

ABSTRACT

DARIO TEDESCHI: Commission created by the Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministers with the aim of tracing back the events occurred to the library of the Jewish Community in Rome.

RESEARCH OF THE ROMAN JEWISH COMMUNITY'S LIBRARY LOOTED IN 1943

The library, whose history and final collocation we are trying to reconstruct after it was looted from the Community, was made up of the works collected from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth century (the Jewish Community of Rome has been in existence for more than two centuries) in five synagogues and thirty confraternities located in the ghetto.

It included manuscripts, incunabula, "soncinati" and works of the sixteenth century printed by Bomberg, Bragadin and Giustiniani. It also includes works printed at the beginning of the sixteenth century in Constantinople and others from of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries from Venice and Livorno.

The books were for the greater part written in Hebrew; a few were in Italian or other languages.

Only a small part of the collection was fortunately saved from the looting since it was kept in another place. These include biblical parchment manuscripts kept in the strongbox of the Community, together with some printed volumes among which there are a number of incunabula located in the cabinet of the Rabbinic Office.

The Italian Commission representatives take part in this Symposium for two reasons. First of all, to inform the experts in this area about the work the Italian Commission carried out and what it intends to fulfil. Furthermore, to encourage the sharing of information and call for an international cooperation which is imperative to the success of this research.

We think that the library cannot have disappeared without leaving any trace. In this regard, a document found by the Commission at the Berlin Bundesarchiv deserves a special attention. It is a report, addressed to the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg –Sonderkommando Italien and sent to Berlin on June 21st, 1944. This document reports about certain activities by the ERR in Italy, such as: "Monthly report December 1943 – thanks to a special operation in Rome, what remained of the library of the Synagogue has been loaded on a wagon and sent to the Institute in charge of the research on the Jewish issue of Frankfurt Main city". Nevertheless, this report concerns only a part of another library, the one belonging to the Italian Rabbinic College.

At the moment, two hypothesis are being taken into consideration and they are likely to be equally valid. The first hypothesis is that the books found in the Offenbach Collecting Point have been dispersed among different libraries all over the world, without checking their origin. The second possibility is that all the material arrived in the former Soviet Union, but we still do not know anything about its track. After some meetings with the Russian Federal Republic senior executives we cannot exclude the latter hypothesis.

In order to find the library, the Commission is studying the historical and chronicle material concerning raids in the occupied Europe; has done and will continue to do several reviews of archives; is consulting library catalogues which uncsciously could contain material coming from the mentioned library, because the materiel was distributed. Research has been carried out at the *Bundesarchiv* of Berlin, the *Politisches Archiv* of Germany's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Archives and Records Administration in the United States. Other research has been done in the United States, mainly at the Library of the Congress, and in other libraries as well. Research in libraries of cultural institutions of other countries is still outstanding or planned, and, among these in Israel. Experts and officials dealing with facts related to the Nazis occupation in Europe have also been interviewed; other interviews have been scheduled.

Among the references for the identification of the lost material, first of all there is a catalogue drawn up by Isaia Sonne in 1934. This one, however, contains just a few among the most considerable titles. To this catalogue we add a manuscript inventory from 1895 and supplied with two appendices of the important collection coming from the "*Talmud Torà*" *Confraternity*, incorporated into the library that we are now searching. Another tool is the reproduction of stamps and labels with which books of the library had been marked.