



# The Girl Who Wrote Luna Ambron's Esther Scroll

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On the cover: Luna Ambron's blessings sheet (see p. 2)

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# The Girl Who Wrote Luna Ambron's Esther Scroll

Anna Nizza-Caplan



On the day of her fourteenth birthday, the 10th of Adar Aleph, 5527 (February 9, 1767), Luna, daughter of Leone Ambron of Rome, completed writing an Esther scroll and a richly decorated parchment sheet containing the ceremonial blessings read on Purim. Unknown and unpublished before its acquisition by the Israel Museum, the scroll is one of the very few manuscripts worldwide identified as having been written by a female scribe, and is the centerpiece of this exhibition.<sup>1</sup>

Luna Ambron's work is one of only three known exemplars – all from Italy – of Hebrew liturgical texts signed by women.<sup>2</sup> In total we know of some twenty women who signed Hebrew manuscripts between the twelfth century and the end of the nineteenth

**Esther Scroll**, Rome, 1767  
Scribe: Luna, daughter of Leone (Judah) Ambron  
Handwritten on parchment; ink and gouache; rod: turned wood, 25.1 x 394 cm  
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem:  
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\* For a preliminary version of this article, see Anna Nizza-Caplan, "La megghilla di Luna Ambron, Roma, 1767," in *Jewish Italy, Rediscovered Stories: Essays in Honor of Daniela Di Castro*, vol. II (Rome: Artemide, 2023), pp. 131-42 (Italian and English). The author wishes to thank Rebecca Ilani, Gioia Perugia, Dr. Rachel Sarfati, and Prof. Sarit Shalev-Eyni for reading early versions of the text.

1 The Israel Museum purchased the item from *Kedem Auction House: Auction 83, Part I – Rare and Important Items*, November 23, 2021, lot 3.  
2 The others are by Stellina bat Menachem of Venice and Camilla de Rossi of Rome; both are discussed in detail below.



century. Luna's very young age at the time of the scroll's writing makes her accomplishment even more remarkable, warranting an examination of the cultural context that produced it.

Two complementary aspects are explored in this article and the exhibition it accompanies: the halakhic considerations regarding a woman writing an Esther scroll for liturgical use; and the cultural and artistic surroundings in which Luna was raised, glimpsed through the many surviving documents and objects related to the Ambron family. In order to understand how Luna's unique endeavor came into being, the article examines the family's history in the broader context of the vibrant Jewish community occupying the Roman Ghetto and its dynamic relations with its Christian neighbors.

### Luna's Esther Scroll and Purim Blessings Sheet: A Rare Achievement

Made of seven parchment sheets sewn together with animal sinew, for a total length of nearly four meters, the scroll features a distinctive Italo-Sephardic Hebrew script characterized by narrow letters. A large, fleshy tulip adorns the right margin of the scroll preceding the opening column. Notably, though, the parchment sheet containing the ceremonial blessings recited during the Purim service (before and after the scroll reading) is much more richly decorated than the scroll itself. The opening word of the scroll, as well as the initial words of the blessings, are penned in large bold letters articulated with leaf-like endings, a familiar feature in Roman scrolls of the period.<sup>3</sup>

Scribing a separate sheet with the blessings and liturgical poems for Purim was common practice among Italian and Sephardic communities, which held strictly to the rabbinical recommendation that no text should be added to the biblical passages copied on a

**Blessings sheet for Purim**, Rome, 1767  
Scribe: Luna, daughter of Leone (Judah) Ambron | Handwritten on parchment; ink and gouache, 26 x 57.7 cm

The Israel Museum, Jerusalem:  
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**Ambron family emblem** (detail from the blessings sheet's upper cornice)

3 Amedeo Spagnoletto, "The Jewish Museum of Rome's Mappot Inscriptions," in Doretta Davanzo Poli, Olga Melasecchi, Amedeo Spagnoletto, eds., *Antique Roman Mappot. The Precious Textile Archive of the Jewish Museum of Rome* (Rome: Campisano Editore, 2016), p. 56.



scroll.<sup>4</sup> Extant decorated examples of such sheets are known from Italy dating back at least to the sixteenth century.

In Luna's blessings sheet, a colorful architectural frame, enriched with marbled pillars and floral and vegetal festoons, surrounds the text columns containing the blessings and the liturgical poems "Arur Haman" and "Kor'ei Megillah."<sup>5</sup> Mirror images of the Ambron family emblem – a rampant lion beneath a crescent moon on a blue field – adorn the upper cornice.<sup>6</sup> Depictions of the triumphant Mordecai led through the city on horseback and the defeat of Haman, who is strung up on a tree (along the bottom), enliven the decoration.

The most noteworthy feature of the blessings sheet is the inscription in tiny, cursive Italian Hebrew script running beneath the text in all four columns and revealing crucial information:

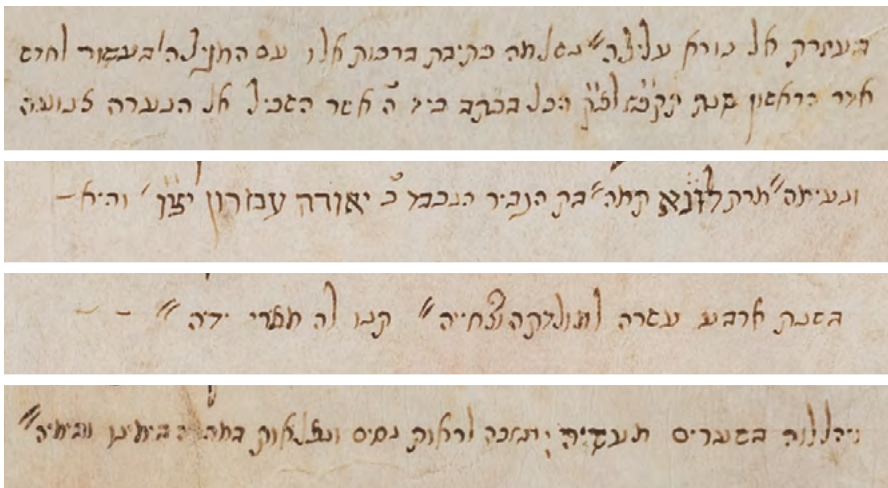
With the help of the wondrous God of great deeds, the writing of these blessings, together with the scroll, was completed on the tenth of *Adar Rishon*, in the year [5]527 [= February 9, 1767], all in script, as if by the hand of the Lord, who has taught the modest and gracious girl, innocent lady Luna, daughter of the honorable gentleman Judah Ambron, may

**Illustrations from Luna Ambron's blessings sheet**

4 Based on the halakhic principle that the Esther scroll should receive the same treatment as a Torah scroll; see: BT Meghillah, 16b. For a comprehensive ruling, see Yisrael Gartner, *Megillat Yisrael: Dinei ketivat megillat Esther* (Modi'in Illit: Gartner, 2013), pp. 60-61 (Hebrew); Ross Singer, "Women and Writing the Megillah," *The Edah Journal* 4/2 (2004): 6, discusses the various opinions on this issue.

5 "Arur Haman" is an ancient, short poem mentioned in the Yerushalmi Talmud (Megillah, 3: 7) that is added to the last blessing after the reading of the Esther scroll; see: Israel Davidson, *Otsar ha-shirah veha-piyut*, vol. I (New York: Ketav, 1938), no. 7560N (Hebrew); "Kor'ei Megillah" was composed by Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra (Spain, 11th-12th century); see: Davidson, *Otsar*, vol. III, no. 2427.

6 On the Ambron family emblem, see Daniela Di Castro, "Gli Stemmi degli Ebrei di Roma," in *Arte Ebraica a Roma e nel Lazio* (Rome: Palombi Editori, 1994), pp. 143-69; specifically p. 146. Di Castro's article also contains a detailed bibliography on the subject.



his Fortress preserve and sustain him in life, as she marks her fourteenth year of birth and [her years of] life;<sup>7</sup> may the fruits of her hands rise before her, and may her works praise her at the gates. May we be worthy to witness miracles and wonders speedily in our days and in her days.<sup>8</sup>

Luna's colophon reveals key information, such as the identity of the scribe and the date. Though the place is not mentioned, her father's name – who, as we shall see below, was a familiar figure – indicates that the scroll and blessings sheet were inscribed in Rome.

Moreover, Luna's paraphrases of biblical verses demonstrate not only her literary skill, but also her knowledge of biblical sources and a profound textual understanding. To express her aspirations for the future, she blends two biblical verses with her own words, beginning with a modified version of Proverbs 31:31: "Give her a share in the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the city gates." Luna replaces "give her" with "[they] rise before her," echoing the language of Proverbs 31:28: "Her children rise up and call her happy." This suggests she deserves respect for her "works," even though she is as yet unmarried and childless. Finally, in the concluding words of her colophon Luna alters the standard blessing - "He who performed miracles for our fathers, may he perform miracles in those days, at *this* time," introducing a personalized formulation by wishing for a miracle in *her own* lifetime. Though we cannot know precisely which miracle the

7 The original Hebrew literally reads, "and she is in the fourteenth year of her birth and life," indicating Luna may have actually been thirteen years old (having just begun her fourteenth year of life) at the time the scroll was signed – meaning she may have begun the task at the age of twelve, the age of *mitzvot* (religious maturity).

8 בעזרת אל נורא עלילה נשלמה כתיבת ברכות אלו עם המגילה, בעשור לחדש אדר הראשון שנת תקכ"ז לפ"ק הכל בכתב כיד ה' אשר השכיל אל הנערה צנועה ונעימה, מרת לונה תמה, בת הגביר הנכבד כ' [בוד] יאודה עמרון יצ"ו [ישמרהו צורו ויחייהו] והיא בשנת ארבע עשרה למולדה ולחיה, קמו לה מפרי ידיה ויהללוה בשערים מעשיה, וזכה לראות נסים ונפלאות במהרה בימינו ובימיה.

young girl was hoping for, we are nonetheless fortunate to have even this small glimpse into her life.

### **A Halakhic Clarification on Esther Scrolls Scribed by Women**

To better understand the significance of Luna Ambron's work, we should consider the halakhic implications surrounding the Esther scroll as a liturgical object, as well as its perception in rabbinic literature until the eighteenth century. Observance of the festival of Purim requires reading the Book of Esther from a scroll whose writing and reading are subject to precise halakhic regulations, derived from those governing the reading and writing of a Torah scroll – though with some leniency.<sup>9</sup> The scroll must be handwritten in ink on parchment sheets that have been properly prepared, ruled, and sewn together with animal sinew (*gidḏin*). The text must be plain, that is, without vocalization or cantillation marks.

Unlike the strict laws that exclude women from writing tefillin, mezuzot, and Torah scrolls (Babylonian Talmud, Gittin 45b), they are not explicitly forbidden from scribing an Esther scroll for ritual use. Early halakhic authorities, beginning with Maimonides, did not address the issue of whether it is permissible to read from an Esther scroll written by a woman. This omission can be, and in fact has been interpreted to imply tacit acceptance.<sup>10</sup>

A range of opinions in rabbinic literature regarding the subject were formulated during the early modern period, around the codification of the *Shulchan Arukh* in the sixteenth century. It is likely that evolving reality posed the practical need for a halakhic response, yet a single, definitive stance failed to emerge.

A key argument in favor of permitting the reading from an Esther scroll scribed by a woman held that women are equally required, as men, to attend the scroll's reading on Purim and to commit to memory the events recorded in the biblical account; it follows, according to this view, that a scroll *written* by a woman should be ritually acceptable. Further support for this position can be found in the Book of Esther itself: "Queen Esther daughter of Abihail, along with Mordecai the Jew, gave full written authority confirming this second letter about Purim" (Esther 9:29). Queen Esther had herself taken part in writing the laws governing the Jews and in recording the events. This verse was particularly significant for Rabbi David Oppenheim of Prague (1664-1736), who permitted the ritual use of an Esther scroll copied by his daughter Sarah. His ruling was based on the Aramaic version of the verse,

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9 See Gartner, *Megillat Yisrael*; Singer, "Women and Writing."

10 Maimonides (Moshe ben Maimon, 1138-1205), *Mishneh Torah, Book of Love, Laws of Tefillin, Mezuzah, and Torah scroll*, 1:13, excludes women from writing a Torah scroll, based on Talmud, Gittin 45b; conversely, in his *Book of Seasons, Rules for Megillah*, 2:9, Maimonides *omits* women from the list of people disqualified from writing an Esther scroll for ritual use.



which translates the Hebrew *igeret shenit* (“second letter”) as *megilta hada* (מִגִּילַת הַדָּא) – “second scroll.”<sup>11</sup> Sarah Oppenheim’s scroll did not survive, yet it is documented in a dissenting opinion from the late seventeenth century by Oppenheim’s peer, Rabbi Moses Meir Perles, regarding its use.<sup>12</sup>

### A Climate for Women Scribes: Esther Scrolls from Italy

Nearly two hundred years before Luna Ambron was born, in 1564, Stellina bat Menachem of Venice scribed and signed a beautiful scroll, which constitutes the earliest dated and decorated Esther scroll to have survived worldwide.<sup>13</sup> Unlike Luna, Stellina situated the Purim blessings at the opening of the scroll, concluding it with an extended scribal note that reveals her name and the date and place of the manuscript’s completion. The liturgical poems are absent. Although Stellina’s father, Menachem, and her grandfather, Yekutiel, are mentioned with their high official titles, their family name is not indicated. A coat-of-arms, further evidence of the family’s high

**Esther scroll scribed by Stellina bat Menachem** (detail), Venice, 1564  
Handwritten on parchment; ink, gouache; rod: turned wood, 34.5 x 190 cm (including roller)  
Braginsky Collection, Zurich, Switzerland, BCS 102 | Photo: Courtesy of The Braginsky Collection, Zurich, by Ardon Bar-Hama, Ra’anana

11 David ben Avraham Oppenheim, *She'elot u-Teshuvot Nish'al David, Orach Hayim* (Tel Aviv: Hemdah Gruzah, 1972).  
12 See Moses Meir ben Elazar Perles (1666-1739), *Megillat Sefer*, commentary on Esther, 9:29; see as well Singer, “Women and Writing.”  
13 Zurich, Braginsky Collection, S102. See Emile Schrijver and Falk Wieseman, eds., *Schöne Seiten. Jüdische Schriftkultur aus der Braginsky Collection* (Zurich and Amsterdam, 2011), p. 256.

status, is rendered on the final edge of the scroll, next to the colophon. Partially scratched and faded, it features a golden crown surmounting a fish on an azure field, yet we do not know definitively which family the coat-of-arms indicates.<sup>14</sup> The running arcade that highlights the text columns is remarkably opulent, featuring refined caryatids and satyrs, festal garlands of flowers and fruit, and painted gold highlights. Arcades and architectural motifs, also apparent in Luna Ambron's blessings sheet, recur specifically in decorated Italian Esther scrolls throughout the centuries, attesting to a specialized artistic idiom.<sup>15</sup>

Both Luna and Stellina confirm having scribed the text but make no mention of being involved in the decorations, suggesting unnamed artists were engaged for this task; these artists' identities remain unknown. Interestingly, in Luna's blessings sheet, the scenes highlighted in the lively illustrations are of the male figures in the Purim narrative - Mordecai and Haman. Mordecai is shown riding the royal mount, led by Haman and surrounded by a procession of musicians and onlookers; while, symbolically placed at the bottom of the frame, Haman is depicted hanging on a gallows, to the astonishment of the witnesses, reinforcing Mordecai's role in the Jews' triumph. We may ask whether Luna, as a female scribe, was the one to choose these specific scenes, rather than one of the scroll's major episodes involving Queen Esther.

In 1770, only three years after Luna Ambron signed her Esther scroll, Camilla, daughter of Moshe Efraim De Rossi of Rome, signed her name, in very concise form, at the bottom of a blessings sheet she scribed, which also contains the liturgical poems recited on Purim (see p. 8): "By my writing, Camilla daughter of Moshe Efraim De Rossi in the year 5530."<sup>16</sup>

If there was a companion scroll to Camilla's blessings sheet, it remains unknown to us. The inscription on her sheet tells us very

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14 Schrijver and Wiesemann have attempted to identify the elements of this family symbol with either the Consiglio or the Castelfranco family. See Schrijver and Wiesemann, *Schöne Seiten*, p. 256. Interestingly, one of the Ashkenazi family coats-of-arms is conspicuously similar to this symbol. See Elvio Giuditta, *Araldica ebraica in Italia* (Torino: Società Italiana di Studi Araldici, 2007), vol. I, p. 13.

15 Sabar suggests that these motifs allude to a triumphal arch, symbolizing the triumph of Esther and Mordechai; see Shalom Sabar, "The Purim Story in Jewish Art – the Illustrated Esther Scroll in Italy," in Olga Melasecchi, Amedeo Spagnoletto, and Marina Caffiero, eds., *Beautiful Esther – Masterpieces for a Queen* (Rome: Museo Ebraico di Roma, Silvana Editoriale, 2024), pp. 39-57. It should be noted, however, that these architectural elements recur in ketubbot and frontispieces of manuscripts and printed books, the latter deriving from a secular ornamental and symbolic tradition of book illumination.

16 נכתב על ידי קאמילא בת משה אפרים מילירוש' בש' התק"ל.  
The sales catalogue of this manuscript reads "Camilla Miele Rossi"; see *Sotheby's: Rare Judaica Items*, 14 December 2011, New York, lot 95. I am thankful to Angelo Piattelli for directing me to the correct reading of מילירוש' as De Rossi. Presumably, Stellina and Camilla identified themselves by their fathers' names in their colophons since they were unmarried and therefore still living in the parental home.



little.<sup>17</sup> Her father, Moshe Efraim, may be the same Moshe Efraim, son of Shabetai Refael de Rossi, who restored and rededicated a splendid Tora scroll wrapper (*mappah*) to the Catalan synagogue in 1749-50 (5510).<sup>18</sup> As we shall see below, the Ambrons were leaders of the same congregation.

Luna Ambron and Camilla de Rossi were clearly instructed on how to scribe a liturgical text: the type, scope, and quality of education these young women received was remarkable - whether by family members or by a private tutor.<sup>19</sup> We are left to wonder

**Blessings sheet for Purim, signed by Camilla de Rossi, Rome, 1770**  
 Handwritten on parchment; ink, gouache, 40.7 x 57.2 cm  
 Braginsky Collection, Zurich, Switzerland, BCB 412 | Photo: Courtesy of The Braginsky Collection, Zurich, by Ardon Bar-Hama, Ra'anana

17 There is documentation of a Camilla Rossi living in the Roman Ghetto in the eighteenth century, but we cannot tell whether she is the same woman. See Elena Lea Rossi Artom, *La Famiglia De' Rossi. Vicissitudini di una famiglia ebraica da Gerusalemme a Roma e da Roma nel Mondo* (Florence: Giuntina, 2013), p. 34.

18 The wrapper was originally dedicated to the synagogue by Refael Mordechai de Rossi in 1637/38 [5398]. See Museo Ebraico, inv. 721, published in: Poli, Melasecchi, and Spagnoletto, *Antique Roman Mappot*, cat. no. 101.

19 Though educational charity institutions – such as a Talmud Torah - are known to have operated in the Roman Ghetto as early as 1772, they were not officially established until 1808, and even then, such institutions were primarily intended to serve boys and young men. See Silvia Haia Antonucci, Claudio Procaccia, and Giancarlo Spizzichino, “La Compagnia Talmud Torà e l’istruzione nel Ghetto di Roma,” in Carmela Covato and Manola Ida Venzo, eds., *Scuola e itinerari formativi dallo Stato pontificio a Roma Capitale* (Milan: Unicopli, 2007), pp. 82-90.



whether they were outliers, or whether the fact they acted in such proximity - as members of the same community during the same period - indicates their education was not exceptional for girls. Since most extant scrolls and blessings sheets do not identify their scribe, at present we cannot determine which conjecture is more feasible. The fact remains that both the Ambron and the De Rossi families educated their daughters to produce an important liturgical object that focuses thematically on the Jewish identity of a biblical heroine.

Significantly, the Jewish education in the Roman Ghetto was at least in part a reaction to the pressure exerted by the local Christian clergy, who were tireless in their attempts to forcibly convert Jewish youth. Jews were forced to listen to long Christian sermons on a weekly basis, and numerous newly converted Christians reported their relatives to the clergy, alleging that they, too, would convert. Jews targeted for conversion were imprisoned in the House of Catechumens, an institution for converting Jews to Catholicism situated right next to the Ghetto and thus posing a constant threat.<sup>20</sup>

One of the best-documented episodes was the case of eighteen-year-old Anna Del Monte, kept in captivity in 1749, before Luna Ambron's and Camilla de Rossi's endeavors.<sup>21</sup> As Del Monte's memories make clear, a sound Jewish education was a way of countering Christian society's pressure to convert. This case reflects how Jewish families actively engaged to help their children gain and maintain their Jewish identity in the face of both temptation and threats. This was especially important for young women, tasked with the responsibility of bearing and raising the next generation of Jews. From this perspective, Luna Ambron's scribed and signed liturgical scroll may be understood as an active step in assuming the responsibilities of Jewish identity.<sup>22</sup>

Scribing a complete Esther scroll, as did Stellina, Luna, and possibly Camilla, is a complex project, one rendered even more noteworthy by the exquisite artistry of each of the scrolls. Though the girl scribes probably did not illuminate the text themselves, the fact that artists were hired to decorate the scrolls attests to the value attached to the girls' accomplishments.

The choice of text may also reflect the wide cultural influence of the Book of Esther in Italy, stemming from the popularity of Esther's

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20 For a comprehensive study of the subject see Marina Caffiero, *Battesimi forzati. storie di ebrei, cristiani e convertiti nella Roma dei papi* (Roma: Viella, 2004).

21 Marina Caffiero, *Rubare le anime. Diario di Anna del Monte ebrea romana* (Rome: Viella, 2008), esp. pp. 3-10

22 For an expanded discussion, see Serena Di Nepi, "A Matter of Choices. Jewish Women and Jewish Marriages in the Ghetto of Rome (17th-18th Centuries)," *Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento*, Fascicolo Speciale (2025): 135-53.

story in medieval Europe.<sup>23</sup> In Christendom, particularly in Italy, the Book of Esther gave rise to intertextual references and commentaries, theatrical performances, and artistic iconography, beginning in the late fifteenth century and flourishing in the following years.<sup>24</sup> Thus, on Purim 1619 in Venice – half a century after Stellina signed her Esther scroll there – the notorious Rabbi Leone da Modena published his theater piece, titled *L'Esther*. The play, portraying the resistance to religious pressure that was threatening Jewish society, was inspired by the case of Jewish Venetian poet and lady of letters Sarra Sullam Copio (1592-1641), who, following an intellectual correspondence with a monk, was accused by the Christian authorities of heresy.<sup>25</sup>

The possible connections between Stellina's Esther scroll and her Venetian environment have yet to be properly understood, as does the identity of Stellina's family. It has been suggested that she too, like noble women in Italy of the period, aspired to identify with Queen Esther as an ideal example of femininity, especially since her name, Stellina, means "little star" in Italian, alluding to Esther's name according to Midrashic sources.<sup>26</sup>

We have more evidence about Luna Ambron and Camilla De Rossi and their environment, which will be discussed in greater detail below, in the chapter dedicated to Luna's family.<sup>27</sup>

### **Defying Expectations: Women Scribes of Hebrew Texts**

Luna's and Stellina's efforts can be seen within the broader context of canonical Hebrew texts scribed by women yet not intended for ritual use, of which we have exemplars from European and Eastern communities. Overall, there is evidence of about twenty female scribes who copied

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23 On Esther in Christian commentaries see: Catherine Brown Tkacz, "Esther, Jesus, and Psalm 22," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 70, no. 4 (October 2008): 709-28. These aspects are discussed in detail in Melasecchi, Spagnoletto, and Caffiero, eds., *Beautiful Esther*, especially in the essays by Stefano Pierguidi, Andrea Damascelli, and Serena Di Nepi.

24 On the reception of Esther iconography in Italian art, see Dora Sallay, "Jacopo del Sellaio's Stories of Vashti and Esther," *Bulletin du Musée Hongrois des Beaux-Arts* 124 (2019): 67-94; Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby, "Bride, Court Lady, Oriental Princess, Virgin Mary, Jewess: The Many Faces of Queen Esther in Early Modern Florence," *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 24, no. 2 (2021): 345-76.

25 Chiara Carmen Scordari, "Behind Multiple Masks: Leon Modena's Diasporic Tragedy *L'Esther* in Seventeenth-Century Venice," *Skenè. Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies* 6, no. 2 (2020); Marina Caffiero, "La bella Hebraea. Two Esthers of Leon Modena and Ansaldo Cebà," in Melasecchi, Spagnoletto, and Caffiero, eds., *Beautiful Esther*, pp. 97-106.

26 As suggested by Shalom Sabar, "The Purim Story," pp. 59.

27 In the interests of further research, it is worth mentioning the rare representation of Esther in the illuminated Rothschild Miscellany, also produced in Veneto ca. 1479, a depiction that might represent a step towards the rise of the genre of Esther scroll decoration, first in Venice and then in Italy in general; this conjecture is based on my correspondence with Prof. Shalom Sabar in 2022. See, too, Sabar, "The Purim Story," pp. 48-49.



Hebrew texts, spanning time periods and continents, beginning in the thirteenth century. Scholarly contribution on the subject is relatively scant.<sup>28</sup> The Italian context is discussed in detail below; studies on women scribes outside Italy are beyond the scope of this article.

The first and most prolific documented female scribe in Italy was Paola, daughter of Avraham Anav of Rome, active between 1288 and 1306. Her family produced generations of Jewish scholars and scribes in Rome. Paola copied a biblical commentary for her first husband, who unfortunately passed away before their son was born. She later copied a siddur for her son Solomon, and, for her relative Menachem Anav, a collection of texts on Jewish law penned by Isaiah of Trani.<sup>29</sup>

Two centuries after Paola, Stellina bat Menachem of Venice copied her Esther scroll in the sixteenth century, as detailed above; the next evidence we have of women scribes in Italy appears yet another two centuries later, in the mid-eighteenth century. In the Hebrew year 5508 (1748/49), Simha, daughter of Isaac Gallico from the small town of Sinigaglia, copied a compendium of synagogal poems for the festival of Simhat Torah, which opens with a sketch

**Booklet of *selihot* (penitential prayers) scribed by Fortunata Fiano**  
Rome, 1793

Handwritten on parchment; ink and gold powder; gold-tooled leather binding, 12.6 x 8.7 cm

Private collection | Photo © Yigal Pardo, courtesy of Kedem Auction House

28 The main sources recording Jewish women scribes are Abraham Meir Habermann, "Nashim Ma'ativot," *Kiryat Sefer* XIII, 1936. 114-20 [Hebrew]; Colette Sirat, "Les femmes juives et l'écriture au Moyen Age," *Nouveaux Cahiers* 101 (1990): 14-23; Michael Riegler and Judith R. Baskin, "May the Writer Be Strong': Medieval Hebrew Manuscripts Copied by and for Women," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues* 16 (2008): 9-28. All the manuscripts analyzed in these works merit further research.

29 The Anav family was one of the earliest recorded Jewish families to settle in Rome after the exile from the land of Israel following the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. See Nello Pavoncello, *Antiche Famiglie Ebraiche Italiane* (Rome, 1982), pp. 15-22. Paola's manuscripts include rabbinic texts and prayer books; for an overview see Giulio Busi, *Libri e scrittori nella Roma ebraica del Medioevo* (Rimini, 1990), pp. 46-47, 54; Colette Sirat, "Les femmes juives," 20-23.

of a gate and an inscription dedicating the compendium to “the young Isaac Arcangelo.”<sup>30</sup>

Another peer of Luna Ambron and Camilla de Rossi was Stella, daughter of S(amuel?) Ascarelli, who in 1768 copied a book of prayers for Shabbat. However, the whereabouts and details of this codex are at present unknown, and it could not be examined.<sup>31</sup>

Some thirty years later, Fortunata (Mazal Tov), daughter of Yehuda Fiano, signed a small, refined codex of *selihot* (penitential prayers) according to the Sephardic rite. The scribe’s initials, “F. F.” (Fortunata Fiano) are tooled on both the front and back of the elegant leather cover, along with the family crest, a rampant lion in a cartouche. On the frontispiece, an arcade contains the title of the work and an inscription reading: “Not for glory, made by Miss Mazal Tov (Fortunata), daughter of the illustrious and honorable Yehuda Fiano, may his Rock and Savior protect him; the year 5553 [=1793/1794] to the Creation [of the World].”<sup>32</sup>

Fortunata Fiano apparently created the booklet for her own private use. About a year later, in 1794, a decorated ketubbah from Rome, today in the Israel Museum collection, records the marriage of Perla bat Yehuda Fiano, who might be Fortunata’s sister; the ketubbah features the bride’s family crest in one of the two cartouches surmounting the text, held aloft by putti. Its graceful floral and vegetal frame is contoured with a micrographic text of the entire Book of Esther – an exceptional choice for this type of document.<sup>33</sup>

In 1792, Olimpia, daughter of Vitale (Yehiel) of Tivoli, transcribed the original travelogue of Sabato di Ezechia Ambron and Amadio Abbina describing their journey to the land of Israel in 1746.<sup>34</sup> Sabato Ambron was Luna Ambron’s paternal uncle. This manuscript was penned mostly in Italian, with biblical quotations, names of sites, and prayers interspersed in Hebrew. Although not a canonical Jewish text, it is worthy of mention, not only as an example of



**Ketubbah for the marriage of Gershon David Volterra with Perla Fiano, Rome, 1794**

Handwritten on parchment; ink, gouache, 87.5 x 53.1 cm

The Israel Museum, Jerusalem:  
Deposit from the Museum of Jewish Folklore, Hamburg | L-B39.09.6299  
| Photo © The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, by Ardon Bar-Hama, made possible by the Jesselson Foundation, New York

30 Parma, Palatina Library, Cod. Parm. 3490; see also Benjamin Richler and Malachi Beit-Arié, eds., *Hebrew Manuscripts in the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma* (Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2001), no. 1590. This manuscript and the circumstances of its production merit further research.

31 See Habermann, “Nashim Ma`atikot,” no. 7.

32 לאין פאר מעשה ידי מרת מזל טוב בת הו"ה [=המפואר והחשוב] כמ"ר [כבוד מורינו רבי] יהודה פיאנו יצ"ו (=ישמרהו צורו וגואלו"); שנת התקנ"ג ליצירה.

33 The text of the ketubbah itself is copied in a different script from Fortunata’s manuscript. Very similar frames of Roman ketubbot, ornamented with a micrographic text of the Song of Songs or the Book of Ruth, are known from the same period.

34 Olimpia’s ketubbah, today in the Bibliothèque Méjanes, Aix-en-Provence, Ms. Heb. 1250, testifies to her marriage in Rome to Shabetai Haim ben Menahem Modigliani in 1803. Presumably, Olimpia was in her early teens when she copied the travelogue, like Luna Ambron when she scribed her Esther scroll.



women's intellectual endeavors at the time, but also in the context of the Ambron family's rich cultural activity.<sup>35</sup>

Another interesting exemplar is a scroll for the counting of the Omer, signed by a "young woman" in 1804 and heretofore unpublished. Severely damaged and fragmentary, the text begins with day 18 of the Omer. Each day is inscribed inside a simple running arcade in green and red ink, recalling the colors of the Italian flag.<sup>36</sup> The only information we have about the scroll's scribe appears in the last column's cryptic inscription:<sup>37</sup> "The work is completed, praise to the Lord, maker of the Earth. The *young woman* has done it properly [?]. I have written thus today, Monday the fifteenth day of the month of Tevet in the year 'So the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with rejoicing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness [Isaiah 51:11]' of the order [the Torah portion] 'and you should *not* let every daughter live.'"<sup>38</sup>

Following a practice widespread among Jewish scribes, the year of the scroll's writing is marked by highlighting specific words from a biblical verse (in this case Isaiah 51:11), corresponding to December 17, 1804. The date points us to the Torah portion for that week, from the book of Exodus, from which the scribe drew the final, altered quote: "and you should let every daughter live" (Exodus 1:22). The word "not," overturning the meaning of the biblical verse, is clearly a later addition. We do not know whether

**Omer calendar in the form of a scroll scribed by an unnamed "young woman," Italy, 1804**

Handwritten on parchment; ink and watercolor, 6.5 x 126 cm

The Israel Museum: On deposit from the Institute for Hebrew Manuscripts B56.11.0003 | Photo © The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, by Elad Zagman

35 The text of this manuscript, kept by one of the last Ambrons in Florence until its recent donation to the National Library of Israel (Ms. Var. 946), was copied from the original and published in Asher Salah and Paola Abbina, eds., *Diario di viaggio di Amadio Abbina e Sabato Ambron in Terrasanta fatto nel 1746* (Rome: Litos, 2012). See also Asher Salah, "Amadio Abbina and Sabato Isacco Ambron: Two Eighteenth-Century Roman Jews in the Levant," in Alessandro Guetta and Pierre Savy, eds., *Non contrarii ma diversi* (Rome: Viella, 2020): 92-109.

36 Jewish identification with Italian national sentiment, beginning in the late eighteenth century, merits further research. On the colors of the Italian flag and their development, see Lorenzo Tomasin, "Tricolore," in *Lid'O: lingua italiana d'oggi* VII (2010): 59-63.

37 Though the ink of the inscription and the quality of its script seem less tidy than the more consistent script of the counting of the days, it was undoubtedly written by the same hand.

38 תם ונשלם שבח לאל / בורא עולם. / הצעירה [כ]דין עשתה. כתבתי היום יום שני חמשה עשר לחדש טבת שנת "ובאו ציון ברנה" ושמת' ע'ל'ם על ראשם ששור' וש[מחה] ישיגור", לסדר וכל הבת [לא] תחיון".



format, which is significantly larger than that of a personal prayer book like the one scribed by Fortunata Fiano. Anna Piperno signed her name at the bottom frame of the portal-shaped frontispiece, which is decorated with clean and neat geometrical and floral patterns reminiscent of an earlier period. Like Luna Ambron, Anna Piperno modestly signed in tiny, semi-cursive script, which differs from the square script of the title page and the Hebrew wording (interspersed with Italian) throughout the book.

### **Art and Leadership: The Ambrons and the Catalan Community in the Roman Ghetto**

It is fascinating to place Luna's work within the portrait of a family that played a major role in the community. This portrait can be traced through objects that, like Luna's scroll, belonged to the Ambrons or were dedicated by them to the congregation, unveiling connections not previously known.

The Ambrons were a family of Sephardic origins who settled in Rome following the 1492 Jewish expulsion from Spain. They were affiliated with the Catalan synagogue (Scola Catalana), which had been active in the city since the mid-fifteenth century.<sup>42</sup> The Scola Catalana was the largest and wealthiest of the Roman Ghetto synagogues. By the end of the sixteenth century only five synagogues, serving roughly 3,600 Jews, remained active in the Ghetto, all of them organized in the same building facing the Piazzetta Cinque Scole – literally the “Square of Five Synagogues.”<sup>43</sup> By the eighteenth century, the Ghetto's population was estimated to number 6,000 Jews.

By the mid-seventeenth century the Ambrons were well-established as successful bankers, having built wealth through the spice and textile trades. They later expanded their business, supplying antiquities, furnishings, and decorative objects to members of the Roman nobility, as well as clothing and footwear to military personnel who accompanied dignitaries on visits to Rome. These occupations greatly enhanced the family's status both

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42 The origin of the family name seems to derive from the town of Embron, or Ambrun, situated in the Rodan valley in the southwest of France, from where they moved to Spain. See Angelo Piattelli, “Ketubbot Ambron,” in *Ketubbòt di casa Ambron* (Firenze: Edifir, 2016), pp. 10, 15; Lionella Viterbo Neppi Modona, “La casa Ambron a Roma nel 1780,” in *Rassegna Mensile di Israel* LIIIV, no. 1 (2019), 139–62, specif. p. 140; Salah, “Amadio Abbina and Sabato Isacco Ambron,” p. 95.

43 Silvia Haia Antonucci, Claudio Procaccia, and Giancarlo Spizzichino, “Benè Romi. The Jewish Presence in Rome in the Eighteenth Century,” in Daniela Di Castro, ed., *The Roman Jews and the Investiture of the Popes* (Rome: Araldo De Luca Editore, 2010), p. 14. Once the Jews were forced to live under restrictions in the limited urban space of the ghetto, the twelve congregations that formerly served them were joined into five: Tempio, Nova, Siciliana, Catalana, and Castiliana. See Daniela Di Castro and Filomena Del Regno, *Arte Ebraica a Roma e nel Lazio* (Rome: Fratelli Palombi, 1994).



**Giacomo Lenghi**, *View of the Rome Synagogue and the Piazza of the Cinque Scuole*, Rome, 1832

Watercolor on paper

The Jewish Museum of Rome, on deposit from the Giancarlo Spizzichino Historical Archive of the Jewish Community of Rome | ASCER AF FSF vol III n 181 Lenghi 5 Scole | Photo courtesy of The Jewish Museum of Rome, by Giorgio Benni



**Torah ark of the Catalan synagogue in the building of the Five Synagogues**

Courtesy of the Giancarlo Spizzichino Historical Archive of the Jewish Community of Rome (ASCER) - ASCER AF FSF vol VIII n 501

within the Ghetto and outside it.<sup>44</sup> Gabriele Ambron and his son Ezechia (Luna's great-grandfather and grandfather) were considered two of the most prosperous Jews in Rome – remarkable given the generally impoverished conditions of the Ghetto's residents.<sup>45</sup>

A 1733 census ordered by the administration of the Apostolic See's properties records a detailed list of the household of the widowed Gabriele Ambron the Elder. He is recorded living with his son Ezechia, Ezechia's wife Luna, and their six children – among them Leone (Judah), later to become father of Luna the young scribe; and a nephew, Alessandro (Elisha), his wife, and three young children. The Ambron household even included a Jewish

44 In 1682 Leone di Giuseppe Ambron is recorded as the richest Jewish banker in Rome. See Claudio Procaccia, "Banchieri ebrei a Roma. Il credito su pegno in età moderna," in Marina Caffiero and Anna Esposito, eds., *Judei de Urbe: Roma e i suoi ebrei: una storia secolare contemporanea* [Proceedings of the Rome State Archives Conference, November 7-9, 2005] (Rome, 2011), p. 166.

45 Viterbo, "La casa Ambron," 142; Olga Melasecchi, "Santità al Signore e alla Sinagoga: famiglie, committenti, donatori," in Poli et al., *Antique Roman Mappot*, pp. 47-54. For information on prominent individuals from the Roman Ambron family during the period under discussion, see Daniela Di Castro, "I mercanti d'arte ebrei nella Roma del Sei e Settecento e alcuni loro clienti: papi, principi e la Regina di Svezia," *Zakhor. Rivista di storia degli ebrei d'Italia*, VI (2003): 117-28, esp. 122, 125-27.

servant named Ester – one of only two families in the Ghetto able to afford domestic help.<sup>46</sup>

Several surviving documents, dated between 1687 and 1804, offer valuable insights into the Ambron family's business affairs. These documents, written in Latin or Italian on parchment and richly decorated with gold paint and bright colors, reflect their social and economic status. The two earliest documents, both from 1687, were addressed to Luna's great-grandfather Gabriele and his brothers (unnamed), by illustrious personalities such as the ambassador of England's King James II and Cardinal Francesco Maria de' Medici. By 1719, Gabriele's son, Ezechia (Luna's grandfather), was already collaborating in the family business, while around the 1750s–60s Ezechia's sons – Leone, Luna's father, and his brothers Gabriele and Sabato – were managing it with other partners from Ferrara (incidentally, Sabato is the same Sabato Ambron who travelled to the land of Israel and whose diary was copied by Olimpia in 1793). In the 1770s, Gabriele's sons – Ezechia the Younger, called after his grandfather, and Alessandro – joined the business.

We may assume these documents were employed and admired within the family home, possibly inspiring the artistry of the decorations on Luna's Esther scroll and blessings sheet. For example, the floral motifs on the scroll and sheet – tulips, garlands, and rosebuds – closely resemble those that adorn the 1763 family certificate. Given their role as art dealers to the Roman elite, Luna's father, uncles, and cousins would have been well acquainted with high-end art and design. The family documents thus reflect not only the Ambrons' commercial enterprise; they are also evidence of cultural exchanges between prominent Jewish families and the broader artistic world of Rome.

A remarkable ketubah documents the marriage of Luna's uncle, Gabriele Ambron, to Simha Di Segni, daughter of a family of rabbis and scholars, in 1734. Exceptional in its artistic quality among local ketubbot of the period, it, too, may have been inspired by the Ambrons' illuminated placards held in the home and available for the family's perusal.<sup>47</sup> The ketubah is illustrated with scenes of biblical protagonists, as well as one image of a heroine, Miriam, leading the women's song after the Exodus from Egypt –



**Missive of thanks from Roger Palmer, the Ambassador of King James II of England to Gabriele Ambron and his brothers, for serving him and his entourage during his stay in Rome**  
Rome, 1687

Handwritten on parchment: ink, gouache, and gold powder, 31.5 x 41 cm  
The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York, B L2 | Photo courtesy of The Library of The Jewish Theological Seminary, New York



**Missive of thanks and appreciation from Bohemian Ambassador to the Holy See Giovanni Wincelao, Count of Galasso, to Gabriele and Ezechia Ambron and to Mose di Capua, for serving him and his entourage in his Rome residence**  
Rome, 1719

Handwritten on parchment; ink, gouache, and gold powder, 37 x 50 cm  
The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York, B L6 | Photo courtesy of The Library of The Jewish Theological Seminary, New York

46 The census, known as the *Descriptio Hebreorum*, was published in Angela Groppi, ed., *Gli abitanti del ghetto di Roma* (Rome: Viella, 2014); this branch of the Ambrons is listed on p. 189, no. 62. Lionella Viterbo, in "La casa Ambron," p. 141, offers additional important information on this list of names based on family documents, revealing, *inter alia*, details about Luna's maternal relatives. See p. 160 for the Ambrons' genealogical tree, with Luna's branch highlighted.

47 The ketubah was published in Chaya Benjamin, *The Stieglitz Collection: Masterpieces of Jewish Art* (The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, 1987); Shalom Sabar, "Concordia Maritale: History and Art of the Ketubah in Rome," in Olga Melasecchi and Amedeo Spagnoletto, eds., *Antique Roman Ketubot: The Marriage Contracts of the Jewish Community of Rome* (Rome: Museo Ebraico – Campisano Editore), p. 35.



**Certificate of privileges conferred on Gabriele, Leone, and Sabato Ambron and their business partners; signed by Cardinal Girolamo Colonna with the coats-of-arms of his family and the papacy of Benedict IV, Rome, 1756**  
 Handwritten on parchment; ink, gouache, gold powder, 44.5 x 57 cm | The Israel Museum, Jerusalem: Purchased through the gift of the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Foundation to American Friends of the Israel Museum, in honor of Daisy Raccach-Djivre | B25.0104 | Photo © The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, by Zohar Shemesh



**Certificate and privileges granted to Gabriele, Leone, and Sabato Ambron Fratelli and their business partners**  
 Rome, 1763  
 Handwritten on parchment; ink, gouache, gold powder, 46 x 58 cm  
 The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York, B L15 | Photo courtesy of The Library of The Jewish Theological Seminary, New York



**Marriage contract (ketubah) for Gabriel ben Ezekiah Ambron and Simha, daughter of Shabetai Di Segni, Rome, 1734**  
 Handwritten on parchment; ink, gouache, and gold powder, 94.2 x 59.2 cm  
 The Israel Museum, Jerusalem: The Stieglitz Collection was donated to the Museum with the contribution of Erica and Ludwig Jesselson, New York, to American Friends of the Israel Museum | B86.0156 | Photo © The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, by Zohar Shemesh

a very rare scene in ketubbot, perhaps hinting at a vision of female leadership which may also underlie the production of Luna's Esther scroll. The family crests of the Ambrons and the Di Segnis are placed proudly above the frame (see p. 19).

In Italy, the use of familial coats-of-arms was common among merchants and bankers, both Jewish and Christian, as a reflection of the family's high social status and as a certificate of ownership of personal objects such as prayerbook covers, ketubbot and even tombstones. Thus, the Ambron family crest appears twice on an impressive gilt spice box dated to the mid-seventeenth century, possibly in the family's keeping since the time of Gabriele the Elder.<sup>48</sup> Other objects bearing the Ambrons' coat-of-arms or identified as belonging to the family at some point or other – whether used privately or donated to the congregation – reflect the family's social status within the community. Among these is a remarkable set of ceremonial objects dedicated in three stages, over ten years, to the Catalan congregation by Luna's grandfather, Ezechia Ambron, and another donor (perhaps Ezechia's cousin) named Elisha. The set includes a pair of splendid Torah finials (rimmonim), donated in 1735; a Torah pointer (yad), donated in 1740; and an opulent Torah crown, donated in 1744.<sup>49</sup> A variety of Torah wrappers were also dedicated by members of the Ambron family between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>50</sup>

At about the same time Luna scribed her Esther scroll, her relatives Isacco Samuele Ambron, Ezechia Ambron, and four other members of the Catalan synagogue donated a silver cover for a printed siddur, embossed with the seven-branched menorah (the congregation's symbol) and a detailed engraved inscription. The siddur originally belonged to Isacco Samuele Ambron, son of Alessandro (Elisha) Gershon Ambron, as evidenced by Isacco's signatures inside the book. Isacco Samuele also dedicated a prayer book for Yom Kippur that, like the siddur, featured an opulent embossed silver binding, this time inscribed with his name and displaying the Ambron coat-of-arms.<sup>51</sup> Isacco Samuele also owned other books, and was himself a scribe. The fact that he was active

48 The spice box was donated to the community of Florence, along with other objects, in the late twentieth century. See Eugenio Cecioni and Dora Liscia Bemporad, eds., *Per ogni cosa una stagione. Oggetti di liturgia domestica ebraica, catalogo della mostra* (Santa Croce sull'Arno: Villa Picchiani 2004), p. 48.

49 See Liscia Bemporad and Spagnoletto, *Argenti Museo Ebraico*, nos. I.23 (finials), II.14 (Torah crown).

50 *Antique Roman Mappot*, nos. 5, 131, 135.

51 See Dora Liscia Bemporad and Davide Spagnoletto, *Consacrati al Signore: Argenti del Museo Ebraico di Roma* (Rome, 2024), no. XI.2. I would like to thank Dr. Olga Melasecchi, director and curator of the Jewish Museum in Rome, who showed me this binding before it was published. The first manuscript by Isacco Samuele Ambron is dated 1763 (National Library of Israel, Ms. Heb. 8°2508); the second is dated 1766 (F. Greenwood collection, Toronto, Canada, Ms. 1).



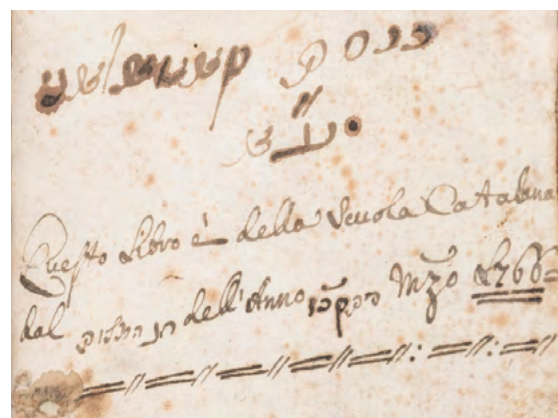
**Spice holder (*besamim* for the ceremony of the *Havdalah*)**

Rome, 1649–50

Silversmith: Sebastiano Gamberucci (active 1633–1658)

Silver, cut, engraved, and punched; gilt, 21 x 7.8 cm

The Jewish Community of Florence, Besamim Ambron 1 | Photo courtesy of The Jewish Community of Florence, by Mauro Cenci



during the same years when his relative, Luna Ambron, was trained to copy her full Esther scroll suggests that Isacco Samuele may have been Luna’s teacher.

Various inscriptions, as well as the list of the 1733 census quoted above, reveal information about Luna Ambron’s mother, Simha, daughter of Samuel Corcos.<sup>52</sup> Like the Ambrons, the Corcos family were influential and highly cultured. Originally from Castile, they settled in the Roman Ghetto and were founders of its other Sephardic synagogue – the Castilian.

A prominent member of the Corcos family was Rabbi Tranquillo (Manoah) Vita Corcos (1660-1730), who led a yeshiva and was Chief Rabbi of Rome. As it happens, he was also a relative of Luna Ambron’s maternal grandfather. One of Tranquillo Corcos’s works is a compendium of his rhetorical sermons, prepared by his pupils for Purim, 1710.<sup>53</sup> Clearly, Luna was born to two families who valued scholarly pursuits, which perhaps explains why her education seemed to parallel, if not exactly equal, the education provided to the men of the Corcos-Ambron families. The contents of the Corcos’s compendium reveal that a robust Jewish education was indeed seen as a way for Jewish families to help their children maintain a Jewish identity.

A splendid set of Torah scroll decorations, including a wrapper (mappah), a mantle, and a binder, was donated by Luna’s paternal grandfather, Samuel Corcos, and his brother Isacco to the Castilian synagogue and later gifted to the Israel Museum. The dedication in the center of the wrapper lists the names of the donors and the date: “. . . a gift from the honorable brothers . . . the *parnassim* [administrators] . . . Samuele and . . . Issaco Corcos, for the memory

**Silver cover for Siddur – dedication to the Catalan Synagogue in Rome, 1766**

Silver, repoussé, engraved, and punched, 17.2 x 13 cm  
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem:  
Gift of the Jewish Community, Rome  
B51.01.0160 | Photo © The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, by Zohar Shemesh

52 See Viterbo, *La casa Ambron*, pp. 139-162, specif. 141, and a genealogical tree on p. 160.

53 Rabbi Tranquillo Vita Corcos, *Discorso accademico de Rabbi Tranquillo Vita Corcos fatto recitare dalli giovani della sua Accademia in occasione della festività degli Ebrei per l’historia d’Ester, e Mordacheo nell’anno 5470 dalla creazione del mondo* (Rome, Giovanni Francesco Chracas, 1710). For more on this important personality see: Marina Caffiero, *Il grande mediatore: Tranquillo Vita Corcos, un rabbino nella Roma dei papi* (Roma: Carocci, 2019).



**The Corcos Wrapper (mappah) for Torah, Rome, 1727/28**  
 Silk velvet, gilt silver-thread embroidery; silk brocade, 64.5 x 240 cm  
 The Israel Museum, Jerusalem: Gift of the Jewish Community of Rome | B51.01.0158 | Photo © The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, by Elie Posner

of the soul of the illustrious sage Rabbi Hezkiah Tranquillo Corcos, . . . and of the elder . . . Tranquillo (Manoah), their father, son of Beni[amino] of good memory, and in honor of their children, in the year 5588 (1728).” This important donation, with a large Corcos family crest proudly displayed in the middle of the wrapper, suggests that Luna’s family on her mother’s side was also affluent and able to invest in the public trappings of a leadership role.<sup>54</sup>

In April 1776, eleven years after the completion of her Esther scroll and blessings sheet, Luna Ambron married Ya’akov Di Segni from Rome’s Jewish community in Livorno, where they joined several family members who had moved there to accommodate their business needs and flee worsening conditions for Jews in Rome. The couple’s marriage contract, of modest dimensions and lacking any decoration whatsoever, stands out in its simplicity compared to the sumptuous objects we have seen so far. The ketubbah was preserved by the family through the generations along with other later family ketubbot, including the ketubbah of Luna’s son, Leone, documenting his marriage to his first cousin, Regina Ambron. Interestingly, this document bears graceful decorations, with a lion symbolizing the groom, Leone.<sup>55</sup>

Members of the Ambron family who remained in Rome maintained important positions. It is therefore not surprising to find the names of some of Luna Ambron’s relatives listed as members

54 Iris Fishof, ed., *Jewish Art Masterpieces from The Israel Museum, Jerusalem* (Southport: Hugh Lauter Levin Associates; Jerusalem: The Israel Museum, 1994).

55 The two ketubbot were published in: *Ketubbòt di casa Ambron*, pp. 22-25.



**Ketubbah (marriage contract) for the marriage of Luna Ambron with Ya’akov David Di Segni**  
 Livorno, 1776  
 Handwritten in ink on parchment, 42.5 x 30 cm  
 The Jewish Community of Florence, Ambron k. 2006.1 | Photo courtesy of the Jewish Community of Florence, by Mauro Cenci



**Ketubah for the marriage of Leone, son of Luna Ambron and Ya'akov David Di Segni his cousin Regina Ambron Livorno, 1815 | Handwritten on parchment; ink and watercolors, 45 x 68 cm | The Jewish Community of Florence, inv. No. Ambron k. 2006.2 | Photo courtesy of The Jewish Community of Florence, by Mauro Cenci**



**Burial society plaque with depiction of the ritual washing preparations for burial, Rome, 1801  
Handwritten on parchment; ink, tempera, and gold powder, 36 x 27 cm  
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem: Extended loan from Mr. and Mrs. David Zaidner, Zurich and Jerusalem | L-B85.056 | Photo © The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, by Zohar Shemesh**



**Leone Ambron's part of assets by the will of his late father, Ezechia, 1781**  
 Photo courtesy of La Rassegna Mensile Di Israele - vol 85, n 1, 2019

of Orah Hayyim, a burial society, on a plaque depicting the ritual washing of the dead.<sup>56</sup> The plaque was dedicated in 1801.<sup>57</sup>

In 1781, Luna's grandfather, Ezechia Ambron, passed away. His will was preserved in the family for generations, allowing us to infer the wealth accumulated by the family, including antique furniture, decorative items, textiles, and books, which were divided among the three brothers: Gabriele, Leone (Luna's father), and Sabato. Reading these lists of objects is like "strolling through their Roman home in the distant past of 1781."<sup>58</sup>

## Epilogue

Luna Ambron had no wish to remain anonymous, consciously calling attention to the interplay of the personal and the communal. She was clearly well-aware of the endeavor she had undertaken; perhaps she even grasped the responsibility of maintaining her Jewish identity as part of her familial and communal attachments. At the same time, as a member of a prominent family holding leadership roles both in lay society and in religious circles, she may have been inspired to produce a unique object. Safeguarded for nearly 260 years, Luna's Esther scroll reflects a resilient and dynamic community that strongly connected women's education with the preservation of Jewish identity.

56 Sabato Hezkiah Ambron, Samuel, son of Beniamino Corcos known as the Elder, and Abramo Raffaele Corcos. Published in: Fishof, *Jewish Art Masterpieces*; Gioia Perugia, "Philanthropy and Jewish Solidarity in Italy: Benevolent Societies in the Ghetto Period on the Basis of Ceremonial Objects and Visual Sources," in Giuliana Gemelli, ed., *Religions and Philanthropy: Global Issues and Historical Perspective* (Bologna: Baskerville, 2007), pp. 165-185.

57 The same members are mentioned in the successive 1816 plaque, almost identical in its iconography and decoration, attesting to the continuing involvement in community life of the Roman branch of the Ambron and Corcos families. The plaque is part of a private collection.

58 The lists were published in Viterbo, *Casa Ambron*; see quote on p. 142.