

# Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations

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A peer-reviewed e-journal of the Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations

Published by the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College

## *A Jewish Construction of a Catholic Hero: David Levi's "A Pio IX"*

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Volume 6 (2011)

<http://ejournals.bc.edu/ojs/index.php/scjr>

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<sup>1</sup> I am very grateful to Prof. Cristiana Facchini and Dr. Asher Salah for their valuable advice on various points.

Along with liberals and patriots, many Italian Jews rejoiced on June 16, 1846, when Giovanni Maria Mastai Ferretti was elected Pope Pius IX.<sup>2</sup> His progressive policies as Archbishop of Spoleto and Bishop of Imola as well as the reformist course he outlined for the Papal State<sup>3</sup> earned Pio Nono (as he was called) a name as a liberal. Patriots and liberals expected the new Pope to reform the Papal State and to favor Italy's unification, the goal of the Risorgimento national movement. Italian Jews suffered from a lack of civil rights, to different degrees within each Italian State. Therefore, they saw the Risorgimento as an opportunity to overthrow the regimes imposed on the different Italian regions by the Congress of Vienna and consequently as a way to achieve full civil emancipation. For Italian Jews, the struggle for emancipation and the Risorgimento movement coincided.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> It is important to clarify that when mentioning three distinct categories (patriots, liberals and Jews), I do not imply a separation between them. Obviously, as actually often happened, one could be a Jew, a patriot, and a liberal at the same time.

<sup>3</sup> Giovanni Maria Mastai Ferretti, "Pensieri relativi alla Amministrazione pubblica dello Stato Pontificio," in *Pio IX, Giovanni Maria Mastai Ferretti dalla giovinezza alla morte nei suoi scritti e discorsi editi e inediti*, ed. Alberto Serafini, Volume I: *Le vie della Divina Provvidenza (1792-1846)* (Vatican City, 1958).

<sup>4</sup> On the Italian Jews during the Risorgimento see: Franco Della Peruta, "Gli ebrei nel Risorgimento fra interdizioni ed emancipazione," in *Dall'emancipazione ad oggi*, vol.2 of *Gli ebrei in Italia*, ed. Corrado Vivanti (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), 1135-1170; Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, "Aspetti della cultura ebraica in Italia nel secolo XIX," in *Dall'emancipazione ad oggi*, vol.2 of *Gli ebrei in Italia*, ed. Corrado Vivanti (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), 1215-1244; Attilio Milano, *Storia degli ebrei in Italia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1992), 338-390. For recent scholarship, reassessing the actual extent and quality of the Italian Jews' contribution to the Risorgimento in light of their narratives about it see in particular: Asher Salah, "Steinschneider and Italy", in *Studies on Steinschneider - Moritz Steinschneider and the Emergence of the Science of Judaism in Nineteenth-Century Germany*, ed. Reimund Leicht and Gad Freudenthal (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 411-456; Tullia Catalan, "Juden und Judentum in Italien von 1848 bis 1918", in *Judentum und Antisemitismus im modernen Italien*, ed. Gudrun Jäger and Liana Novelli-Glaab (Berlin: Trafo

Verlag, 2007), 71-86; Cristiana Facchini, *David Castelli – Ebraismo e scienze delle religioni tra Otto e Novecento* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2005); and Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, *Il prezzo dell'uguaglianza – Il dibattito sull'emancipazione degli ebrei in Italia (1781-1848)* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1998), 6-12.

Recent studies have begun to analyze the rich narrative that the Italian Jews constructed around their support for the Risorgimento. Part of this Jewish narrative is David Levi's poem "A Pio IX" (To Pius IX), which was composed in 1846 to honor Pio Nono and to invite him to promote Italy's unification and the consequent emancipation of the Italian Jews. This paper presents an analysis of Levi's poem on a number of levels. Not only does this poem demonstrate the Jews' desire to praise the newly elected Pope Pius IX, but from a historical point of view, it also illustrates how Italian Jews' objectives in the 1840s coincided with those of liberals and patriots. Perhaps this poem's most striking feature, though, is Levi's use, along with the more secular symbolism of the Enlightenment, of Catholic and Christological symbolism as a feature requiring interpretation and contextualization since it comes from a Jewish author. In addition, I hope to show how, through these verses, Levi envisions Pio Nono's role in the Risorgimento, both as supporter of Italy's unification and of Jewish emancipation.

## Historical Background

Understanding Pius IX's activity prior to his papal election is fundamental to comprehending his career's successive developments and his perception by patriots, liberals and Jews. Recent studies have considered Mastai Ferretti's attitude towards the Italian Jews, analyzing in particular the political activity that earned him a name as a liberal among them.<sup>5</sup> However, Frank Coppa points out that both nineteenth-century Jews and subsequent historiography have apparently misinterpreted the reasons which led to his benevolent attitude by

<sup>5</sup> Frank J. Coppa, "Pio Nono and the Jews: From 'Reform' to 'Reaction': 1846-1878," *The Catholic Historical Review* (2003): 671-695.

paying insufficient attention to Pio Nono's religious motivations.<sup>6</sup> His positive acts towards the Jews were prompted by Christian solidarity with the poor and the oppressed—neither by sheer sympathy for the Jewish cause, nor by his sharing their aspiration for full civil rights. According to Coppa, “Pio Nono did not envision a Christian-Jewish reconciliation. His reforms were designed to correct abuses and offer assistance rather than to change prevailing structures in either the Church or the Papal State.”<sup>7</sup>

There were three phases of Mastai Ferretti's career that were primarily responsible for causing liberals, patriots and Jews to misinterpret his intentions. In Spoleto, he pawned his furniture and donated the resultant funds to the poor. During the 1831 uprisings, he mediated between the Papal army and the insurgents, giving the order not to shoot and instead to find an agreement.<sup>8</sup> While these actions were seen as progressive, in religious terms, however, he always remained a conservative. An analysis of his sermons in both Spoleto and Imola reveals that Mastai Ferretti was mainly concerned with themes of Christian charity and love, and that, at least initially, he was interested in attempts at reconciliation between Catholicism and modernity.<sup>9</sup> These interests probably spurred his proposed reform of the Papal State. The fifty-eight points he drafted in 1845 before his elevation to the papacy called for a prudent modernization of the Papal State but proposed neither religious reform nor the civil emancipation of the Jews. Nevertheless, he earned a reputation as a liberal. These and other political maneuvers and reforms contributed to his emergence as a quasi

“heroic figure” among the Italian patriots and liberals. This image, again described as a misinterpretation by Coppa, has also been labeled the “myth...of the good and liberal Pope.”<sup>10</sup>

It is no surprise that the election of a “liberal” Pope fed the hopes of all those who wished that the Catholic Church would adopt a new political approach. They wanted a curtailment of the church's temporal power, if not complete elimination of it, thus facilitating the formation of a future Italian state and ameliorating the Jews' condition. A number of intellectuals explicitly delineated a new role for the papacy in the future united Italy in pamphlets and essays published in the years preceding Pio Nono's election. These pamphlets often also advocated full emancipation of the Jews. Two are especially interesting for us:<sup>11</sup> Vincenzo Gioberti's *Il primato morale e civile degli italiani* (Moral and Civil Primacy of the Italians, 1843),<sup>12</sup> and Massimo D'Azeglio's *Dell'emancipazione civile degli Israeliti* (Civil Emancipation of the Israelites)<sup>13</sup> written at the end of 1847 and addressed directly to Pope Pius IX.

Vincenzo Gioberti (Turin 1801–Paris 1852)<sup>14</sup> was a Catholic priest, a moderate liberal intellectual and one of the Risorgimento's main figures. His *Il primato morale e civile degli italiani* was published in two volumes in Brussels and has been defined as a “major influence on moderate liberal thinking in the

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 674.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 672-673.

<sup>8</sup> On Giovanni Maria Mastai Ferretti's life and political activity before his papal election see Carlo Falconi, *Ilgiovane Mastai* (Milan: Rusconi, 1951).

<sup>9</sup> Coppa, “Pio Nono and the Jews,” 673.

<sup>10</sup> Giacomo Martina, *Pio IX (1846-1850)*, vol.1 (Rome: Università Gregoriana Editrice, 1974), 2.

<sup>11</sup> Apart from the two pamphlets considered here, another influential work was Carlo Cattaneo, *Ricerche economiche sulle interdizioni imposte agli Israeliti* (Milan: De Cristoforis, 1836).

<sup>12</sup> Bruxelles: Meline, 1843.

<sup>13</sup> Florence: Le Monnier, 1848.

<sup>14</sup> On Gioberti's biography see Giorgio Rumi, *Gioberti* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1999).

Risorgimento.”<sup>15</sup> In this large book, Gioberti touches upon several topics including the Jews’ emancipation, a new role for the papacy, and a supporting argument for Italy’s unification as a federation of States. It was influential on Pio Nono, perhaps because it was written by a Catholic priest, albeit a moderately liberal one, and also because, in spite of advocating a new role for the papacy, it does not envision (or in any way explicitly support) major reforms in the Papal States.<sup>16</sup> Concerning the Catholic Church’s political role, Gioberti invites the church to understand and embrace the spirit of the time.<sup>17</sup> Only then will the church be able to contribute to the unification of Italy as a federation of States, led by the symbolic figure of the Pope.

As a moderate liberal, Gioberti naturally supports the Jewish pursuit of civil emancipation. Trying to reverse some of the current stereotypes, he maintains that the negative habits and morals of some Jews are only due to the unequal situation in which they live and that, if granted equality with the other citizens, they would easily integrate. He urges Christians to act with brotherly love towards the Jews and critiques that small part of the Catholic Church that, in his view, has wrongly insisted on accusing the Jews of deicide.<sup>18</sup>

In contrast, D’Azeglio’s pamphlet focuses solely on the Jews’ condition and not on the papacy. That a politically influential liberal intellectual like D’Azeglio addressed his work directly to the Pope after Pius IX had implemented his first reforms in favor of Jews late in 1847 further confirms the high

<sup>15</sup> Quotation from "Political Union without Social Revolution: Vincenzo Gioberti's *Primato*," *The Historical Journal* 41 (1998): 705.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 712.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 708.

<sup>18</sup> A good analysis of Gioberti’s stance towards the Jews can be found in Giordina Arian Levi – Giulio Disegni, *Fuori dal ghetto – Il 1848 degli Ebrei* (Rome: Editor Riuniti, 1998), 72-75.

hopes Italian liberals had for the reign of this Pope. In his essay, D’Azeglio follows the convention of other liberal thinkers and focuses his work on demonstrating the invalidity of Jewish stereotypes. He tries to demonstrate how civil emancipation would remove those obstacles preventing Jews from enlarging the scope of their professions and activities, thus facilitating their integration into Italian society.

Initially, Pio Nono did not disappoint, taking concrete political measures that encouraged the hopes of liberals. In response to the enthusiastic atmosphere created by these Italian intellectuals and pushed by the aforementioned religious motivations, rather than by a specific plan for the emancipation of the Jews, the newly elected Pope accepted the need to make some concessions. For example, at the end of 1846, when the Tiber river overflowed and partly flooded the Jewish ghetto, Pio Nono allowed a number of Jewish families to live outside of the ghetto. This also improved the quality of life within the ghetto itself. He also modified some minor restrictive laws, which, while not earth shattering, did aid him in acquiring the Roman Jews’ approval. Under these changes, for instance, Jews were allowed to serve in the Civic Guard, albeit grouped into one distinct battalion. The “balzello,” a tax the Jews had to pay in order to finance the Carnival games preceding Lent, was reduced (though not completely cancelled). Their forced attendance at public sermons and obligatory homage to the Capitulum’s senator were repealed.<sup>19</sup> Current scholarship suggests that the value of these minor measures was actually amplified by the enthusiasm and atmosphere generated around the Pope. They thus contributed to the reinforcement of Pio Nono’s liberal reputation.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> On the measures taken by Pope Pius IX in favor of Rome’s Jews see: Milano, *Storia degli ebrei in Italia*, 358-369 and Cecil Roth, *The History of the Jews of Italy* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1946), 421-473.

<sup>20</sup> Coppa, “Pio Nono and the Jews,” 674.

Of all the laws decreed by Pius IX, however, the one that made the biggest impression among the Italian patriots and Jews was his July 1846 amnesty for political prisoners within the Papal State. This step had a strong emotional impact for two reasons: first, it was a substantive measure, and second, it occurred at the very beginning of his pontificate (only one month after his election). This confirmed the impression of his liberal attitude. This amnesty was also the inspiration for David Levi's poem "A Pio IX," as we will see, as well as for numerous other poems written by Italians in praise of the Pontiff.

The enthusiasm around Pio Nono led Jews, patriots and liberals to overlook his first encyclical, *Qui pluribus*, published in November 1846. In it, Pius IX showed his fully traditional attitude to religious matters, bashing non-believers and other enemies of Christian truth. He also revealed he was not a liberal at all by condemning rationalism, indifferentism, latitudinarianism and supporting Pope Gregory's banishment of liberalism.<sup>21</sup> This encyclical did not curb the liberals' enthusiasm, which was refueled in 1848. Once again, pushed by the international political situation, in particular by the uprisings in Palermo and Paris, Pius IX promoted the drafting of a Papal State constitution in order to show liberals and patriots he was willing to make further reforms. However, he made sure his collaborators would entirely preserve the Pope's spiritual power while only slightly limiting his temporal realm. On April 17, 1848 Rome's ghetto gates were torn down, although Roman Jews were not granted full civil emancipation. This act marked the high point of enthusiasm and positive opinion towards Pio Nono by Italian Jews.

In spite of all these concrete political actions, it did not take long for a radical change in Pio Nono's attitude towards

<sup>21</sup> Claudia Carlen (ed.), *The Papal Encyclicals 1740-1878* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1981).277-284

both the Risorgimento national movement and the Italian Jews to become clear. When the Pontiff's religious jurisdiction in addition to his temporal power received a serious threat, his attitude became extremely defensive and reactionary. In his famous allocution of April 1848, he declared his opposition to the war of independence against Austria, a traditionally Catholic empire. Subsequently, on November 24, he decided to flee Rome. Between February and July 1849, Rome had a very brief democratic regime, the so-called *Repubblica Romana* (Roman Republic). During this, equal rights were granted to all citizens, including the Jews. From his exile in Gaeta, Pio Nono strongly condemned the laws enforced by the *Repubblica Romana*, and, once he regained power in July 1849, he not only voided the Constitution of the Roman Republic but he also made the Papal State's laws more stringent. "The events of 1848-49 led this pope to abandon his early reformism, concluding that constitutionalism was incompatible with the government of the States of the Church."<sup>22</sup>

This turned out to be the act that drove a wedge between Pius IX and the Italian Jews, liberals, and patriots. In spite of some small improvements to the Roman Jews' condition, which the pope conceded little by little, his position was, as epitomized by Coppa, "Christian charity to the Jews, yes; Jewish equality, no!"<sup>23</sup> The distance between Pio Nono and the Jews increased further in 1858 with the infamous Mortara affair<sup>24</sup> and in 1864 with the encyclical *Quanta cura* to which he attached a Syllabus of Errors. Here he again and more directly attacked the modern principles of liberalism and listed a number of errors of the modern times: pantheism, naturalism,

<sup>22</sup> Coppa, "Pio Nono and the Jews," 680.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 686.

<sup>24</sup> Edgardo Mortara was a Jewish child who was forcefully baptized and brought to the Pope's residence, where he lived most of his life. On this case see David I. Kertzer, *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara* (New York, 1997).

materialism, rationalism, indifferentism and false religious tolerance. He finally stated explicitly how the restrictions on the Jews in the Papal State ought to be maintained.<sup>25</sup> Roman Jews achieved their final emancipation only in 1870, with Rome's annexation to the kingdom of Italy.

However, we have seen how the atmosphere at the time of Pius IX's accession to the Papal throne in 1846 was completely different. It is in this light that we must view the work of David Levi. He was inspired by the fervor surrounding the newly elected Pope and wrote a poem celebrating him. Levi has gained some scholarly attention in recent years, particularly within Italian academia, but he is still virtually unknown in international scholarship. By sketching out his background, we can better understand the poet's social and literary point of departure.

### David Levi

David Levi<sup>26</sup> was born in Chieri, in the vicinity of Turin, on November 6, 1816. His personality is difficult to grasp due to a scarcity of secondary literature and the limited analysis of his oeuvre to date. His character was complex and many factors played a role in his life. Nevertheless, exhaustive biographical information about Levi may be found in his unpublished autobiography. He also included parts of this work in two of his published books: *Vita di pensiero: ricordi e liriche* (Life of

<sup>25</sup> Carlen, *The Papal Encyclicals*, 381-386.

<sup>26</sup> There is not a lot of literature written on David Levi and no full-fledged monograph. However, some important bibliographical references are as follows: Luigi Bulferetti, *Socialismo risorgimentale* (Turin: Einaudi, 1975); Augusto Comba, "Giuseppe David Levi profeta del Risorgimento," in *Isacco Artom e gli Ebrei Italiani dai Risorgimenti al fascismo*, ed. Aldo Alessandro Mola (Foggia: Bastogi, 2002), 109-116; Francesca Sofia, "Gli Ebrei risorgimentali fra tradizione biblica, libera muratoria e nazione," in *La Massoneria*, ed. Gian Mario Cazzaniga (Turin: Einaudi, 2007), 244-265.

Thought: memories and lyrics)<sup>27</sup> and *Ausonia, vita d'azione (dal 1848 al 1870)* (Life of Action).<sup>28</sup>

His family was rather wealthy, allowing David to be well educated. In 1830, he enrolled in the Jewish College of Vercelli, called "Foà Institute," which taught both traditional Jewish and secular subjects, consistent with Italian Jewish tradition but rather modern when compared to most of the Jewish educational systems around Europe at the time. Levi demonstrated literary talent at a young age and grew up with an excellent philosophical education. Because university education was not allowed to Jews in Piedmont at the time, he enrolled at the University of Parma and Piacenza and later at the University of Pisa (always supported by his family's wealth). His stay in Pisa turned out to be fundamental for the formation of his ideological principles. There he met Giuseppe Montanelli<sup>29</sup> (Fucecchio 1813–1862), who introduced him to the philosophy of Saint-Simonism, a form of utopian radical socialism derived from the French enlightened philosopher Saint-Simon, trendy in France and some areas of Italy in the first half of the nineteenth century. Saint-Simonism was Levi's creed throughout his political career.<sup>30</sup> This philosophical system characterized his entire *Weltanschauung*, not only his socialist political views, but also his approach to other important elements of society, such as art and religion.

In Tuscany in the 1830s, Levi became acquainted with two other institutions which accompanied him throughout his

<sup>27</sup> Milan: Battezzati, 1875.

<sup>28</sup> Florence: Loescher, 1882.

<sup>29</sup> Giuseppe Montanelli was an Italian writer and politician, very active during the Risorgimento.

<sup>30</sup> Although some scholars argue that Levi's political ideology changed during the second half of his career. See in particular Luigi Bulferetti, *Socialismo risorgimentale*.

life. He was initiated into Freemasonry and became affiliated with the Giovine Italia, Mazzini's secret society, which plotted for Italy's liberation and unification. Finally, Levi moved to the University of Siena, where he graduated in 1840. During the 1840s, Levi traveled abroad extensively. In particular, he lived in Paris for a few years, where he became acquainted with several Italian exiles plotting for Italy's unification. The years in Paris were also fundamental for Levi's intellectual growth. In the French capital, he attended the university courses of some of the major French intellectuals of the time, such as the historians Edgar Quinet (Bourg-en-Bresse 1803–Versailles 1875) and Jules Michelet<sup>31</sup> (Paris 1798–1874). Influenced by all the cultural experiences of his youth, Levi became one of the Risorgimento's protagonists and one of the main advocates of the Jewish cause. After Italy's unification in 1861, Levi continued his political career at the highest level. In fact, he was among the first Jewish members of the national Parliament, where he was elected as a member of a left wing party. In the late 1870s he retired and focused on his literary activity. He died in Turin in 1898.

His literary activity was strongly influenced by the four main elements of his identity, constantly amalgamating throughout his life: his being a Jew, an Italian, a Freemason and a Saint-Simonian. He actually rejected the religious part of his Judaism from a young age, but always felt strongly about the social and cultural elements of his Jewish identity. His oeuvre includes treatises, poems and what he himself calls "historical dramas," in addition to his many contributions to French and Italian rationalist and liberal journals. His historical dramas, in good nineteenth-century fashion, bring the past to the stage in order to reflect on the present. Thus, they deal with

<sup>31</sup> Historian of Huguenot tradition. Levi's meeting with these important characters are also reported by A. Comba, "Giuseppe David Levi profeta del Risorgimento," in A. A. Mola, *Isacco Artom e gli Ebrei Italiani dai Risorgimenti al fascismo* (Foggia: Bastogi, 2002), 111.

themes connected to Jewish and Italian identity. The plays with a romantic touch are his only works so far to receive scholarly attention. His two most important works are certainly *Il profeta. La passione di un popolo* (The Prophet: The Passion of a People)<sup>32</sup> and *Giordano Bruno, o La religione del pensiero: l'uomo, l'apostolo e il martire* (Giordano Bruno, or The Religion of the Intellect: The Man, the Apostle, the Martyr).<sup>33</sup> However, the ongoing research into Levi's oeuvre is still at such an early stage that many elements of his personality and thought deserve much deeper investigation and will certainly yield extremely interesting results. Levi's poem dedicated to Pope Pius IX has not previously received sufficient scholarly attention.

#### Levi's Poem "A Pio IX"

"A Pio IX" has to be considered within the wider context of celebratory texts written to hail Pius IX's accession, consisting mainly of odes to the Pope.<sup>34</sup> There are no scholarly studies of these poems, only anthologies and collections that record the elevated expectations of many Italian intellectuals. Similar literary celebratory works were also composed outside of the Italian peninsula.<sup>35</sup> Levi's poem is unique, however, for its Jewish perspective and rich content.

"A Pio IX" is a relatively long poem, comprising 188 verses. It was published in 1848 within an anthology of poems,

<sup>32</sup> Turin: Società Tipografica Editrice, 1866.

<sup>33</sup> Turin: Carlo Triverio, 1887.

<sup>34</sup> Many of which can be found in *Ragguaglio storico di quanto è avvenuto in Roma e in tutte le provincie dello Stato pontificio in seguito accordato dalla santità di n.s. Papa Pio IX. Come dal suo editto del 16 luglio 1846* (Rome: Ajani, 1846).

<sup>35</sup> Frank Paul Bowman, for instance, informs us that positive poems and articles appeared in France. See his *Le Christ Romantique* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1973), 89-90.

collected by the author himself, called *Patria ed affetti. Canti storici e liriche (Homeland and Affections: Historical Poems and Lyrics)*,<sup>36</sup> the patriotic and romantic content of which is indicated in the title. In this work, one of Levi's earliest, the author included a number of poems expressing the enthusiasm and strong patriotic sentiments of those frantic and tumultuous years. His original intention, detailed in the book's preface, was to dedicate the parts of this volume to different Italian cities for which they were written. The literary and political fervor of the time, however, led him to write and thus include more poems, so that his original partition by city was only partly preserved in the published edition. After the preface and the poem examined here, which was placed before all of the following categories, he divided the volume into three parts. The first section contains eighteen lyrical poems, called "Canti storici" (Historical Poems) followed by footnotes with historical explanations, typical of David Levi's style. The second part, apparently following his original categorization by city, is titled "Notti veneziane" (Venetian nights) and includes seventeen poems dedicated to the city of Venice. Finally, the last chapter, titled "Liriche diverse" (miscellaneous lyrics), contains eleven lyrics on various themes, from personal to patriotic.

"A Pio IX" takes primary position within the book, thus emphasizing both the hopes of the Italian liberals for a radical change in the Catholic Church's attitude toward the Risorgimento national movement and their perceptions of the importance of Pius IX's election as Pontiff. In a footnote to the poem, Levi indicates that he wrote it in June 1846 when the Pope decreed a general amnesty for political exiles. However, the general amnesty was granted on July 16, 1846, suggesting either that Levi wrote the whole poem later than he states or that he at least added the footnote at a later stage (i.e., earlier than 1848, the year of publication, but long enough after the

events to confuse the month of the Pope's election [June] with the month of the amnesty [July]). As previously discussed, the Italian Jews' positive perception of the Pope was still intact in 1848 when the volume was published; their political disappointment would have occurred later. Surprisingly, in a footnote to the 1884 edition of his masterpiece *Il Profeta*, Levi cites his own poem "A Pio IX" and adds that he does not disavow it, in spite of the changed attitudes to Pio Nono.<sup>37</sup>

"A Pio IX" is partly a lengthy praise of the newly elected Pope and partly a fervent expression of Levi's political aspirations for Italy's unification and the Jews' emancipation. The poem's content can be divided into eight unequal parts. It begins with five lines announcing the election of Pius IX as a positive event. The second part (vv. 6-31) describes the feelings of anticipation and the turmoil which characterized the historical period immediately preceding the election. Here Levi brings the Pope's liberal attitude and actions in his previous ecclesiastic appointments to the reader's attention as a reason for hope. In the third part (vv. 32-76), Levi appeals directly to the Pope, asking him to listen to Italy's lamentation, a result of its being divided into many small states and oppressed by foreign powers. The fourth part (vv. 77-106) presents Italy's lamentation. Levi sets this off with quotation marks and its words function as a sort of dramatic choir. The fifth and sixth parts (vv. 107-116 and vv. 117-154) are again a direct appeal to Pius IX, first through personal praise and then as a demand to renew the Catholic faith, thus uniting the Italians, in order to bring about the country's unity. The last two parts are more personal. In the seventh part (vv. 155-174), the poet reveals his identity as Jewish and describes the Jews' negative condition. Levi then concludes, in the last part (vv. 175-188), with one last,

<sup>36</sup> Turin: Zecchi & Bona, 1848.

<sup>37</sup> David Levi, *Il profeta o la passione di un popolo: dramma – Vol. II: L'Occidente* (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice, 1884), iv.



strong, heartfelt appeal to the Pope that he grant particular attention to resolving the Jewish question in Italy.

Although never explicitly stated, a few indicators and metaphors throughout the poem before the final sections reveal the author's Jewishness and the importance he attributes to the Jewish cause. Nevertheless, the words "Jew" or "Jewish" never appear even in these final sections. Only by knowing the context do we know that the poet is Jewish when he writes, "Me, figlio dell'antico sui popoli del mondo (...) Voce percossa di tue gesta, o Pio" (The news of your actions, o Pius (...) hit Me, son of the world's most ancient people),<sup>38</sup> or refers shortly thereafter to "Fratelli miei di fede, e di sventura" (My brothers in faith and misfortune).<sup>39</sup> The author's two-fold identity, Italian and Jewish, emerges at verses 160-161: "Ma doppia sul cor mio, Voce risuona di martir, di pianto" (But the sound of martyrdom, of cry, resounds doubled in my heart).<sup>40</sup> In my interpretation, Levi wants to point out how his suffering for Italy's condition is dual, both as Jew and as an Italian. More hints are present earlier in the poem, but they indicate a Jewish author only to a reader who is already aware of the writer's identity. For instance, at line 45 Levi quotes almost literally Exodus 13:21, (The Lord went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night)<sup>41</sup> when he writes "La colonna é di fuoco, e Dio la guida?" (The pillar is made of fire, is God leading it?). The quotation marks within the poem let the reader know that this verse is intended as a citation. Evidently, Levi uses this reference to the events of

<sup>38</sup> David Levi, "A Pio IX," in his *Patria ed affetti. Canti storici e liriche*, (Turin: Zecchi & Bona, 1848), p. 31.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 31

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 27. NRSV English translation

the Jewish people's liberation from Egypt to urge the Italian people to awaken and, with God's help and protection, to liberate themselves from foreign powers and to unify.

This reference to the vicissitudes of the Jewish people and, in particular, their escape from Egypt, needs not indicate the writer's Jewish identity. References to the history of the Jews (not only the Exodus) were actually quite popular among the Risorgimento intellectuals and were often used as a metaphor for Italy's liberation. A poet and playwright like Levi was certainly aware of one of the most famous references to the Jews among his contemporaries, Giuseppe Verdi's opera "Nabucco," first presented at Milan's *La Scala* in 1842. However, by the end of Levi's poem, the reader realizes that the author is Jewish and in retrospect this Exodus reference further verifies his identity. Levi, however, expresses himself in ways that could not be perceived as arrogantly boasting his own identity. On the contrary, he repeatedly employs language that emphasizes positive Christian or specifically Catholic elements. Indeed, readers unaware of the poet's identity would perceive this as a Christian poem, at least until the last lines, when Levi subtly reveals his Judaism.

"A Pio IX" is not only a hymn of praise addressed to Pope Pius IX, but it also functions as a sort of pact between Italian Judaism and Catholicism. This explains its Catholic references. These are best contextualized within the Italian Jews' desire, common during the Risorgimento, to demonstrate their loyalty to the future Italian nation whose vast majority was Catholic, shaping every element of Italian culture. Furthermore, the poem itself was designed to be received as a present and read by the Pope himself. Thus, the richness of references to Catholicism and Jesus Christ function also as a sign to Pio Nono that the opposition of the Italian Jewish intellectuals would apply only to the Church's temporal power and not to the Pope or the Catholic Church *per se*.

Levi gathered all the characteristics that he considered positive about Catholicism into this one poem, leaving out all the elements that he criticizes in his other writings. He knew his audience and wrote appropriately for the occasion. Despite the negative stereotypes to the contrary and the restrictive laws against them, Italian Jews were in fact quite integrated into Italian society. Therefore, it was not uncommon for Jewish intellectuals to be familiar with Catholic theological themes and to discuss them with Catholic intellectuals or even priests, with whom they at times shared sincere friendship. For instance, Niccolò Tommaseo (Šibenik 1802–Florence 1874), a prominent Catholic intellectual who played an important role in the Risorgimento, can be considered a bridge between the Catholic and the Jewish worlds in Italy.<sup>42</sup> David Levi himself had met Tommaseo during his sojourn in Venice and was a good friend of his.

Nevertheless, the interpretation of Levi's Christological references should not be limited to a socio-political reading; they should be contextualized within the general European intellectual streams of the nineteenth century and more specifically within Jewish approaches to the Christian/Catholic world and its teachings.

In Levi's time, the German-Jewish *Wissenschaft des Judentums* school had begun to produce studies of the origins of Christianity as a corollary to their historical critical analysis of Judaism.<sup>43</sup> In the Italian peninsula too, some among the most prominent Jewish intellectuals dealt with historical interpretations of the life of Jesus Christ, following the European trends.

<sup>42</sup> Bruno Di Porto, "Niccolò Tommaseo e gli ebrei: una meditata simpatia," *Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 35 (1969): 505-514.

<sup>43</sup> For an overview of the German Jews who dealt with Christianity and Jesus' life, see Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998).

In Italy, however, this phenomenon took place mostly in the second half of the nineteenth century. It is not easy to reconstruct what their main sources were; christological references by Italian Jewish intellectuals are scattered in different works and not gathered in monographs or homogenous treatises on the theme.<sup>44</sup> However, in 1903, the Italian philosopher Baldassarre Labanca suggested that the works of David Strauss and Ernst Renan were formative for these Italian writers.<sup>45</sup> This observation provides a starting point from which we can offer a more detailed analysis of Levi's references to the Catholic Church and Jesus Christ.

Levi's use of christological symbolism from a Jewish perspective in such a direct and explicit way in the 1840s is quite exceptional—making this perhaps the most interesting feature of "A Pio IX." The primary although not exclusive lenses shaping Levi's interpretation of Christianity, at least up to the year of publication of "A Pio IX," were the philosophical system of Saint-Simonism and the universalist ideas circulating in the masonic lodges he frequented.<sup>46</sup> Reconstructing other influences is a more difficult task, as Levi offers scarce clues. Perhaps wishing to justify (maybe for potential Jewish readers?) what he meant by Christ, Levi added an explanatory footnote at the end of the poem that clarified that he did not mean Christ as reshaped throughout the centuries by Christianity, but rather "Il Cristo ideale, quale fu concepito da molti dei primi padri della Chiesa, e da alcuni moderni pensatori,

<sup>44</sup> Good indications of the Italian Jews' interpretation of Jesus Christ can be found in: Cristiana Facchini, *David Castelli – Ebraismo e scienze delle religioni tra Otto e Novecento* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2005), in particular pp. 173-185.

<sup>45</sup> Baldassarre Labanca, *Gesù Cristo nella letteratura contemporanea straniera e italiana* (Turin: Fratelli Bocca, 1903), 1-60, 229-286.

<sup>46</sup> Francesca Sofia, "Gli Ebrei risorgimentali fra tradizione biblica, libera muratoria e nazione," in Gian Mario Cazzaniga, *La Massoneria*, in *Storia d'Italia – Annali* 21 (Turin: Einaudi, 2007) 248-261.

massime della scuola tedesca, ecc.” (The ideal Christ, as he was conceived by many among the first Church Fathers and by some modern thinkers, especially of the German school, etc.).<sup>47</sup> To which German thinkers was he referring? Here we can only hypothesize. It is well known that Christian German scholars in the second half of the eighteenth century offered historical interpretations of the life of Jesus Christ.<sup>48</sup> The pioneering work of Hermann Samuel Reimarus<sup>49</sup> prompted subsequent investigations by a number of German intellectuals, including Hegel<sup>50</sup> and the aforementioned David Strauss.<sup>51</sup> Thus, we can conjecture that these, among others, were the scholars referred to by Levi as “the German school.”

Through a survey of Levi’s direct citations of other authors in his later works, it is possible to identify his primary literary and philosophical sources. For example, in the introduction to the second volume of his main work, *Il Profeta*, Levi discusses Christianity and Jesus Christ at length and directly cites David Strauss. Therefore, it seems reasonable that Strauss’ *Das Leben Jesu* had a major influence on Levi’s thought, and it is possible that Levi was familiar with it already

<sup>47</sup> David Levi, “A Pio IX,” 31.

<sup>48</sup> Two useful tools for the reconstruction of the main European critical analyses of Jesus’ life between the eighteenth and nineteenth century, especially in the leading intellectual contexts of Germany and France, are: Frank Paul Bowman, *Le Christ des barricades, 1789-1848 (Jesus depuis Jesus)* (Paris: Cerf, 1987) and Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London: A. and C. Black, 1910).

<sup>49</sup> His work on the life of Jesus was actually published posthumously by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Fragments eines Ungenannten (Wolfenbütteler Fragmente, 1774-1778)*.

<sup>50</sup> Hegel’s work on Jesus was also published posthumously by Eugen Diederich, *Das Leben Jesu* (Jena, 1906).

<sup>51</sup> David Strauss, *Das Leben Jesu kritisch bearbeitet* (Tübingen, 1835-1836).

in 1846.<sup>52</sup> However, several French intellectuals were simultaneously engaging in this topic, in parallel to the German discussions. Given Levi’s years living and studying in France and his familiarity with French philosophers, we cannot rule out their influence on his views on Jesus.<sup>53</sup> The French philosopher Henri de Saint-Simon<sup>54</sup> deeply influenced Levi’s discussions of Christianity, and his teachers in Paris included Quinet and Michelet, who themselves wrote about Christianity and Jesus Christ. In short, both the German and the French “schools” addressing the theme of Jesus Christ serve as potential background for Levi’s presentation of Christianity.

The first Christian element of the poem is apparent on its very first page; between the title and the text, Levi inserted two quotations in Latin from the New Testament. These verses are: I Corinthians 6:15, “Nescitis quoniam corpora vestra membra sunt Christi?” (Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?); and Colossians 3:11, “Et non est Gentilis et Iudeus, Barbarus et Scythia, servus et liber; sed omnia et in omnibus Christus” (There is no longer Greek and Jew, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all).<sup>55</sup> If the quotation of a verse from the Hebrew Bible, as we have already seen, is consistent with Jewish textual tradition, a citation by a

<sup>52</sup> The main problem is whether at such an early stage Levi knew German sufficiently to be able to read a philosophical text. However, a French translation of Strauss’s *Das Leben Jesu* by Emile Littré appeared in 1839, and Levi could have consulted this instead.

<sup>53</sup> Ernst Renan’s influential writings on Jesus and Christianity appeared much later than Levi’s “A Pio IX.” Renan’s great influence on Levi’s thought can be seen in later writings. A likely influence is Joseph Salvador, *Jesus-Christ et sa doctrine* (Paris, 1838).

<sup>54</sup> Henri de Saint-Simon, *Nouveau christianisme* (Paris, 1825).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 25. NRSV English translation. The original Latin version also includes “circumcision et praeputium” (circumcised and uncircumcised) but Levi skipped this in his quotation, perhaps deliberately. In any case, he neither indicated this omission, nor explained it.

Jew from the New Testament is unusual and, therefore must be correctly interpreted. The superficial meaning of the selected verses is evident: Levi wants to emphasize the equality of all peoples as limbs of Christ. Italian Jews thus also deserve their place within the larger Italian community.

A deeper analysis, examining these verses through his Saint-Simonian philosophy, allows the extrapolation of additional meaning from the verses chosen by Levi. One of Saint-Simonism's primary features was that it differentiated itself from other forms of socialism by not dismissing religion *per se* and not suggesting an entirely materialistic and secular view of the world. Instead, it maintained that the economic and moral situations were inseparable and that the latter could not be isolated from the religious sphere. Convinced of society's inability to completely rid itself of religion, Saint-Simon proposed a religious synthesis that would become the universal religion of humanity. He called this "New Christianity."<sup>56</sup> Levi explained without hesitation that "New Christianity" did not retain anything of Christianity and, in fact, was renamed by Saint-Simonian adherents as a generic new universal religion. In light of his adherence to Saint-Simonism, Levi's use of the verse "sed Omnia et in omnibus Christus" can also be interpreted as an expression of this new universal religion.

Although Saint-Simonism is not the main theme of Levi's poem, we have to refer to his "faith" in this doctrine to explain not only the preamble to the poem, but also some other key verses within the poem itself:<sup>57</sup>

Dall'ombre incerte ove giacea compresso

<sup>56</sup> David Levi, "Prima fase del socialismo in Italia: il Sansimonismo," in *Nuova Antologia* 69,4,1 (1897): 5-31, where he quotes entire portions of Henri de Saint-Simon, *Oeuvres de Saint-Simon. Lettres aux Princes, au Pape et Le Nouveau Christianisme* (Paris, 1841), 182.

<sup>57</sup> David Levi, "A Pio IX," 30.

Splendido, immenso, ed Uno  
L'eterno Ver rifolgori alle genti  
Che tanto spazio, e lunga ira dispaia:  
Dai vertici dell'Ande all'Imalaia  
In Lui tutte s'abbracciano le menti,  
Dall'uno all'altro polo  
Le membra siam, lo spirit d'un solo.  
Siam le membra del Cristo, che non spento  
Sul Golgota spiró, ma eterno, e forte,  
Vive per ogni secolo, e si spande:  
Siam lo spirit del Cristo, che ritorte  
D'ogni gente patí, d'ogni tormento  
Rifulse ognor piú splendido, e piú grande...

(From the uncertain shadows where it lay compressed, splendid, immense and One, may the eternal Truth re-enlighten the peoples, so that so much space, and a long-lasting rage would disappear: from the Andes' peaks to the Himalaya may all minds hug one another in Him. From one pole to the other we are the limbs, the spirit of only one. We are the limbs of Christ, who died on the Golgotha but is not lifeless, but eternal, and strong lives through all the centuries, and expands himself: we are the spirit of Christ, who suffered chains of all peoples, who shone brighter and greater out of every torment...)

In these few lines a plethora of meanings can be found, but they fundamentally explain in more detail the significance of the few verses of the New Testament quoted before the poem. Here again are both themes: the equality of all peoples as limbs of Christ and a universal Saint-Simonian interpretation of it. The universality is expressed in geographic terms ("from the Andes' peaks" / "from one pole to the other") but also as humanity ("may all minds hug one another in Him").

The poem's real focus, however, is Pope Pius IX. The title and the first verses immediately clarify to whom the poem is dedicated and why: to celebrate his election as Pontiff. Pio Nono is introduced *in medias res*, emphasized by "Te" (You)<sup>58</sup> as a first word in the foreground, in clearly antithetical contraposition with "Me" (Me),<sup>59</sup> which opens the poem's last autobiographical section (seventh section). Levi emphasizes this antithesis with the positive epithets he attributes to the Pope's figure throughout the poem, such as "tu spirito" and "tu vita" (You, oh spirit; you, oh life),<sup>60</sup> in contrast with the dark adjectives by which he characterizes himself: "oscuro", "solo" and "nel dubbio chiuso e il duolo" (obscure, alone, closed in my doubts and pain).<sup>61</sup> The description of the poet's own condition is actually a synecdoche for the situation of the Italian Jews, since we know that Levi's personal condition, though limited by law, was not comparable to that of poorer Jews.

Levi's works characteristically describe positive characters with adjectives or terms recalling the rhetoric of Romanticism, the Enlightenment or of Risorgimento (the last used in the original meaning of the term, that is, "rebirth" or "re-awakening").<sup>62</sup> For instance, these lend Levi's use of the word "spirit" here a complex and special meaning. In general, Levi refers to "spirit" as an entire set of ideas, values, and sense of identity that can give certain people the strength for self-determination and liberation. It is connected to the Hegelian concepts of *Volkgeist* and *Geist*, where *Volkgeist* refers to all the information and features characterizing a people's identity throughout history (represented according to Levi by the "moral values" and "feelings of national identity" of the Jews or the

Italians, for instance) and *Geist* applies the same moral strength and values to the individual's identity. It is in this second sense, referring to the individual, that Levi's applies the word "spirito" to the person of Pius IX. However, two other times in the poem, in vv. 139 and 143, he employs "spirit" in the sense of *Volkgeist*: "Le membra s'iam, lo spirito d'un solo" and "S'iam lo spirito del Cristo" (we are the limbs, the spirit of only one; we are the spirit of Christ).<sup>63</sup> The Italian *people* share one spirit, which is the spirit of the ideal Christ.

Words suggesting Enlightenment themes are another typical feature of Levi's writings. In particular, a contrast Levi often utilizes is the antinomy of light and darkness. The light of knowledge and wisdom symbolizes the mind's illumination and, therefore, its liberation from medieval obscure stereotypes. The cause and consequence of this intellectual illumination is the equalization of all humanity, since everybody is equal in the light of reason. In general, light characterizes wisdom, knowledge, values, and, through them, freedom. Darkness, on the contrary, represents opposite qualities like stupidity, ignorance, lack of values, and, in general, oppression. Departing from the common Risorgimento rhetoric, Levi in his poem associates light with Pio Nono and even with Catholicism as a whole. With this Pope's election, Levi calls and hopes for a total renewal of Catholicism. He aspires for Pius IX to become the harbinger of this renewal, the hero of an illuminated Catholicism:<sup>64</sup>

La parola cattolica, che nero  
Aere non gravi soffocante, e opprime,  
Ma, sole del pensiero,  
Tutto irraggia, comprende, a sé sublime.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>62</sup> This appears profusely in his most famous drama *Il Profeta*.

<sup>63</sup> David Levi, "A Pio IX," 30

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

(May the Catholic word not burden and oppress as stifling black air, but may it be as a sun for the intellect, which radiates and comprehends everything, elevating it to itself.)

Levi's great mission for his hero (the Pope) is the Risorgimento's goal: the unification of Italy and the Italian people as one nation-state. Because of the Pope's past political actions, but also in response to his first concrete gesture as Pope in granting political amnesty, he considers Pius IX to be particularly liberal. His election gave David Levi (and many other Italian liberals) strong reason to hope that he would relinquish his temporal power (at least partially), thus favoring the process of Italy's unification. Therefore, parallel to the Romantic and Enlightenment terminology, Risorgimento rhetoric pervades this work of Levi. As we have seen, the first two sections of the poem focus on describing the strong feelings of anticipation, anxiety and doubt permeating Italy during the time immediately preceding the Pope's election, the growing enthusiasm of the people which would lead to the uprisings of 1848, and the "heroic" activity of Mastai Ferretti as a bishop before becoming Pope. Then that anticipation breaks into enthusiasm at the Pope's election and becomes an appeal to his liberal attitude. The poem addresses a sort of prayer to the Pope that he senses the people's enthusiasm in this special time and takes advantage of it to finally lead the process of Italy's unification. The repetition of the word "Odi"<sup>65</sup> (Listen), placed at the beginning of several verses and repeated six times in total, sets the poem's pace and functions as an invocation to the Pope to listen to Italy's cry. The following part (section four) of the poem reports that cry itself. Certainly, the repetition of the verb "Odi" would quickly remind a Jewish reader of the important prayer *shema yisrael* (Listen, o Israel!), which is a constant reminder for a Jew of the unity of God and of the Jewish people. Here,

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-28.

then, the call to listen becomes another plea for the unity of Italy and the Italians.

Italy is therefore, together with Pio Nono, at the center of Levi's lyric. This is to such a degree that we can even single out a sort of identification of Italy with the Pope, in verse 68, right before Levi's desperate appeal for the Pope's help. He describes Italy as "desolata", "fiera" and "pia" (desolate, proud and pious),<sup>66</sup> where "pia" is an obvious reference to the Pope's Italian name Pio. This creates the effect of identifying the two as one; Italy can be united and pious only under Pius' lead.

Italy's cry follows the appeal to the Pope and is printed in quotation marks in the original publication as if citing the actual words of the country's lamentation.<sup>67</sup> This section is central to the poem in terms of its location and its unusual length (circa 30 verses). The key lines follow this cry and are a direct petition to Pius IX to answer Italy's call and explicitly address what is demanded of him:<sup>68</sup>

E t'invia il ciel. Tu l'ansia e'l duolo,  
 Che lei da secol tanto agita, e preme  
 Consolasti in un giorno, e a maggior volo  
 L'ali sollevi a la prostrate speme:  
 L'opra tu compi, o Pio;  
 L'itale genti stringi in un legame  
 Che santo diritto, e libert a rinserra,  
 Tu ministro al reame,  
 Tu spirito, tu vita, ed essi brando; ...

(And Heaven sent you. You consoled in one day the anxiety and the pain that have agitated and oppressed it

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-29.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

[Italy] and lift the wings of a worn out hope to a higher flight: You make this possible, o Pius; You tie the Italian peoples with a bond that is kept together by a sacred right and liberty, you minister of the kingdom, you spirit, you life, while they [the Italians] are the sword; ...)

## Conclusion

David Levi's poem "A Pio IX" is thus important and deserves attention for many reasons. In the first place, it offers further evidence of the positive, and even enthusiastic, attitude Italian Jews, or at least the liberal intellectuals among them, had for the election of Pope Pius IX prior to 1848. Most historians report this positive reaction as a fact, but this poem substantiates that claim with literary support. Secondly, the poem contains a number of rather interesting themes, from Enlightenment to Romanticism, from Saint-Simonism to Jewish relations with Catholicism, that contribute to the understanding of the worldview of its author, David Levi. The poem's most striking feature is perhaps the author's usage of Catholic and christological symbolism for Jewish purposes. This allows us to add a piece to the complex puzzle of nineteenth-century historical interpretations of Jesus Christ, both from a wider European perspective and from a specifically Jewish one. Further research is needed, in particular through a deeper analysis of Levi's oeuvre, in order to sketch a more detailed picture of his view of Christianity and Jesus Christ and to place it more precisely within his European context, Jewish and non-Jewish. What has been presented here is just the tip of the iceberg.