaves* is praise of the Livornese system and the opportunities it held for Jews. An exchange between Abigail and Jacob underscores this motif in scene five, but also hints at a contrast between Livornese and North African Jews. This contrast is borne out in contemporary Jewish sources from both sides of the Mediterranean.<sup>73</sup> It is reasonable to assume that Gariel had enough exposure to members of the ethnically complex *nazione ebraica* to be familiar with intra-Jewish stereotypes, including common prejudices on the part of the "European" Livornese Jews against their Arabic-speaking Maghrebi brethren, considered backward and uncivilized. Replying to Abigail's contented announcement that her father is going to purchase a female slave for her, Jacob agrees that this is indeed a good thing. Most Algerian Jewish servants are so stubborn, slovenly, and ignorant that they are only good for the basest domestic chores, he continues. Livornese (Christian) women, on the other hand, are full of

69. This praise of Peter Leopold resonates with classic Jewish expressions of gratitude for the good treatment received from particular sovereigns. But in Gariel's twist, it is an Algerian Jewish merchant who publicly declares his thanks to the ruler of another country, Tuscany, for its treatment of his fellow Jews (*ibid.*, 12).

70. *Ibid.*, 13.

71. Lessing, *Gli ebrei*, 15.

72. Uncommon in eighteenth-century Italian pamphlets, the stereotype of the greedy Jewish banker circulated widely in anti-Jewish discourse in France and the German lands, where conflicts between Jewish creditors and Christian debtors ran high. On images of the Jewish usurer in early modern and modern Europe, see Francesca Trivellato, *The Promise and Peril of Credit: What a Forgotten Legend about Jews and Finance Tells Us about the Making of European Commercial Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

73. Samuele Romanelli, *Visioni d'Oriente. Itinerari di un ebreo italiano nel Marocco del Settecento*, ed. Asher Salah (Florence: Giuntina, 2006); Hayim Yoseph David Azulai, *Ma'agal Tov*, ed. Ahron Freiman (Berlin: Mekitze Nirdamim, 1921). See also Matthias B. Lehmann, "A Livornese 'Port Jew' and the Sephardim of the Ottoman Empire," *Jewish Social Studies* 11 (2005): 51–76, and Lehmann, "Levantine and Other Jews: Reading H.Y.D. Azulai's Travel Diary," *Jewish Social Studies* 13 (2007): 1–34.

appeal, grace, and loveliness. Indeed, if only Judaism did not forbid it, when he was in Livorno he would not have missed his chance to court a certain Mademoiselle Dorothée, “the most accomplished person in the world.”<sup>74</sup>

Abigail retorts by decrying her fate in the “cursed land of Barbary,” lamenting that while her brother can travel and see the world, as a young woman she is trapped within four walls, just like a slave.<sup>75</sup> If she wishes to go out she must be wrapped in clothes from head to toe! This comment once again demonstrates Gariel’s understanding of the different condition experienced by Jewish women in Italy as opposed to those in North Africa.<sup>76</sup> Abigail’s fortune is about to change, however. Jacob lets slip that she has been betrothed to the handsome son of a Livornese Jewish merchant, Salomon Abukibak, who is about to arrive. Full of joy, Abigail pledges that she will take her slave with her to Tuscany, where she will give her back her freedom—on the condition that the young woman remain her friend forever.

An explicit condemnation of the slave trade concludes the first act. Despite its humorous tone, *Le marchand de Smyrne*, the direct inspiration for *Les esclaves*, contained a strong indictment of the slave trade in both its Mediterranean and Atlantic forms. Gariel directly adapted a series of exchanges that skewered the arbitrary character of European social conventions and privileges by satirizing the cruel absurdity of the slave market, and transformed it into a comic scene between Osman and Abraham. In the original French play, several witty passages focused on complaints about disappointing slave purchases: a quack doctor, a useless scholar, a good-for-nothing aristocrat, and a hairsplitting lawyer.<sup>77</sup> Gariel remolded Chamfort’s extended satire into a more compact scene, while retaining the criticism of slavery at the expense of figures depicted as comically unproductive captives despite the social capital they may have enjoyed in the upper rungs of European society.

Vocally praising the physical traits of Étienne, the male captive selected by Abraham (“What height! What figure! What teeth! What eyes! What muscles! What white skin with such a delicate crimson blush! What hair!”<sup>78</sup>), Osman asks a steep price for the two Livornese slaves. The corsair explains that his good merchandise has to compensate him for the bad. What shall he do with faulty goods? The old Portuguese doctor that looks like a ghost, the Muscovite priest with his big glasses, the Neapolitan chemist who has ruined many people in search

74. Gariel, *Les esclaves*, 15. The play alludes repeatedly to the possibility of romantic attraction between a Jew and a Christian. In another scene, Bernard expresses admiration for Abigail’s charming spirit, education, and figure (*ibid.*, 17), while Jacob later declares to his father that he does indeed think about Dorothée, but only to honor, respect, and serve her (*ibid.*, 30). Although erotic affairs between Jews and Christians were likely more frequent than we can ascertain from the sources, only the conversion of the Jewish partner to Christianity would have made such relationships officially viable.

75. *Ibid.*, 15.

76. Renée Levine Melammed, “Sephardi Women in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods,” in *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, ed. Judith R. Baskin (1991; repr. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 128–49, here p. 130.

77. Poirson and Razgonnikoff, *Théâtre de Chamfort*, 139–43 and 151–53.

78. Gariel, *Les esclaves*, 17.

of the Philosopher's Stone, the feeble marquis whose limbs look like they may break any moment—he has to tend to them as well, or they will deteriorate in the warehouse. These most unproductive human beings are equated to “junk merchandise” (*marchandise de rebut*), in a metaphor that was meant to stir both laughter and discomfort.<sup>79</sup>

Not unsurprisingly, Abraham, always the voice of humanity, expresses disapproval: “Since you sell human flesh like butchers sell beef and mutton,” he says, “I refuse to haggle.”<sup>80</sup> With the fate of the sale uncertain, Abraham asks Bernard to invite the slaves in. It is at this point, towards the end of the first act, that it is finally revealed that the young woman, Dorothee Loretani, is indeed Bernard's sister. Overcome by emotion, Abraham promises Osman that he will pay anything the corsair asks. Bernard and Dorothee fall at his feet, praising the Jewish merchant for his generosity. Even Osman is moved by Abraham's charitable behavior. He declares that he will not take any payment for himself, but rather accept whatever sum Abraham will give “to satisfy his crew.”<sup>81</sup> When Abraham pays him an extravagant five hundred *zecchini*, four times more than necessary, the corsair frees the captured vessel's captain, pilot, and clerk as well. Abraham happily calls for festivities. Urging Sara, Abigail, and Dorothee to love each other like sisters, he invites everybody to his home for some mutton pilaf—including Bernard (“as far as your religion may allow”) and Osman. The first act closes on this joyous cosmopolitan celebration: “Jews, Christians, and a Muslim dining together: it is not common,” Osman ponders, and accepts the invitation contentedly.<sup>82</sup>

## The Second Act: Cosmopolitan Toleration and the Ransoming of Captives

The second act of the play, which returns more directly to the question of the Jewish role in the ransoming of Christian captives, opens with a reflection on cosmopolitan toleration. The proximity of the themes—captivity and enlightened spirit—might be jarring to twenty-first-century readers, yet that intersection is at the heart of *Les esclaves*.<sup>83</sup> If it is obvious to readers that Abraham and his family are Jewish, the two newly acquired slaves are not yet privy to this information. This allows Gariel to elaborate further on the theme of toleration, correcting anti-Jewish stereotypes and clarifying the moral foundations of the play. After meeting at length with Jacob, a surprised Étienne comments on his gentle character, a rare trait “among the

79. *Ibid.*, 18.

80. *Ibid.*, 19.

81. *Ibid.*, 23.

82. *Ibid.*, 24.

83. Justin Roberts, *Slavery and the Enlightenment in the British Atlantic, 1750–1807* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013); Silvia Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender and the Limits of Progress* [2008], trans. J. Carden (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Jean-Paul Doguet, *Les philosophes et l'esclavage* (Paris: Éd. Kimé, 2016).

Turks.” Bernard quickly disabuses him: Jacob, and the entire household, is Jewish. The news frightens Étienne. He has heard that the Jews, and above all those from “Barbary,” are ruthless enemies of the Christians and a hundred times worse than the Turks. Once again, Bernard corrects him, echoing the inscription on the play’s frontispiece: “Think again! Perhaps there may be some bad ones, but in general they are good, benevolent, humane, charitable.”<sup>84</sup>

Cosmopolitan understanding, Gariel suggests, was common currency among rational people who saw the light of the divine laws of nature.<sup>85</sup> That understanding was also the path towards universal and personal contentment. In a crucial monologue, Abraham explains to his son the foundation of his happiness, a form of deistic belief in the law of nature that allows him to respect other religions, as long as their believers subscribe to the same universal, divinely mandated values he embraces:

*I have never been intolerant. I have loved all the individuals of any religion as long as they follow the divine and natural law, which is the fundamental principle of all civil and human laws. It has been my only guide. God willing, one day all human beings will share this same belief. Then we will see the rebirth of a true golden age, and we will peacefully enjoy the greatest happiness.*<sup>86</sup>

Jacob’s own enlightened spirit is put on display soon after. When he entrusts Étienne to Bernard so that the new captive can start his work, the young Jewish man recommends that the older captive “take [Étienne] to the French consul on all [Christian] holidays, to practice your religion there.” “If all slaves had such a sweet fate as ours, I would stop pitying them,” Étienne replies, invoking divine blessings on Abraham and all his family.<sup>87</sup> Toleration seems to be catching.

Abraham’s cosmopolitanism extends to his treatment of Dorothée, who despite having been bought as a slave is welcomed into the Benkiber home as a daughter. Most individuals captured by corsairs in the early modern Mediterranean were men.<sup>88</sup> In the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, myths about women seized at sea became popular in British and French literature, and by the second half of the eighteenth century, Europeans envisioned the harem, or *seraglio*, as a site of sexual slavery.<sup>89</sup> The threat of rape and sexual captivity was

84. Gariel, *Les esclaves*, 26.

85. On the emergence of this kind of cosmopolitanism, see Margaret Jacob, *Strangers Nowhere in the World: The Rise of Cosmopolitanism in Early Modern Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Sophia Rosenfeld, “Citizens of Nowhere in Particular: Cosmopolitanism, Writing, and Political Engagement in Eighteenth-Century Europe,” *National Identities* 4, no. 1 (2002): 25–43.

86. Gariel, *Les esclaves*, 30.

87. *Ibid.*, 31.

88. Usually, they were skilled seamen, ship workers, and merchants: Khalid Bekkaoui, *White Women Captives in North Africa: Narratives of Enslavement, 1735–1830* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 17.

89. Joe Snader, *Caught between Worlds: British Captivity Narratives in Fact and Fiction* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 149. The genre of the Mediterranean

already alluded to in one of the most memorable episodes from Voltaire's *Candide*, no doubt familiar to many readers of *Les esclaves*: the story of the Old Woman, once a beautiful Italian princess sold into captivity.<sup>90</sup> This extravagantly horrid tale of enslavement and disgrace not only served as an ironic counterpoint to *Candide*'s naïve optimism but was also a parody of the female captivity narrative: it featured rape, dismemberment, plague, and the partial loss of a buttock to feed the princess's masters during a siege.

In *Les esclaves*, Dorothée's description of her travels by sea, ordeal on the corsair's boat, and ultimate redemption by the generous Abraham, provide a much more uplifting variation on the well-worn theme, and a pious, indeed optimistic, contrast to *Candide*'s sardonic tale. In this way, Gariel revealed himself to be more Panglossian than Voltairian.<sup>91</sup> Invited to tell her story by Abraham, Dorothée explains that she embarked on a ship destined for Marseille because she had been betrothed to "the son of Monsieur Orux, the famous merchant."<sup>92</sup> The reference is an allusion to Georges Roux (1703–1792), dubbed "of Corsica," a fabulously wealthy merchant and ship-owner. Notorious for his bizarre behavior, he was one of the eponymous Roux Brothers, a prominent eighteenth-century French merchant house based in Marseille.<sup>93</sup>

captivity narrative was extremely popular in England: Daniel J. Vitkus, ed., *Piracy, Slavery, and Redemption: Barbary Captivity Narratives from Early Modern England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Diane Long Hoeveler, "The Female Captivity Narrative: Blood, Water, and Orientalism," in *Interrogating Orientalism: Contextual Approaches and Pedagogical Practices*, ed. Diane Long Hoeveler and Jeffrey Cass (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), 46–71, here pp. 51–57. See also Linda Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History* (London: HarperPress, 2007).

90. See Voltaire, *Candide, ou l'optimisme*, chap. 11. "The story of Cunégonde" (chap. 8) is also relevant here: When her parents' castle is attacked by Bulgarians, Cunégonde, *Candide*'s beloved, is raped by a "big Bulgar" and falls into a sort of slavery. Eventually, she is sold to Don Issachar, a Sephardic Jewish merchant "who loved women passionately" (ibid., 33 and 34).

91. Gariel was quite aware of the optimistic, sunny take of his play. Discussing the Italian translation of *Die Juden*, the fictional critics of *Les Juifs* had compared Lessing's work with the chiaroscuro technique of classic Dutch painters. While the Dutch masters used strong shadows to emphasize light, Jonas Gay mused, Lessing's chiaroscuro was a failure: his hand had been too heavy with the shadowing, with the result that the "creative light" was lost (Gariel, *Les Juifs*, 18). Recalling the remarks of his own characters in the preface to *Les esclaves*, Gariel anticipated that some critics would say that he had in turn cast his work in a light "so hazy that it does not mean anything." "And yet," he added, "it sparkles, which is what people love in the unfortunate century in which we live" (Gariel, *Les esclaves*, 3).

92. Gariel, *Les esclaves*, 32.

93. The Roux family played a key role in the distribution of sugar from the Antilles. Georges Roux became known as a laughable braggart after transforming his ships into a corsairing fleet during the Seven Years' War, and declaring war—as a private citizen—against King George II of England. See Charles Carrière and Michel Goury, *Georges Roux, dit de Corse. L'étrange destin d'un armateur marseillais, 1703–1792* (Marseille: Jeanne Lafitte, 1990); Michel Vovelle, *The Fall of the French Monarchy 1787–1792* [1972], trans. Susan Burke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 52. On the Roux brothers

On the boat, the captain had afforded her all attentions, while Étienne—who, the readers know, secretly loves her and deliberately embarked on the same ship<sup>94</sup>—served her with the most respectful eagerness. Things were proceeding smoothly until corsairs captured the ship. Everybody on board, including Dorothée, was put in chains,<sup>95</sup> though unlike *Candide*'s Italian princess her purity had been “religiously respected” to drive up her price, with a guard outside her cabin door. Once arrived in Algiers, Osman intended to take her to Constantinople and present her to the Grand Seigneur, but she had pleaded with the old corsair to keep her in the safety of her cabin until her parents sent a rich ransom. The plan was undermined by Osman's sons Mustapha and Soliman, who had “fallen madly in love” with the young woman: “They looked at each other with burning eyes, threatening each other; one even tried to force the door of the cabin where I was locked while Osman was absent.”<sup>96</sup> Once Osman heard of the risk she had run, he decided to sell her, which is how she arrived in the Benkibers' home. Though it alludes to some of the most common tropes of female captivity tales, including the threat of sexual enslavement and the passionate, jealous Moor, Dorothée's ordeal has a happy ending.

Towards the end of the second act, three more characters appear: the Livornese merchants Salomon Abukibak and his son, Saul, together with Monsieur Loretani, Dorothée and Bernard's father. In the first act, Jacob had revealed to Abigail her betrothal to Abukibak's son. Saul and Abigail's wedding, however, is not the only reason for Salomon Abukibak to be traveling to Algiers: he is accompanying Monsieur Loretani, distraught at having lost first his son and now his daughter, captured by “a damned corsair.”<sup>97</sup> Loretani is coming to pay Dorothée's ransom, and Abukibak is responsible for the redemption funds, an involvement that points to the important role played by Jewish merchants of North African origin in negotiating the ransom of captives.

The redemption of slaves was part and parcel of early modern Mediterranean commerce. The “economy of ransoming” was a complex system that included the “redistribution of wealth from the victims of corsairing to those who offered financial services and who organized the recovery or the recycling of ships and cargo,” including

firm, see Charles Carrière, *Négociants marseillais au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Contribution à l'étude des économies maritimes*, 2 vols. (Marseille: Institut historique de Provence, 1973); Sébastien Lupo, “Révolution(s) d'échelles. Le marché levantin et la crise du commerce marseillais au miroir des maisons Roux et de leurs relais à Smyrne (1740–1787)” (PhD diss., Aix-Marseille université, 2015); Lupo, “Inertie épistolaire et audace négociante au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Rives nord-méditerranéennes* 27 (2007): 109–22.

94. Gariel, *Les esclaves*, 27.

95. At Sara's horrified exclamation—“What barbarians!”—Abraham explains that women can be dangerous, as the biblical examples of Judith, Yael, and Delilah show—and small, pretty girls more so than big, vulgar ones (*ibid.*, 34). Abraham's assessment complements Abigail's earlier complaints about the female condition in Algiers. One wonders how these comments were perceived in Livorno, where women were free to walk around unsupervised.

96. *Ibid.*, 35–36.

97. *Ibid.*, 40.



human beings.<sup>98</sup> Rather than seeing it as an obstacle to trade between Muslims and Christians, it is possible to suggest, with Wolfgang Kaiser, that it “lubricated” economic and cross-cultural exchange.<sup>99</sup> For their part, Jews were involved at all levels in the business of Mediterranean captivity. Aside from their implication as consumers, Jewish merchants based in North Africa were crucial in the redemption of Spanish captives, serving as intermediaries for Trinitarian and Mercedarian friars.<sup>100</sup> Livornese Jewish traders were particularly involved in the ransoming of captives from Algeria, transferring funds and providing loans. This was the case of the fictional Salomon Abukibak—probably inspired, like Abraham, by his namesake Salomon Coen Bacri, who had gained a substantial fortune from his role in the redemption of slaves.<sup>101</sup>

In a departure from reality, however, the redemption of the Loretani siblings in *Les esclaves* does not ultimately require Salomon’s financial mediation. The reunion of Bernard with his father, arranged by Abraham unbeknownst to both captive and parent, reveals that the young man is safe and well taken care of in his home, as is Dorothée. Not yet satisfied, Abraham decides to play cupid as well. Having noticed Étienne’s affection for the young woman, and given that her arranged marriage in Marseille has fallen through due to her enslavement, Abraham pleads with Monsieur Loretani to arrange their wedding. The five hundred *zecchini* that he paid for the two slaves, which Loretani insisted on reimbursing, should go to the couple as a wedding gift. Moved by the gesture, Loretani is overcome by happiness and wonders how he can ever repay such generosity. But Abraham brushes aside Loretani’s profuse thanks: he does good deeds for the pure pleasure of doing them. His recompense—unlike that of actual Jewish brokers involved in the economy of ransoming—is within his heart.<sup>102</sup>

Like the other names in the play, that of Loretani carries a certain symbolism that is meaningful here. While there was no actual Loretani family in Livorno, the name directly evokes the Order of the Loretani Knights, established by Pope Paul III in 1545 and tasked with protecting the Adriatic coast, and particularly the sanctuary of the Virgin of Loreto, from piracy. Might the last name Loretani, in

98. Kaiser and Calafat, “Violence, Protection, and Commerce,” 78.

99. Wolfgang Kaiser, introduction to *Le commerce des captifs. Les intermédiaires dans l'échange et le rachat des prisonniers en Méditerranée, xv<sup>e</sup>–xviii<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. Wolfgang Kaiser (Rome: École française de Rome, 2008), 1–14, here p. 5; Wolfgang Kaiser and Guillaume Calafat, “The Economy of Ransoming in the Early Modern Mediterranean: A Form of Cross-Cultural Trade between Southern Europe and the Maghreb (16th to 18th Centuries),” in *Religion and Trade: Cross-Cultural Exchanges in World History, 1000–1900*, ed. Francesca Trivellato, Leor Halevi, and Catia Antunes (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 108–30, here pp. 125–30.

100. Daniel Hershenzon, “Jews and the Early Modern Mediterranean Slave Trade,” in *Jews and the Mediterranean*, ed. Matthias Lehmann and Jessica Marglin (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020), 81–106.

101. Filippini, “Una famiglia ebraica di Livorno,” 290. While the origins of the family and its history in the early part of the eighteenth century are still unclear, there is substantial research on its nineteenth-century vicissitudes: M. J. M. Haddey, *Le livre d'or des israélites algériens* (Algiers: Imprimerie typographique A. Bouyer, 1871), 66–72; Rosenstock, “The House of Bacri and Busnach”; and more recently Kalman, *Orientalizing the Jew*, 91–118.

102. Gariel, *Les esclaves*, 44–45.

referring to a papally sanctioned military order, be an ironic allusion to reactionary Catholic groups in Livorno—groups that were traditionally hostile to the prominence of the port’s Jews? Reading the encounter between Abraham and Monsieur Loretani through this lens adds an unexpected twist to its dramatic tension. At his arrival in Algiers, Loretani is oblivious to Abraham’s role in the fate of his children. Abraham feigns ignorance about the identity of both father and son and plays puppet-master in arranging their reunion—and by so doing asserts his superiority in the exchange. In the fraught political context of Livorno, Abraham’s gentle prank on Monsieur Loretani and Bernard may well have resonated deeply among the play’s Jewish readers.

Echoing the transfer of Salomon Coen Bacri and his family from Algiers to Livorno around 1785, the end of *Les esclaves* celebrates the move of the entire Benkiber family to the Tuscan port. After the Abukibaks’ arrival with Monsieur Loretani, Abraham, who had already arranged for Abigail to marry Saul Abukibak, betroths his son Jacob to Abukibak’s talented daughter Rachel, in a second biblically correct pairing.<sup>103</sup> Abraham is not only eager to unite the two houses—in family-based Mediterranean commerce, marriages reinforced business alliances, increasing capital and adding male members to a firm’s workforce—but also wishes to establish himself in Livorno, leaving backward Algiers behind. The Grand Duchy of Tuscany and the admirable *nazione ebrea* of Livorno are calling: “Goodbye Turkey! Goodbye Barbary! I am going to dwell in a Christian land, to live henceforth with a wise, learned, educated Nation, governed by a prince who is human, affable, and tolerant, an enemy of prejudices who zealously protects and rewards virtue,” Peter Leopold of the House of Habsburg-Lorraine. Jacob is the only member of the family who remains behind, to wrap up his father’s affairs. Soon he too will move to Livorno where his bride awaits, and there he will be reunited “with such a tender father, with the most generous of men.”<sup>104</sup>

Gariel was quite aware that his critics might find him overly optimistic. In the play’s preface, he anticipated complaints that “all my characters are too virtuous” but countered that he much preferred “praising virtue to punishing crime.”<sup>105</sup> *Les esclaves* featured an uplifting tale and model North African Jewish characters, none of whom display any moral stain, something the Livornese public would not have expected. Still, Gariel’s choice of epigraph reminds us that *sunt bona mixta malis*: in the real world there is no such thing as perfect virtue. At the core of the play thus lies an overt paradox. Perhaps, like Voltaire at the end of *Candide*, Gariel wished to stress the importance of cultivating all that is good in “one’s garden,” without too much bitterness towards the evils of the world. But just like Lessing, he also wanted to see what would happen on the stage if he presented the public with virtue where they least expected it. We do not know if any “lovers of toleration” showed admiration

103. Abigail and Rachel are described as perfect merchant’s daughters: they know everything about running a household, they can read and write, and they know arithmetic, French, Spanish, and dancing (ibid., 42).

104. Ibid., 47–48.

105. Ibid., 3.

for this play, as its author hoped.<sup>106</sup> The evidence suggests that Gariel, *Le Tolérant*, was in the minority—and that the Livornese public had neither much interest in a story of virtuous Jews, nor much tolerance for Jews in the theater.

## The Academy of the Avvalorati and the Saint Julia Uprising

From 1787, the political climate in Tuscany began to degrade. The setback suffered by Peter Leopold, powerless in the face of the bishops' curialist majority, instilled courage in the most reactionary sectors of society. This complicated any discussion of the Jewish question, while the theatrical scene became increasingly heedless of the *nazione ebrea's* demands. After the conciliatory figure of Bicchierai left the project for the new theater (by then known as Teatro dagli Armeni), a period of conflict began among the box owners, leading to the ousting of the Jewish elite from decision-making forums.

In May 1788, Bicchierai decided to sell the theater to Andrea Campigli, the impresario in charge of its productions, who agreed to pay a sizable advance followed by the remainder in instalments.<sup>107</sup> The buyer passed away shortly thereafter, however, and his heir, not wishing to assume Campigli's commitments, threatened to impugn the contract in court, where it could be invalidated due to prior tax evasion. To save the theater and allow Bicchierai to retire to private life, the marquis Filippo Berte, one of the box owners and a prominent figure in conservative circles, promoted the establishment of an academy to take over the contract.<sup>108</sup>

The goal was to form an exclusive association from among the city's most prominent figures, who would take on the economic management and the artistic direction of the theater. This would become known as the academy of the Avvalorati. Its models were the Florentine academies of the Immobili and the Infocati, which had brought together the Tuscan capital's aristocratic elites in the meritorious purpose of sharing the expenses of the Pergola and Cocomero theaters.<sup>109</sup> Academies

106. *Ibid.*, 4.

107. ASLi, *Governo*, 43, fols. 195–197v, agreement to take over the contract (August 29, 1789).

108. Berte belonged to a family of French origin, which had settled in Livorno in the second half of the seventeenth century to engage in commerce and had obtained a noble title by acquiring some landed property in the Tuscan countryside that the Medici had enfeoffed. His sister Anna Maria held a very well-attended literary salon in her Pisa home, while his wife Caterina Casimira was the daughter of the rich notary Giovanbattista Gamera. The marquis was thus the brother-in-law of the famous Giovanni Gamera, a dramatist and playwright who had little talent but was very prolific and ambitious enough to stand as a candidate to succeed Metastasio at the Viennese court. See Federico Marri, "Lettere di Giovanni de Gamera," *Studi musicali* 29 (2000): 71–184 and 293–452, and 30 (2001): 59–128; on Berte in particular, see *ibid.*, 293–95. On Gamera, see Franco Tagliafierro, "Giovanni de Gamera e le sue tragedie 'domestiche,'" *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 171, no. 553 (1994): 183–216.

109. Loredana Maccabruni, "L'Accademia degli Immobili e il teatro della Pergola dai sovrani lorenese al regno d'Italia," in *Lo "Spettacolo meraviglioso." Il teatro della Pergola: l'opera a Firenze*, ed. Marcello de Angelis et al. (Florence: Polistampa, 2000), 47–59; Sara

were institutions whose rank-driven, corporate structure conferred luster and distinction on their members. Indeed, in the mid-1700s, when the new ruling House of Hapsburg-Lorraine set out to reform citizenship, opening a debate on the juridical foundations of Tuscan aristocracy, some maintained that academic membership should not be merely an honorific recognition, but accepted as legal grounds for nobility.<sup>110</sup> However, the project proposed by Berte in the summer of 1789 was not only in conflict with the government's reformist policies; it did not even meet with the kind of convinced and enthusiastic support he had hoped to find among the Livornese elites. *Cavaliere* Francesco Sproni and Count Filippo Agostini, charged with collecting the thirty-six subscriptions needed to take over the contract, struggled to compile a list of potential members, each of whom was asked to pay a hundred *pezze* in advance and to jointly underwrite the commitment to the former owner. They received many refusals. Obviously, the invitation had to target Livornese personalities distinguished by merit and patrimony; unfortunately, these two requirements were not always to be found in the same individual. Livorno's *gonfaloniere* (or mayor), the *cavaliere* Paolo Valentino Farinola, initially gave his vague assent but ultimately refused to sign; several other figures who had only underwritten the shares out of courtesy later made it known that they were withdrawing their signatures.<sup>111</sup> The project risked failure and Campigli's heir, tired of so much vacillation, issued an ultimatum. Berte was running out of possibilities: to save the theater it was necessary to call Livorno's richest man to the academy's aid. Although Giovanni Niccola Bertolli, known simply as the "Bertolla," could not boast illustrious ancestors—people still remembered him behind a fish counter at the market—his wealth was legendary.<sup>112</sup> Having earned his fortune through trade, he had turned to real estate speculation and later made enormous profits buying and selling the buildings of the confraternities suppressed by the grand duke. The rich Bertolla did not shy away from the deal: he agreed to pay off the creditors, as long as it was very clear that his contribution was a loan and not a free grant.

The Sephardic elite understood that the operation orchestrated by Berte stemmed from reactionary motives. They suspected that the marquis and his

Mamone, "Accademia e opera in musica nella vita di Giovan Carlo Mattias e Leopoldo de' Medici, fratelli del granduca Ferdinando," in *Lo stupor dell'invenzione. Firenze e la nascita dell'opera*, ed. Piero Gargiulo (Florence: Olschki, 2001), 119–38; Caterina Pagnini, *Il teatro del Cocomero a Firenze (1701–1748)* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2017).

110. Marcello Verga, *Da "cittadini" a "nobili." Lotta politica e riforma delle istituzioni nella Toscana di Francesco Stefano di Lorena* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1990). See also Jean Boutier, "Les membres des académies florentines à l'époque moderne. La sociabilité intellectuelle à l'épreuve du statut et des compétences," in *Naples, Rome, Florence. Une histoire comparée des milieux intellectuels italiens (XVII<sup>e</sup>–XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, ed. Jean Boutier, Brigitte Marin, and Antonella Romano (Rome: École française de Rome, 2005), 405–43.

111. ASLi, *Governo*, 43, fols. 216–217, report from Aghib, Abudharam, and Attias.

112. Some believed that Bertolla's wealth derived from a lottery win: Biblioteca Labronica, MS XVI, Pietro Bernardo Prato, "Giornale della città a porto di Livorno," 1782, pp. 12–13. Others thought he had received, in trust, the treasure of two Jesuits passing through the city: David G. LoRomer, *Merchants and Reform in Livorno: 1814–1868* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 66.

friends intended to save the theater without the help of the Jews, and in fact to shut them out by erecting the academy as a new status barrier that would once again relegate them to political insignificance. When it became clear that the membership campaign was encountering difficulties, some of the Jewish box owners offered to help but were met with a polite refusal. Still, Aghib was not willing to throw in the towel. A former deputy of the *nazione ebrea* on the municipal council,<sup>113</sup> and the box owners' representative at the time of the new theater's construction, Aghib had got wind that some of the underwriters regretted their involvement. His two brothers, Moisè and Isach, acquired the share of the English merchant James Bird, while the brothers Joseph, Moisè, and Isach Abudharam—a family originally from Tétouan and very well established in British mercantile circuits—got hold of that of Francesco Bicchierai.<sup>114</sup>

On February 2, 1790, the first meeting of the soon-to-be-established academy was held with twenty-five out of thirty-six shareholders present. Academic offices were elected, Angelo Bentivoglio was chosen as the impresario, *cavaliere* Sproni and the attorney Antonio Michon were tasked with writing the articles of association, and measures were taken to prevent “intrusions” into the academic body.<sup>115</sup> The brothers Aghib and Abudharam informed the new president—Berte—that they had bought two shares only some time later, and appealed to be officially recognized as members.<sup>116</sup> In a tardy reply, Berte made it known that the request could not be accepted, as the society had decided that “it was not possible to proceed with the replacement of any interested party without the prior consent of the others.”<sup>117</sup> In other words, the academy reserved the right of pre-emption, in analogy with the disposition found in the statutes of the academy of the Florentine theater of the Pergola. The Aghibs and Abudharams, after being duly reimbursed, would therefore have to cede their shares to the academic body, which from then on would include only thirty-four people. This took place on March 21, 1790, just four weeks after the Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II had died and his brother Peter Leopold had left Tuscany for Vienna, where he would soon receive the imperial crown as Leopold II.

In his reply, Berte had been extremely obsequious, reassuring the brothers Aghib and Abudharam (“and through them all the other members of their Nation”)

113. In the eleven years following the municipality reform, Jacob Aghib was twice a deputy of the *nazione ebrea*. The others were Lazzaro Recanati, who held the post five times, and David Franco and Jacob Bonfil, who held it twice each. See Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers*, 312.

114. ASLi, *Governo*, 43, fols. 220–221, transfer from Bird to Aghib (December 22, 1789); fols. 222–223, transfer from Bicchierai to Abudharam (January 19, 1790). Francesco was the son of Pietro Gaetano, and owned one box in the theater.

115. ASLi, *Governo*, 43, fols. 200–204, “Copia della Deliberazione dei SS.ri Accademici Avvalorati del 2 feb. 1790.”

116. ASLi, *Governo*, 43, fol. 224, brothers Aghib and brothers Abudharam to Berte (February 16, 1790).

117. ASLi, *Governo*, 43, fol. 225–225v, Berte to the brothers Aghib and brothers Abudharam (March 11, 1790). The original letters can be found in ASLi, *Avvalorati*, 1, n. 5.

that despite their exclusion from the academy they would continue “to fully enjoy all those rights and considerations they have enjoyed [so far] as theater box owners.”<sup>118</sup> Such intolerable hypocrisy was debated among the Jewish box owners, who, with the support of the *massari*, decided to call for a reparatory intervention on the part of the sovereign. A long document was composed that traced the history of Livorno’s theater from 1778 to the Jews’ insulting exclusion from the academy, deemed illegitimate because it was decided before the institution’s charter had been drawn up and approved by the government. Above all, Peter Leopold was asked to reinstate the rights of the Aghib and Abudharam brothers. The deliberation of the so-called academicians was not only detrimental to the “interests of the owners from the [Jewish] Nation,” it tarnished the “decorum” of the Nation as a whole.<sup>119</sup> The Jews possessed as many as twenty-four theater boxes out of the ninety-two held by private individuals (the remaining thirty-six constituted the impresario’s allocation), and like the other box owners they had made every effort to ensure that the new theater would be built. And yet, when it became necessary to form a consortium to take over Bicchierai’s rights, everything had been done to keep them out in favor of Christians, most of whom were not even box owners. Only eleven of the thirty-four academicians actually owned a theater box, while all the others were lessees—some even rented their boxes from Jews. The deliberation of the putative academy was therefore clearly discriminatory; other sale transfers had taken place, without the new purchasers having to face the right of preemption. Moreover, the decision was in clear contrast with the policies of the government, which had repeatedly intervened to give Jews the same rights as other subjects of the grand duke.<sup>120</sup> The document, signed by the Aghib and Abudharam brothers and by Jacob Attias, was sent to the emperor in Vienna, but was returned unanswered. Occupied with the Russo-Turkish war, the rebellion of

118. ASLi, *Governo*, fol. 224, the brothers Aghib and brothers Abudharam to Berte (February 16, 1790).

119. ASLi, *Governo*, 43, fols. 208–219, report from Aghib, Abudharam, and Attias.

120. As evidence of the grand duke’s non-discriminatory approach, the document mentioned the involvement of the Jews in the municipality and in the deputations in charge of the Chamber of Public Payments and the licensing of commercial brokers (*sensali*). See Andrea Addobbati, “Le molte teste dell’Idra. I sensali livornesi nell’età delle riforme,” *Mélanges de l’École française de Rome. Italie et Méditerranée modernes et contemporaines* 127 (2015): <https://doi.org/10.4000/mefrim.2181>. It also claimed that the grand duke had mandated the membership of Jews in academies. In fact, with a few exceptions Tuscan sites of scholarly and literary sociability such as academies remained closed to Jews: Ulrich Wyrwa, *Juden in der Toskana und in Preußen im Vergleich. Aufklärung und Emanzipation in Florenz, Livorno, Berlin und Königsberg i. Pr.* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 30–43 and 39–40 for the episode of the academy of the Faticanti. See also Wyrwa, “Perché i moderni rabbini pretendono di dare ad intendere una favola chimerica...”. *L’illuminismo toscano e gli ebrei*, *Quaderni storici* 1 (2000): 139–62. More extensively, on the participation of Jews in the life of Tuscan cultural institutions, see Bregoli, *Mediterranean Enlightenment*, 39–126. On the exceptional figure of Joseph Attias, see *ibid.*, 39–67, and Frattarelli Fischer, *Vivere fuori dal ghetto*, 307–38. See also Liana E. Funaro, *Un sentier sparso di luce. Salomone Fiorentino fra Firenze e Livorno* (Nola: Il laboratorio, 2014).

the Netherlands, and the ferment in Bohemia and Transylvania, Leopold II did not have time to deal with the theater of Livorno.

Things came to a head, however, with the fateful events of May 31, 1790. Social tensions and popular discontent spilled over into a revolt on the occasion of the feast of Saint Julia, the city's patron saint.<sup>121</sup> At the end of the religious services, the relics of the saint were brought back with popular acclaim to the confraternal chapel in the church of Saint Julia, from which they had been removed under Peter Leopold. Amidst the euphoria and commotion, the populace came up with the idea of completely and utterly restoring the old order. The crowd demanded the restoration of the office in charge of provisions and victuals, invoked a price ceiling on bread and other basic goods, and called for the restitution of the old confraternity buildings, which had been sold and adapted to other uses, for the purpose of religious worship. In truth, not all their demands looked to the past. The old decrees that reserved port work to a monopolist company of porters were also challenged.<sup>122</sup> In general, however, the masses' instinct was in favor of restoration. Every novelty was to be canceled, and everything was to return to its proper place, beginning with Saint Julia's hallowed relics. Driven by this goal, the crowd took possession of the confraternities and broke into parish churches, private homes, and wherever it was suspected that sacred furnishings, which had been put up for auction by order of the grand duke, may be held. The most diligent in the search for these "stolen" goods were the confrères of the Nativity of Saint Anne in the working-class Venezia district: these porters, boatmen, and fishmongers were gripped by the rumor that the marble jambs and thresholds of their chapel's entrance had been bought by the Jews to embellish the synagogue.

Up to that point, the rioters had encountered no resistance. But as they stormed threateningly into the Jewish quarter, the inhabitants began to pelt them from the windows. To avoid the worst, the government auditor Giuseppe Pierallini deployed the dragoons, but the mob was not intimidated and the turmoil continued until blood was shed. Isolated from his comrades, a soldier took fright and fired, leaving three of the rioters for dead. It took much effort to restore calm. The negotiations were frantic, until the porters and stevedores of the Venezia district agreed to guarantee public order themselves after being promised free access to port work. According to an anonymous chronicler, it was the lieutenant Angelo Mussio and the head porter Matteo Bruni who managed to reach an accord. As soon as things were settled,

*with the leaders of the tumult regarding the articles in question, and all their requests had been granted, [Mussio] set off with them, and they moved as a whole into the Venezia*

121. Gabriele Turi, "Viva Maria." *La reazione alle riforme leopoldine (1790–1799)* (Florence: Olschki, 1969), 3–25; Carlo Mangio, *Politica toscana e rivoluzione. Momenti di storia livornese* (Pisa: Pacini, 1974), 1–36; Samuel Fettah, "Les émeutes de Santa Giulia à Livourne. Conflits locaux et résistances au despotisme éclairé dans l'Italie de la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Provence historique* 202 (2000): 459–70.

122. Andrea Addobbati, *Facchinerie. Immigrati bergamaschi, valtellinesi e svizzeri nel porto di Livorno (1602–1847)* (Pisa: ETS, 2018), 113–22.

*Nuova. Having been communicated to all the other inhabitants of the district, the agreed-upon measures were approved, and it was loudly declared that there would be peace with the Jews, so that all of them together with the said officer returned with beating drums and flags to the Via degli Ebrei to ratify the Peace aloud. And in this way the tumult was quelled, the troops withdrew, apart from a few patrols which remained as a simple precaution, and tranquility returned among the inhabitants of the Venezia district and the Jews.*<sup>123</sup>

While Lieutenant Mussio dealt with the porters in the square, other negotiations were being held behind the scenes. At that juncture of “very great affliction,” the *massari* of the *nazione ebrea* sought to find out from the authorities and the Christian notables what could be usefully done to avert “the very serious and real danger” that hung over the “lives and substances” of their coreligionists. Those consulted included the attorney Michon, one of the main promoters of the academy. On June 1, 1790, “the day of the greatest agitation,” Michon suggested that “to ward off any pretext of discontent” it would be opportune to reply to the marquis Berte.<sup>124</sup> The next day, the Aghib and Abudharam brothers agreed to hand over their shares to the academic body.<sup>125</sup>

The game was over. Berte and his allies had managed to keep the Jews out of the direction of the theater. However, unlike the *massari*, the Aghib and Abudharam brothers did not abandon the cause and sought redress when they learned that Leopold II would be in Florence to establish his son Ferdinand on the Tuscan throne. Emperor Leopold arrived in Florence in early April 1791, rebuked the ministers of the Regency Council for their submissive attitude during the recent uprisings, and finally left for Vienna, entrusting the Tuscan government to his son. Nobody showed him the Jews’ complaint, which was returned with the Regency Council’s order to delegate the dispute’s resolution to the auditor Pierallini. While Pierallini easily dismantled the arguments of the Aghib and Abudharam brothers’ lawyer in his report,<sup>126</sup> he did not want to elude the question underlying the recriminations over the academy’s statutes. Had there been discrimination, he asked? Of course there had. It was in the nature of exclusive societies to discriminate against certain people. It had to be very clear that, in the case of associations like the *Avvalorati*, membership involved both a real right and a personal right. And if a shareholder could unquestionably dispose of the first right, the same could not be said of the second, which was of an honorary nature and therefore depended on reputation. It is for this reason, explained Pierallini, that in academic charters the preemptive

123. Pietro Vigo, ed., *Livorno e gli avvenimenti del 1790–91 con notizie di Firenze e altri documenti. Diario anonimo* (Livorno: Meucci, 1907), 41.

124. ASLi, *Governo*, 43, fols. 141v–142, “Memoria” (March 1791).

125. ASLi, *Governo*, 43, fol. 145, brothers Aghib and brothers Abudharam to Berte (June 2, 1790).

126. ASLi, *Governo*, 43, fols. 163–187, “Memoria Pierallini.” See also fols. 156–158v, “Obiezioni fatte dall’Auditor Consultore del Governo di Livorno alla supplica dei fratelli Aghib e Abudaram”; and fols. 158v–162, “Risposta ai dubbi promossi dall’Auditor Pierallini contro la supplica degli Aghib e Abudaram umiliata a S.M.C. intorno al Teatro di Livorno e sua Accademia.”



right is established in favor of the body in question. It served to prevent the stock's indiscriminate negotiability, with the risk of shares ending up in the hands of just anyone and the resulting obligation to admit "to the society people with whom it was not appropriate for others to be united, such as plebeians or people of low status, people of dubious credit and conduct, quarrelsome individuals, or such like."<sup>127</sup>

Pierallini stressed that in this case no one intended to equate the Aghibs and the Abudharams with such awful people. It was not because of "contempt for their *nazione*" that the academicians had exercised their right of preemption. But it was a fact, he observed, that "the common people have a certain abhorrence for [Jews], and think of ways to be spiteful and unkind to them." Since a shareholder's duties included monitoring the theater, with the power of "having the insolent arrested" to guarantee "peace and good order during performances," the reason for the exclusion, according to Pierallini, would be clear to everyone:

*Such a position is certainly not suitable for a Jew, as he would expose himself to affronts from the poorly educated and injudicious people who fill the theater stalls in Livorno, and who are the ones who must in fact be kept in check. Since it is not possible that this race of people should have respect for a Jew, this could result in the people insulting the nazione [ebrea], and other unpleasant consequences, which would cause the government considerable disquiet.*<sup>128</sup>

What prevented the Jews from joining the academy was thus the unwavering prejudice of the populace. With Ferdinand III on the throne in Florence the question of the Jews' rights was shelved, while the distinctions of rank that Leopoldian absolutism had tried to dismantle were brought back into vogue. This was a victory for the advocates of tradition and its hierarchies, including the circle of Livorno reactionaries who had set up the academy of the Avvalorati. Together with the impresario Bentivoglio, Berte and the other members decided to inaugurate the new order of the theater with a serious work which, we believe, expressed their satisfaction at the defeat inflicted on the supporters of the reforms. While in 1782 Bicchierai had chosen to present Metastasio's *Adriano in Siria*, and hence the figure of one of the wisest and most beloved princes in historical memory, for the first performance of the 1790 winter season maestro Ferdinando Robuschi was commissioned to set to music *La morte di Cesare* (The death of Caesar), a drama with republican and anti-despotic overtones by librettist Gaetano Sertor.<sup>129</sup>

For Jews to obtain legal parity it would be necessary to wait, in Livorno too, for the arrival of the revolutionary armies. Meanwhile, Gariel, the *Tolérant* who had imagined being able to discuss the Jewish question dispassionately, disappears forever from our sight. Apart from the sparse details given in his prefaces, we do not know who he was, where he came from, or even what happened to him; he was just

127. ASLi, *Governo*, 43, fol. 178v.

128. ASLi, *Governo*, 43, fol. 179.

129. Hewitt, "I teatri di Livorno," 39; Alessandra Feri, "Il teatro musicale a Livorno dall'età leopoldina alla fine del Settecento (1766–1799)" (*Laurea* diss., Università di Firenze, 1994–1995), 197–98.

a wandering, furtive man of letters, like so many others in the late Enlightenment.<sup>130</sup> It was instead Francesco Maria Gianni, one of the most respected ministers of grand duke Peter Leopold's reign, who would look back on the fierce dispute over the theater and the expulsion of the Jews from the academy of the Avvalorati,<sup>131</sup> refuting the hypocritical thesis that civil and tolerant Christian notables had been forced against their will to bow to the unreasonable bestiality of the people.

In some of his private notes, dating back perhaps to 1791, Gianni observed that Livorno's populace were willing to respect the *nazione ebrea* as long as the government and its ministers "showed ... that they kept it in consideration in the same way as the other nations."<sup>132</sup> However, the minister had learned from reputable sources that during the dispute about the theater the local representatives of the government had fallen short of their duty of impartiality, revealing "signs of contempt and aversion that were few and small" but enough "to sow contempt and aversion among the people" and to push "the populace ... to excesses." According to what he had been told, "some merchant or gentleman of Livorno," encouraged by the demeanor of public officials, had spoken "with contempt of the *nazione [ebrea]* with his porters, boatmen, and the like, with whom one speaks on familiar terms in those hours of the morning when the Livornese do not put on airs of gentlemen or of rich and important merchants." Similar insinuations had continued until the day of the turmoil, "because with ... words referring to the theater" it was said that:

*"Now they will be kept in their place—Now we will see if we can have a theater without them—Now they will get back into their ghetto, and they will leave polite society," and similar sayings, which make an impression on the common people when they are spoken by those whom they regard as the source of their earnings, and the reason for their survival.*<sup>133</sup>

In short, it seems that so-called polite society, before giving good advice to keep tempers in check, had made great efforts to inflame them. If the government, concluded Gianni, had embarked on a serious investigation "to find out what really happened in Livorno," they would have found "that which perhaps would not be believed."<sup>134</sup>

The two protagonists of *Les Juifs*, Gariel's first dialogue, conclude their discussion at the café proclaiming their satisfaction with the protection accorded to them by the Jewish privileges of Livorno. In reality, the *leggi livornine* were the precarious result of time-honored practices of supplication, and in the late eighteenth century

130. Robert Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985).

131. Furio Diaz, *Francesco Maria Gianni. Dalla burocrazia alla politica sotto Pietro Leopoldo di Toscana* (Milan: Ricciardi, 1966).

132. Francesco Maria Gianni, *Scritti di pubblica economia, storico-economici e storico-politici*, vol. 1 (Florence: Niccolai, 1848), 261.

133. *Ibid.*, 262.

134. *Ibid.*

were becoming a somewhat fragile safeguard, connected as they were to the power of the absolute monarchy. What is more, these privileges would not facilitate Jews' social acceptance and a painless transition towards an equality of rights. Not only were they ultimately founded on an assumption of difference—and hence on a form of discrimination, albeit positive—but even these prerogatives (real or presumed) would eventually be seen in a different light by the Christian majority, especially in the most economically disadvantaged quarters where they were considered an unmerited and detestable mark of preference. After all, prejudice takes root tenaciously not thanks to its immutability but rather through its resilience in the face of particular circumstances. It is hardly surprising that, as we move into more Mediterranean latitudes, we see different facets of anti-Jewish prejudice emerging, although certain assumptions remain constant.

Literature, and culture more generally, cannot withdraw from the fray, as if they were “politically, even historically innocent.”<sup>135</sup> To the contrary, as authors elaborate and rework ideological models and representations, their full responsibility emerges most clearly not just in the context of literary history and tradition (though even these are not innocent schematizations), but above all when we reconsider their works as they concretely intersect with the struggles, abuses, ploys, and fabrications of politics and society. In this way we can rethink their singularity without teleological assumptions and “seek them in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history.”<sup>136</sup>

At the end of his introduction to *Orientalism*, Edward Said stressed the connections, seen and unseen, between power and knowledge, and the methodological steps needed to recover them. His research had persuaded him that “society and literary culture can only be understood and studied together.” It was a scholarly approach that led him to a historical, cultural, and political truth with ironic implications for an Arab Palestinian in the late twentieth century: in revealing the contours and tortuous genealogies of Orientalism, Said found himself “writing the history of a strange, secret sharer of Western anti-Semitism,” concluding that “anti-Semitism and ... Orientalism resemble each other very much.”<sup>137</sup> The same is valid here. Having returned *Les esclaves livournois à Alger* to its specific context and to the political program of its author, we seem to have arrived at conclusions not dissimilar to those of Said: that anti-Jewish sentiment and Orientalism were (and remain) close relatives, a fact of which Gariel unintentionally reminds us.

Just like Lessing, Gariel wanted to show his public the most perfect virtue where they least expected to find it. He not only chose a Jew as his champion of Enlightenment humanism but also put him on an Orientalist stage, and even had him engaged in the slave trade.<sup>138</sup> While this inhuman practice was starting

135. Said, *Orientalism*, 27.

136. Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” [1971], in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. and trans. Donald F. Bouchard with Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 139–164, here p. 139.

137. Said, *Orientalism*, 27–28.

138. “The Orient is a stage on which the whole East is confined,” mused Said: *ibid.*, 67.

to be viewed with opprobrium in Europe, it was hypocritically relegated beyond European borders and associated with a barbarous Orient. Gariel's intention was surely that Abraham Benkiber would have been judged guilty even before the curtain rose, only to reveal himself to be the best of men, contrary to all appearances. The spectator would thus have to recognize that there was good even in that Algerian Jew, and that it was not all that difficult for such a figure to shed any negative aspects that remained. It was enough for Abraham to leave Algiers for Livorno, put distance between himself and the Orient, and begin an entirely new life in a civilized country—the most civilized country that could be imagined, in fact, because it was ruled by the best of princes.

Even here, however, the paradoxical parable of the good man disguised as an evildoer did not seem to function particularly well. The appearance on stage of a character considered inconceivable by received wisdom did not have enough force to singlehandedly modify the inertia of prejudice. Less than five years later, a popular uprising sufficed to demonstrate that the public sphere would not open easily to Jews. The privilege of the corporate order could only reduce frictions; it could not in itself succeed in fueling a true process of mutual understanding and acceptance. With the Jews expelled from the management of the theater in the name of rank and academic prerogatives, intercommunal relations in Tuscany resumed their normal course. In 1789, the marquis Berte's brother-in-law, the renowned comic writer Giovanni Gamera, published *I due nipoti, o l'uomo del mondo* (The two nephews, or the man of the world).<sup>139</sup> Among the play's secondary characters was a Jewish commercial broker, depicted with all the most antiquated and stereotypical features of traditional anti-Judaism; and, as usual, the *massari* could do nothing but protest and call for the censure of the prince.<sup>140</sup>

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139. *Nuovo Teatro del Signor Gamera*, vol. 4 (Pisa: Ranieri Prosperi, 1789), 73 (act 4, scene 3).

140. ASLi, *Commissariato, fondo segreto*, 2, Samuel Lusena and Aron B. Carvaglio to the commissario (November 1789).