

Jewish Italy

Believe It or Not!

The University of Bologna established a **Chair of Hebrew Language** in 1455!

Ashkenasic Jewish money-lenders were **the first to settle in the Venice Ghetto** (hence the Merchant of Venice). They built two synagogues: Scola Grande Tedesca in 1528-29 and Scola Canton in 1531-32. In 1541 Sephardic Jews expanded the ghetto, built their own neighborhood and the Levantine Synagogue. Today, tourists know not to miss the spirited Friday Night dinner experience at Chabad's **Gam Gam** Venice restaurant with hundreds of people from all over!

Rabbi G.M. Garelick who certifies the JoyVin & Bartenura wines (on the table tonight) as Kosher - is the regional director of Chabad in Italy **since 1958**. His wife Bassie Garelik, a noted speaker and educator, grew up in Pittsburgh PA.

A 1487 letter from visiting R' Ovadia Bartenuro describes Jewish life in Palermo, Sicily: 850 families, mostly artisans, live down one street in the best part of town. They are obligated to wear a red cloth badge... The synagogue vestibule has **three entrances, massive stone pillars, a splendid fountain...**

Leghorn (Livorno) never had a Jewish ghetto thanks to the efforts of Tuscan Grand Duke Ferdinand I di Medici, who put out the welcome mat for Jews from Spain and Portugal in 1593.

Rome is Europe's oldest Jewish community with Jewish settlement since Roman times in the Second Temple period. Today the community is said to number 15,000 **with 25 (!!) Kosher stores and eateries** (a number of them Glatt Kosher) and four Chabad Houses including one run by Rabbi Shalom Hazan, a friend of Rabbi Mendel from Yeshiva.

A Leghorn priest Don Roberto Angeli hustled patients out of the Jewish hospital, hid them in local apartments and fed the **during the German occupation**.

In the Padua Jewish cemetery (dating back to 1348) the grave of the famous Rabbi Maharam of Padua is decorated with the **image of a cat** in reference to his last name: KATZnelenbogen.

In the enlightened city of Mantua for nearly 100 years an active Jewish Theater (attended by Jews and non-Jews) which **performed on Friday afternoons** respecting the Jewish Sabbath observance.

BN

Pranzo di Shabbat Prima di Purime all'Italiana

Pre-Purim Italian-style Shabbat Dinner

Menu

Pane bianco Italiano

Italian White Bread

Pane di Aglio

Garlic Bread

Vino Spumante

Sparkling Wine

Olive Miste

Assorted Olives

Pesce in Salza di Pomodori con Spezzi

Fish in Spiced Tomato Sauce

Insalata di Cesare

Caesar Salad

Minestrone

Minestrone Soup

Pasta Asciuta con Polpete

Spaghetti and Meatballs

Biscotti

Biscotti ala Mandel Bread

Thanks to Professor Herman Prins Salomon for the Italian translation

ITALIAN RABBINICS

Menachem Recan(a)ti

lived in Recanati (a coastal city on the Adriatic Sea, Italy's eastern side) wrote important Kabbalistical works including "Taamei HaMitzvos"

Yosef Colon - Maharik

The Maharik was the leading Halachic authority in Italy in the 15th century. His legal opinions and responsa were sought from Jewish communities throughout Europe. He served as Rabbi in Bologna, Mantua and Pavia. His writings are often quoted in later Italian Rabbinic writings and are reflected in Ashkenasic Halacha.

Ovadia Sforno

was a Rabbi, a physician and a Biblical commentator. He was born in 1475 in Cesena and passed away in 1550 in Bologna, both cities in Italy's Northeast. While studying medicine in Rome he befriended Henry II the future king of France with whom he maintained a lasting correspondence and friendship. The famous Christian scholar and patron of Jewish scholarship Johannes Reuchlin studied under Rabbi Sforno for two years 1498-1400 on the recommendation of the Vatican's Cardinal Grimani.

Ovadia Bartenua

is one of the foremost commentaries on the Mishna. He was born, studied and served as Rabbi in Italy where he wrote his Mishnaic commentary, and later moved to Jerusalem where he became the Rabbi of the Spanish exiles (1492) who settled there. He

worked to establish vital institutions such as hospitals and charitable societies. Even Muslims came to him to decide their monetary disputes. His leadership strengthened the Jerusalem community and built necessary infrastructure which was greatly lacking before his arrival.

Menachem Azaria of Fano

Leading Kabbalist. One of his texts is carefully studied in Rabbi Mendel's "Mystical Significance of Meatballs and Spaghetti" class (see bottom of opposite page) based on a Chabad Chassidic text (5666) by Rebbe Sholom Ber Schneersohn.

Moshe Chaim Luzzato

Better known by the acronym RAMCHAL, he is the author of Mesilas Yesharim and Derech Hashem, both classic books of Jewish inspiration and introspection whose study was popularized by Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, founder of the Mussar Movement in Eastern Europe. He may have attended the University of Padua, and also wrote poetry. He is buried near the famous Rabbi Akiva of the Talmud on a hilltop overlooking the Kineret in Tiberias, Israel.

Donna Gracias Mendes Nasi

A woman of tremendous wealth and influence who worked tirelessly to improve the spiritual and material situations of her fellow Jews, especially former Spanish-Portuguese Marranos/Conversos. She greatly raised the profile of Jewish people in the courts of Popes, Kings and Sultans. After the death of relatives, she assumed management of the Mendes financial empire, one of the greatest in Europe. She lived in Venice and Ferrara from 1544-1553 and then moved to the Ottoman Empire.

PURIM FOSSANO - made in italy

Just as Purim is celebrated for the great redemption through which the Jews in all of the 127 countries Ahasuerus ruled were saved from annihilation, many other communities throughout the world have their own "Purims" marking their salvations. Many communities even wrote their own Megillot describing the miraculous events of their salvation.

Among local Purims is the Purim of Fossano. Fossano is a town in Northern Italy at the foothills of the Alps. In 1798 it was the scene of fighting between France and Italy. Napoleon Bonaparte was a 27-year old general who had just been appointed Commander-in-Chief of the French forces in Italy.

Just before Passover, the French laid siege to the town of Fossano, and began a bombardment of the town.

Two things (in addition to their general dislike of Jews) made the non-Jewish populace suspicious that the Jewish community was in cahoots with the French and sending signals to the enemy troops.

(1) While the city was fighting for its life, all the Jews dressed up in finery and held long festive meals in their homes. Why? It was Passover and they were celebrating the Seders. Their neighbors thought they were celebrating the siege and the hope for French victory.

(2) The French bombardment was relentless. The canons were booming at all hours. But somehow not a single bomb fell in the Jewish quarter. Evidence of collaboration and treason!

Sensing the dangerous situation the Jewish community asked the city elders for protection. But they were occupied with the defense of the city and couldn't spare any soldiers.

Rumors flew and anger mounted. An armed mob gathered and began hacking its way through the ghetto, pillaging what they could. They thirsted for blood, and advanced to the synagogue where the Jews were gathered. They reached the synagogue and rushed up the steps. A few broke into the vestibule.

Suddenly a bomb, fired at random from a French cannon, burst through the wall of the synagogue and landed in the vestibule. Terrified, the attackers beat a hasty retreat. Many of them threw away their spoils, as they ran for their lives, crazed with fear.

As it happened, the bomb that fell in the vestibule did not do much damage, as if its only purpose was to frighten away the attackers and save the Jews.

The elders of the Jewish community decreed that the 2nd day of the intermediate days of Passover should be observed every year by the Jews of Fossano as a day of celebration for the wonderful miracle of the bomb.

It was also decided that the gaping hole, which the shell made as it crashed through the wall, should not be closed up. Instead, it was made a window, around which a golden inscription in Hebrew proclaimed it as evidence of the miracle of the bomb.

from "ASK RABBI MENDEL" on www.shabboshouse.com

Q. I noticed you advertised a study group on "The Mystical Significance of Meatballs and Spaghetti" but Rabbi, it's an Italian Food!

A. This wasn't intended to be a serious interpretation of this food favorite, rather a light and humorous springboard into an important kabbalistical concept. Kabbalah and Chassidic Thought explore in depth two distinct G-dly Lights or Revelations, used in the Creation of our world, one circular (like meatballs) and infinite, one linear (like spaghetti) and finite.

By the way, Italy was home to many important Kabbalistical rabbis, one of whom was Rabbi Menachem Ezaria of Fano, 16th century author of many Kabbalistical writings based on the teachings of R' Moshe Cordevero and the Arizal (Issac Luria) of Safed. The class I taught (during a meal of Raizy's delicious meatballs) was based on a Chassidic elucidation of this Italian Rabbi's writings.