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Luke Devine

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Reviewed by Luke Devine, University of Worcester, Worcester, United Kingdom

Federica Francesconi's *Invisible Enlighteners* examines Jewish life in Modena through the early modern period to modernity by focusing on the commercial elite. As Francesconi points out, this is a "social and political history of ... Modenese Jewish merchants" from early settlement of the community, through the ghetto period, to political emancipation (2). The quality of the account, however, is that it is so much more. Indeed, *Invisible Enlighteners* carefully deconstructs and problematises broad-brush accounts of European Jewish history, the *Haskalah*, and emancipation, and instead makes a convincing case for a "unique Italian model" that focuses on "the particularities of the Modenese Jewry" (22). In doing so, Francesconi's study is meticulously underpinned by research from a range of archives not only in Italy, but Israel and the United States, and documents in several languages – Italian, Hebrew, French, and Latin (6). Francesconi's source material also includes Inquisition documents that are analysed in context alongside a range of other historical sources (7). Further, the account of Modena's Jewish community is brought vividly to life by Francesconi's focus on the "built environment" itself: the homes, synagogues, and communal sites, and the objects and materials housed within (9-10).

The extensive source material enables Francesconi to put together an historical account of Jewish Modena that identifies a "cultural crossroads" impacted by commerce, science, philosophy, scholarship, migration, Lurianic and Sabbatean mysticism, Catholicism, and Jewish tradition (4-5). This makes Francesconi's claim "that integration, acculturation, and the actual legal process of emancipation varied in their pace and nature from country to country, and from region to region" seem understated (20). But, even armed with the cogent foregrounding of Francesconi's introduction, the reader is still unprepared for the rich insights into the diasporic experiences of Modena which follow. Indeed, *Invisible Enlighteners* explores family and community networks, leadership, and culture, and life under the inquisition and in the ghetto. However, the story that stands out within this account of Italian Jewish life from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment is that of *So 'ed Holim*, the "sisterhood" Francesconi claims "constituted a new development in the Western European Jewish world in that upper-middle-

class women organized themselves in order to carry out the traditional work of *tzedakah*” (177, 192).

The story of *So‘ed Holim*, “To Benefit the Sick,” is central to Francesconi’s thesis about “female agency,” the “silenced yet instructive voices of women,” and how the Jewish mercantile community existed “behind the scenes” and was virtually “invisible” (2, 5, 9, 19, 197). Francesconi frames Jewish communal engagement with commerce in Modena, compared with other European states, as progressive (22). Moreover, Francesconi’s focus on the “domestic” as a site of progress provides a nuanced gendered account of the Italian Jewish community approaching modernity that shows how the limitedness of domesticity gradually transitioned into opportunities for communal engagement (5, 9). Indeed, Francesconi posits that what began as “confinement to the house or, more properly, to the domestic sphere became the catalyst for the transformation of silent women, wives, and daughters of successful Jewish merchants into an active, almost entrepreneurial female community” (5). The vehicle personifying this process is *So‘ed Holim*, the story of which is covered in accessible and engaging detail, investing the reader in the lives of the women impelling change in Modena’s mercantile Jewish community.

For both scholars of the period and readers with no prior knowledge of Italian Jewish history, the account of *So‘ed Holim* captures in detail the experiences of Jewish women engaged in a diverse array of communal activities. In the process, we learn about women studying mystical texts, a synagogue for women, and how women engaged in a range of communal activities, including on *Rosh Hodesh*, in having local rabbis speak at meetings, and in being at the centre of the community’s philanthropic endeavours (186, 197, 201). As Francesconi points out, in a period when confraternities were nearly all patriarchal, *So‘ed Holim* was unique “for both its female leadership and the wide scope of its activities” and in the way that it negotiated a “proper female space” (192, 200). What makes this point even more significant is the way in which Francesconi builds on earlier histories of Jewish women approaching European modernity. For Francesconi, by focusing on “microhistories” scholars can provide an account of Jewish history that is more diverse and representative (5-6, 200-201).

This approach underpins Francesconi’s claim that marginalised Jewish women were able to counter androcentrism in Modena’s community through the development of a “sisterhood” (177, 200). This is where the meticulous and exhaustive nature of Francesconi’s research

becomes clear. *Invisible Enlighteners* painstakingly analyses several centuries of Modenese Jewish history to point to the “slow process of redefinition of femininity in both the domestic and the public spaces” (200-201). To describe the Italian Jewish transition from early-modern to modern, its periodisation, contextualisation within European and Christian cultures, and history in a way that places the reader directly in the context of Modena’s Jewish community and the “the microhistories of Jewish individuals and families” (5) is no mean feat. This is a masterful and absorbing account of Modena’s mercantile Jewish community and its history that will appeal to scholars of the period and the reading public.