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## Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



### Mampieri, Martina. Living under the Evil Pope: The Hebrew Chronicle of Pope Paul IV by Benjamin Nehemiah ben Elnathan from Civitanova Marche (16th cent.)

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long after—because the only man who knew how to get rid of them was not alive—ruined and are still ruining Italy” (280). The “Late Letters (1525–27)” includes letters to Guicciardini and about the capture and imprisonment of François Ier in Madrid (281–95). This is a strong collection for students, scholars, and general readers.

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**Mampieri, Martina.**

*Living under the Evil Pope: The Hebrew Chronicle of Pope Paul IV by Benjamin Nehemiah ben Elnathan from Civitanova Marche (16th cent.).*

Studies in Jewish History and Culture 58. Leiden: Brill, 2020. Pp. xx, 400. ISBN 978-90-04-41514-0 (hardcover) €168.

The tide appears to have turned definitively with regard to the study of Jews in early modern European history. It is increasingly difficult and also unnecessary for scholars of religious history in Europe to keep their denominations in boxes. For the early modern period, a wave of scholarship that examines points of conversion, collaboration, coercion, or mutual influence has thrown new light on the pressure points of the Reformation, and particularly on the roles of early modern Jewry. Comparative works such as Magda Teter’s *Blood Libel: On the Trail of an Antisemitic Myth* (2020) or Kenneth Austin’s *The Jews and the Reformation* (2020), and narrower ones such as Peter Mazur’s *Conversion to Catholicism in Early Modern Italy* (2016) and Piet Van Boxel’s *Jewish Books in Christian Hands: Theology, Exegesis and Conversion under Gregory XIII* (2016), all suggest that no early modern Christian confession can be fully understood without reference to Judaism. Yet entrenched narratives are slow to change, however good the new scholarship, until there are new stories: primary sources that provide us with novel perspectives and that are accessible to introductory classes and to scholars venturing into new fields. For this reason, Martina Mampieri’s edition of Benjamin Nehemiah ben Elnathan’s *Chronicle of Pope Paul IV* is a very

welcome publication. This is an extraordinary document, which deserves far more attention and can now, at last, make an impact.

Benjamin was from Civitanova Marche, a small, strategic town on the Adriatic coast in the Marche, and part of the papal states. He belonged to the town's recently established and peaceable Jewish community. His chronicle, however, reflects an extraordinary adventure that put him in the centre of papal action in Rome, prompting him to produce a history of the event in the context of the reign of Paul IV. This was a tumultuous period for Jews in Italy. Benjamin lived through the establishment (or attempted establishment) of ghettos in Rome and the papal states, a blood libel scare in Rome in 1555, the execution of a group of Portuguese conversos in Ancona in 1556, a host of other hostile anti-Jewish initiatives, and the reign of the most unpopular pope of the era.

Benjamin's composition begins with Paul IV's election, and much of the content reveals which papal behaviours might have most concerned his subjects, Jewish or otherwise. Benjamin reflects on Paul IV's ties with his nephew Carlo Carafa and the other relations who served as papal henchmen, his strengthening of inquisitorial offices, and his war with Charles V, observed up close. Benjamin also describes and laments Paul IV's measures against the Jews: his new, restrictive legislation, the seizure of Jewish assets in the Marca, punitive finances in Civitanova Marche, and the trial and imprisonment of the Portuguese Jews of Ancona (and execution of some of them), mentioned above. As Mampieri notes, Benjamin writes with emotion and vivid detail, making these events present to their readers.

But the most extraordinary event is Benjamin's own arrest, with his brother and six other men, after a series of harassments by a hostile tax collector and an aggressive recent convert to Catholicism. The seven men (one escaped) were conveyed in stages to Rome and housed first in the prison of Curia Savelli and then in the Ripetta. (Benjamin incidentally provides important detail on early modern prison life.) While incarcerated, the group also encountered the Sicilian nobleman-scholar Bartolomeo Spada and the famous Christian Hebraist Guillaume Postel, both suspected of heresy by Paul IV. Benjamin was still in Rome to witness the pope's death, marked with extraordinary riots and looting because Paul IV was so widely hated. He describes this event at length, along with the quieter restitutions that followed. Eventually exonerated, the group made their way back to Civitanova Marche.

The first half of Mampieri's edition of this work provides a detailed background for everything discussed by Benjamin in his chronicle. She fills in the gaps on the history of Jewish communities in Civitanova Marche, Rome, and the regions between them. She also covers Paul IV's papacy, his role in the transformation of papal-Jewish relations in the sixteenth century, and the events of his reign, notably his finances, his politics, and his long, slow death and its violent aftermath. As a responsible curator of a critical edition, Mampieri has researched all the events and characters noted in the chronicle and provided independent verification as often as possible. This thoroughness will enable novices in Jewish studies, early modern Catholicism, or Italian history to catch up easily on context they need.

The second half of the book provides an English translation and Hebrew transcription of the text itself, annotated and presented with superlative linguistic skill. Mampieri has also furnished the volume richly with maps, useful tables, a luxurious number of plates and figures, and a full facsimile of the only surviving copy of the original manuscript (a transcription made in the nineteenth century). These all enhance its use as a teaching tool and give the chronicle solid purchase and context.

Benjamin's composition has potential to influence many broader scholarly debates. Because it was written from the perspective not of Rome but of Civitanova Marche, it offers an excellent example of the dynamic between centre and periphery, or better, a test of Simon Ditchfield's model of "universal" and "particular" that Ditchfield describes in his 2009 article "Thinking with Saints" ([doi.org/10.1086/598809](https://doi.org/10.1086/598809)). It is notable that Benjamin interpreted particular events in his community—such as his own brief arrest following an asset grab by the governor-general of Macerata—in universal terms, defined by Paul IV's reign and divine designs. The chronicle is equally relevant to other developments in recent scholarship, such as new interpretations of papal histories, mobility and communications, early modern chronicling, or, as Mampieri herself hints, the history of premodern prisons. Because Benjamin's story is now so fully available and so well presented, many other historical narratives can be revisited.

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