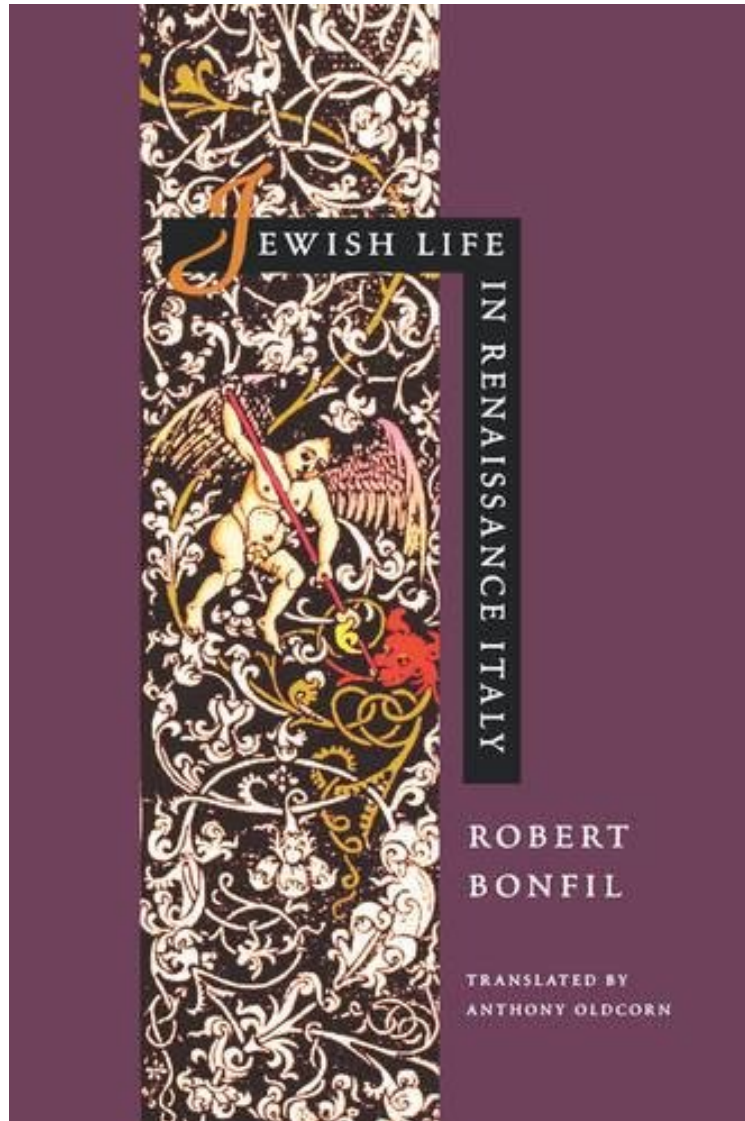


## Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy

*Robert Bonfil*

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#1824292 in Books 1994-03-04Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 9.02 x .88 x 5.98l, 1.55 #File Name: 0520073509336 pages | File size: 35.Mb

**Robert Bonfil : Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy:

12 of 12 people found the following review helpful. intriguing but ultimately unfulfillingBy Daniel LossRobert Bonfil's Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy (originally published in Italian as Gli Ebrei in Italia nell'epoca del Rinascimento and translated into English by Anthony Oldcorn) seeks to establish a new approach to Italian Jewish history and, indeed, Jewish history in general. His account of the existing historiography on the subject describes two

contrasting themes: one that describes the gradual, almost inevitable, assimilation of Jewish culture to mainstream Christian culture (and thus indicative of a willingness on the part of Christians to assimilate Jews to their dominant culture) and one that focuses on the persecution of Jews by Christians. Bonfil sums up his approach in the afterward as "seeking the definition of an identity in the context of a nascent awareness of the Jewish self as organically interrelated with the Christian Other, without for all that becoming confused with the Other and still less annihilated by it." In other words, Bonfil sees the assertion of Jewish identity 1) as necessarily relational 2) involving the same forms, themes, etc. as Christian culture. In some instances, it is difficult to reconcile these two aspects as self-assertion, as it is all too easy to view adoption of what Bonfil insists are "neutral" components of the broader Renaissance culture as assimilation to Christian norms rather than affirming Jewish identity. Bonfil succeeds in demonstrating this process in certain cases and in outlining a new methodology for others to pursue. Bonfil is most convincing when discussing the how the cultural production of rabbis during the Italian Renaissance imported forms from the broader context of the Renaissance yet still forged a uniquely Jewish identity. Unfortunately, he fails to demonstrate how this model of self-assertion held in other contexts of Jewish culture. Taken as a whole, Bonfil's work is intriguing but ultimately unconvincing. His claim that assertion of Jewish identity took place in relation to Christians and importing aspects of Renaissance culture is a plausible one. Unfortunately, he only succeeds in demonstrating it in limited cases. One cannot help but ask, "What about the Jews who weren't rabbis? What about the average Jew?" In other words, Bonfil's hypothesis needs further exploration from below rather than from above. 0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By AIresearcher excellent

With this heady exploration of time and space, rumors and silence, colors, tastes, and ideas, Robert Bonfil recreates the richness of Jewish life in Renaissance Italy. He also forces us to rethink conventional interpretations of the period, which feature terms like "assimilation" and "acculturation." Questioning the Italians' presumed capacity for tolerance and civility, he points out that Jews were frequently uprooted and persecuted, and where stable communities did grow up, it was because the hostility of the Christian population had somehow been overcome. After the ghetto was imposed in Venice, Rome, and other Italian cities, Jewish settlement became more concentrated. Bonfil claims that the ghetto experience did more to intensify Jewish self-perception in early modern Europe than the supposed acculturation of the Renaissance. He shows how, paradoxically, ghetto living opened and transformed Jewish culture, hastening secularization and modernization. Bonfil's detailed picture reveals in the Italian Jews a sensitivity and self-awareness that took into account every aspect of the larger society. His inside view of a culture flourishing under stress enables us to understand how identity is perceived through constant interplay with the Other.

"Draws on evidence from economics, population movements, education, literature, philosophy, and the patterns of daily life. [Bonfil's] erudition is apparent on every page. . . . Full of rich details about the life of Italian Jewry."--  
"Times Literary Supplement Language Notes Text: English (translation) Original Language: Italian From the Inside Flap" The first fully developed and sophisticated statement of a position that goes against the main current of Jewish historiography for the past century. . . . The book will be of interest to scholars (beyond the specific field of Italian Jewish history) and to thoughtful general readers." Marc Saperstein, Washington University