

Surveying Zionism and Anti-Zionism in Turn of the Century Italy **Jonathan Lerdau '25**

This fall, I commenced my senior honors project in Religion with Professor Morrison. I am studying the interactions between Libyan Zionist groups and mainland Italian Jewry between the 1910s-1930s, when Libya was under Italian colonial rule. Specifically, I aim to examine the ways the two groups viewed each other. From my research this summer, I came to the idea that the Libyan Zionists (specifically the Tripoline political group, *Circolo Sion*) display an interesting conflict in that they simultaneously push back against Westernization in their community while also celebrating colonial Italian culture. On the other hand, mainland Italian Jews romanticized Tripoline Zionists as the ideal, unassimilated Jew, welcoming them as Italians while continuing to emphasize their difference. I plan to study how these two perceptions interact with and against each other, and how that works to form Tripolitan Jewish identities of the early 20th century. I am very excited about this project, and it would not have been possible without the opportunity to conduct preliminary research last summer with the assistance of the Surdna Foundation Undergraduate Research Fellowship. Although my summer research was primarily focused on a different topic, it was from the pursuit of that summer project that I was able to come to an idea of what my honors project should be.

In my summer research, I examined the origins of Jewish anti-Zionist movements, using the spiritual leaders and communities within Italy as a case study; Zionism and the development of a Jewish nation emerged on a similar timeframe to the Italian unification of the late 18th century, thus the Jews of Italy had a rather unusual experience of undergoing the manufacturing of two nations at once. I examined a selection of individuals and events related to late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Italian Jewish culture, in an effort to make a broader point about the development of political and religious Zionism and anti-Zionism, the Jewish people's relationship to the unification of Italy, and the vexed relationship between nationalism and religion.

I approached this project through a variety of sources, both primary and secondary, in English and Italian. The main primary sources I employed were Italian Jewish periodicals (*il Vessillo Israelitico*, *il Corriere Israelitico*, *Israel*) ; I was interested in how the relationships between Zionism and Anti-Zionism and the development of national sentiment played out in the public sphere. I also performed a broad survey of secondary literature, from Italian scholars such as Francesco del Canuto to Americans such as Francesca Bregoli and the Israeli historian of nationalism Schlomo Sand. After studying abroad in Italy and pursuing five semesters of Italian language, I was well-prepared for the challenge of all this Italian source-work.

With regards to results, I view this summer as a great success. I was able to go beyond the existing scholarship on Italian anti-Zionism through my primary source work, and gained information that at the very least helps flesh out the story of how Zionism developed in America. After I finish my honors thesis, I am planning to write a paper on what I learned in my summer research and submit it to journals or online publications, such as JSTOR daily. Beyond the summer, this research was instrumental in helping me come to my honors project topic. It was through examination of my primary sources and Italian scholarship that I developed my fascination with Tripolitan Jewry and their own intricate relationships with Zionism and the diasporic Jewish national identity. I look forward to further pursuing this work and amplifying stories of Italian and Libyan Jewry, both in my honors thesis and beyond. I am incredibly grateful to the Bowdoin Office of Student Fellowships and Research and the Surdna Foundation. Without their support, I would not have been able to pursue this project full-time for the entire summer, and would not be nearly as well-prepared to pursue my honors project.

Faculty Mentor: Robert Morrison

Funded by: Surdna Foundation Undergraduate Research Fellowship