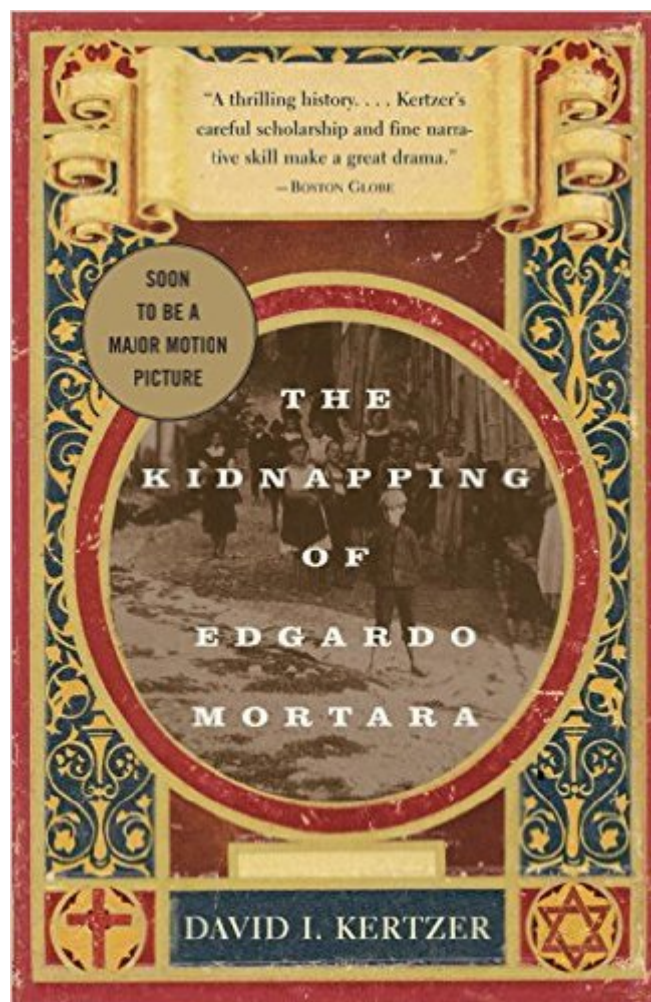


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# The Kidnapping Of Edgardo Mortara



## Synopsis

Soon to be a major motion picture from Steven Spielberg. A National Book Award Finalist  
The extraordinary story of how the vatican's imprisonment of a six-year-old Jewish boy in 1858 helped to bring about the collapse of the popes' worldly power in Italy. Bologna: nightfall, June 1858. A knock sounds at the door of the Jewish merchant Momolo Mortara. Two officers of the Inquisition bust inside and seize Mortara's six-year-old son, Edgardo. As the boy is wrenched from his father's arms, his mother collapses. The reason for his abduction: the boy had been secretly "baptized" by a family servant. According to papal law, the child is therefore a Catholic who can be taken from his family and delivered to a special monastery where his conversion will be completed. With this terrifying scene, prize-winning historian David I. Kertzer begins the true story of how one boy's kidnapping became a pivotal event in the collapse of the Vatican as a secular power. The book evokes the anguish of a modest merchant's family, the rhythms of daily life in a Jewish ghetto, and also explores, through the revolutionary campaigns of Mazzini and Garibaldi and such personages as Napoleon III, the emergence of Italy as a modern national state. Moving and informative, the Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara reads as both a historical thriller and an authoritative analysis of how a single human tragedy changed the course of history.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

David I. Kertzer has written a wonderful account of a pivotal event in Italian, Jewish and Catholic history. The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara tells the story of the 1858 kidnapping of a six year old Jewish boy secretly baptized while a baby by a Catholic servant in the home. From this horrifying

personal incident for this Jewish family the panorama of the story grows very large indeed, taking into account the Pope, the governments of Europe, and the forces for the unification of Italy. The author does a superb job of making all of this understandable to the reader. He also never allows the epic scope of the book to overwhelm the family as the centre of all of this controversy. The Mortaras hold a special place in this tragedy as they deserve and the lives lived by Jewish families, such as theirs, in Italy is vividly presented. It is a shocking book, yet very illuminating and well written. Highly recommended.

I can't help but think that millions who do not know that they are interested in the history of the Italian Risorgimento would suddenly find themselves incapable of putting this book down. David Kertzer kept my attention while helping to answer my questions regarding how a country that is predominately Roman Catholic can name streets, buildings, and piazzas after the heroes of the Risorgimento who took by force most of the lands ruled by the Pope while Pope Pius IX called upon all the faithful to oppose them. I am now closer to seeing how statues and monuments honoring Garibaldi, Mazzini, Cavour, and King Victor Emmanuel can share the beautiful Italian landscape with cathedrals and the Vatican. Historical events are impossible to understand without learning of the human issues of the times in which they transpired. Such a study should not be a dry recounting of the facts when it can be, as Kertzer demonstrates, a living, breathing, gut-wrenching encounter with those who created that compelling history. I know it's almost cliché to say that this reads like a good novel, but it's true. The trial of Momolo Mortara rivals any of the stories by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and it is all the more riveting in the context of the amazing events that led to it. Sherlock Holmes could not have used his powers of deduction more skillfully than Momolo's attorney used his unbiased mind to separate facts from prejudiced and selective interpretations. I give this book my highest recommendation. I hope that THE KIDNAPPING OF EDGARDO MORTARA has been or will be translated into Italian. Perhaps a greater awareness of the past can positively influence current challenges in Italy involving the assimilation of other cultures and religious beliefs - brought on by mass immigrations in recent years.

This is non-fiction at its best! David Kertzer deserves our applause for such professional and academic research. Using his background in anthropology and history, the author revives the all-forgotten story of the abduction by Catholic Church authorities of a 6 years old Jewish boy, in 1858, under the pretense that the child had been secretly baptized. Church authorities acted with utter contempt for Edgardo's parents, trusted on the belief that the boy would receive eternal

damnation where he to remain a Jew. He was adopted by then Pope PiousIX who nurtured for the boy the affection of a father. This rather insignificant event (not unusual at that time in the Papal States) is given a pivoted historial role in the soon to come unification of the Italian states, flaming the forces behind the Risorgimento. The fact received great publicity at the time mainly due to the influence of the Rothschilds and Mr. Moses Montefiore. It's one more tale of prejudice, of abuse of power, reaching the unconceivable.

Kertzer treats us to a very readable and lively story that includes passages rising even to the level of situation comedy and detective thriller. As an experienced author of anthropological history, the author knows his audience and craft well, and includes fascinating details of life in Italy during the 19th century. The controversy of the Mortara child was created when Pope Pius IX steadfastly refused to return a boy that had been taken by local police from his family at the direction of the church. While the Pope held fast to ecclesiastical doctrine, diplomatic support for the Papal States collapsed worldwide and the Italian lands governed directly by the Vatican were soon swept into the unified nation of Italy. An important theme throughout the work is the role of the newspapers in their coverage of the episode. Numerous, conflicting accounts of events appeared worldwide and precipitated the spread of the controversy into lands far removed from Italy. The temptation to exploit the controversy continued well after the unification of Italy and the death of Pius IX. In a closing chapter we learn of an erroneous report that the child's mother had, upon her deathbed, converted from Judaism to Christianity. To see someone's life exploited for religious, monetary, or political gain should certainly raise readers' ire today even more than it did then. The report of Marianna Mortara's conversion was quickly corrected in the newspapers by a person who understood what it was to play the pawn, and about whom we still know almost nothing: Father Pio Mortara.

But it is even scarier because it's true. The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortora tells the story of the taking of a Jewish child who had (maybe) been baptized by a Jewish family's Catholic servant. With intrigue that includes Church officials from the inquisition to the Pope, a famous French Emperor, and a famous Jewish philanthropist, the history reads like a work of fiction. Would that it were! This book is all the more horrifying for its truth. Think that this horrifying story took place in the 1400's? Wrong. Only 150 years ago, Edgardo Mortora was stolen from his parents, and the rest of the story... Can be found in this fantastic book... For history lovers and fiction lovers... An absolute must!

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