Hebrew print shops have been a fixture in cities throughout Europe from shortly after Gutenberg’s invention of printing with movable type. A small number only of those cities, however, have long and distinguished histories in the Hebrew book field. Among that small number is Livorno (Leghorn), an important center of the Hebrew book industry for two hundred years, from the mid-eighteenth century until the beginning of World War II. This extended period of productivity was due to the activity of a series of Hebrew presses, beginning with that of Abraham Meldola and concluding with that of the Belforte family. Although Livorno never achieved the prominence or prestige of such locations as Venice or Amsterdam, its presses succeeded in adding Livorno to the list of significant Hebrew book centers that have served Jewry so well since the invention of printing.

Before turning to the earliest imprints of the first Meldola press, the subject of this paper, it should be noted that this almost continuous period of activity was preceded, first in the mid-seventeenth century, by the short-lived press of Jedidiah ben Isaac Gabbai, and by the publication in 1703 of *Zikkaron Purim*, printer unknown. A small number of additional works have been attributed to Livorno at this time but whether they are Livorno imprints cannot be ascertained and they are discounted by most bibliographers. Meldola, in the introduction to *Sefer ha-Rashbash* (1742), writes that Hebrew books were not printed in Livorno from the time of the Gabbai press until he established his print-shop.

Gabbai had issued Hebrew books from 1650 to about 1658. His imprints consist of a small number of titles made up of an interesting...

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1 The original version of this article was published in the *International Sephardic Journal* 2:1 (Orlando, Fl., 2005), pp. 83–94.

2 In 2001 the Salomone Belforte & Co. publishing house began to once again publish Hebrew books. The history of this family and their press is described in *Le Apri Della Torah. Storia di una famiglia ebrei livornesi. The story of a family of Jewish Publishers from Livorno* (Livorno, 2001).
mix of liturgical works, classics, responsa, and contemporary titles. 3

Žikkaron Purim: Tsava’ah ve-Hashkavah shel Haman ben Hamdata u-Vanav Ti’orim ha-Yehudim, by the satirist David Raphael ben Abraham Polido, is a parody based on the Book of Esther, in which Haman, incarcerated and awaiting execution, reads his last testament to his family. He admonishes them, in the style of the Blessing of Jacob and the Ten Commandments, to live in harmony, unified in their animosity towards the Jews, without mercy for the poor, not giving alms, threatening their creditors, and harassing their debtors. It is followed by a liturgic parody excoriating Haman, parodies of requiems, all with word play. The book is not highly regarded, however, being described as “sadly deficient in ideas. Euphony is mistaken for thought, and paranomasia for humor.” Žikkaron Purim, a small book (8° [8] leaves), is dated, “O, cut them off in your truth” (463 = 1703)! (Psalms 54:7). 4

Abraham ben Raphael Meldola (1705–55), who reestablished Hebrew printing in Livorno in 1740, was the scion of a prominent Sephardic family. The Meldolas traced their lineage to R. Isaiah Meldola (1282–1340), dayyan and hakham of Toledo, who, due to religious and political troubles, emigrated from there to Mantua, Italy. Successive generations of Meldolas provided Mantuan Jewry with rabbinic leadership. Abraham Meldola’s father, R. Raphael Meldola (1685–1748) was the author of ethical works and responsa. He was born in Livorno, served as rabbi in Pisa, Bayonne, and St. Espirit, remaining there until 1741, when he returned to Livorno. Raphael was named Samuel Jacob at birth, but his name was changed to Raphael due to a serious illness. 5

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5 The Jewish Encyclopedia, VIII (New York, 1901–06), pp. 450–53. A chart of sixteen generations of the Meldola family’s genealogy, from 1282 to the beginning of the twentieth century, can be found on p. 451. The source of the custom of changing the name of a seriously ill individual, by adding another name to the original or replacing it, is tractate Rosh Ha-Shanah 16b: “R. Isaac said four things nullify (lit. tear) a person’s decree of judgment. They are charity, repentance (lit. crying out), changing one’s name, and changing one’s deeds… changing one’s name, as it is written, ‘As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah [will be] her name.’ And ‘I will bless her and give you a son from her’” (Genesis 17:15–16). The Maharsha