Introduction

Exactly 50 years ago, Professor Shlomo Simonsohn wrote an important pioneering article, published in *Kirjath Sepher*, concerning the various registers of the Jewish community of Verona.¹ This article starts by arguing that one of the most important sources of information about the history of Jews in Italy is precisely those community registers.

During the 16th century, as well as the 17th, the organisations and internal government institutions of many Jewish communities in Italy underwent a unique process as a result of which new forms of Jewish political and public life emerged. Probably the main manifestation of this process was the establishment in each community of a constitution, which laid down clear rules regarding the nature and functions of the various Jewish organisations and the relations between them.² The first constitution of this kind was enacted in Rome in October 1524, when Jewish leaders called upon the well-known banker Daniel da Pisa to formulate his famous regulations.³ Until then, the Roman community obviously was somehow organised, but lacked a written constitution that enforced a balance between the various institutions and public offices, their powers,

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³ This first document was published by Attilio Milano in his article, “I capitoli di Daniel da Pisa e la comunità di Roma,” *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 10 (1935), pp. 410–426. The first idea of collecting various statutes in order to analyse the development of political thought was suggested to me by the late Professor Daniel Elazar. On this subject, see D. Elazar, “The Constitutional Documents of Contemporary Jewry: An Introduction to the Field,” in *A Double Bond*, D. Elazar, J.D. Sarna, and R. Monson (eds.) (Lanham 1992), pp. 3–34.
their duties, and so on. Following in the footsteps of Rome, many other Jewish communities enacted constitutional regulations: Verona in 1539, Mantua in 1539 and again in 1587, Florence in 1572, Venice in 1603 with the first “Conventions,” which were renewed in 1624, Pisa in 1636, and Livorno in 1655.

Almost all of these documents contained a provision to appoint a secretary or scribe to draw up decisions taken by communal committees, and despite Boksenboim’s claims, I am not convinced that these rules existed even before this documentation. As a consequence, from the beginning of the 16th century, there began to appear written minute books of communities, as well as other kind of registers of various companies and associations that were active within the community.

Some Italian community registers, or minute books (in Hebrew תוקס פנקס), have already been published. In particular, I refer to five modern editions: the Register of Verona (the oldest), the Register of Padua, the

12 Boksenboim, Pinkasè Verona, p. 17 states: “From the style of the earlier agreements which dealt with appointments, it seems that this rôle was defined for the first time. But it is not true, because it reflects a writer's routine, a mechanical repetition of previous agreements, words concerning repetitive issues, to save effort in drafting each time.”
13 Boksenboim, Pinkas Kahal Verona, cit.
14 D. Carpi, Pinkas vaad K.K Padova, cit.