

## Introduction

by *The Editors of Quest*

This volume of *Quest* offers to its readers a miscellaneous issue, with six research articles devoted to a variety of topics covering the eighteenth and twentieth century. There is no connecting theme, but some of the articles explore, from different angles, the issue of religious conversion.

Indeed, the first essay, by Samuela Marconcini, studies the topic of conversion to Catholicism and the right of inheritance, which was often linked to it. In eighteenth century Livorno the “Ergas-Fortunati case,” which she analyses in detail, turned into a dispute concerning the confines of canon law and civil law, showcasing the defense or the opposition of converted Jews’s right to inheritance. As the author demonstrates, the special legal privileges stated in the Livornine Laws, according to which the converted member of the family could not claim his/her inheritance, were effective until the unification of Italy.

The second article, by Michele Sarfatti, moves to the twentieth century and investigates the implementation of the laws against “mixed marriages” between 1935 and 1938, starting with the norms introduced in the Italian colonies and reaching up until the racist laws implemented in 1938. The author suggests that Mussolini unilaterally amended the Concordat of 1929 and illustrates the defeat, in that instance, of the Catholic Church vis-a-vis its relationship with the fascist regime.

Tullia Catalan’s article is also about Italian fascism, and focuses on the years 1938-1939, analyzing conversions to Christianity in the city of Trieste, which hosted an important Jewish community and numerous foreign Jews who passed through the port city in those years. As Catalan chronicles, many Jews and foreign refugees from Austria, Germany, and Hungary converted to Catholicism on their way to the Americas. The article aims to describe individual paths to conversion, and the reaction of both the Jewish authorities and the local Church. Furthermore, the author attempts to disclose how the local clergy perceived the fascist racial laws. Shifting to a different scenario and set of historical problems, David Guedj explores the establishment of Judeo-Arabic non-fiction literature in Morocco during the first half of the twentieth century. The rise of this literature was

engendered, according to the author, by changes that invested Moroccan Jewish culture and society: the establishment of local Hebrew publishing houses in many cities; the rise of a new intellectual elite; changing patterns of religious observance along with secularizing trends; the dissemination of Zionism.

The fifth article in this issue is written by Livia Tagliacozzo and analyzes Muslim-Jewish relations in Libya under the Italian colonial administration during War World II. As in other colonial contexts, the fascist regime implemented different policies in regard to Muslim and Jewish subjects, influencing the interactions between the two communities, causing distress and conflict but, at the same time, provoking shared feelings of opposition, caused by the experience of oppression. The final article published in this issue of Quest is devoted to Baghdadi Jews and is authored by Marcella Simoni. The aim of this work is to integrate the well-known history of the Baghdadis' elites with the one of the middle classes, using different type of sources, from oral history repositories to articles from the monthly periodical *Israel's Messenger*. This research unearths a transnational history of a segment of the Jewish diaspora in the first half of the twentieth century, locating its imagined homeland and cultural identity in different spatial zones, which comprise Baghdad, London, and then Spain.

We are glad to announce that with this issue we are introducing a new section of our journal, which will be dedicated to "Review Essay(s)." The inaugural essay is authored by Arie M. Dubnov and is devoted to the figure of the Israeli poet Nathan Alterman.

The "Discussion" section is dedicated to Tudor Parfitt's book, *Hybrid Hate: Conflations of Antisemitism and Anti-Black Racism from the Renaissance to the Third Reich*. It is reviewed by Monica Miniati.

Finally, the "Reviews" section publishes concise but critical presentations of eight books dedicated to a wide range of topics.

**The Editors of Quest**

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