Mobility and Creativity

David de' Pomis and the Place of the Jews in Renaissance Italy

Guido Bartolucci
University of Bologna, Department of History and Cultures
guido.bartolucci@unibo.it

Abstract

Many scholars believe that mobility was one of the elements that characterised the history of the Jews in the early modern period. They also maintain that this movement from one country to another influenced the cultural productivity of many Jewish intellectuals. David de' Pomis was one of the most important figures in the Jewish community of the Italian Renaissance. After being expelled from the State of the Church, he moved to Venice in 1569, where he wrote his works. Throughout his life, he attempted to find a way to recover from the trauma of expulsion, and he did so by explaining Judaism to a Christian audience through a variety of means: translations from Hebrew into the vernacular; speeches to Christian authorities; a trilingual dictionary; and a Latin apologia of Judaism. The languages that de' Pomis used and the works he decided to write were the daughters of his experiences, which gave birth to an entirely new body of work. Thus, if the combination of the two experiences—mobility and creativity—underlies the history of European Jewry in the early modern period, then de' Pomis's story and work represent a recognisable but as yet unexplored fragment of the broader history of the Jews in Italy during the Renaissance.

Keywords

1   Introduction

> The expellee has been ripped from his usual environment. Habit is a
> blanket that hides the state of things. In the habitual environment, only
> changes are perceived, but not permanence. In exile, everything is unu-
> sual. Exile is an ocean of chaotic information. Exile is uninhabitable,
> because it is unusual. In order to inhabit it, one must first transform the
> information whizzing around it into meaningful messages; one must pro-
> cess the data. It is a question of survival: if you do not perform the task
> of processing the data, you will end up swallowed by the waves of exile.
> Data transformation is synonymous with creation. The expellee must be
> creative if he does not want to go to ruin.[1]

The words of Vilém Flusser, a Czech Jewish philosopher who was forced into
exile first to Brazil and then to France, perfectly fit the character of David de'
Pomis, particularly the idea that creativity in exile is triggered by the neces-
sity of processing the chaos of data that emerges when the exiled person is
abruptly removed from their usual environment, which is a blanket that allows
them to perceive changes, but not permanence. In fact, de' Pomis's intellectual
life was characterised by this very fracture, between a before, in which he lived
a quiet, untroubled life in the territories belonging to the State of the Church,
and an after, in which his exile in Venice forced him to reckon with completely
different living conditions. While the former period was characterised only
by his occupation as a physician, the latter (in which his literary production
occurred) was marked by a feverish writing activity that aimed to help him to
cope with the event that had radically transformed his life. For this reason, his
personality and work differ from those of the other Jewish intellectuals such
as Azariah de' Rossi, Judah Moscato, and Abraham Portaleone, who were more
typical examples of Italian Jewish thinkers living in the second half of the six-
teenth century.

2   The Trauma of Expulsion

De' Pomis was born in Spoleto in 1524 to a family of bankers. In the 1530s, he
started studying medicine, first in Todi and then in Perugia, where he gradu-
ated in 1555.[2] He began his medical practice in Magliano Sabino, though he was

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1   Vilém Flusser, "Exil und Kreativität," *Spuren* 9 (1985): 104–9 (my translation).

2   For de' Pomis's life, see Guido Bartolucci, "Pomis, David (de')," *Dizionario biografico degli
    Italiani* 84 (2015): 682–85. The main sources are (up until 1588) the Hebrew introduction

interrupted by the decrees issued by Pope Paul IV (1476–1559) that prevented Jewish doctors from treating Christian patients (1555). After leaving the territories of the State of the Church, de' Pomis was first accepted into the service of Count Niccolò Orsini and then that of the Sforza family, but recurring difficulties prevented him from working. When Pius V ascended the papal throne (1504–1572), de' Pomis was obliged to leave the State of the Church and moved to Venice, most probably after 1569.

The description of the first years of de' Pomis's activity, mainly provided by his Hebrew autobiography, which was published in 1587, outlines the sufferings he endured in exile, where every city that welcomed him was described in biblical terms as "city of refuge" and where, due to the difficult environmental conditions, he had to cope with the loss of most of his family.[3] Therefore, despite his arrival in Venice, the exile heavily conditioned his life, above all inducing him to rethink the relationship between his people and the Christian world around him.

After his arrival in Venice, de' Pomis established a dense network of friendships beyond the borders of the lagoon city: the Grimani family—particularly Giovanni, Patriarch of Aquileia—Margaret of Savoy, Giacomo Contarini, Pasquale Cicogna, and Francesco Maria II, Duke of Urbino.[4] He also became a

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to *Ṣemaḥ David* (David de' Pomis, *Ṣemaḥ David. Dittionario novo Hebraico, molto copioso, dechiarato in tre lingue, con bellissime annotationi e con l'indice latino e volgare, de tutti li suoi significati* [Venice: Giovanni di Gara, 1587], 5r–v); Ariel Toaff, *Gli ebrei a Perugia* (Perugia: Deputazione di Storia Patria dell'Umbria, 1975), 146–49; Toaff, "Il commercio del denaro e le comunità ebraiche 'di confine' (Pitigliano, Sorano, Monte San Savino, Lippiano) tra Cinque e Seicento," *Italia Judaica. Gli ebrei in Italia tra Rinascimento ed Età barocca. Atti del II Convegno internazionale, Genova 10–15 giugno 1984* (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1986), 99–100. The main biographies of de' Pomis give 1525 as the year of his birth. This date may have come from his account of the loss of part of his father's estate in 1526–1527, in which he reports that this occurred in 5287, two years after his birth (de' Pomis, *Ṣemaḥ David*, 5r; Toaff, *Gli ebrei a Perugia*, 133). The Jewish date was interpreted as the Christian year 1527, fixing his birth to 1525. However, in a letter written to Ferdinando I de' Medici in August 1593, de' Pomis explicitly states that he was born in 1524 (Florence, Archivio di Stato, Archivio del Principato, vol. 840, l. 882r: "Sono nato nel 24"). Another testimony confirming the year 1524 is found in the introduction to his medical treatise *Enarratio brevis*, which was published in Venice in 1588, in which he declares himself to be sixty-four years old (David de' Pomis, *Enarratio brevis, de senum affectibus praecavendis atque curandis rationali methodo decorata, aeque atque praestantissimis arcanisque auxiliis in quibusdam profligandis morbis, insignita in qua, quod singulae humani corporis prave constitutiones haud absque innati caloris oppressione defectuve, oriri possint, passim liquidoque ostenditur* [...] [Venice: Giovanni Verisco, 1588], *2v). It is therefore likely that given that the Jewish year began at the end of September, the year 5287 mentioned by de' Pomis should be understood as 1526. All the translations from the Latin and vernacular of de' Pomis's works are my own.

3   De' Pomis, *Ṣemaḥ David*, 5r.

4   See the letters and the introductions to his Latin and vernacular works quoted in this article.

prominent member of the city's Jewish community and came into the circle of the great Venetian rabbis of the time, such as Baruch Calimani, Samuel Jehuda Katzenellenbogen, and Abigdor Cividale, as well as the intellectuals who were involved in the press, such as Isaac Gershon.[5]

When he arrived in Venice in 1571, de' Pomis, who was forty-seven years old, published his first writing, a translation of the book of Qohelet.[6] Before this date, there is no evidence of any work, so it can be assumed that the papal policies and the suffering they caused him (the deaths of his wife and children), as well as the complete destruction of the environment in which he had grown up, encouraged him to write. His works, therefore, clearly express the trauma that marked the first half of his life and represent his creative attempt to respond to it. It is important to stress one aspect: de' Pomis was not exiled among foreigners, as he immediately became integrated into the Venetian Jewish community. He continued to work as a doctor there, as evidenced by his speeches on the plague that struck Venice in 1577. His trauma lies, above all, in the radical change in his living conditions: in his having been forced to abandon a model of life that he could not find in the Venetian ghetto and that he would attempt to recover, for example, by asking the Duke of Tuscany, Ferdinand I de' Medici, to allow him to teach Hebrew at the University of Pisa during the last years of his life.[7] In this period, Venice was also becoming an inhospitable place for Jews because of the conflict between the republic and the Ottoman Empire. This conflict, in fact, had led Venetian society to believe that the Jews were a threat to the security of the republic because of their secret alliance with the Turks. In 1571, the Venetian Senate approved the non-renewal of the Jews' *condotta* and their consequent expulsion from the city at the request of one of its inhabitants, Alvise Grimani.[8]

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5 See de' Pomis, *Ṣemaḥ David*, 5v.

6 De' Pomis, *L'Ecclesiaste di Salomone. Novamente dal testo hebreo tradotto e secondo il vero senso nel volgar idioma dichiarato dall'eccellente phisico M. David de' Pomi Hebreo* (Venice: Giordano Ziletti, 1571); de' Pomis, *Discorso intorno a l'humana miseria e sopr'al modo di fuggirla con molti bellissimi essempi et avertimenti* [...] (Venice: Appresso Giordano Ziletti e compagni, 1572). On the use of the vernacular in the works of Italian Jews, see Alessandro Guetta, *Italian Jewry in the Early Modern Era* (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2014), 94, 248 n. 7.

7 Florence, Archivio di Stato, Archivio del Principato, vol. 839, f. 534, David de' Pomis, letter to Ferdinando I de' Medici, 4 June 1593 (see Ariel Toaff, *Il prestigiatore di Dio. Avventure e miracoli di un alchimista ebreo nelle corti del Rinascimento* [Milan: Rizzoli, 2010], 122–23).

8 On this episode, see Benjamin Ravid, "The Socio-Economic Background of the Expulsion and Readmission of the Venetian Jews, 1571–1573," in *Essays in Modern Jewish History: A Tribute to Ben Halpern*, ed. Frances Malino and Phyllis Cohen Albert (London: Associated University Press, 1982); Benjamin Arbel, "Venezia, gli ebrei e l'attività di Salomone Ashkenasi

3 The First Works

What happened during those years strengthened de' Pomis's commitment. He began to write a series of works in the vernacular, both printed and handwritten, in which he attempted to show that Judaism and Christianity were linked by a common destiny.

In the first treatise, which was dedicated to Giacomo Contarini, de' Pomis glorifies the institutions of the lagoon city, comparing them to the biblical model in terms of divinity and efficiency.[9] He begins his speech by praising Venice, which is based on the heavenly order, as a model and example for all earthly governments, which should build their laws and institutions on it.[10] The constitution willed by God is a republican one, and this is clearly demonstrated in the king's law that Samuel presents to the people, a *ius* according to which the ruler is above all laws and tyrannises his subjects.[11] The words of the

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nella guerra di Cipro," in *Gli ebrei e Venezia, secoli XIII–XVIII: Atti del convegno internazionale organizzato dall'Istituto di storia della società e dello stato veneziano della Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venezia, Isola di San Giorgio Maggiore, 5–10 giugno 1983*, ed. Gaetano Cozzi (Milan: Edizioni di Comunità, 1987), 163–90. This decree, however, was entirely revoked.

9   David de' Pomis, *Breve discorso nel quale se dimostra la maestà divina haver particolar cura e custodia della republica Venetiana e che li oderni di essa sono nel publico governo alle divine Mosaice constitutioni conformi* (Modena, Biblioteca Estense, Fondo estense, Italiano 981, alpha H.9.2). Now published in Guido Bartolucci, "Venezia nel pensiero politico ebraico Rinascimentale: Un testo ritrovato di David de' Pomis," *Rinascimento* 44 (2005): 225–47. See also Guetta, *Italian Jewry in the Early Modern Era*, 86–87. For the Venetian model in Jewish political thought, see Avraham Melamed, "The Myth of Venice in Italian Jewish Thought," in *Italia Judaica. Atti del I convegno internazionale, Bari 18–22 maggio 1981* (Rome: Multigrafica editrice, 1983), 401–13.

10 De' Pomis, *Breve discorso*, fols. 7r–7v: "Se alcuna republica è in questa nostra età sotto la divina regola costituta, la venetiana, è veramente manifesto, è vivo essempio d'ogni celeste ordine, regolatrice, (senza dubio), di molt'altri magistrati, over sembiante et idea, dalla quale non pochi prencipi della christianità formano le lor perpetue e religiose leggi." ("If any republic in this age is constituted under the divine rule, the Venetian one, it is truly manifest, is a living example of every celestial order, the regulator [without doubt] of many other magistrates, that is the semblance and idea from which not a few princes of Christianity form their perpetual and religious laws").

11 De' Pomis, *Breve discorso*, fols. 7v–8r: "Ma quanto sia grata ad Iddio, parlando universalmente, il dominio della republica, si può assai bene comprendere da queste sue santissime parole scritte nel primo libro de' Re, perciochè, essendosi sdegnato contra 'l popolo che dimandò per suo capo un re, non volendo più stare sotto forma di republica, disse per bocca del profeta Samuel" ("But God's gratefulness for the dominion of the republic, universally speaking, can be very well understood from these most holy words of his, written in the first book of Kings, for when he was angry at the people who demanded a king as their leader, not wanting to be governed as a republic, he spoke through the mouth of the prophet Samuel"). This is followed by a quotation from the famous passage

judge, de' Pomis writes, are a way of dissuading the Jews from demanding a single king and instead encouraging them to choose a government with many leaders, in which it will be more difficult for everyone to contribute to an unjust policy and, above all, in which both the harm and the public interest affect everyone and not just a single person.[12] He contrasts this anti-monarchical vision with the moment when Jethro, Moses's father-in-law, advises him to seek help from wiser men when judging cases (explained in Exod 18). In describing this episode, which led to the selection of the heads of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens from among the people, de' Pomis compares the institutional structure found in the book of Exodus to the four organs of the Venetian Republic: the Great Council, the *Pregadi*, the *Quarantia*, and finally the Council of Ten.[13] The short treatise on the Venetian magistrates concludes with a prophetic introduction in which de' Pomis offers an interpretation of some passages from Isaiah and Daniel. In fact, he claims that God loved the Republic of Venice so much that he would never abandon it to a tyrant (identified with Sultan Selim II), but would always defend it: this resulted from the Hebrew prophecies that spoke of the future victory of the Christians over

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in 1 Sam 8:11–18. In this presentation, de' Pomis does not devote much space to the figure of the king, as if he rejects his legitimacy outright. His analysis in his explanation of the term *melekh* in his dictionary is different: cf. de' Pomis, *Ṣemaḥ David*, 125v–26v.

12   De' Pomis, *Breve discorso*, fols. 10r–10v: "Si vede con quanto bel modo persuade il popolo a non mutarsi del publico governo, dipingendoli tutti li costumi del tiranno quali possono facilmente derivare da vero che sia principe assoluto e con difficultà, è di raro da una repubblica essendo composta di molti capi, la onde è quasi impossibile che tutti concorrino a pervertire la ragione e tanto maggiormente essendo il danno e l'utile pubblico e non di un solo" ("One can see how nicely he persuades the people not to change their public government, depicting all the customs of the tyrant that can easily derive from the fact that he is an absolute prince, and this is rarely the case in a republic, since it is composed of many leaders, so that it is almost impossible for all of them to pervert reason, and all the more so since the damage and the profit are public, and not just for a single person").

13   De' Pomis, *Breve discorso*, fols. 12r–12v: "Lo essortò a far elettione di huomeni possenti e leali, che havessero il timor d'Iddio, amatori della verità et inimici de l'avaritia e che di questi tali alcuni d'essi fussero costituiti Signori di Migliaia, cioè del Gran Conseglio et alcuni d'essi Centurioni che sono di minor numero com'a dire del numero di Pregati, li Signori de Cinquanta erano simili alli Signori della Quarantia, li Decani era il conseglio di Diece" ("He urged him to elect mighty and loyal God-fearing men, lovers of truth and enemies of avarice, and for some of them to be made Lords of Thousands—that is, of the Great Council—and some of them Centurions, who are fewer in number than the number of the Pregati, the Lords of Fifty were similar to the Lords of Forty, the lords of ten were [like] the Council of Ten"). For the history of this episode in early modern political thought, see Avraham Melamed, "Jethro's Advice in Medieval and Early Modern Jewish and Christian Political Thought," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 2 (1990): 3–41.

the Turks.[14] This second part was not original, but came from another speech he had written earlier, which was more clearly prophetic and in which he had announced the Christians' victory in the Mediterranean.[15] De' Pomis was writing just after the Christian League had been founded in order to counter the Turkish threat, and it was precisely this political decision that enabled him to draw a parallel between the Jewish and Christian worlds at one point in his work. Indeed, he writes:

> The word with which St. Jerome translates *Pactum* in Hebrew is *berit*, meaning *berith*, which brings as much relief as the word *assecuratione de pace*, "confederation," or, better and more properly expressed, a covenant: in this way it signifies the pact that God made with Abraham and his descendants, from which this most sacred word "religion" arose.[16]

The Hebrew word *berit*, the covenant by which God bound the people to himself first with Abraham and then with Moses and which was the constitutive

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14   De' Pomis, *Breve discorso*, fols. 21r–21v: "Questo picciol raguaglio mi è parso dare del magistrato che ordinò Iddio alli Hebrei, per mostrare che non è molto da esso difforme quello della republica Venetiana, la quale il Creator del tutto promette di custodirla e di liberarla dal tiranno" ("This little comparison seemed to me to be given by the magistrate that God ordained for the Hebrews, to show that it is not very different from that of the Venetian republic, which the Creator of all promises to protect and to free from tyranny").

15   David de' Pomis, *Discorso meraviglioso di David de Pomis, fisico ebreo, sopra la guerra promossa da Selim, imperator de' Turchi, e sopra quel che succederà in fin al tempo dell'universal pace, con la lega de' principi christiani in essa compresi e da comprendersi*. [...] (Bologna, Biblioteca dell'Archiginnasio, Ms. A 428). Another copy of the work was sold by Christie's in 1998 as New York, lot. 408, sale number 8105 (London, Robinson Trust, Ms. 2535): see Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Iter Italicum. Accedunt alia itinera. A Finding List of Uncatalogued or Incompletely Catalogued Humanistic Manuscripts of the Renaissance in Italian and Other Libraries*, vol. 4: *Great Britain to Spain* (London: Warburg Institute; Leiden: Brill, 1989), 231b. On the composition date, see de' Pomis, *Discorso meraviglioso*, fol. 26r: "Ma felicissimo sarà colui che si troverà nel mille trecento 35 giorni doppo la detta profanatione che viene ad essere, secondo il tempo corrente nel millecinquecento settantasette, cominciando a contare il principio della lega nel millecinquecentosettanta uno et seguitando in fin al compimento della settimana revelata a Daniel" ("But the most fortunate will be the one who finds himself 1335 days after the said desecration, which, according to the present calendar, begins in 1577, beginning to count the league in 1571 and continuing until the completion of the week revealed to Daniel").

16   "La voce interpretata da San Hieronimo *Pactum* in hebreo dice *berit* cioè *Berith*, che tanto rilieva quanto che 'l nome di assecuratione di pace, confederatione, o per dir meglio e più propriamente lega: non altrimenti significa il patto che fece Iddio con Abraam, e con gli suoi descendenti, onde hebbe origine questo santissimo nome religione" (de' Pomis, *Discorso meraviglioso*, fol. 20r. The reference is to *Vulg.* Dan 9:24).

basis of Judaism, consists of the same "substance" as the covenant through which the Christian states allied themselves in order to fight their common Turkish enemy: it is a generating principle of political unity and moral obligation. De' Pomis thus attempts to show both the ethico-moral and in some sense also the juridical framework in which Christians and Jews coexisted.

This commonality is also evident in the interpretation of Isaiah's and Daniel's prophecies contained in the discourse: the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent liberation of Jerusalem would be the moment when God would forgive the people of Israel for their sins and allow them to return to the ancient homeland they had abandoned after the destruction of the Temple.[17] De' Pomis tries to make his enemies reconsider their views on the Jewish presence in Venice: not only are the Jews not allied with the Turks against the Christians, but, on the contrary, the Ottoman Empire represents a common threat to both peoples.

De' Pomis's two works on Qohelet, published in 1571 and 1572 respectively, also illustrate his desire to restore a certain type of relationship between Judaism and Christianity and to construct a new image of the Jewish tradition by transforming the content of a work like Qohelet into a treatise on ethics. In the first work, this aspect particularly emerges in the comparison between the Hebrew text of Qohelet (translated into the vernacular) and the commentary, in which the content of the work, a neutral (non-confessional) religious sentiment, becomes a tool for fighting sceptical, pessimistic thinking. De' Pomis presents the second text as a discourse on philosophy that can be an antidote to the sceptical positions of Greek philosophy, acknowledging the Jewish character of the work, whose meaning can be understood only if we rediscover the ancient tradition to which Ecclesiastes belonged. De' Pomis's quotations, taken from the Prophets, the Psalms, and also from rabbinic literature, represent the threads from which his reflections are woven: one must understand that an ethically upright life, based on respect for the law, is the only way to receive a reward in the world to come. De' Pomis constructs this perspective without reference to Christianity, as if to remind his audience that the Jewish tradition can also share the principles of Christian society, against the "poisons" of certain positions that come from Greek philosophy. Thus, he not only acknowledges the Jewish origin of his work, but also once again affirms that Judaism and Christianity are on the same side against a common enemy: where the

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17   De' Pomis, *Discorso meraviglioso*, fol. 31r: "Ne solamente gli vuole aggradire di perdonare gli loro peccati tutti, ma anco rimettergli nell'Antico stato, consegnandogli da ovunque sono dispersi" ("He will not only forgive them all their sins, but also restore them to their former state, and deliver them whithersoever they are scattered").

adversary was once the Ottoman Empire, it is now the atheism of classical philosophy.[18]

There is a final element that can be read in light of the previous interpretations. One of the accusations traditionally levelled against the Jews was that they spread the plague. On the occasion of the epidemic that struck Venice between 1576 and 1577, de' Pomis not only intervened as a physician, but also presented three speeches to the doge in which he presented solutions to contain the contagion.[19] Thus, he followed the humour theory on which the assumptions about the causes and spread of the plague were based and proposed a series of solutions associated with the use of health officers and health policies.[20] He also referred to the Jewish scriptures and reminded the doge that the Bible describes the technique of removing harmful atoms from substances by washing.[21]

4   Explaining and Defending Judaism

While in his vernacular texts, de' Pomis builds a parallel between Christianity and Judaism, attempting to demonstrate a common destiny, in his Latin works

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18   De' Pomis, *L'Ecclesiaste di Salomone*; de' Pomis, *Discorso intorno*. For these works, see Guetta, *Italian Jewry in the Early Modern Era*, 169–71; Guido Bartolucci, "Hebraeus sempre fidus. David de' Pomis e l'apologia dell'ebraismo tra volgare e latino," in *Umanesimo e cultura ebraica nel Rinascimento italiano*, ed. Stefano Ugo Baldassarre and Fabrizio Lelli (Florence: Pontecorboli editore, 2016), 59–89; Bernard Dov Cooperman, "Cultural Pluralism from the Ghetto: What Might It Have Meant?", in *Non contrarii, ma diversi: The Question of the Jewish Minority in Early Modern Italy*, ed. Alessandro Guetta and Pierre Savy (Rome: Viella, 2020), 32–38.

19   David de' Pomis, *Brevi discorsi et efficacissimi ricordi per liberare ogni città oppressa dal mal contagioso, proposti in diversi tempi secondo l'occorenze, al serenissimo prencipe di Venezia dall'eccellente dottor David de' Pomis hebreo* […] (Venice: Gratioso Perchacino, 1577). See Carlo M. Cipolla, *Public Health and the Medical Profession in the Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976).

20   "Io ne posso render buon conto per esser stato del continuo nella travagliosa tempesta visitando alle porte maggior quantità delli feriti, di quella che si conveniva alle mie deboli forze, la onde l'isperienza oltre la dottrina d'Hyppocrate e di Galeno mi mostrava qualche difesa contra l'oppressione de si gran nimico" (de' Pomis, *Brevi discorsi*, A2v) ("I can well explain this, for I have been constantly in the storm, and I have seen more wounded at the gates than my feeble forces could cope with, so that experience, as well as the teachings of Hippocrates and Galen, have shown me some defence against the oppression of this great enemy"); "Nulla dimanco ho voluto anco ponerle in carta a fine Vostra Serenità ne possa far partecipi li Clarissimi Proveditori della Sanità a ciò da essi siano poste in essecutione" (de' Pomis, *Brevi discorsi*, B3r) ("I also wanted to put them on paper so that Your Serene Highness could share with the health officers what they have put into practice").

21   De' Pomis, *Brevi discorsi*, C3r.

he goes one step further. Ten years had passed since he composed the treatises (the early 1570s), a period of relative calm for the Venetian Jewish community, during which de' Pomis had exclusively devoted himself to his activities as a physician. In 1587, he published an important linguistic work, *Ṣemaḥ David. Dittionario novo Hebraico*, in three languages: Hebrew, Latin, and the vernacular. This is a two-column work (one devoted to Hebrew lemmas, the other to foreign lemmas appropriated by the Hebrew language) in which de' Pomis presents the most important terms in the Hebrew language in three idioms. It was inspired by the great Hebrew lexicons of the past, from David Kimchi to the most recent by Elias Levita dating to the beginning of the sixteenth century, but it also referred to the Christian lexicographical works of its time, such as the work of the Christian Hebraist Marco Marini.[22] His work was the first to use the three languages, and in a very unique way, for he devotes a separate space to each Hebrew (and Aramaic) entry in both Hebrew and Latin and also in the vernacular. However, the three versions of each entry are not simply translations of the same text; rather, each subject is often analysed from different angles (depending on the language in which the sections are written). An interesting example of how the interaction between the three languages works can be found in the three introductions. The first, which is written in Latin, is dedicated to the history of the Hebrew language and its progressive assimilation of words from other languages, such as Greek, Latin, or Arabic (especially in the *Gemara*), and it ends with a celebration of Aramaic, which, through the Targum, illuminates and clarifies the darkest passages of the Torah.[23] The second introduction, which is written in the vernacular, recounts the reasons that led de' Pomis to publish the text and identifies the noble and learned Christians as those who insisted that this work be published so that in his words, "it would help many to understand the meaning of the entries written by various Jewish authors on various sciences."[24] The third, in contrast,

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22   Kimchi and Elia Levita were the two main sources of the work. De' Pomis quotes Marco Marini at the end of the Latin introduction, and Marini's lexicon was printed by the same publishing house as *Ṣemaḥ David* in 1593 ("Reverendus praesertim Abbas ac Doctissimus Dominus Marcus Marinus, qui non parum apud latinos haebraicam linguam illustravit" [de' Pomis, *Ṣemaḥ David*, A3v]). See Marco Marini, *Arca Noe. Thesaurus linguae sanctae novus* (Venice: Giovanni di Gara, 1593). For Elia Levita as a lexicographer, see Emma Abate, "Elias Levita the Lexicographer and the Legacy of *Sefer ha-Shorashim*," *Sefarad* 76 (2016): 289–311. For *Sefer ha-Šorašim* in early modern Europe, see Saverio Campanini, "'Thou Bearest Not the Root, but the Root Thee.' On the Reception of the *Sefer ha-Shorashim* in Latin," *Sefarad* 76 (2016): 313–31.

23   De' Pomis, *Ṣemaḥ David*, A3r–3v.

24   De' Pomis, A4r–4v.

which is written in Hebrew, reconstructs the events of de' Pomis's life, or rather the sufferings he endured.[25]

The three successive texts offer the possibility of reading the entire work as a tool not only for scholars, but also for those who wanted to find out about the principles of the Jewish tradition, an explanation that de' Pomis considered essential for preventing the repetition of the events that had caused him so much pain. In fact, he does not hold back from explaining the Jewish tradition to Christians: thus, he not only deals with political institutions such as the king (*melekh*), but also gives very long explanations of concepts such as Torah, sacrifice (*qorban*), or poverty (*raš*), in which he examines the meaning of these terms, referring not only to the Bible, but also to rabbinic literature and to Jewish lexicography, such as David Kimhi's *Sefer ha-Šorašim*.[26] There is a particular question regarding the relationship between the three languages; that is, the role that each language plays in the treatment of the respective subjects. Some scholars have argued that the distinction reflects de Pomis's desire to help Jewish scholars to perfect their Latin and Christians their Hebrew, reserving the vernacular for more detailed explanations of certain aspects of his people's tradition or to present anecdotes about his life or the history of Judaism.[27] The relationship between the renderings in the three languages, however, is not always constant: sometimes the Hebrew and the Latin agree while the vernacular treats the subject by emphasising its most miraculous or extraordinary aspects; at other times, however, the relationship changes and the vernacular translates the Hebrew more carefully—for example, while the Latin is reduced to a few lines.[28] The overall impression is that de' Pomis's intended each entry to be read in its entirety, for only from the combination of the three languages would the overall meaning emerge.[29]

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25   De' Pomis, A5r–5v.

26   See note 22 above.

27   Andrew D. Berns, *The Bible and Natural Philosophy in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 109–93.

28   See, for example, the item *yahalom*, *diaspro*, where the Latin consists only of the name of the stone while the vernacular translates the Hebrew entry (de' Pomis, *Ṣemaḥ David*, 48r), or the item *pašaṭ*, where the quotations from Elias Levita are only found in the vernacular and Hebrew sections (de' Pomis, *Ṣemaḥ David*, 185r).

29   For example, in the vernacular part of the entry for *qorban*, he writes: "Et avendo io a bastanza detto della divisione e differenza delli sacrifici nelle altre due lingue […] me pare cosa vana replicarla nella volgare. Solo, al mio parere non è incoveniente dar qualche notitia in questo idioma della innumerabile quantità di animali che quel santo luogo si santificavano" ("And having said enough about the division of and difference between the sacrifices in the other two languages […] it seems to me a vain thing to repeat it in the vernacular tongue, except that, in my opinion, it is not inconvenient to give some

A particular case is represented by the word *mašiaḥ* ("messiah"), in which de' Pomis seeks to illustrate the principles of his religion. After having listed the references to the biblical passages in which the term appeared in the Hebrew and Latin sections, he concludes in the vernacular:

> This word *mašiaḥ* has the same meaning as *christos* in Greek, which means "anointed," because all the Jewish kings were anointed with holy oil. Since it is a name of great respect, both among the Jews and in the writings of the Christians, I thought it was appropriate to quote all the passages of the Targum in which this word is mentioned, so that everyone who wishes to know can read the passages cited and will find the chapters in which the words *mešiaḥ*, *mašiaḥ*, or *Christo* are mentioned.[30]

Starting from the "neutral" definition of the Messiah as the anointed one, de' Pomis adds that anyone can discover the meaning of this term by checking not only the passages of the Hebrew Bible, but also its Aramaic translation (in Latin, "Caldaica translatio"); that is, the Targum, which, as mentioned in the Latin introduction, often clarifies the Torah's obscure Hebrew passages. This obviously refers to the centuries-old Christian practice of using this very text (the Targum) to convince the Jews to accept Jesus as the Messiah, whose true prophetic message, according to the Christians, was always rejected by the Jews because of their ignorance and unbelief. In a sense, de' Pomis, while

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information in this language of the innumerable quantity of animals that were sanctified in that holy place").

30 "Questa voce *meshihach*, tanto rilieva quanto *christos* in greco, che significa onto, percioché tutti li re hebrei si ongevano con l'olio santo et essendo nome di gran rispetto, si appresso li Hebrei come parimente nella considerazione delli Christiani, m'è parso cosa degna de citare tutti i luoghi del *Targum*, nelli quali di detta voce s'è fatta mentione, la onde chiunque ciò desidera sapere, legga li sopra scritti numeri e troverà ogne capitolo che vi è ricordato il *meshihach*, Masiak o Christo che dir vogliamo"; de' Pomis, *Ṣemaḥ David*, 131v. On the Messiah in anti-Jewish literature, see for example, Jerónimo de Santa Fe, *Contra Iudaeorum perfidiam et Talmuth Tractatus, sive libi duo*, in *Magna Bibliotheca Veterum Patrum et antiquorum scriptorum ecclesiasticorum* (Paris: Apud Ioannem Billaine, Simeonem Piget, Fredericum Leonard, 1654), book 4, part 1, 748: "Idcirco divina gratia mediante verificare intendo praedictas conditiones in vero Messia in Lege promisso haberi debuisse per authoritates et glossas, per magistros Iudaeorum atque magistros talmudistas nihilominus factas, quorum utique verba nemo Iudaeorum ausus esset quoquo modo negare. Item per Caldaicas translationes, quas quidem Onkelos et Ionathas filius Ozielis fecerent, qui fuerunt tempore destructionis Templi secundi, quos ipsi Iudaei authenticos habent in maxima reputatione." For Jerónimo de Santa Fe, see his work *El Tratado "De Iudaicis erroribus ex Talmut,"* ed. Moises Orfali (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1987).

acknowledging the importance of the term for both religions, challenged his readers to verify the truth of the statements from the anti-Jewish tract on the basis of the texts, especially since in the Hebrew and Latin sections, he limited himself to listing the passages, while the challenge was issued in the vernacular section, which made it accessible to a wider audience. While in his earlier vernacular works, de' Pomis confined himself to acknowledging a common destiny of Judaism and Christianity, in this work, which unites the three languages, he begins to explain to his Christian readers the principles on which the Jewish religion is based, making no concessions, and, on the contrary, strongly affirming his religious identity.

However, the text also confirms some recurring themes of de' Pomis's vernacular works and, in particular, his reflections on the weakness of human knowledge and the absolute centrality of God in man's life. They emerge, for example, in the entry for "certainty" (*wadday*), which belongs only to God and which is contrasted with doubt (*safeq*), or his discussion of the term "disciple" (*talmid*), where he acknowledges the humility and pride of the rabbis, who (like the Greek philosophers) never called themselves "wise" (*ḥakhamim*), but rather "disciples of wisdom."[31]

The following year, in 1588, de' Pomis's masterpiece, *De medico hebraeo enarratio apologica*, was published.[32] His return to apologetic literature—and especially to the defence of the medical profession being practised by Jews—was perhaps triggered by Pope Gregory XIII's bull of 1584, which reaffirmed the prohibition on Jews treating Christian patients already established by Paul IV. In reality, however, the new pope, Sixtus V (1521–1590), who ascended the papal throne in 1585 and to whom the dictionary is dedicated, had already introduced a new policy towards the Jews in 1586 with the bull *Christiana pietas*, which allowed them to settle in certain areas of the Papal States and, above all, to

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31   De' Pomis, *Ṣemaḥ David*, 49r and 233v respectively. For example, he writes in the vernacular section of the entry for *wadda'y*: "La presente dittione non significa altro che certo e non si può applicare se non quella cosa che non riceve dubio alcun, com'è Iddio Benedetto qual è certissimo e l'istessa verità" ("The present word means nothing but 'certain' and can only be applied to that thing that experiences no doubt, such as God the Blessed, who is most certain and the truth itself").

32   David de' Pomis, *De medico hebraeo enarratio apologica, in qua tum quamplurima praeclara alia, notatu digna reperiuntur; tum etiam quod magna inter hebraeum et christianum adsit affinitas, quodque mutua inter eorum utrumque dilectio (iure divino) esse debeat, pervalidis rationibus, passim demonstratur* […] (Venice: Giovanni Varisco, 1588). For this text, see Harry Friedenwald, "Apologetic Works of Jewish Physicians," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 32 (1942): 228–55; 407–8; Friedenwald, *The Jews and Medicine* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1944), 2:575–76; Winifried Schleiner, *Medical Ethics in the Renaissance* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1995), 68–70.

practise as physicians. Thus, it was not a contingent subject, but a work that aimed to develop in Latin the ideas proposed in de' Pomis's vernacular works in order to broaden the range of sources used and the justifications they offered.

The work, which was dedicated to the Duke of Urbino, Francesco Maria II della Rovere, is divided into twelve sections, but what may surprise the reader is that instead of being dedicated to the defence of Jewish physicians, eight sections out of twelve recount the history of the Jewish religion and its foundations. This discussion, however, is not intended to introduce a simplified, "universal" type of religion that is capable of coexisting with the Christian one. On the contrary, de' Pomis insists on the exceptionality of Judaism. The Jews, in fact, were witnesses, guardians, and transmitters of divine law. According to de' Pomis, they were spectators of divine miracles, and therefore, since human reason often deceives itself where divine things are concerned, they are the only ones who can conclusively prove the validity of its law.[33] The ideas of the weakness of human knowledge and the centrality of God in man's life also returns here. Moreover, de' Pomis adds that it is the observance of the commandments that God gave to Moses that obliges every Jew, precisely because they are worshippers of the law, to possess "omnes divinas praescriptas qualitates," the principal of which is mercy for one's neighbour. De' Pomis demonstrated this obligation to righteous behaviour towards both Jews and Gentiles with a dense network of not only biblical, but also rabbinic quotations. Once again, it seems that he does not refer to a commonality between Jews and Christians, but rather exalts the ethical peculiarities of the Jewish tradition itself. The discourse develops in the subsequent pages, always following the same thread: de' Pomis wants to show that the Jewish religion, which in many fields often proves to be superior to other traditions, cannot be a threat to Christians.

This defence and exaltation of Judaism leads de' Pomis to imagine a relationship with Christian society founded on radically different bases. In the

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33   De' Pomis, *De medico*, 54: "Repetamus igitur id quod omisimus, nempe quod Iudaeus sit a Christiano amplectendus, atque favendus. [...] Secundo quod omnium fere mirabilium Dei testis dubio procul Iudaeus existat, ab Abraam nempe ad Iesus Nazareni adventum, qui (ut supra dicebamus) legem totam amplexus fuit et omnia, quae in sacris litteris conscripta sunt, vera esse confirmavit. Caeterae autem Gentes fidem adhibent, viderunt autem minime. Iudaeus vero praesentia fidem in Deo Christianis auget, qui tot mirabilium genera se vidisse patresve suos comprobasse pronunciat" ("Let us repeat, then, what we have omitted; namely, that the Jew must be welcomed and favoured by the Christian. [...] Secondly, because the Jew is undoubtedly witness to all God's miracles, from Abraham to the coming of Jesus Christ, who [as we said above] comprehended the whole law and confirmed as true all that is written in the holy scriptures. The other peoples accepted the faith, but they did not see anything. The Jew, on the other hand, who claims that he has seen all the miracles and that his ancestors have confirmed them, strengthens the Christians' faith in God").

last section, he pauses to discuss the policies of conversion promoted by the Church of Rome. De' Pomis responds to this process of forced inclusion in the Christian community by referencing (without explicitly mentioning) Lactantius's *Divinae institutiones*, in which he finds an absolute refusal of the use of violence against those who profess another faith because "nihil est tam voluntarium quam religio" ("nothing is as voluntary as religion").[34] In this conception of religion as a voluntary choice, de' Pomis thus recognises his understanding of Judaism, since, as he had recalled several times, especially in his vernacular speeches, it arose from the pact between God and Abraham and all Jews had been bound by the law given to Moses since the time of Sinaitic revelation: there was no better reason to oppose the increasingly repressive conversion policy.[35] De' Pomis, therefore, reiterates that coexistence between those who belong to different religions cannot take place through the rejection of each other's religion. The solution he proposes is quite surprising, even if it is not directly explained. In fact, he suggests that his interlocutors follow the policies of the rulers of antiquity, who, in different ways, always granted legal autonomy to the Jews who lived in their kingdoms. If, de' Pomis polemically asks at the end of his treatise, these sovereigns, who were pagans, were so benevolent towards the Jews in the past, why should Christians—and especially Pope Sixtus v—not be so today?[36]

5   Conclusion

We do not know what reaction de' Pomis's appeal provoked in the Roman Curia, but we do know that he lived between Venice and perhaps Padua until

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34   De' Pomis, *De medico*, 80: "At defendenda religio omnis (Christiana presentim) non occidendo, sed moriendo, non sevitiae, sed patientia, non scelere, sed fide; necesseque est bonum in religione versari, non malum, nam si sanguine, si tormentis, si malo religionem defendere velis, iam non defendetur illa, sed polluetur. Nihil profecto est tam voluntarium quam religio, non enim beneficium est quod ingeritur recusanti, sed iis consulendum est qui quod bonum est nesciunt" ("Every religion [especially the Christian one] must be defended not by killing, but by dying; not by cruelty, but by patience; not by malice, but by faith. In religion, you must do good, not evil: if you want to defend religion with blood, torture, and evil, you are not defending it; you are defiling it. Undoubtedly, nothing is as voluntary as religion. It is not good for the one who rejects what is forced upon him, but you must take care of those who do not know what is good"). See Lact. *Inst.* 5.19.

35   De' Pomis, *De medico*, 82: "Contra vero Christianus quotidie Hebraeos (propter conversationem) ad baptismum vertit" ("On the contrary, the Christian daily directs the Jews to baptism [for conversion]").

36   De' Pomis, *De medico*, 83.

1593, after which we have no further news of him.[37] His last work, therefore, was his 1588 *De medico hebreo*, which closed a very intense period of activity that lasted less than twenty years that had begun with his arrival in Venice after his expulsion from the State of the Church.

In a recent work, David Ruderman suggested that mobility is one of the elements that characterised the history of the Jews in the early modern era. He added that this movement from one country to another also influenced the cultural productivity of many Jewish intellectuals.[38] With regard to kabbalistic literature, Moshe Idel has shown that the expulsion from Spain in 1492 marked a moment of supreme creativity in which many authors increased their literary production and that "their creativity was more than a mere continuation of what they had achieved before their departure."[39] Following this idea, Ruderman proposed to extend the research to other authors and other areas. Of course, the expulsion of 1492—and the Sephardic emigration more generally—was one of the central moments of this process, but other events, other expulsions, such as that from the Papal States in 1569, also shaped the lives of Jews in the early modern period. The life of David de' Pomis can be seen as a paradigmatic example of this phenomenon. Although he always remained within the Italian peninsula, his move from the provincial towns of central Italy to Venice triggered a creative activity in him that was unknown in the first period of his life (he did not begin writing until he was forty-seven years old). The content of his works and the languages in which he wrote them were also influenced by his experience as an exile: he used Latin, the vernacular, and Hebrew (in combination or alone) as tools in order to construct a representation of Judaism that was a response to what had happened in the first part of his life. All his creative efforts to compare the Jewish and Christian traditions, to explain Judaism, and to search—for example, in his writings on prophecy—for a common destiny for the two peoples stemmed from the trauma he experienced when he was expelled from his home in Spoleto and from the State of the Church. As Vilém Flusser said, in order to inhabit exile, it

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37   For the hypothesis that de' Pomis ended his life in Padua, see Leone Luzzatto, "Risposte," *Il Vessillo israelitico* 32 (1884): 207.

38   David B. Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 41–55.

39   Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry*, 42; Moshe Idel, "On Mobility, Individuals and Groups: Prolegomenon for a Sociological Approach to Sixteenth-Century Kabbalah," *Kabbalah* 3 (1998): 145–73; Moshe Idel, "Italy in Safed, Safed in Italy: A Chapter in the Interactive History of Sixteenth-Century Kabbalah," in *Cultural Intermediaries: Jewish Intellectuals in Early Modern Italy*, ed. David B. Ruderman and Giuseppe Veltri (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 239–69.

is necessary to collect and process "the information that is whizzing around." The languages that de' Pomis used and the works that he decided to compose were precisely daughters of this endeavour: speeches, dictionaries, commentaries, apologies, collected Christian discourses on the Jews, and the stimuli that came to him from the new Venetian environment (which were not exclusively Jewish) gave rise to something completely new. Thus, if the combination of these two experiences (mobility and creativity) underlies the history of European Jewry in the early modern period, then de' Pomis's story and work represent a recognisable but as yet unexplored fragment of the broader history of Jews in Italy during the Renaissance.

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