The enthusiasm aroused by the discoveries of the so-called European Genizah runs the risk of overshadowing the contents of the books or parts of books that have been fortuitously recovered, reproducing the pattern already developed in the richest of these treasure-troves on the Continent, that is to say the Italian one. The books, indeed, are the reason for all the excitement, and only a philological assessment can do justice to the importance of this long-neglected phenomenon: the recycling of Hebrew manuscripts in the bindings of books and registers in early modern Italy. Having worked for some years on the discovery and inventory of the books and registers kept in Italian archives, I never lost sight of the next step in the process, which is the evaluation of the fragments as texts.

This shift in scholarly attention leads to a crucial controversy concerning the preservation of this cultural heritage. One could say that a bookbinding made from the severed folios of a medieval Hebrew manuscript creates a conflict between the preservation of the book as an object (the register or the book wrapped with inscribed parchment) and the restoration of the text, which in most cases cannot be detected and appreciated in its entirety without detaching it from the binding. In order to promote the detachment, one could argue that the Hebrew manuscript itself is a book, and necessarily an older

* I wish to thank my colleague and friend Mauro Perani for the support and help he constantly gave me and for his generosity in sharing with me the results of his tireless researches in the Italian Genizah.

1 Of course, non-Hebrew manuscripts have also been recycled, and in fact they represent the vast majority of reused manuscripts, but we concentrate on Hebrew manuscripts when speaking of a “Genizah.”
one, but this line of argument is indeed slippery because those who support the preservation of the now-existing book could counter that the detachment would create two sets of fragments out of a unified book. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that the bookbindings are the context in which, although incidentally, these fragments have been preserved: detaching them could favour *de facto* their final dispersion. The conflict is therefore concentrated around two poles: book versus text. That is why I would like to contribute to the textual evaluation of a group of fragments belonging to a specific text and a single book, capitalizing on the results of the new campaign aimed at discovering the extent and the contents of the German Genizah. These fragments were discovered in Italy, but they belong to the cultural world of Ashkenaz, and particularly northern France, which justifies their treatment in the context of a conference dedicated to the German Genizah. The boundaries of the “national” Genizahs, especially as far as Italy is concerned, are to be taken *cum grano salis*, and to speak of a European Genizah seems in this case more appropriate.

The publication of the catalogue of the Hebrew fragments found in the Biblioteca Civica and in the Archivio di Stato of Alessandria (Piemont) is only a starting point, in my view, and not the terminal phase of the project. As I will try to show, there is much than can still be done and it is my intention to contribute to clearing up some of the questions left unanswered.²

I will begin this presentation of the material with a brief historical introduction of the site, meaning the library as well as the books, where the fragments were discovered. On August 10, 1999, Fabrizio Quaglia³ found some printed books belonging to the Biblioteca Civica of Alessandria (Piemont) bound with parchment folios from several manuscripts, partly written in Latin and partly in Hebrew. He called Mauro Perani’s attention to his discovery and the two scholars sought to have the fragments detached under the direction of the library. Before the operation had been completed, Perani published a short


³ The attribution of the discovery to Quaglia, and not to Elisabetta Scappaticci, a palaeographer working on fragments of Latin and musical manuscripts reused as bookbindings (as stated in the article quoted in the next footnote), was confirmed to me by Mauro Perani.