Italian

People are often surprised to hear that there are Jews in Italy. This is because theirs is a small community-it was much reduced by emigration „ a following the Fascist racial laws of 1938 and by the Nazi deportations and it is also very integrated and assimilated into Italian society. In fact, the Jewish presence in the Italian peninsula is the oldest in Western Europe and was uninterrupted for 2,000 years.

Until recently, when a few cookbooks were published, almost nothing , at all - apart from the famous carciofi alla giudia, little Roman artichokes opened out like sunflowers and deep-fried - was known about the food of Italian Jews, not even by the Italian Jews themselves. This is partly because Italy is regionally diverse (until unification in 1870, it was divided into separate states), and the cooking of the Jews furthermore reflects the individual histories of their once numerous communities.

At one time or another they were in almost every region. Their traces can be found in street names like Via della Sinagoga and Piazza Giudea and quarters called Giudecca. There are remains of old synagogues; reliefs and frescoes representing symbols of Jewish identity like a menorah and an oil flask; tombstones and catacombs with Hebrew lettering. *Guida all'Italia ebraica* by Annie Sacerdoti in collaboration with Luca Fiorentino gives the Jewish sites in various cities as well as the historical background of the old communities. It is uncanny how there is a dish in the Jewish repertoire to match each of the sites.

A cookbook contributed by members of the Italian Jewish women's association ADEI (Associazione Donne Ebree d'Italia) called *La Cucina nella tradizione ebraica,* edited by Giuliana Ascoli Vitali-Norsa, identifies the recipes as `al uso marchigiano', `alla romana', `di Ferrara', `alla padovana', 'vecchia ricetta veneta', `vecchia ricetta anconetana', `all'uso fiorentino', `alla livornese', `alla piemontese', `di Trieste', and so on, revealing the main centers where Jews once had an important and intense presence.

Now they are mostly concentrated in Rome, Milan and Turin, and the old historic communities, which were once dispersed throughout the peninsula, have disappeared or lost their identity. As Jews gained equal rights and full emancipation after the kingdom of Italy was created in 1870, they abandoned orthodoxy and assimilated. The old family dishes are among the few things that remained as a testimony to their past.

Jews have lived in Rome and in southern Italy and the islands of Sicily and Sardinia since the second century BCE. Many came from the Mediterranean outposts of the Roman Empire, attracted to the centre of power. The community grew enormously as thousands of prisoners were brought back as slaves after the conquest of Jerusalem by the Roman general Pompey in 61 BCE, and as a result of revolts against Roman occupation and the destruction of the Holy Temple by the Emperor Titus in CE 70. (The Arch of Titus portrays the Jewish slaves carrying a menorah.) In the first century of the Empire there were up to 50,000 Jews in Rome. They lived in the Trastevere area, in the Suburra and in Porta Capena.

The earliest and largest colonies of Jews existed in the Italian south - in the little ports around the Bay of Naples, in Puglia, Basilicata, Calabria, Sardinia and most particularly in Sicily, where the Jewish population was 100,000 - until the Inquisition banished them from that part of the Italian peninsula, which was under Spanish rule in the beginning of the sixteenth century.

In Sicily, the Jews enjoyed eighteen centuries of tranquil existence. They grew oranges, produced silk and mined minerals, were cheese-makers and artisans, cloth merchants and doctors. They were among the colonies of the Diaspora that had the richest culture and traditions, being at the heart of Mediterranean traffic and benefiting from the cultural and economic impact of foreign occupiers, including Arabs, Normans, Angevins and Aragonese.

Under Muslim rule, from 831 to 1061, the Jewish population increased greatly with new immigrants from Muslim lands. They traded with the East and dealt in silks and perfumes; became Arabized in their tastes and looked to North Africa and the East, especially to Egypt, for their culinary standards. The Arab influence on Jewish cooking in Italy remains today.

In 1492, on the orders of Ferdinand the Catholic of Spain, the Jews were banished from Sicily and Sardinia, and a few years later from southern Italy. It was said that over 35,000 left Sicily alone. There has been little or no Jewish population in those parts since then, but the foods the Jews took with them when they fled to central and northern cities - vegetables like aubergines and artichokes, garnishes of raisins and pine nuts, sweet and sour flavours, marzipan pastries, and the custom of deep-frying batter-coated morsels in oil - all of which came to Sicily with the Arabs, are still associated with the Jews. Many of the dishes labelled `alla giudia' or `alla ebraica' throughout Italy are like those of the Italian south. Some, like cassola, the creamy ricotta cake sold by a Jewish bakery on the Via del Portico di Ottavia in the old Jewish Ghetto of Rome, are archaic Sicilian.

The massive emigration of Jews from the south and their arrival in cities of central and northern Italy coincided with the arrival there of a flow of escapees from German lands at the same time as thousands of refugees from Spain and Portugal. The crisis that this huge influx created resulted in their segregation in special quarters and the imposition of restrictions. Venice was the first city, in 1516, to force Jews to live in a special quarter with walls behind which they were locked in at night. The quarter was called *ghetto* after the hard *-g* Jewish pronunciation of the Venetian word for foundry, because it was situated near an old foundry that made cannons. The *ghetto* became the model for all the ghettos of Europe, which also adopted the name. Forty years later, Pope Paul IV issued a decree obliging Jews in the Papal States to live in ghettos. In most cities where they lived in the Italian peninsula, the Jews were confined in ghettos for up to 300 years. But restrictions varied and were enforced with a certain elasticity, and in many cases were in theory rather than in practice. The ghettos continued to exist until Napoleon's armies occupied Italy in 1796 and tore down their gates, in accordance with the principles of the French Revolution.

From the sixteenth century on, the history of the Jews swung between periods of security and tolerance and periods of segregation and restrictions. There were never persecutions on the scale suffered by Jews in the rest of Europe, and although they were marginalized, a kind of symbiosis and friendly relations generally prevailed with the rest of the population. They were often expelled, but because Italy was a patchwork of independent states - republics, dukedoms, principalities, papal and city states - they could escape from one to another, sometimes to return when the situation changed. At a time when every state was entirely ignorant of the cooking of its neighbours and no other group moved as they did, the ways of cooking they brought from one state to another remained forever linked with them.

The cooking was different in every ghetto. Local regional styles were absorbed, and dishes from other lands adapted. Some communities were destitute, some were close to royal courts and an aristocracy. The Roman Ghetto was the most desperately cramped, and its inhabitants were the poorest in Italy, forbidden to own property, forced to wear yellow badges and red hats, and excluded from most professions except moneylending, dealing in old clothes and bric-a-brac and street peddling. Many of them were *friggitori* - vendors famous for their deep-fried morsels, mainly of fish and vegetables. Their type of fritto misto, once considered vulgar, is very fashionable now and the speciality of many Roman restaurants.

Very little remained of the grand dishes enjoyed by Roman Jews in better times, like those described by the Jewish scholar Kalonymus ben Kalonymus (1286-after 1328), known as Maestro Callo. Among the meats he listed as foods eaten at Purim were lamb, gazelle, venison, chicken, pigeon, turtle dove, goose, capon, swan, duck, pheasant, partridge,

moorhen and quail. He also mentioned macaroni, tortelli and tortelletti, various pies and tarts, pancakes and fritters, foccaccia, mostaccioli, gingerbread, macaroons, chestnuts and salad.

A fashionable restaurant called Piperno near the Rome synagogue in the old ghetto, which is now the intellectual hub of the city, was described in the *Guida all'Italia* as `not quite the temple of Jewish food - the oldest, poorest, and tastiest food of Rome'. Many of the dishes, like ceci coi pennerelli (chickpeas with bits of meat from the knuckle) and aliciotti con 1'indivia (anchovies with chicory), reflect the pauperization of the old community - anchovies being the poorest fish. Other Roman dishes, like the caponata alla giudea with aubergines, concia di zucchine (fried and marinated courgettes) and cassola, are testimony to the swamping of the Roman community by refugees from Sicily and the south.

In the Venice Ghetto, Jewish cooking was exotic and cosmopolitan. Since the twelfth century, when Venice was the only Italian city to trade with the Levant, it allowed foreign merchants, among them Levantine and German Jews, to reside near but not in the city and to open warehouses and offices. The first Jews allowed in the city were Germans invited in as moneylenders in 1382. They were permitted to reside only on the island of Spinalunga, now known as the Giudecca, and later in Mestre. When Jews from southern and central Italy and from around the Veneto flooded in, followed by exiles from Provence and Marranos from Spain and Portugal, the city dealt with the invasion by separating the communities into three ghettos. The *tedeschi* (German Jews), who were poor secondhand dealers and pawnbrokers and ran the Monte di Pieta - the poor people's banks - were settled in the *ghetto nuovo* with Italians (from Sicily and the local inland province); the Oriental *levantini,* who came as merchants from Turkey, Syria and Egypt, were put in the adjoiningghetto *vecchio;* and the Spanish and Portuguese *ponentini,* in the *ghetto nuovissimo.* The ghettos became more and more cramped, so new floors jelly)'were added on to houses that grew into *grattacielli* (skyscrapers) nine storeys high; corridors and balconies were turned into rooms; and the streets were so narrow that people could hold hands across windows.

But despite the squalid conditions and the vulnerable position of the inhabitants, commerce was allowed to flourish. There were many large-scale international merchants - a few were even shipowners. They were mainly of Portuguese Marrano and Levantine origin. They dealt in precious cloth and *objets d'art* from the Levant and controlled the trade in wool, sugar, silk, spices, grain and dried fruit and nuts. An intense artistic and intellectual life also blossomed in the ghetto. Printing houses brought out hundreds of books. Venice became a Jewish intellectual capital. It was the major point where Iberian, German and Levantine Jews coexisted, and an international meeting place for travelling Jews.

The inhabitants were locked in at night, but during the day were free to move around the city. Christians came into the ghetto as soon as the gates were opened in the morning to do business and attend fairs and to enjoy the celebrations, such as the Purim carnival and other street festivals. The Jews had a symbiotic relationship both with the poor Venetians and with the Signoria, who at the same time detested and wooed them. By the end of the seventeenth century, when the political and economic power of the city declined because of Ottoman competition and the discovery of America, crippling taxes were being imposed on the community, and restrictions reduced them to dealing in secondhand goods. So many moved away. In 1797 when the French occupied Venice, the ghetto gates were broken and restrictions lifted.

When I visited the old Ghetto of Venice and asked a rabbi about Venetian Jewish cooking, he directed me to the Casa di Riposo Israelitico (Jewish old people's home), where they also serve meals to tourists during Jewish holidays. One of the ladies in charge of the cooking answered my question by pointing to the three synagogues (scole) that stood together in the piazza - the *spagniola,* the *levantina* and the *tedesca.* They represented, she said, the different styles (a fourth one was Italian) that make up the Venetian Jewish style.

The coexistence in the ghetto bore fruit in the kitchen. The *levantini* brought riso pilaf and risi colle uette (rice with raisins, eaten cold, as in Istanbul today). The Iberian *ponentini i*ntroduced salt cod dishes, frittate (vegetable omelettes), almondy sweets, orange cakes, flans and chocolate cakes (more about these later). The *levantini* and *ponentini* introduced the range of spices and aromatics that they dealt in. The Arab combinadon of pine nuts and raisins came both with the Sicilians and the *levantini.*

The *tedeschi* introduced goose and duck, beef sausages and goose salame, pesce in gelatina (jellied fish) and polpettine di pesce (gefilte fish), penini de vedelo in gelatina (calf's-foot jelly) and knaidlach, which became cugoli. An example of the interweaving of cultures is pastizzo di polenta, with raisins and pine nuts. Another is the buricche - little pies half-way between Portuguese empanadas and Turkish borekas but with fillings unique to Italy, such as fish with hard-boiled egg; or anchovies and capers with fried aubergines and courgettes; or pumpkin with crushed amaretti and chopped crystallized citrus peel. A bakery in the old , ghetto sells the old Jewish pastries, and at Passover you can find pane azzimo (matzos) hand-made in the old ways, with holes or with a lattice design.

In *La Cucina veneziana* (1982), Giuseppe Maflioli writes that the Jews were not liked in the ' past because of their activities as usurers but that, within a generation after they left the ghettos, they were regarded as extraordinary and prestigious citizens. Daniele Manin (18o4-57), the last doge of Venice, was descended from the Jewish family of Medina. Wealthy Jewish families, such as the Franchettis, Luzzattis, Treves, Morenas and Vidals acquired palaces on the Grand Canal, while the poor stayed in the ghetto. Jewish cooking had an important impact on the local cuisine. Among the Jewish dishes adopted by Venice that Maffoli cites are various vegetables `alla giudia', salt cod dishes, almond pastries and puff-pastry. The Jews introduced the aubergine, which the Venetians at first feared would drive them mad. Maffioli says that I the Jews had so much *`fantasia'* (imagination) that despite their forbidden foods they had a more varied diet and made greater use of vegetables than the Christians. He attributes the ; Venetian tradition of making risotti with every possible type of vegetable - artichokes, ; I courgettes, fennel, celery, carrots, peas, tomatoes, cabbage, potatoes and spinach - to them, and he believes that the famous Milanese riso giallo (rice with saffron) is the Sabbath riso col zafran. Pesce in saor, fried and marinated fish with raisins and pine nuts, was also adopted from the Jews.

The cooking of the communities in the different Italian cities reflected the origins of the inhabitants. Continual persecutions in Germany and the Rhineland sent waves of refugees, " a from as early as the thirteenth century, which intensified in the fourteenth at the time of the Black Death, across the Alps, spreading throughout Lombardy and the Veneto. Jews from Germany represent the origin of the majority of communities of upper Italy. The communities of Trentino and Alto Adige had so many German Jews that they adopted the German rites in their synagogues, and their cooking was very German, with stuffed goose, potato cakes, cabbage, dumplings and apple fritters.

In the Piedrmont (the old duchy of Savoy), a large part of the communities of Turin, Casale-Monferrato, Alessandria and Vercelli were made up of an influx of Jews from Provence which started in the fifteenth century and continued until the nineteenth. A first wave was expelled from Provence by Charles VI in i394, and almost all the Jews of Cuneo came from Avignon in 1570. The cooking had a strong French accent. One of the French-style dishes that recently came to me in a letter from Turin is a polpettone - a galantine of turkey or chicken with minced veal and pistachios. Other Provencal dishes that have come into the Jewish tradition are patate e pomodori of Ferrara, which is like a tian with baked layers of potatoes and tomatoes, and the curious Tuscan sweet spinach tart, torta di mandorle e spinaci, which is a speciality of Nice.

Trieste was a very cosmopolitan port city. Since the eleventh century, German, Spanish, French and Levantine Jews had settled there, and when Iberian Jews came in large numbers, their Sephardi synagogue rite was adopted. In the nineteenth century, Jews came from Corfu fleeing the Greeks, and when Austria annexed Trieste, many flooded into the city from all over the Hapsburg Empire. The Jews of Trieste were professionals and intellectuals. They became affluent, founded banks and insurance companies; they were judges and were elected to the Vienna Parliament. Some became part of the Hapsburg nobility and were given titles.

Their cooking was a varied mix that included Hungarian dishes like gulyas and palacinche (stuffed pancakes), and the yeast cake putizza of Austrian descent. In many cities the Renaissance provided a tolerant background for Jews and for the Marranos who arrived from Spain and Portugal. It idealized talent and learning and created an atmosphere of opportunity. Jewish wealth helped its cultural flowering. Since the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, money-lending banks had mushroomed all over Italy. Such work was forbidden to Christians, and the Jews were called upon to assume it. Christian guilds and merchants, resisting their competition, pushed them out of other trades. Money-lending became a Jewish preserve.

In certain areas money-lenders were subjected to crippling taxation, which led to higher interest rates, and resentment from borrowers. But their services were in demand, and they were invited into many cities, where they financed economic expansion as well as the local nobility, who became their protectors. Thousands of Jews settled in such cities as Ferrara and Modena, where they prospered under the protection of the dukes of Este; Verona and Padua, where the Viscontis and the Sforzas treated them well; and Mantua, where the community, which included many Jews from Provence, became important under the Gonzagas. In Florence, Pisa, Luca, Siena and many little Tuscan centres, Jewish fortunes were tied to the Medici, who protected them. Lorenzo invited Jewish scholars to his court in Florence. Many sophisticated old Jewish recipes - like the buricche ferraresi (little pies filled with chicken), the arancini canditi padovani (balls of orange paste), and the tortelli di zucca mantovani (pumpkin tortelli) - are linked to the cities where Jewish life flourished and cooking reached a high level of sophistication.

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were the age of great Jewish merchants. Many were Sephardim and Marranos from Spain and Portugal, and they spread all over the country, participating in the beginnings of capitalism. Their maritime trade was the dominant force in cities like Ancona, Ferrara, Livorno and Venice. Some had their own ships. They traded with their relatives and coreligionists around the Mediterranean, including their New Christian connections in Spain and Portugal. Through these contacts they introduced New World food products such as tomatoes, pumpkin, potatoes, corn and haricot beans, the seeds and plants brought back to Spain and Portugal from South America by the Conquistadors. That is why red mullet cooked with tomatoes is called triglie alla mosaica in Livorno, and a tomato sauce in Venice is called `alla giudia'. Pumpkin too, despised for a long time by the general population, was considered Jewish. Many pumpkin dishes are still Jewish favourites. This period was also an age of intellectual brilliance for the Jews. Italy became the world centre of Jewish printing and bookmaking, and there were prominent Jewish physicians, musicians, actors, poets and playwrights. A refined cuisine developed in this kind of environment.

The most glorious community was that of Livorno. There, Jews enjoyed a degree of freedom and prestige unknown in any other city. In 1593, the Grand Duke Ferdinando I dei Medici turned the city into a free port and invited in merchants of all nations, and Jews in particular. In a public manifesto known as La Livornina, he promised them tax exemptions, freedom of commerce, and freedom of religious practice - including reverting to Judaism and building synagogues, as well as personal protection. The great majority of Jews who flooded

in were Portuguese Marranos, and it is they who shaped the character of the community and the style of cooking. Their Sephardi synagogal rites were adopted as well as their language, which was Portuguese (it later turned into the Judeo-Livornese dialect *bayito),* and their written language, which was Castilian. The Marranos controlled the port administration; they manufactured arms, produced soap, paper, tobacco and coral; and they had printing houses. They were rich and cultured and had had a century of life as Christians, mingling and marrying into the Iberian upper classes (the less advantaged Jews of Spain and Portugal left a hundred years earlier, in 1492). Portuguese delicacies like uova filate or filli d'oro (threads of egg yolk cooked in syrup) and Monte Sinai and bocca di dama (made with eggs and almonds) are among their legacies. A number of Livornese chocolate cakes owe their existence to contacts with Marranos in Amsterdam. That community started the first chocolate factory with cocoa sent by New Christians in South America.

The dishes of Livorno had an impact beyond the borders of Italy, because Livornese Jews 'sent relatives to various North African and Levantine cities, like Tunis, Tripoli (in Libya), Izmir, Aleppo and Alexandria, to develop interfamily commerce. A Livornese community in Tunisia, which was born in t68s, became enormous and still has a powerful identity today among the *pieds noirs* in Paris. The many North African dishes, including cuscussu, pastries filled with dates, and dates filled with marzipan, are testimony to the continuing connection with Tunisia and also with the Jews who came from Tripoli in i S i i and those who arrived in *o* from Oran (Morocco), banished by the Spanish governor of the city, the marquis of Los Velez. When Livorno lost its importance in the second half of the nineteenth century, many Jews followed their relatives, especially to Tunis and Libya. By an irony of fate, the small community that is left in Livorno today has a majority of Jews from Tripoli, who were expelled by Colonel Qaddafi after the Six-Day War. So *cucina tripolina* is making an impact in Livorno as it is in Rome.

There is a curious gastronomic link between Livorno and nineteenth-century London. A cookbook entitled *TheJewish Manual* (see page rs~), published in r846 and assumed to be by Lady Judith Montefiore, includes many recipes very similar to those cooked in Livorno today. The family of Lady Judith's husband, Sir Moses Montefiore, came from Livorno. London Jewish high society at the time was dominated by families of Marrano and Sephardi origin, and Italian, Spanish and Portuguese dishes were much in evidence on the grander tables.

Though every trace of such food has disappeared from Anglo Jewish tables, testimony to the old Italian Jewish culture survives on the tables of families from Istanbul, Salonika, Damascus, Cairo and Tunis - cities where there were once Jews with names like Ancona, Viterbo, Ventura, di Pisa, Romano and Senigallia. In Salonika there were once synagogues Napoli, Puglia, Palermo, Siracusa and Sardegna. If our community in Egypt had an it Italian flavour (in Alexandria most Jews spoke Italian at home), it was partly thanks to the Livornese. Because the town hall in Livorno was burned down during the Second World War and all the records were lost, when the Jews began to leave in the 1950s many stateless families managed to get Italian passports through the embassy, claiming that they had lost their birth certificates. The Milan community grew after 1870, with the economic and industrial development of the city. Now it is dominated by Syrian and Persian Jews, Lebanese Jews have settled mainly in Rome, and Libyan Jews are in Livorno.

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