Volume 3: Gender, Family, and Social Structures, 2006, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT

Family Ties & Political Structure in Pisa and Livorno

Bernard Cooperman, University of Maryland, USA

ABSTRACT: In his presentation of two documents pertaining to Jews in Pisa and Livorno, Bernard Cooperman discusses the link between family connections and the construction of a new formal Jewish community and explores the connection between family and business networks. Cooperman argues here that new communities in early modern Italy were often structured as merchant companies, and it was a family that was a base of trade networks. Family also became a method of joining the community, while at the same time families and individuals used membership in a community to legitimize a family. The presentation further explores interracial marriages and offspring of Sephardic Jews, role of women in the community and in wealth distribution. A larger overarching argument is that it was in the early modern period that the Jewish community was able to create formal structures.

This presentation is for the following text(s):

- Communal Decision of June 8, 1606 in Pisa
- Petition of Jewish Merchants of Pisa to Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo II



Bernard Cooperman

University of Maryland, USA Duration: 52.27

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Introduction to Communal Decision of June 8, 1606

Bernard Cooperman

Notes: In a petition to the Grand Duke from the end of June 1599, the Massari had already requested and received confirmation of their right to refuse entry into the community. One of the "problem groups" they mentioned were those who joined for tax benefits, engaged in commerce, and then left without bringing their families and settling permanently.

A central problem of governance, one that was especially pressing in the small Jewish communities of Italy during the transitional stage from banking to merchants' colonies, is how to control the most powerful wealthy families and to impose collective authority on them. This issue is usually treated with regard to moneylenders who had held individual charters and who had now to be convinced that they should obey the commands of elected, non-banker, officials. In my presentation I would like to explore the issue in the context of the merchant colonies created by Sephardic/Portuguese /converso immigrants in Pisa and Livorno at the end of the sixteenth century. Although the issue of restraining oligarchy is not unique to these communities, their problems and responses mark the special situation they faced.

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Communal Decision of June 8, 1606 in Pisa Pinkas Pisa, 1606

Translated by Bernard Cooperman

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In Pisa on the 38th day of the Omer, 5366 [June 8, 1606]

The Senhores of the communal council (maamad) are gathered together. Seeing that many people are inscribed in the book of the Chancery of Customs in order to enjoy the benign privilege of H[is Most] S[erene] Highness who then don't bring their families nor do they live [in PIsa] in accordance with the intention of H.S.H., they [the Senhores] order that within four months they [immigrants] must bring their families and live in the family way. Otherwise, the said term having passed, they are declared revoked, and they may not enjoy the said privileges. The [Senhores] order that in the future noone shall be registered without giving a guarantee of 100 ducats that he will bring his family within four months. And I, David Abenine, secretary (sofer), have written this at the order of the said Senhores.

Samuel Boguati.
Abraham Fra[n]qo Velho [the elder]
David Montesinos
Abram Framco
Mose Sullema

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B"H en pisa em 38 del omer 5366

Estando juntos os s[enho]res do maamad e vendo aver muitas pesoas serem escritas no livro de canseleria da duana para gozarem o benino previlejo de S.A.S. os quais naõ trazé[m] suas familhas ne[m] abitaõ conforme ha m[en]te de S.A.S. ordenaraõ que demtro de quatro mezes ajaõ de trazer suas familhas vivendo familiarm[en]te houtram[en]te pasado o dito tenpo os daõ por escanselados e que naõ posaõ gozar ditos previlejos e ordenaraõ que ao diante se naõ possa asentar peçoa nenhu[m]a sem primero dar fiánsa de sento ducados que dentro de ditos quatro mezes traxaõ suas familhas. y eu David Abenine sofer ho escrevi por mandado dos ditos senhores

Samuel Boguati, Abrao Fraqo Velho, David Montesinos, Abram Framco, Mose Sullema.

Publisher: Toaff, La Nazione Ebrea, p. 536, doc. 5 from a manuscript in his private library.

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Introduction to Petition of Jewish Merchants of Pisa to Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo II

Bernard Cooperman, University of Maryland, USA

A central problem of governance, one that was especially pressing in the small Jewish communities of Italy during the transitional stage from banking to merchants' colonies, is how to control the most powerful wealthy families and to impose collective authority on them. This issue is usually treated with regard to moneylenders who had held individual charters and who had now to be convinced that they should obey the commands of elected, non-banker, officials. In my presentation I would like to explore the issue in the context of the merchant colonies created by Sephardic/Portuguese /converso immigrants in Pisa and Livorno at the end of the sixteenth century. Although the issue of restraining oligarchy is not unique to these communities, their problems and responses mark the special situation they faced.

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Petition of Jewish Merchants of Pisa to Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo II

Una Supplica dei mercanti ebrei a Pisa al Gran Duca di Toscana, Cosimo II Moise Sulema, Jacob Levi, Raffaele Coen, Abram Penso and Abram de Luscena, 1618

Translated by Bernard Cooperman, University of Maryland, USA

[To His] Most Serene Grand Duke:

Moise Sulema, Jacob Levi, Raffaele Coen, Abram Penso and Abram de Luscena, Jewish merchants living in Pisa, in thier own name as well as that of the other Jewish merchants, humbly state to Y.S.H. [Your Most Serene Highness Grand Duke Cosimo II] that when the Jews first lived and traded in this city, among the various provisions they made for administering their synaoggue was the order and method of electing the Stewards (massari) who year by year govern and have jurisdiction over the Jews in virtue of the privleges and edicts of Y.S.H. These rules were voted on by all heads of household so long as they were not related nor enemies. This situation continued for many years. But afterwards, because of the lack of merchants, it was deemed suitable to change the stated method, and it was ordered that the five Massari who were about to leave office, together with seven other merchants, neither related nor enemies as above, should elect the five massari who would enter [into office] for the following year. This rule lasted for about six years, and was revoked as [leading to] corruption and fraud. Next, we began to have one merchant per household, so long as they were neither enemies nor relatives, extracted in order to vote for the massari. This arrangement was also corrupted by the same massari who had ruled (hanno dominato) then (pro tempore) and until this very day. They would scheme and form alliances among themselves such that between themselves and their relatives [people] would be off one year and then serve the next. In order to maintain their association (collegatione) they undertook (appresso), even though this was always forbidden, that relatives and brothers and enemies for enemies, may vote on all rulings (ordinationi) even though this was always forbidden.

Now disputes and disturbances arise daily from this mode of action, as happened in the past few days (alli giorni passati), which leads to troubling Y[our] H[ighness]. On the other hand many who are truly real merchants and people of quality are left behind by this [arrangement]. We therefore appeal to Y[our] Most Serene H[ighness] asking Him, for the guiet of the said Nation and to avoid the even greater scandals that may daily arise from the said situation, and also so that those who are truly real merchants will be allowed to share in the honor and office of steward (massaro), that He be willing to order by his benign signature (benigno rescritto) that a container (borsa) be created under the supervision of the Most Illustrious Commissioner of Pisa and of the Conservatore of our Nation [that will contain the names of] all heads of household who are truly real merchants and who are recognized, evaluated and reputed to be such. Of these will be extracted by lot each year five, with the prohibition of relatives as above. And so it will continue until the container be empty. Thus greater quiet will be maintained, and there will be further opportunity for other foreign Jewish merchants to come and live [in Pisa], for they will know that once they have been approved to live here in accordance with the said privilige, they will also be able to enjoy the office of steward. The reason for bothering Y.H.S. daily will also be removed.

We pray God to grant [You] every greatest happiness and exaltation.

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Prepared by Moise Sulema, Jacob Levi, Raffaele Coen, Abram Penso and Abram de Luscena--Jewish Merchants of Pisa

Ser.mo gran duca

Moise Sulema, Jacob Levi, Refael Coen, Abram Penso, [55r] Abramo de Luxena, mercante hebrey habitanti en Pisa en nome loro e de altri mercanti hebrey umilm[en]te espongono a V.A.S. come da prencipio che li hebrev cominciorono abitare y negociare in questa citta fra gli altri ordenacioni fatti da essi per il mantenim[en]to della loro sinagoga vi era l'ordine e modo di elegiere li massari che de ano in ano comandano e anno giurdicione fra loro hebrei in virtu delle previleggii e capitoli de V.A.S. le qualli erano balotatti per tutte li cappi de casa pur che non fusero parenti ne ynemici e cossi se contineo molti any e doppo per mancam[en]to di mercanti convene alterar il modo sudetto y se ordeno che li cinque massare che dovevano ussire con sette altri mercanti non parenti ne enemici come sop[r]a elijesero li cinque massari che dovevano entrare per l'ano seguente la quale ordenacione durro circha sey ani fu desmessa per eser corota e fraudatta e soxesivam[en]te introdota che de ogni mercanti uno per cazata dovese essere estratto per balotare detti massari pur che non fosse ne inimico ne parente come sop[r]a la qual ordenatione e statta anchi essa corota dagli estessi massare che pro tempore hanno dominatto fino al giorno di oggi e qualli fra di loro si trovano congiunti e colegati di manera che loro medesimi e loro parenti un ano escano e l'altro entrano havendo apreso per piu mantenere questa loro colegatione ordinato delli parenti o fratelli et enemici p[er] Inimici nonostante que questo sia statto sempre prohibito possino balotare in tutte le loro ordinationi e p[er]che da questo modo di fare ne nascono giornalm[en]te dissidie e desturbe come ancora ne segui alli giorni pasati che ne convenne infastidire V.A. e ne vengono tal volta eleti de quelli che non sono mercanti

Reali e per consequenza sono incapaci di deta carica secondo li sudetti capitoli e previleggi di V.A.S. e p[er] il contrario ne restino adreto molti che veram[en]te sono mercanti Realli e persone di qualita pertanto ricorono a V.A.S. supp[lic]a che p[er] quiete di deta natione e p[er] oviare ascandalo maggiori che alla giornatta potrano succedere per l'ocassione sud[ett]a et accio quelli che veram[en]te sono mercante reali restino parcipite di questi onore e carica di massaro voglia ordenare p[er] suo benigno rescrito che si facia borsa con intervento de le Par.mo Sig.re Comisario di pisa e del conservatore [55v] della natione cioé cappi de casa che sarano veramente mercanti reali e p[er] talli tenutti estimatti e reputatti e che di questi ni siano estratti a sorti ognie cinqui [!] ani col divieto de parenti come sop[r]a e che cosi se seguiti fini a che sara votta la borsa che con queste sy manterano in maggior quieti y si dara ancora ocassione ad altri mercanti hebrei foretieri di venire ad abitare quando saprano che doppo l[']e[s]sere aprovatti di abitare conforme a detti previleggi resterano ancora participi di poter godere dela carica di massaro e se levara l[']occasione de infastidire sop[r]a cio giornalm[en]te l'alteza vostra ser[enissi]ma alla qualle pregone da dio ognie maggior felicita et esaltattione.

Publisher: Published from ASL text in Renzo Toaff, La Nazione Ebrea a Livornoe a Pisa (1591–1700) (Florence: Olschki, 1990), pp. 541–42.

Archive: Archivio di Stato Livorno Governatore ed Auditore 2602 c. 591. Copy with minor variations in Pinkas Pisa, c. 54v–55v.