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Jewish institutions for children in Florence during the 19th and 20th Centuries

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Abstract

This essay aims to introduce the reader to a first reflection on the non-formal educational reality existing in the Jewish community of Florence from the 19th until the beginning of the 20th century. The archival research has been integrated with readings about the history of the educational institutions in Tuscany and compared with the evolution of pedagogical criteria at that time. Some of the different kinds of educational forms that resulted from the need to give an appropriate response to the new cultural needs of the Jewish population during the time of emancipation in Italy will be examined. It will thus be possible to observe how the Jewish community in Florence – although consisting of a small number of people – could nonetheless promote philanthropic and educational initiatives that were consistent with the zeitgeist of the times and able to give a first institutional response to the needs of children and their families.

Introduction

This essay deals with Jewish institutions for children in Florence during the 19th and 20th centuries, and it is based on research done in the Jewish Community Archive in Florence. It does not refer to the primary school history, as this topic requires a more specific study context. In fact, the history of the Jewish elementary school is so rich with diverse issues and multiple aspects that it needs to be considered in detail. The system of Jewish formal education has been a pillar of cultural transmission also in the post-emancipation period when the danger of assimilation became stronger (Guetta, 1998; Levi, 1998; Vivanti, 1996).

Nevertheless, this work does underline the kind of cultural and overall interest that the Jewish community has always shown towards the needs of children from the most disadvantaged families. The variety of institutes for Jewish children that can be found inside certain communities, starting from the first half of the 19th century, substantiates the sensibility and the interest concerning social and pedagogical problems that was evolving at that time. It was, in fact, a period in which deep social, economic, and institutional changes begun to be perceived, not only by the moderate Italian intellectuals, but also by the representatives of some communities. After the Napoleonic advent, some Jewish communities had started “to open the ghetto’s doors” by introducing ideas, behaviors, and sometimes also institutions from the surrounding culture in their own environment—ideas which were circulating during those years.

The attention towards childhood was not limited to the opening of primary schools for the education of young Jewish Italians, but managed to create also other institutions as well, such as orphanages, kindergartens, arts and crafts, schools, and eventually also some boarding schools with very different characteristics from those of the charitable institutes. Boarding schools were established to give an opportunity to rich Jewish families to enrol their children in a school where it was possible to learn Jewish and civil disciplines, and where the teaching level was higher than that of the public and the extant Jewish schools. Moreover, these boarding schools were attended by students who came from small cities where there was not a Jewish community and, therefore, neither Jewish elementary nor higher level schools..

The “Israelitic University” of Florence,¹ like the parallel institution in Livorno, consistently showed a real interest in the establishment and diffusion of actions on behalf of the most disadvantaged children. Certainly, these communities were embedded in the moderate Tuscan milieu in which the *Georgofili Academy*² was disseminating new concepts on the need for a different kind of education through two publications: *L'Antologia*³ and *Il Giornale Agrario Toscano*.⁴

In fact, inside the Gran Ducato of Tuscany, following the Lombard initiatives and after the economic recovery and the in-progress social changes (at about 1830), the need was acknowledged of opening the Custody Rooms for children, whose parents, working out of the home from morning to late evening, were not able to take care of them. The Custody Rooms were institutions that welcomed and gave shelter to children of working parents. These establishments not only gave assistance, they soon became places where the children from 3 to 6 years of age received the first elements of education. They were founded on the education model of Ferrante Aporti (Italy, 1791-1858) who claimed it necessary that schooling be given to all, in particular to the people that had previously been excluded from any kind of formal education or instruction.

Kindergarten

In 1836, the Florentine Israelitic University also decided to offer this service to the Jewish community by trying to organize a kindergarten for children aged three to six. This school was essentially intended for Jewish

¹ In the history of the Jews in Italy, the congregations have had many typologies and names. One of these was the “Jewish University,” or, more exactly, “Israelitic University.” This name was given after the Rattazzi law of 1857 that constituted a new system of Jewish congregations brought under the reign of Savoy. See A. Milano, (1963), *Storia degli Ebrei in Italia*, Torino, Einaudi; G. Disegni, (1983), *Ebraismo e libertà religiosa in Italia. Dal diritto all'uguaglianza al diritto alla diversità* Torino, Einaudi.

² *Georgofili Academy* was founded in Florence in 1753 with the aim of studying and establishing modern resolutions to problems and issues of agriculture.

³ The journal *Antologia* was founded in Florence in 1821 by Gino Capponi and Gian Pietro Vieusseux. It dealt with political, economic, and cultural issues.

⁴ In 1827 the scientists of the Georgofili Academy founded the journal *Il Giornale Agrario Toscano* with the aim of teaching and disseminating knowledge of the new research being done in agriculture.

and deprived children, in the same manner and with the same intention that had led to the establishment of other community institutions for children in the 19th century. This “philanthropic” image of the kindergarten for the Jewish community, lasted until the first decades of 20th century, creating, in certain cases, real problems of attendance. These schools were started in order to answer the social and education needs of the most destitute population of the Jewish community. They were seen by the middle class and rich families as institutes for the excluded and the marginalized. It was not important to them if these schools were teaching Jewish knowledge, what was perceived as their main characteristic was the fact that they were for poor children, and after the emancipation most of the families preferred to send their children to schools in which there was an actual social exchange between children who belonged to different social environments.

The first call for funds and support for the establishment of the kindergarten was made in 1833, while in 1835 an “Official request for children[’s] education” (*ACEF*, B.44.1, fasc.1) was drafted. The idea of creating this school, that recalled some of the characteristics of the aportian kindergarten,⁵ was based on the need to educate the impoverished from their earliest years, in order to avoid any future deviance from accepted social norms. At school, the child should be taught to clean his/her body and would regularly get enough to eat. Among the activities of the school, besides the basic religious orientation - where the child was encouraged and motivated to learn the blessings - they were also introduced to a preliminary orientation towards reading and writing, by “easy and ready methods,” and to Hebrew learning classes.

The first “Regulation for the school of poor Jewish children” dates back to 1836 and in Article 1 one can read that “The School will host those children who are aged from three to no more than six, and who belong to the disadvantaged class of the Jewish Community of Florence” (*ACEF*, B.44.1, fasc.1).

At school the child was expected to receive the principles of a good moral and religious education. Furthermore, as previously mentioned,

⁵ Aporti wanted to offer the children of poor people the opportunity to learn reading and writing when they were three years old. The specific features that the Aportian institution emphasized were: organization, the desire to use a common language (Italian) for teaching, the adoption of a method that was open to modification but which at the same time accentuated the principles that had inspired it, and, above all, the employment of teachers who had been trained specifically in these methods. See Cristina Sideri, “Ferrante Aporti and Infant Schools in Italy,” *Annali di Storia dell’Educazione e delle Istituzioni Scolastiche* 6 (1999): 17-43 (Italian).

special attention was given to promoting the habits of maintaining a clean body and neat clothes. There was a doctor in service, in order to be periodically assured of the good health of the children.

Children's education was conducted by having them listen to moral or holy-history tales and by teaching them the basic elements of Hebrew and Italian, of basic calculation, and to repeat the names of the parts of the human body. Finally, children were given "some information about natural history, especially about the more frequently observed entities in their environment" (*ACEF*, B.44.1, fasc.1). When proposing to introduce new elements of knowledge to the children, teachers had to take into consideration the age of the child and his/her mental and concentration skills.

The regular day-to-day school functioning was the responsibility of the Director (usually a woman) who, according to the Regulation, had several tasks, ranging from opening, cleaning, and keeping control of school premises to teaching and class organization. Therefore, the Director had to be at school twenty minutes before the children's arrival to prepare the necessary material for a regular development of the lessons. After the children's arrival, she noted those who were absent on that day. Prolonged absences were the object of investigation, unless an appropriate justification was given by the parents. The Director was helped by a Deputy-Director and by a Caretaker, who executed the Director's orders and coordinated the work with her.

To be admitted to the school, children had to be vaccinated, while they were checked and admitted each day only if well-combed and clean, and only if they had had their breakfast. Every child likewise had to have a fresh handkerchief to clean his or her nose.

Children attended the school all year long, except on Saturdays and during the Jewish holidays, as well as being released on the eve of Purim and the ninth of Av, which are fast days. During the first years of its establishment, the school opened at nine during the warmer months from April to September, and at nine-thirty, during the colder ones, but always closed at 11 p.m. The possibility of remaining at school until such a late hour was instituted due to the fact that many children's parents worked all day and came back home very late at night. Often, these parents didn't have meals to give their children. The teachers, the director, and the benefactors thought that if the children remained in the Custody Room, they would not be required to go in the streets on their own late at night.

At the beginning the school admitted only boys, disregarding the need of educating girls as well. After only two years, however, in

December 1838, girls were admitted, too. Along with this decision, some additional amendments were introduced to the original regulations. The age of permanent acceptance at school was raised to seven and set at a maximum of nine, if it was necessary for a child to stay until that age. It was then established that recess must always be gender segregated, and take place at different times for boys and girls (*ACEF*, B.44.1, fasc.2). The estimated attendance at the school was between twenty-two to twenty-five pupils. During the following years, it seems that attendance increased, though it is not possible to know the exact number: “The number of children is constantly increasing, almost all of them are in good health, their moral qualities benefit from new learning, in comparison to the past, they care about the school so much that, when they have to leave it, because they have grown up, it makes them cry” (*ACEF*, B.44.1, fasc.3).

Later on, the school introduced the first classes of the primary school. As a matter of fact, the “Regulation for the Jewish kindergarten in Florence,” approved in 1864, did not only include some totally new articles, but it also specified in Article 52 that: “children leave the kindergarten at the age of eight, if their education level does not give them access to the higher school cycle earlier. Under particular circumstances, they can remain until older” (*ACEF*, B.44.1). It was a unique situation, as Florentine Jewish children were given the opportunity to attend the first year of the primary school either in Jewish primary schools or in the Jewish kindergarten, in the latter case then starting at primary school by attending the second year. On this aspect, the Statute of the Jewish Kindergarten of 1891 is even more detailed:

Art.1 (...) A regular first year of primary school has been established at the kindergarten, in compliance with the rules of Art.27 of the Regulation approved by the Royal Law 16 February 1888. In this first year of primary school, carried out by a teacher with a regular licence, besides accepting children from six to seven, either males or females, not only the didactic programmes of the Kingdom's schools will be carried out, but children will also learn to read in Jewish.

(ACEF, Jewish Kindergarten Statute 1891, annex B.42.1)

The first year of the primary school was later abolished at the kindergarten in 1919.

Throughout the years, the schedules were modified; around the middle of 1800, the school opened at ten in winter and at nine-thirty

in summer. The closing hour was set much earlier than previously: at four p.m. The school was closed at two p.m. during public holidays and on the eve of the Jewish ones. Several changes also took place in the education system. In fact, the Regulations and the Kindergarten Statute reveal progressive change from the rigid methodologies based on the exclusive teaching of set notions, towards different criteria, much closer to a ludic, natural style of learning typical of children. Since the end of the 19th century, more modern methods - like that of Froebelian schooling - were adopted in Jewish kindergartens, similar to those employed, for example, in Florence, Rome, and Venice. Children were allowed to play with materials that were specifically designed for the purpose of educating them to the understanding of the form, the color, and the nature of the material of the objects.

Teachers took care to stimulate children's attention by varying daily activities as much as possible. Therefore, there was an alternation between "singing classes, gym, and manual work, while older children also learnt to read either in Italian or in Hebrew" (Cassuto, 1911).

On the occasion of Jewish holidays, the Florentine kindergarten organized parties for the children, in which parents, relatives, and older children also actively participated. Younger students performed songs and gym routines, and their schoolwork was exhibited. We can read about these happy days from Adriana Genazzani's report, published in 1920 in *Israel dei Ragazzi*:

There is nothing nicer and kinder than a party of little children in a Jewish school. The school Talmud Torà of Florence and the children participating are young children of the kindergarten and of the first year of the primary school. Imagine a quantity of white and blue, of little rose faces and anxious eyes full of joy and laughter: here are the little artists, who performed without any hesitation to a wide public in the crowded school room.
(Genazzani, 1920, p. 3)

Orphanages

Among the institutions for disadvantaged Jewish children, there were also orphanages. They were established in four Italian cities around the end of the 19th century, thanks to the charity of some benefactresses.

According to the documents of the Archive, such institutions had a particular organization, different in some aspects from other orphanages of the time. In many cases, in fact, the institution played

the role of “charitable institution in favour of orphans,” as the people in charge of the development of the orphanage activity were committed to finding one or more foster families who could welcome the abandoned children, and offer them, besides food and a place to sleep, also a Jewish education. Nevertheless, even in the absence of foster families, there were always places where it was possible to host and give support to disadvantaged children. The will of the organizers was to have children live in spacious, bright, and healthy places. Anyway, it was also possible that “these poor orphans, so hardly affected by their destiny, had the moral support of some beloved relative; some still had their mother, some had grandparents or uncles, etc., people who would make them feel less alone” (Fiano, 1908, 584-586).

The existence of relatives was an object for investigation by the people in charge of the institutions, as they wanted to facilitate the contact between children and their families as much as possible, considering it useful especially from an education perspective. To continue the familial education activity in collaboration with the orphanage, “the development of that part of sentiments and love that has a great importance for the moral education of a person” was considered highly beneficial. “In addition, families, by their presence, share in a certain sense the responsibility of the administrators; they assist them in their education and control activities, facilitate, and sometimes stimulate, actions that are in the interest of their beloved ones” (Fiano, 586)..

The idea of establishing an institute to host little Florentine orphans came about during the first months of 1899. Following lawyer Moise Finzi’s advice, Ms. Regina Jalfon, the widow of Mr. Attias, left all the wealth in her will to the foundation of an orphanage to honour the memory of her son Achille Leone, who had passed away when he was young. Following the approval of the first Statute by the Royal Law of 24th January 1901, on 28th November of the same year, the Jewish Orphanage “Achille Leone Attias” (*ACEF*, B.41.1 Orfanotrofio A.L. Attias) was officially opened.

During the first two decades of the century, the premises of the orphanage moved to three different places: first at the beginning in Via della Robbia n°56, then in Viale Principe Eugenio (now Viale Gramsci) n°3, and finally in Piazza Beccaria n°2.

Initially, according to Ms. Attias’ will, judging that a considerable number of children should benefit from the institute, they decided that only six-year-old children and orphans who had lost both parents, or only the father, should be accepted. Therefore, in addition to very young

children and orphans who had lost only their mother, girls were also excluded from this aid. Children could stay until the age of sixteen, when, although still very young, they would have learned a trade in order to be able to earn a salary and support themselves with a decent living.

Throughout the years, the institute modified its statute with the purpose of enlarging its assistance activities. Considering that the number of recipients in the institute was not that large, (there were never more than six children), the Board of the Attias Orphanage asked and obtained the approval of the Royal Law on 8 December 1907, authorizing it to keep the children, under special circumstances, until they were 18 years old. In addition, it was decided to open the institute to females.

Unfortunately, due to the lack of documents, it was not possible to identify the internal organization of the orphanage, and which changes were enacted to allow the presence, at the same time, of males and females. It can be assumed that, regarding little girls, the orphanage had already adopted the method of “granting custody” to Jewish families in town. From the available documents, we know, at any rate, that the maintenance expenses for the children were rather out of proportion to their number, as “it was first of all important to have a healthy premise[s], well located and with a big garden. One could not risk having to move, every time that two or three more orphans were arriving. Therefore, the premises had to be more spacious than apparently necessary” (*ACEF*, B.41.1 Orfanotrofio A.L. Attias). .

During the following years, starting from 1912, the Board of the Jewish Orphanage made some amendments in the organization of the institute. It was decided that the hosting premises would be closed, that the director would end his/her mandate, and that male children would be placed in private families. In 1914, considering the existence of particularly disadvantaged children, to whom the assistance of the orphanage was denied because of the rigid regulation, a wider statute was approved which “determined that the premises for hosting children should remain open only when their number would justify it thus leaving to the Board the possibility to decide on the basis of the circumstances, whether to place the orphan males in its premises or in private families” (*ACEF*, B.41.1 Orfanotrofio A.L. Attias). Furthermore, in consideration of the fact that also little children could be accepted inside families and therefore very small children would not have to live in the same premises with older youngsters, the previously fixed age limit of six years was abolished. Finally, evaluating that “the education action must

be started at a very early age and has to be extended to all those who need it, the admission to the institute was offered also to children only orphans of mother, considering that sometimes the lack of a mother can be even worse than the one of the father” (*ACEF*, B.41.1)..

As did many other institutions for abandoned children in Florence at the beginning of the 20th century, this orphanage also used to receive public assistance from the municipality of Florence. Of course, this implied that the institution had to be controlled by the Municipal Authority.(Bruni & Visciola, 2003). In archive documents there is no information detailing the reason why the orphanage was closed, but there are two tentative explanations: one, there were no Jewish abandoned children; and two, the orphanage didn't receive enough financial support for its activities.

Even if the range of action was considerably enlarged, the Attias Orphanage always maintained a positive balance in its account, thanks to the incomes received by the benefactors. The spare resources of the year were often given to other Jewish institutions for children, like the Primary School, the Kindergarten, the Committee for Jewish Children, the Ospizio Marino, or to aid Jewish orphans in other Italian towns.

Committee for Children

In 1908, with the ongoing purpose of helping disadvantaged children, a Committee for Children was established in Florence. The purpose of the initiative was “rescuing those little orphans who, for regulation rules, could not be hosted inside the Attias Orphanage”(Prato, 1910, p.3). Among the many orphaned children living in poor conditions, those who needed special assistance and family education could not be the guests of the orphanage. In the first decade of the 20th century, many children died before the age of five because of malnourishment and various diseases. The children with particularly bad health conditions did not go to the orphanage, but were assigned to selected households.

From the documents, we know that these children came from environments that were either physically or socially unhealthy and that could cause incurable diseases, as well as representing a danger to their moral education. Children were selected by the Committee and given into the custody of families of “good morality,” from whom they would receive, besides good nutrition, also a healthy moral education. The Committee also placed children from the Jewish schools of Florence in a villa in the hills of Fiesole during the summer months of July and

August. At the summer school the children enjoyed quiet days in a healthy environment where they could also strengthen themselves physically, thanks to walks and excursions in the countryside. As only a limited number of children could benefit of this initiative,

the Committee wished to extend its educational activity to a larger scale by establishing the Sunday Camps. Many pupils of our institutes meet on Sunday afternoon in Kindergarten premises kindly opened for us,. They have only one duty: that of spending some hours having the most of fun. (Bruni, 1907-10, 3)

Some ladies of the Florentine community took care of organizing games for the children in order to develop body and mind. Often, children were given some books of tales and stories to be read during the week. The Committee was also organizing parties for all the children during Purim and Hanuccà that took place in the Jewish schools of Florence and in the recreation spaces created by the Committee.

During the following years and thanks to the several charities received, the Committee offered the children the possibility of staying during the summer, not only in the countryside, but also at the seaside. It encouraged attendance at the school among disadvantaged young people by prizes and grants, and in 1915 offered a Sunday course connected to the Florentine Talmud Torà, for the completion of the education of those students who had not been able to get the primary school certificate (*Qua e là per l'Italia*, 1918, p.4). Therefore, the educational activity carried out by the Committee for children in Florence is revealed to be useful not only for those children in need of material and spiritual care, but also for its interesting initiatives in the school.

School of Arts and Crafts

During the first decades of 1800, the establishment of a School of Arts and Crafts for either young boys or girls of the Florentine community was of great interest from a vocational point of view. This kind of school seemed to be a rather new initiative, as there were only a few similar programs in some foreign countries. Other organizations, like the Evangelical Church, established in Florence the same kind of institution only in the last decades of 1800 (Andrea, 1989, pp.222-226).

Around 1826, after the creation of a “Philanthropic Society of Arts and Crafts,” a project of the school was presented in which guidelines for the future institution were indicated according to a specific regulation. The project was sent to the representatives of the Israelitic University, who had specifically

requested it. Although a certain interest in the realization of the school had been shown since the very beginning, it was only opened in 1836.

Reading that original document allows us to understand how the foundation of the school took into account the orientation and evolution of ideas prevalent in the education environment of those years. As it delineates, the purpose of the institution should be to begin

a happy and wished for regeneration for those poor, among our co-religious, who are threatened to be corrupted and damaged by laziness. When people are abandoned to themselves, laziness pushes them to practice shameful deeds, that degrades them among all nations and marks them with the sign of misery and humiliation.

The progress of the universal education, not only in the civilized world, but also in areas still experiencing ignorance and superstition, must be an object of true joy for all friends of Humanity.(...). An illuminated Government, that considers that realizing the happiness of its people is its best patrimony, shall encourage our initiative. (ACEF, B.40.1)

The need of giving an education to the poorest and most disadvantaged classes, in order to allow them to progress beyond that world, depicted as made of laziness and in fact supported by charity and alms, was certainly a positive characteristic of the Jewish approach towards this issue. The stated intentions for founding this new institution reveal a modern and progressive idea of education, far from the reactionary-conservatory forms which were very widespread during the years of the Restoration.

The Florentine School of Arts and Crafts was directly linked to the other education institution of the Israelitic University. It did not intend to offer a substantial basis of first education elements, as these were already taken care of by the kindergarten and the Jewish primary schools. It rather proposed to place the students directly into the workshops, where they would learn an art or a craft more easily and practically. The commission in charge of composing a report for the foundation of a new school clearly understood the need of taking into account the potentially rejectionist attitudes and other problems that families could have raised about regular attendance at the school by their children. Learning a specific trade meant avoiding the risk of prematurely having to take over their fathers' street-selling work. In the new institute, the child invested his or her time and energy in learning a trade that would become a source of income only in the near future, rather than the here-

and-now. Therefore, another purpose of the institution was “to facilitate the placement of kids in the workshops and in the factories by giving the appropriate advice, and to distribute financial support to their less lucky parents and families” (*ACEF*, B.40.1).

In connection with the professional training, the Philanthropic Society of Arts and Crafts also proposed that during the closure of the factories and workshops attended by the students, for the Christian holidays, they could continue to gather in a school to progress in their study of Italian grammar, linear design, and practical geometry, “because these are things that go closely with the arts, and that good craftsmen cannot do without” (*ACEF*, B.40.1). During the holidays of the Jewish calendar, the trainees were instead obliged to attend “one or two hours of letters, of moral lesson and of domestic and social virtues” (*ACEF*, B.40.1).

Families were admitted to the school after a deliberation following a selection that examined their real motivations and economic conditions. Once in the institute, the student was regularly instructed by the inspector specifically in charge of following the student’s conduct and his or her relations with the teachers. From their side, the trainees were obliged to present every month a certificate of good conduct signed by one of the inspectors, which allowed the family to receive the mandate for financial support that had been decided upon by the Direction. The attendance of the child was meant to be the result of a collaboration between the school and the family, as “it is the relatives’ responsibility, more than others, to transmit those religious feelings to their children in favour of which the Philanthropic Society gives its protection to the trainees” (*ACEF*, B.40.1). The Philanthropic Society fixed the terms of the monthly support to be assigned to the trainees of both sexes depending on their age. A tenth part of this support was retained to create a protection fund and a fund for the students’ future to provide them with the necessary tools of the trade they were learning. According to Art.10 of the Regulation, attached to the report presented to the committee of the Israelitic University, the candidates to be admitted had to show a certificate of good conduct, of religious principles, and of good health, while Art.11 requested, only of male students, the basic skills of reading and writing and of arithmetic.

In order to monitor the activity of the institute and the students’ progress, a collective general meeting was scheduled to take place once a year during the month of November. On that occasion, awards were distributed to the trainees who had distinguished themselves during the

year for their good conduct or for their progress in learning the trade.

Even if the idea of creating such a school in the Jewish community appeared to be of interest to many people, the project probably was delayed for some years, because a debate began about which would be the appropriate age to start learning a trade. Art.9 of the first Regulation of 1826 recites that “trainers will not benefit of financial support unless aged 10, or if older than 16” (*ACEF*, B.40.1). Probably the age of ten was fixed because the student would have then completed the primary school course of Talmud Torà or the kindergarten. As there was not a mandatory age to start formal education, children attended Jewish primary school according to the years that their parents considered necessary. Some thought that the early age of ten was too young to charge the child with the heavy responsibility resulting from the work. Therefore, admission to the school for boys was possible only if they were not younger than thirteen. Girls, on the other hand, could not be younger than twelve, and they were not allowed to go to Jewish teachers living outside the “delimited area or annex streets.”

At any rate, when the school was finally opened in 1836, there was no amendment concerning the age of student admission. In Art.2 of the new regulation, fixing the opening date for May 1836, one can read that “males should not be younger than ten years and not older than fifteen, while females not younger than eight and not older than thirteen” (*ACEF*, B.40.1).. It is true that in the new regulation it was clearly specified that the workshops attended by students had to be inside the Jewish neighborhood or very close to it.

At the beginning, the school included about fifty students and also offered classes of physical and moral education, linear design, and Talmud Torà for the male students. Female students attended classes of reading, writing, and calculation, together with a teacher of Talmud Torà. This was possible thanks to a daily break in the schedule, consisting of two hours, one of which was dedicated to the lessons and another for lunch, from 1 to 2 p.m.

Articles 8, 9, and 10 in the Regulation of 1836 give us an idea of the organization:

Males and females are divided in classes and each class will have its own teacher;

For male education there will be a male teacher in charge of the two classes of Carpenter and of Cabinetmaker. A Turner. A Shoemaker. A Tailor. A Upholsterer. For female education a

Dressmaker. A Men Dressmaker. A Maidservant's Cap Maker and another for the White Hand-Sewn and Embroidery.

After a careful attention given both to the male students and to the female ones, the most appropriate trade will be assigned to him/her, independently from those indicated in the before mentioned article; like Bookbinder, Umbrella Maker, Goldsmith, Silversmith and other; the Commission will have to deal with it separately, when having to execute it..(ACEF, 1836, B.40.1)

The organization of the first school was later modified in 1850, when the need of integrating into public life was perceived as more important. The School of Arts and Crafts, also called Vocational School, then reinforced its own tools to achieve the “regeneration of the poor Jew,” creating:

between the two extreme points of the pedlar and of the professional or employee struggling in a decent poorness, that kind that still does not exist in Italy of the “Jewish worker”, i.e. of the physically strong man, also strong in spirit, simple in wishes and aspirations, but rich in ideals and used to the culture, far from the average working people around: in other terms, the “good worker, the good Jew.”

(La Settimana Israelitica, 49, 4 December 1914, p.2.)

By reconfirming the placement of students as trainees at craftsmen workshops, the vocational school underlined the need of sending children to those work places where they could be let off with respect to Saturdays and other Jewish holidays.

After reviewing the purposes, and, thus the functioning of the school, it was decided that the admission age had to be thirteen for boys and twelve for girls. These age limits had already been identified as the most appropriate ones. Nonetheless, it is not clear what the children did in the intermediate years between primary school and vocational school. One should take notice that the age limit established by the school corresponds to the moment in which children come of age religiously according to Jewish tradition.

We can therefore assume that the choice was dictated by the fact that, once youth had demonstrated their religious maturity, they could work outside the community's environment, even while respecting the duties of Jewish tradition, such as, for example, the observing the

religious laws regarding Saturdays. The maximum age of attendance was elevated to twenty years.

The School of Arts and Crafts, as mentioned above, organized parties yearly to distribute awards to the best students. During these ceremonies, attended by a wide public, the executive committee organized speeches about the school achievements, its successes, and the students' attendance, but did not hide problems concerning the school. Here is an example, in the speech of attorney Aristide Nissim, President of the School, in 1915. The Institute:

created in the purpose of orienting boys and girls towards the exercise of a trade or craft, embodied the aim of the honourable founders and benefactors to having the students respect Saturdays, until some years ago fully corresponded to their wishes, because quite many students distinguished themselves as well-known and valuable ones. Nowadays, instead, while the female section is numerous and gives good results, the male section, except some cases, does not completely correspond to the Board's aim, as the students' registrations are decreasing. This situation does not depend on the Committee, nor on a lack of statute dispositions, or on a lack of internal teaching, but it depends on a lack of trust on the part of parents, who wrongly think that a damage could be caused by the absence from work on Saturdays. The Jewish feeling must be effectively awoken to convince that it is possible to get to the purpose of our lives, while maintaining ourselves good observant Jews. (Il Vessillo Israelitico, 2, 31 January 1915, p.46).

The intention was to avoid the situation that parents, while not allowing sons and daughters to attend the institute, would tell them that the only work for them was the one of pedlars, and furthermore, they would take advantage of their unstable condition, and would constantly beg for money from the community. The supporters of these schools considered charity to be "the moral and material elevation of the poor achieved in a rational and modern way. Begging is not useful to elevating the poor, even when it does not facilitate laziness, it can never provide for a long-term relief. It is necessary to make a person feel the importance of work and to give a job to him or her, thus offering a safe way of seriously uplifting one's own condition" (*Il Vessillo Israelitico*, 6, June 1910, pp.257-258)..

Boarding schools

In Florence in the 1800s several boarding schools were established by private initiative to host both Jewish and non-Jewish young people.

From *Educatore Israelita* of 1862 we know that Eugenio Le Monnier, author of some education works, annexed a boarding school to his Italian-French College, only for young Jewish students, that offered them the opportunity to observe all the Jewish traditions. In the Institute, where students paid a yearly rent of one thousand francs, classes were held on scientific, literary, linguistic, and commercial subjects (*L'Educatore Israelita*, 3, March 1862, p.4.).

In Florence, sometime in the 1870s, a Jewish boarding school institution, called “Florentiner Solomon,” was opened. The institute was for either boarding or external students, and aimed to offer to students a good education linked also to the ministerial programs. Such an institution was probably addressed to those who, after finishing the primary school, wished to continue their studies while remaining in a Jewish environment. In fact, in the institute, both Jewish and non-Jewish teachers gave classes, as well as the rabbi, David Maroni. During the 1880s, a new Jewish boarding school was opened in Florence for males and females without distinction of religion, called “Istituto Campagnano.” The institute was located in Via delle Oche n°5, and it was divided into two sections. The first one gave courses following the ministerial program, while in the second section, attended by older students, classes were carried out to give support to students in the Technical School or Gymnasium. Students learned Hebrew and Italian, and also attended special internal courses in French, English, and Latin. Finally, students were additionally prepared for the military schools and the marine (*Il Vessillo Israelitico*, 6, June 1910, pp.257-258).

Among the most successful Florentine boarding schools during the 1800s was the Feminine Institute directed by Olimpia Paggi. Founded in 1853, this boarding school accepted young girls from three to twelve years of age. The advertisement for the Institute in 1874 in the magazines of the time read:

This Institute has existed for the past 25 years and it is one of the best in Italy. Besides an accurate education, it teaches, thanks to its valuable teachers, Italian, French, English, German and their related literature; activities for women, dance, gymnastic, music and singing. We guarantee religious education and a constant control. For programmes and information, ask the Director, Via della Pergola n°14

(Il Vessillo Israelitico, 1, January 1874)

Students were certainly being supported in their cultural and moral education. Several reports were published in magazines about parties and activities of the Institute where girls demonstrated their talents. It happened that girls, accompanied by their teachers, were reading their work to the public, on the occasion of Jewish parties or at the opening of the school's new premises on 24th April 1864:

Three works were mostly appreciated, one of which by a girl of age on the subject "A Jewish teacher announces the emancipation to his students and exhorts them to the virtues that the new State requires"; the second work of a gentle young girl who compared the joy of the family to those of the school; and a third one, whose subject was chosen by the student, a dialogue between two house finches, one of which has been inhumanely blinded. (L'Educatore Israelita, 6, June 1864, pp.179-181)

Performances like these were followed by choral singing and by exhibitions of embroidery by the girls studying at the institute.

Several Florentine newspapers of that time, including Firenze Artistica, La Nazione, and La Gazzetta del popolo di Firenze, wrote about the Paggi Institute, praising its high pedagogical and didactic value, and the talent the girls demonstrated in their studies. The institute itself was most likely interested in maintaining contacts and cultural exchanges with the other institutes in Florence. The Paggi boarding school college organized a circulating library among the boarding and other students in 1879, whose income was given to the Scuole Domenicali of Prof. Dazzi (Il Vessillo Israelitico, 1, January 1879, p.28). The number of girls studying at Paggi Institute increased throughout the years, growing from thirty the first years to more than forty in the next ten years. Olimpia Paggi, director of the Institute, took care of girls also during summer holidays, accompanying them to the seaside after they had finished their school exams.

Concluding with the above analysis of the Paggi Institute, this brief essay on Jewish institutions for children in Florence between the 19th and the 20th centuries draws to an end. This overview provides evidence that the Jewish Florentine attitude towards disadvantaged children needing the care of charitable organizations did not operate under the rubric of philanthropic and charitable motives, but rather was oriented towards the development and the growth of this youth in order to prepare them to live a morally fair and economically autonomous life.

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