



**Governo italiano**

*Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri*

*Commission for recovery of the bibliographic patrimony of the  
Jewish Community of Rome stolen in 1943*

***REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION FOR  
RECOVERY OF THE BIBLIOGRAPHIC PATRIMONY OF THE JEWISH  
COMMUNITY OF ROME STOLEN IN 1943***



## INTRODUCCION

The Commission for the recovery of the bibliographic patrimony of the Jewish Community of Rome, stolen by the Nazis in 1943 was set up under the Presidency of the Council of Ministers with a Decree of 26 November 2002.

The recovery of that irreplaceable patrimony was deeply desired by the Jewish community, which had raised the issue several times. The problem was reiterated by a previous Commission, established by the Italian government in 1998, mandated to provide information about the plundering of property of Jewish citizens during the Nazi persecution (the Anselmi Commission). In its General Report presented after its work was completed, the Commission held that, given the special nature of the goods stolen, the plundering of the Libraries of the Jewish Community of Rome and the Italian Rabbinical College deserved special mention. It underlined that this was especially true of the library of the Community of Rome, containing manuscripts, Soncino volumes and works printed by Bomberg, Bragadin, Giustiniani, and others, at the beginning of the sixteenth century in Constantinople, together with texts from eighteenth and seventeenth-century Venice and Livorno.

After the presentation of that report, and based on its concluding recommendations, the Union of Italian Jewish Communities (UCEI) presented a number of requests to the President of the Council of Ministers. These included as request for a renewed commitment by the State for the systematic search of the Library of the Jewish Community in Rome. In doing so, UCEI underlined that – aside from its mere monetary value – the material had an inestimable cultural value of great importance to the general cultural heritage of Italy.

The appeal was promptly accepted, partly considering the fact that the discovery and recovery of the Library of the Jewish Community would be an element of high cultural interest for the Italian State. The Commission, which is now presenting its final report, was then set up under the auspices of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers.

The Commission was charged with “promoting extensive research to reconstruct the events surrounding the disappearance of the bibliographic heritage of the Jewish Community of Rome the raids perpetrated during the last months of 1943”, suggesting “restitution, if even part of the heritage was recovered.” The Commission, in accepting, was well aware of the serious difficulties

of the search, mainly due to the fact that all traces of the library were lost after it was loaded, for unknown destinations, on railway cars of which only the wagon numbers and the fact that they belonged to the German railways were known. Indeed, in all the vast bibliography on the plunder committed by the Nazis, there was not even any mention of the library in Rome.<sup>1</sup>

The Commission was made up of historians and archivists as well as high-ranking government officials, representing the President of the Council of Ministers and other ministries (Foreign Affairs, Culture, and Justice).<sup>2</sup> Since this was a group project, it is not possible here to describe all the work done by the Commission. It must, however, be said that all Commissioners contributed generously and selflessly, allowing the Commission to continue the difficult task of research without interruption or internal conflict. The research was extremely widespread, as discussed in the following chapters.

Having completed its mandate, the Commission thanks the Under-Secretaries to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers who succeeded one another in the changes in government. All of them gave constant support and encouragement, essential to carrying out the Commission's duties: Dr. Gianni Letta, who created the Commission and, subsequently, Hon. Enrico Letta. It also thanks Hon. Giuliano Amato for his help. Special thanks go to Hon. Mr. Gianfranco Fini, who, during his tenure as Minister of Foreign Affairs, spoke personally to the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs; Ambassador Giampiero Massolo, Secretary General of the Foreign Ministry, for his valuable suggestions and for obtaining cooperation in research in the archives of the Russian Ministry, the ambassadors in Moscow, Gianfranco Facco Bonetti and successively Vittorio Surdo, who provided maximum assistance to the Commission; and Minister Mario Bondioli Osio, Director of the Interministerial Commission for the Recovery of Works of Art, for his precious suggestions.

The Commission is also grateful to Prof. Massimo Giuliani, Professor of Jewish studies at the University of Trento, who, during his visit in the United States, without any remuneration or reimbursement of expenses, did initial research at the National Archives in Washington, DC (at the

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<sup>1</sup> Towards the end of 2005, Patricia K. Grimsted mentioned the library in *Roads to Ratibor: Library and Archival Plunder by the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg*, in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 19, n.3 Winter 2005, pp 390-458. The book mentions the ERR document found by the Commission.

<sup>2</sup> The Commission is composed of: Dario Tedeschi (Union of Italian Jewish Communities) Chairman, Anna Nardini (Presidency of the Council of Ministers), Bruna Colarossi (Presidency of the Council of Ministers), Rosa Vinciguerra (Ministry for Cultural Assets and Activities), Marcella Conti (Ministry of Justice), Michele Sarfatti (Center for Contemporary Jewish Documentation), Mario Toscano (University of Rome La Sapienza), Filomena Del Regno (University of Rome, La Sapienza), Lutz Klinkhammer (Germanic Historical Institute of Rome), Sandro Di Castro (Union of Italian Jewish Communities) and, the following succeeded each other in representing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Piergiorgio Cherubini, Fabrizio Piaggese, Maurizio Lo Re, Alessandro Pignatti, Sergio Busetto and Daniele Verga.

College Park, MD, offices). He then gave the Commission a report containing information and investigative material of particular importance for subsequent research; and Dr. Tonia Pankopf who cooperated with the Commission from New York. In addition, the Commission thanks all those scholars or institutions, whose numbers make it impossible to mention individually, for their interest in the Commission's work and cooperation. Finally, the special gratitude of the entire Commission goes to the employees of the Office of Studies and Institutional Relations of the Presidency of the Council of Minister, who gave continued support, intelligent and diligent secretarial support.

Looking at the Commission's work, it should be briefly recalled that the Nazis, in addition to pursuing the extermination of the Jews, systematically looted, both in Germany and in occupied Europe, libraries and archives belonging to Jews or to private institutions, as well as to those whom the Nazis considered enemies of the regime. This plundering was part of a wider political, ideological and cultural agenda. Some of the less significant books and documents plundered were destroyed or sent for pulping. Others, those most important due to their content or rarity, were destined and intended to be stored as documents of a "lost civilization".

After the war, part of the archives and libraries looted were found at various sites by Allied troops and returned to the institutions or individuals to which they belonged. Among them were books belonging to the Library of Italian Rabbinical College, which until recently was considered to constitute the entire Library. However, in 2005, during a conference held in Hannover, the Commission delegation that participated was presented with a Pentateuch, printed in Amsterdam in 1680 and bearing the bookplate of the Italian Rabbinical College, presumably belonging to the collection of books stolen.<sup>3</sup> The Commission then found out through one interview, that a group of precious incunabula belonging to the library was also not returned. For that reason, it was decided that the search for the Library of the Community of Rome would also include the undiscovered part of the Italian Rabbinical College Library, since the fate of both collections was the same.

The magnitude of research was mentioned above and will be discussed at length in the report. Here we need only mention that this research was performed not only through the study of publications concerning the looting of books and other material by the Nazis, but also through correspondence with experts in the field and especially with the visits to archives around the world, where documentation regarding the looting might have been preserved. Archives in Germany, the

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<sup>3</sup> On this point see, Hoogewoud F.J., *Eine späte Rückgabe*, in *Judischer Buchbesitz als Raubgut – Zweites Hannoversches Symposium*, Frankfurt am Main, 2006.

U.S., the Russian Federal Republic and elsewhere were examined. A digital list (albeit only partial) of the books that disappeared was also prepared, for easier searching in library catalogues.

Despite a widespread search, which kept Commissioners fully engaged for a very long time, the Library of the Jewish community and the still missing part of the Italian Rabbinical College were not found. Limitations, which in several respects were necessarily inherent to the Commission's activities do not allow any continuation of the already vast and difficult research. Some far from negligible results have, however, been achieved.

First, as discussed during this final report, certain documents and information acquired throw a few gleams of light on the looting, paving the way for possible further research. But above all, letters and personal contacts and the participation in international meetings and publication of reports, including the present, has aroused the interest of scholars on a subject until now rarely treated.

An interesting document was found at the Bundesarchiv in Berlin. It is a monthly report signed by Hans Maier, for the group of *Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg* (ERR) operating in Italy, giving notice to headquarters that the last load of books from the Synagogue of Rome left for Frankfurt on December 23, 1943. This is confirmation that, of the various agencies of the Nazi Party responsible for looting and often in competition with each other, the plunder of Rome was carried out by the ERR. The document thus provides an important indication, useful for research purposes.

At the Jewish National & University Library in Jerusalem, a catalogue of the books of Italian Rabbinical College, presumably dating from the '30s, was found, together with an application form for reference books. The Commission obtained the microfilm copy of this catalogue, together with a copy of the form, but could not ascertain how it arrived there. Interestingly, as discussed below, in a list of material recovered after the war OAD (Offenbach Archival Depot), we read "Italian Rabbinical College. Rome. Italian manuscript. (Book Index) 2. The Commission wondered exactly what that catalogue and card were.

As for the books, apart from the discovery of the Pentateuch belonging to the Italian Rabbinical College mentioned above, two manuscripts were found in the archives of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, clearly belonging to the Rome Jewish Community as they bear the stamp of the Community. The Commission managed to procure the microfilm, but it was not possible to determine with certainty whether those manuscripts were part of the looted books.

Finally, a work by Estelle Gilson,<sup>4</sup> shows that a manuscript as well as a book printed in the sixteenth century, which, though they belonged to the Library of the Jewish Community of Rome, are now apparently housed at the library of the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. The Library however stated to the Commission that it does not know of the existence of these works.

Finally, research done in Russia through the Russian State Library for Foreign Literature directed by Dr. Ekaterina Genieva deserves special mention. Back in 2003 during an official meeting between Minister Plenipotentiary. Mario Bondioli Osio and Russian Deputy Minister of Culture Khoroshilova, the "far from inconceivable" possibility was considered that the library might be located in Russia. Other evidence, only indirect however, was found by the Commission (discussed below), that somehow credits this hypothesis. The intervention of UniCredit Private Banking, which generously sponsored the initiative, made it possible to conduct surveys of libraries and archives in Moscow and St. Petersburg. The results were negative, but cannot however be considered complete as access was denied for research conducted in some sites in those cities. There are probably other sites that can be explored in the vast Russian territory, but since the most important ones were visited, uncertainty about the outcome has increased, making it difficult to find additional funding.

In conclusion, in the face of the almost total absence of documents relating to the sacking of the libraries of the Jewish Community of Rome and the Italian Rabbinical College, the Commission made an arduous and lengthy effort, but without cost to the State, if we exclude a few, strictly necessary missions abroad, in an attempt to reconstruct the path taken by the collections after they were removed.

Our hope is that the data obtained may in the future be integrated with other data, found by others, perhaps through the exploration of the Russian archives today inaccessible, and that this might lead to the discovery of an invaluable cultural heritage. It is still the Commission's conviction that it cannot have utterly vanished.

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<sup>4</sup> - GILSON E., *The Fate of the Roman Jewish Libraries*, in De Benedetti G., *October, 16, 1943*, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001.

# THE THEFT OF JEWISH LIBRARIES FROM ROME DURING THE GERMAN OCCUPATION OF ITALY 1943-1945

## *INTRODUCTION*

In preparing to reconstruct the story of the library of the Jewish Community of Rome, stolen in 1943 during the Nazi occupation, the Commission had to consider the following issues and outline the resulting working hypothesis:

- Scarcity and fragmentation of contemporary documentation available;
- Generality of contemporary oral sources;
- Difficulty in precisely and accurately defining the extent and content of library materials at the time of the removal, due to the availability of only partial cataloguing, but accompanied however, by the reproduction of stamps and bookplates;
- Lack of documentation concerning the transportation of bibliographic materials removed and locations of destination, with the consequent need to consider every possible hypothesis;
- Limited amount of documentation produced afterwards;<sup>5</sup>
- The fact that large number of Nazi institutions operating in Italy that were hypothetically involved in plundering the Jewish cultural heritage and/or belonging to Jews, namely: a) Amt Rosenberg and its operational branch ERR, to be discussed below; b) SS chief Himmler's department and its various branches, primarily the RSHA and its offices in Italy; c) others. We should mention here that the Commission, in light of the evidence available at the initial stage, later corroborated by the results obtained during the investigation, decided to focus its research on the role of the ERR. This will be explained in more detail below;
- The need to distinguish between Nazi organizations involved in planning looting operations and implementation procedures;
- The need to reconstruct a historical framework of the German occupation in Italy and general methodology of the looting for a proper contextualization of the events in Rome;

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<sup>5</sup> A preliminary investigation on the documents on this topic housed by the Historic Archives of the UCEI was carried out by Dr. Filomena Del Regno who prepared a report, later used by the Commission to plan its work. The text can be found in the Commission archives.

- The advisability of proceeding simultaneously and often only on the basis of general evidence for the serious documentaries and cognitive limits initial reconstruction of historical events of the removal and search the library itself.
- The need to work primarily on the basis of general evidence. Faced with this situation, the Commission considered it important not to overlook any assumptions during its investigation. There was first particular emphasis on defining the fate of the library of the Jewish Community of Rome and the library of the Italian Rabbinical College. As discussed below one hypothesis was reached backed up by strong evidence, i.e. that not all the library of the Italian Rabbinical College was returned after the war.<sup>6</sup> In addition, several hypotheses were pursued regarding which institutions were involved in the theft. Finally, different theories were examined as to the final location of the material stolen. The inescapable need to juxtapose and pursue distinct research hypothesis obviously influenced the Commission's work and is reflected in the text of the Report. Therefore, based on the results of its archival research, the Commission undertook to precisely document the results of its investigation, but also decided, albeit with all due caution and the appropriate doubts, the various possibilities that were formulated and that – given the absence of certain, irrefutable documentation – are still open questions and plausible working hypotheses.

## ***THE CONTEXT***

The Second World War, was not only a war of aggression and extermination. The Nazi regime also organized one of the largest attempts to steal the libraries in the occupied European countries, particularly those of the Jews and Freemasons, people classified as "enemies of the Reich" according to criminal Nazi ideology. It is estimated that about 3 million books were looted in Western Europe between 1939 and 1945.

After the war, most of this heritage was returned to the countries of origin. As for Eastern Europe, reliable data is not yet available. In order to reconstruct the history of this immense cultural heritage, its entire journey (from when the books were stolen until their return to their countries of origin) should be investigated, bearing in mind that the Nazi archives suffered huge losses and destruction at the end of the war. During the last two years of the conflict, Italy was in a very

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<sup>6</sup> The hypothesis is related to the restitution of the Pentateuch to the Commission President during the 2005 Hanover Conference, and the discovery of a catalogue of the books in the Rabbinical College housed in the Jewish National and University Library of Jerusalem, as well as the declaration of Prof. Ariel Toaff to the Commission on July 17, 2006 concerning the unreturned manuscripts.



complex situation: after signing the Pact of Steel in 1939, the Fascist state was the Third Reich's main ally until the fall of Mussolini on July 25 1943 and the armistice. When Germany occupied Italy, the country that had been its ally for four years. On September 8, 1943 (under the pretense that the alliance would continue) this anomalous position put Italy in a different condition than in other conquered countries. After stabilization of the front in October 1943, the decisive power of combat troops was limited to war zones while the rest of the occupied territory was run by delegates of the various special Nazi agencies. The complicated internal structure of power of the Reich were therefore also transferred to Italian occupied territory.<sup>7</sup> On the German side, the Italian Social Republic was defined as an *Allied Foreign State* to avoid the impression that its sovereignty was questioned.

With the occupation, a number of Nazis ministries and offices sent their representatives to Italy to comb the country looking for material to be transferred to Germany. The gold of the Bank of Italy came under German control and the men of the "Amt Rosenberg", the organization most involved in the looting of cultural objects in the occupied countries also arrived. The head of that structure was Alfred Rosenberg, Nazi Minister for Occupied Eastern countries. Rosenberg had also designed a *Hohe Schule* ("High School") *der NSDAP*, an intellectual center of the Nazi party, which was intended one day to replace the German universities. A central library (*Zentralbibliothek*) and additional research institutes were planned for the Hohe Schule. One in particular, *the Institut zur Erforschung der Judenfrage* (IEJ) based in Frankfurt, was destined to receive the books seized in occupied countries.

The plundering was organized by the operational branch of the Amt Rosenberg, i.e. the so-called *Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg* (ERR) which in turn was divided into several branches. In order to carry out the looting in a newly occupied country, a *Sonderkommando Reichsleiter Rosenberg* or an *Arbeitsstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg* were created, always as part of the ERR (*Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg*). It was the property of "escaped Jews" and "other enemies of the German people". In particular "all the state, municipal and parties libraries," schools and universities in occupied countries to find materials to be used for ideological purposes were plundered.<sup>8</sup> The ERR intended to seize the cultural heritage of Jews and Freemasons to ideologically prepare the *Gegnerbekämpfung*, the so-called "struggle against the enemy." In July 1940, various topic-based departments were set within the ERR, each named *Sonderstab* (special

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. the classic study by Enzo Collotti, *L'amministrazione tedesca dell'Italia occupata*, Milan, Lerici, 1963.

<sup>8</sup> On the *Einsatzstab Rosenberg* cf. the now classic study by Reinhard Bollmus, *Das Amt Rosenberg und seine Gegner. Studien zum Machtkampf im nationalsozialistischen Herrschaftssystem*, Stuttgart, dva, 1970, p. 145-151.

office). Each office was dedicated to a specific cultural sector: *Sonderstab Bildende Kunst* (art) *Sonderstab Kirchen* (churches), *Sonderstab Musik* (musical), and others for *Presse* (the press) *Volkskunde* (Ethnology), *Wissenschaft* (science), *Archive* (archives), and finally *Bibliotheken* (libraries).

The ERR was the leading organization engaged in the looting of Jewish cultural heritage, but as mentioned in the introduction, it was not the only one.

The libraries of Jewish origin were collected and maintained by at least two Nazi organizations that sought, in competition with each other, to establish a large central library specializing in *Judaica* and *Hebraica*. The two organizations were the Amt Rosenberg and the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (the Reich Main Security Office - RSHA) which collected the books to have a source of information on the "enemies" of Nazism.

In 1940, a library was created within the RSHA - Directorate General VII, Division VII A 1 ("ideological enemies"). Some German Jews were forced to serve as librarians and were assigned to catalogue Hebrew materials,<sup>9</sup> since the SS staff did not have the appropriate skills. Several Jewish libraries were transferred to Berlin and housed in a number of warehouses. The libraries included those belonging to the Jewish communities of Breslau and Königsberg. By August 1943, roughly 500 thousand books were collected. Duplicates, despite their inestimable value, were destroyed. After the summer of 1943, the books were evacuated from Berlin, to be held in deposits in Silesia and the Sudetenland.

In the aftermath of war, with the advance of the Red Army, this material was confiscated by the Soviet authorities and transferred to the USSR. Consequently, the Commission, supported by the assessment and research of experts, also had to consider this line of research.<sup>10</sup>

Competition within the Nazi state for control of the Jewish books seized thus conditioned and made it more difficult to find the vanished Roman Jewish library. The Commission in fact had to follow two possible avenues of research: one that assumed the transport of books to the structures created by Amt Rosenberg, probably in Frankfurt (or at the Rosenberg headquarters in Berlin), and a second, not to be ignored, to the SS headquarters in Berlin.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. note 71 on this topic.

<sup>10</sup> Reference is made to the work of P. Kennedy Grimsted and conversations with Ambassador Bondioli Osio, quoted in the paragraph on research in Russia.

<sup>11</sup> Formulation of these hypotheses took place when the study was being prepared. At this time, as discussed below, the role of the ERR and the Frankfurt destination was considered as quite probable. Cf. the letter of January 21, 1944 of the ERR *Sonderkommando Italien* signed by Maier, BundesArchiv, NS30/32; Report of November 28, 1944, *Bericht über*

The Berlin hypothesis suggests that after the defeat of Nazi Germany, the books remained under Soviet control, while the Frankfurt hypothesis suggests the books fell under the control of the U.S. army. A third theory suggested that the volumes were sent to München thanks to available lines of communication.

In addition to the actual search for the vanished library (a strategy followed by the Commission in its relations with Russia, for example), the Commission sought documentary evidence (i.e. archives) that would testify to route taken by the library. Since involvement of the SS could not be ruled out, archival research also had to take into account the participation of structures of the Amt Rosenberg as well as Nazi Security Police. It should be noted however that, although it is known that systematic theft was carried by both SS of the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR), these activities have not yet been properly identified and studied partly because of the dispersion and destruction of sources.<sup>12</sup>

Given this background, the Commission turned its attention to events in occupied Italy, bearing in mind the particular situation of the foothills and the coastal zone of the Adriatic controlled by German authorities.

The removal of the two Jewish libraries of Rome (the libraries of the Rabbinical College and the Jewish Community of Rome, located in the same building) took place in two stages, in early October 1943 and in December 1943.<sup>13</sup> A specific paragraph of the report is dedicated to this.

After the "Nazi persecution of the books" in Rome,<sup>14</sup> ERR activities (which according to the documentation collected by the Commission were involved at least in the second stage of the theft) moved to other areas such as information activities against the "ideological enemies" of Nazism. In occupied Italy (i.e. outside the 'zone of operations '), the policy of "confiscation" was significantly lower than in other occupied countries. Moreover, the legislative and administrative framework of occupying Germany changed with the November 14, 1943 Congress of Verona, following the police order n. 5 of November 30, 1943 that generalized seizure of movable and immovable

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*den Besuch in Bad Schwalbach und Hungen*, signed Wunder, ERR - Stabsführung/I, Ratibor, Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine of Paris, CXLI-150.

<sup>12</sup> P.K.Grimsted, F.J.Hoogewoud, E.Ketelaar, *Returned from Russia*, UK 2007, Introduction pag. 3-12; P.K.Grimsted, *Roads to Ratibor : Library and Archival Plunder by the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg*, in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 19, n.3 Winter 2005, pp 390-458.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. the reconstruction by Michael Tagliacozzo, "La comunità di Roma sotto l'incubo della svastica. La grande razzia del 16 ottobre 1943", in: Quaderni del Centro di documentazione ebraica contemporanea, n.3 (November 1963), pp. 8-37, in particular p. 17. Robert Katz, *Sabato Nero*, Milan 1973, pp. 150-153.

<sup>14</sup> In Rome, according to Michele Sarfatti, "the Nazi persecution of Jewish books turned into a genuine generalized deportation." Michele Sarfatti, *Contro i libri e i documenti delle Comunità israelitiche italiane, 1938-1945*, in "La Rassegna mensile di Israel", vol. LXIX, n.2 (2003), pp. 369-386, the quotation is found on p. 375.

property of the citizens of the "Jewish race" and Mussolini's legislative decree of January 4, 1944 ordering the general confiscation of Jewish property.<sup>15</sup> The agencies of German occupation thus reflected the new situation: in January 1944, the head of the Sonderkommando ERR for Italy, Maier, wrote in his monthly report to Berlin that they could not seize the books without having first consulted and asked the consent of police SS (Sicherheitsdienst) and the German Embassy in the Republic of Salò.<sup>16</sup>

On March 3, 1944 the "Head of the military at the General Plenipotentiary of the Wehrmacht in Italy," wrote a circular addressed to all regional military commands on Jewish property. "The SS Police Chief for Italy who is responsible for Jewish affairs, reported that after the decision of the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (the SS Central Police in Berlin), there is no longer any German interest in property, or the property of German Jews emigrated from Germany. The seizure and use of Jewish property in Italy is therefore a matter for the Italian authorities."<sup>17</sup>

Regarding the collection and sorting of the stolen books managed by the Amt Rosenberg in Berlin, "the library loot" was distributed through *Buchleitstelle*, namely central book deposit. The *Buchleitstelle* ran 10 depots and kept up close relations with the Frankfurt Institute. The collection of material was concentrated in Berlin despite the bombing. However, after the destruction of certain locations there, the *Buchleitstelle* was transferred to Ratibor in Silesia in October 1943. The "central library" (directed by Walter Grothe, Nazi Party member since 1931, and member of the ERR as of 1940) was instead moved to a hotel in Carinthia that became a hospital in September 1944. The library staff was subsequently evacuated along with most of the books to a different location in Carinthia. We know that, starting in October 1942, transfer of books to the central library were directed to Carinthia, but the situation became more complex - at the central level - with the creation in 1941 of the so-called "national library", i.e. separate collection or storages sites for book collections from occupied countries.

Not all books ended up in the central library. A large part was chosen to be transferred to Frankfurt. In January 1943, the Frankfurt Institute (IEJ) had 30 employees and 300,000 books, of which only ten percent had been cataloged. At the same time, the Berlin *Buchleitstelle* had 250,000 books in storage, which were destined to be transferred to Frankfurt. During 1943, some of the books in Frankfurt were put in safe deposit in the area, namely in Hessen. When the bombing intensified, the Frankfurt Institute was completely evacuated, but the books continued to arrive in

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<sup>15</sup> Michele Sarfatti, *Contro i libri e i documenti*, cit., p. 377.

<sup>16</sup> Bundesarchiv Berlin NS 30 b. 32 letter of January 21, 1944 of the ERR Sonderkommando Italien signed Maier

<sup>17</sup> There is a copy of the document in the Sibidero Archive (housed at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Stolen art Recovery Office).

Frankfurt after the IEJ was moved, as evidenced by a load of books from the Netherlands that was destroyed in the Institute courtyard during a bombing raid in 1944.

The Commission therefore had to evaluate the many assumptions related to this complex reality very carefully.

## THE JEWISH LIBRARIES IN ROME

During the Thirties, the upper floors of the building of the synagogue in Lungotevere Cenci housed two collections of Hebrew books: The Library of Jewish Community of Rome and the Library of the Italian Rabbinical College, transferred from Florence to Rome. These were two particularly valuable collections.

### 1. The Library of the Jewish Community of Rome

The Library was set up at the beginning of the twentieth century, bringing together a collection of various fraternities and synagogues, the largest of which was that of the Talmud Torah, which included 4728 volumes.<sup>18</sup>

According to testimony given by those who at the time worked with the collections, the abundance and quality of the library was remarkable.

In a letter dated April 5, 1961, Fabian Herskovitz pointed out that the library contained 7,000 volumes and was neither open to the public nor catalogued, unlike that of the Italian Rabbinical College, which also contained ancient texts as well as recent material.<sup>19</sup>

That same year, Attilio Milan<sup>20</sup> confirmed that the inestimable value of the library was consolidated over the centuries through the gradual addition of texts, often donated by families or confraternities and charities operating in the ghetto. According to the Milan's recollections, incunabula were kept separately and had the largest number of texts in Hebrew, and he also confirmed the presence of valuable sixteenth century works printed by Bomberg, Bragadin, Nicollet, as well as seventeenth and eighteenth century texts from Venice and Livorno. Milan also stated that the community had never written a complete catalogue to avoid divulging the precious contents of what appears to be the richest and most valuable Jewish library in Italy.

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<sup>18</sup> This figure was supplied by A. Toaff, *Stampe rare della Biblioteca della Comunità Israelitica di Roma scampate al saccheggio nazista*, in "La Bibliofilia", a. LXXX (1978), n. 2, pp. 139-140.

<sup>19</sup> During the 1930s, Herskovits, Director of the Department of Education and Culture of the City of Tel Aviv-Jaffa, prepared the catalogue of the Library of the Italian Rabbinical College and, in the summer of 1938, was invited David Prato to prepare a catalogue of the Community Library, however, because of the racial laws, Herskovits left Italy in June 1939. Cf. letter from Fabian Herskovits to Fausto Pitigliani dated April 5, 1961 (documentation preserved with the Secretariat of the Community of Rome)

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, letter from Attilio Milano to Fausto Pitigliani dated March 21, 1961. In 1927-1928 Milano had already reorganized and made an inventory of the community archives and examine the library under the guidance of Isaia Sonne.

On April 17, 1961, in a letter to the then president of the Jewish Community of Rome Fausto Pitigliani, the firm Otto e Rosoni, which had moved the two libraries on 14 October and 22-23 December 1943 on behalf of the German authorities, said that roughly 25,000 volumes had been seized, about one third of which belonged to the library community.<sup>21</sup>

A reading of the only, albeit partial, catalogue available, edited by Isaia Sonne in 1935, draws a clear enough picture of the library composition. It especially enables us to understand the importance of this material not only for the Roman Jewish community, but for Italy's cultural heritage in general.<sup>22</sup> Sonne classified the texts into five groups: manuscripts, incunabula, texts printed by Soncino, sixteenth century oriental copies printed in Constantinople, and special specimens. He divided the material in an entirely personal manner, choosing 26 ancient codices and 12 incunabula, although in reality some Bible codes and about 20 incunabula were removed from the library. Incunabula in particular seem to have constituted the core of the collection, which included lexica, compendia of rituals and sermons as well as Biblical codices. Sonne said that about 25% of the Soncino production was kept in the library, which also boasted the rare presence of books printed at the beginning of the sixteenth century in Constantinople.<sup>23</sup>

## **2. The library of the Italian Rabbinical College**

Between October and December 1943, the library of the Italian Rabbinical College (Collegio Rabbinico Italiano - CRI) together with the library of the Jewish Community of Rome was loaded onto wagons of the German Railways.

We also know that the two libraries had different characteristics and were in different conditions.

Aside from very ancient editions, the CRI library also included much more recent publications. It was reorganized during the Thirties when the CRI was moved from Florence to Rome, and contained prayer books, liturgical texts, copies of the Talmud, and works of

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, letter from Otto e Rosoni cit.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, report by Isaia Sonne (1935); Cf. also I. Sonne, *Rapporto intorno alle relazioni sulle biblioteche e sugli attività delle comunità israelitiche italiane*, September 1937, in AUCEI, collection from 1934, b. 35B.

<sup>23</sup> For this information, cf. the introduction to the catalogue *Scelta di manoscritti e stampe della Biblioteca dell'Università Israelitica di Roma esaminati e catalogati da Isaia Sonne*. Rome-Florence, August-September 1935. The catalogue is published in the appendix. The problem remains of how the Jewish Community controls the texts which the Nazis failed to take.

philosophy and literature. In the mid-Thirties, presumably after the move, Fabian Herskovitz produced a catalogue.<sup>24</sup> According to Ariel Toaff, the CRI library contained over 10,000 volumes.<sup>25</sup>

On 26 March 1948 the Italian Mission for Restitution, directed by Rodolfo Siviero, supervised the transfer of this library, contained in 54 crates, by the Central Collecting Point in Munich to Bolzano. The crates came from the Offenbach Archival Depot Office of the Military Government.

The few documents available provide some more detailed information and make it possible to make some assumptions.

A summary sheet, prepared by Captain Charles Rupnik of the Recovery Works of Art Office, Bolzano section, on February 3, 1948, shows the volumes of the CRI library were contained in 54 crates. More specifically, 6,580 pieces were in crates n. 1 - 46 and 1,760 in crates n. 47-54.<sup>26</sup>

On March 15, 1948 the Offenbach Archival Depot Office of the Military Government, Economics Division, stated that the Central Collecting Point in Monaco sent the library collections on March 15 in two wagons. Specifically, the 54 crates of CRI books were loaded onto one wagon.<sup>27</sup>

On June 2, 1949 the Jewish weekly "Israel" announced the return of over "60 cases of volumes, which after controls, proved almost all to belong to the Rabbinical College library."<sup>28</sup>

An analysis of a sample of the restituted volumes showed that no other stamps in addition to the originals of the CRI library were placed on the books after they were commandeered.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Nella sua lettera Herskovits non fornisce riferimenti cronologici precisi. E' stata comunque formulata l'ipotesi da parte della Commissione che si tratti del catalogo rinvenuto a Gerusalemme alla vigilia della conclusione di questa indagine.

<sup>25</sup> A. Toaff, *Stampe...cit*, p. 141. In particular, cf. U.Cassuto, *Incunaboli ebraici a Firenze*, in "La Bibliofilia" a. XII (1910-1911), vol. XII, pp. 349-356; 464-472; vol. XIII, pp. 222-230, 384-394.

<sup>26</sup> Archive of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereinafter MAE) "Sibidero Collection", Dir.ne 3-232, Office. 4, "Comunità Israelitica-Roma": Schedule A

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, note of March 15, 1948. The wagon was marked CSD-Zsr 1-37631. *Ibid*, notice of April 13, 1948. On April 13, the Bolzano Section of the Office for the Recovery of Works of Art and Bibliographic and Scientific material of the Ministry of Education stated that on March 26, the Italian Mission for Restitution had transported Italian bibliographic material from Munich to Bolzano in two trucks provided Territorial Military Command. This included 54 crates containing the CRI library. The material was held by the Customs Office of Bolzano because the German customs authorities had not sealed the crates.

Note also that in Munich, at the Central Collecting Point, other bibliographic material was ready: 15 crates of the Institute of Speleology, Postumia; 57 crates from the Austrian Institute of Historical Studies; 5 crates from the Boemo-Slav Institute; 5 crates from the Royal Institute of Prussian History; and 17 crates of miscellaneous material.

<sup>28</sup> Israel, June 2, 1949: *Enti Istituzioni Avvenimenti. Tornano i libri*.



A more careful evaluation of the facts leads to additional considerations.

Based on the evidence available, as we know that the library of the CRI was looted in two stages: a first portion of the library was taken on October 14 together with the library of the Jewish community of Rome, while the second portion was stolen on December 22 and 23.<sup>30</sup>

The Commission therefore sees the hypothesis that the current library of the Red Cross held at the Union of Italian Jewish Communities Bibliographical is incomplete as credible.

A topographic catalogue was only found during the final phase of the Commission's work. It is probably incomplete and lacks a second volume. A comparative analysis of the volumes listed in the catalogue and those currently in the library of the Rabbinical College, which of course the Commission could not make, could determine whether the restitution was complete or whether, as the Commission believes based on the facts presented in this report, restitution was only partial.

## THE THEFT

On September 30, 1943 two German experts went to the offices of the Community to view the library collected there. After a search that ended with the seizure of archival materials and cash kept in the safe, there were other visits by experts in Oriental languages and German officers.

In one of these instances, the Germans were probably Dr. Pohl and Dr. Grunewald of ERR, a hypothesis confirmed by research conducted by the Commission, as explained below.<sup>31</sup> Once the books were seized, the directors of the Community – aware of the seriousness of the events – tried to get the Italian authorities involved to prevent the loss of a heritage that was national as well as Jewish. But neither the Ministry of Education (Library Division) nor the Ministry of Interior (General Directorate for Religious Affairs, Directorate General for Public Security and the Directorate General of Civil Administration) thought it appropriate to intervene and did not even deign to respond to the request for help.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> A control was carried out for the Commission during the recent cataloguing of the material housed in the UCEI's Bibliographic Center. Cf. as well note 71.

<sup>30</sup> Letter from Otto e Rosoni, shipping agents of the MAE to the President of the Jewish Community of Rome dated April 17, 1961 (preserved at the offices of the Jewish Community); R. Katz, *Sabato nero*, Milan 1973, pp. 150-151; G. Debenedetti, *16 ottobre 1943. Otto ebrei*, Rome 1978, p. 41; L. Morpurgo, *Caccia all'uomo*, Milan 1973, p. 123; *Le misure razziali adottate in Roma dopo l'8 settembre 1943*, in "La voce della comunità israelitica di Roma", a.I, n.3-4, November-December 1952, p.5.

<sup>31</sup> See notes 59 and 60.

<sup>32</sup> G. Debenedetti, *op.cit.*, p. 41; L. Morpurgo, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-123 nota.

Given the gravity of the situation, the President of the Community along with other leaders, ignoring the summons of the German officers not to touch anything of the material seized, managed to salvage some volumes of the Community Library.<sup>33</sup>

On October 14 the porters of the Otto e Rosoni shipping agents<sup>34</sup> loaded a first portion of the books from the Community library and part of the books from the Rabbinical College library onto two freight cars of the German Railways, marked DRPI-Munchen-97970-G and DRPI-Munchen -C-97970. The theft was completed on December 22 and 23 when the rest of the books of the CRI library were loaded onto a third car.<sup>35</sup>

The available evidence on the removal of the two libraries does not contain any further information. Therefore, all the Commission could do was to draw up various theories, discussed above, as to their destination and destiny.

After the war, a part of the library of the Rabbinical College was recovered thanks to the Italian Mission for Restitution, which supervised the transfer from the Central Collecting Point in Munich to Bolzano.<sup>36</sup> The 54 crates that came from the Offenbach Archival Depot Office of Military Government was therefore under United States jurisdiction.<sup>37</sup>

Instead, all traces of the Roman Jewish Community Library were lost in that long ago day in 1943.

It should be noted that in 1961 a settlement agreement was signed between the Jewish Community of Rome and the Federal Republic of Germany for compensation of fifty kilograms of

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119 note; R. Katz, *op.cit.*, p. 121 note: the author narrates that Foà had hidden a few manuscripts that were copied while the originals were transferred to Vallicelliana Library (still, this seems to be an approximate memory, especially in reference to the assertion that the manuscripts were copied). On the material that has survive, cf. A. Toaff, *Stampe rare della Biblioteca della Comunità Israelitica di Roma scampate al saccheggio nazista*, in "La Bibliofilia", a. LXXX, 1978, installment 2, pp. 139-149.

<sup>34</sup> Letter from Otto and Rosoni, shipping agents of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Fausto Pitigliano, President of the Jewish Community of Rome, (documentation housed in the offices of the Jewish Community, made available by Dr. Bice Migliau, Director of the Cultural Center).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>36</sup> *Enti. Istituzioni. Avvenimenti. Tornano i libri*, in "Israel", June 2, 1949.

<sup>37</sup> Schedule A of Captain Carlo Rupnik of February 3, 1948; memorandum of the Offenbach Archival Depot Office of Military Government-Economics Division dated March 15, 1948; excerpt of letter of the Minister of Education, Office for the Recovery of Works of Art and Bibliographic and Scientific Material, Section of Bolzano dated April 13, 1948; ; Cf. also "Report on Verbal Agreements" made on July 14, 1947 with Mr. Horne, Director of the Archival Depot of Offenbach. All documentation is preserved in the Archives of the Delegation for Restitution, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and File 3 "Israelite Community of Rome-Rabbinical College".

*Ibid.*, letter dated June 7, 1946 in which the Ministry of Education sent the Office for the Recovery of Works of Art a copy of the stamps used on the books of the Rabbinical College and the Rome Community. In the memorandum cited, sent by the Embassy of the Germany Federal Republic in Rome, there is a reference to the Offenbach deposit where "complete chaos reigned."

gold extorted the Community under the threat of serious reprisals,<sup>38</sup> of certain sums of money found in the Community safes and the Library. In that regard, the Commission stresses that it was only assigned the task of conducting research designed to find missing traces of the library in the national interest and is extraneous to any assessment of that agreement. However, the Commission was cognizant of the search for the missing volumes and the result of that search, and made use of the documentation produced on that occasion.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> On September 26, 1943, the SS demanded a tribute of 50 kg. of gold from the Community. SS Major Kappler called in the President of the Union of Jewish Communities Almansi and the Rome Community President Foà, saying “You and your co-religionists are citizens of Italy, but that doesn’t matter. We Germans see you as Jews only, and as such our enemies. Actually, to be quite clear, we consider you a detached group, but not isolated, of the worst enemies we are fighting. And that is how we should treat you. But we won’t take your lives or that of your children, if you meet our requests. It is your gold we want, to give our country new weapons. You are ordered to give us 50 kg. of gold within the next 36 hours. If you pay, no harm will come to you. Otherwise 200 of you will be taken and deported to Germany, to the Russian border, or made harmless in some other way.” The gold was collected and taken to Via Tasso on September 28. When it was weighed, the Germans tried to trick the on the weight, but when they admitted the weight was correct, they refused to give any receipt. On September 29, the Germans took from the Community 2,021,540 lire and the documents preserved there. After the first phase of the looting of the libraries, at dawn of October 16, 1943, the German’s started rounding up the Jews of Rome. Cf. R. De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo*, Turin, 1988, pp. 467-470.

<sup>39</sup> Fritz Becker, of the World Jewish Congress, was delegated to represent the Rome Jewish Community and for the Union of Italian Israelite Communities investigated into the fate of the Roman library. In particular, he contacted some experts in Berlin who had apparently helped to prepare a catalogue of the books that were looted and transferred to Germany, however without receiving any important information. In particular, cf. the Archive of the Union of Italian Israelite Communities, collection as of 1945, b. 74L, file. “Restituzione (brug) comunità di Roma 1959-1960-1961”, letter dated April 20, 1960 from Nehemiah Robinson of the World Jewish Congress to Fritz Becker, in which he mentioned the names of Ernst Grumach, Max Marcus, Marx Heyn and Hans Bukofzer, to whom Becker asked for information on the library, on March 28, 1961. With a letter dated April 8, Bukofzer replied: “... between 1943 and 1945 I was part of a group of Jews condemned to forced labor with an initial task of putting in order, wrapping and transporting some volumes kept in a library in Berlin in the Eisenacherstrasse, controlled by the Department for the Security of the Reich. They were volumes that the SS stole in occupied countries, both public and private collection, then transported to Berlin. One section where the Jews doing forced labor contained Jewish books and documents on various topics. I cannot therefore remember whether there were also books from the Jewish community of Rome. Since as you yourself indicated, the books only reached the library in October 1943, it is probably that they were not even sent to Berlin, since the local library was transferred to Silesia and Czechoslovakia after the bombings of 1943 until almost the end of the war. I have no knowledge of the subsequent fate of the collection ...” Bukofzer concluded suggesting that Becker contact E. Grumach and M. Heyn. Grumach answered on April 11, 1961, “It is true that between 1941 and 1945 I led in Germany a “Gruppe von Angestellten der Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland” whose task was to order and catalogue anew the collections of Jewish libraries confiscated by the then so-called Office VII of the Reich Department of Security (RSHA). However, I have no memory of any volumes from the Jewish Community of Rome in those collections, and therefore presume that it was taken elsewhere under the control of the SS. If, as you claim, the library collection in question was confiscated by the Oriental Section the role of the RSHA is to be excluded since the SS officers of that department did not include any expert orientalist...”. This last declaration in particular would seem to confirm the hypothesis that the looting was carried out by the ERR.

## THE COMMISSION'S RESEARCH

The Commission research went in multiple directions, according to different investigative assumptions. Each was proposed by a commissioner in a plenary meeting of the Commission, or emerged during the meetings themselves, the result of group work. For each of them the plausibility and the needs for each were evaluated, together with the steps and the most appropriate course of action. The Commission kept the various areas and fields of inquiry open to further suggestions.

The Commission has pursued its goal through: 1) correspondence and on site research at numerous libraries and archives, that might - as deemed appropriate - be in possession of the stolen books, archival documents or documentation on the theft and the subsequent movement of books, or possession certain books or documents that might be useful to the Commission; 2) the activation of contacts with individual scholars or others who might provide useful information or simply suggestions of interest.

The research at libraries and archives was carried out by correspondence or through local studies by Commissioners or scholars and researchers engaged for this purpose. In particular, the Commission appointed Dr. Carlo Gentile to do some research in US and German archives. In addition, Prof. Massimo Giuliani examined documents in some US archives.

All these studies are summarized below on the basis of subject matter, and regardless of the dates when they were actually conducted to account for the lines of research pursued. The major topic areas are described in the paragraphs below in order to give detailed account of their complexity.

1. One study was based on an article in the review "*Israel*"<sup>40</sup> that one of the wagons containing the looted books was destroyed by Allied bombs during its journey through Italy. The Italian State Railway was consulted, but reported they had no documentation on the subject.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, the Commission found no other documentary evidence that proved the hypothesis, nor has it been possible to ascertain the source of the article. However, the possibility does exist.

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<sup>40</sup> "Israel", Year XXXIV, n. 35, June 2, 1949.

<sup>41</sup> The correspondence is deposited in the Commission's Archives.

2. Regarding the railway route from Italy into Germany, the Commission tried to discover whether there was documentation in this regard and the actual meaning of the term “DRPI Munchen 97970” written on cardboard on the sides of the two wagons loaded on October 13 and 14, 1943, and transcribed by witnesses to the theft.<sup>42</sup> In reality, this statement did not mean that Munich was actually the final destination and there was no indication when the archives were examined.

The issue of the train’s journey was also raised with the Swiss government authorities, who responded that there were no documentary records in this regard.<sup>43</sup>

3. The theme of the wagons’ possible original destinations and subsequent transfers of the plundered books in Nazi Germany is developed below.

Research was focused primarily on archival documents produced by the Third Reich. To that end, research was conducted in archives in Germany and other countries with archives containing documentation produced by institutions and offices of the Third Reich. Regarding the former, the Bundesarchiv, Koblenz, the Bundesarchiv Berlin, and Institut für Stadtgeschichte, Frankfurt, were consulted. Correspondence was also kept up with the Office for Culture of the City of Hungen. Regarding the latter, research was carried out at the National Archives and Records Administration, NARA (Maryland, USA), the Military Archives in Moscow, and the Central State Archive of Kiev. Documents concerning individual agencies responsible for Nazi theft of books in various areas of the continent were acquired at the Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine in Paris.

4. Three options, not in alternative, were considered regarding the possibility of a transfer of stolen books to areas outside of the present boundaries of German territory: 1) a transfer made during the war by the Nazi authorities to deposits now situated in Polish or Austrian territory; 2) removal by the Soviet authorities during their westward advance during the war or the immediate postwar period; 3) direct distribution to states, organizations or individuals, made after the war by U.S. authorities who organized the recovery of all stolen library material in Europe.

The issue of the possible arrival of some of the books in what was then the USSR is developed below.

Requests for information were sent to the cultural institutions Zydowski Instytut Historyczny (Jewish Historical Institute) in Warsaw and YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. *Relazione del Presidente della Comunità Israelitica di Roma Foà Ugo circa le misure razziali adottate in Roma dopo l’8 settembre (...)*, in Comunità Israelitica di Roma, *Ottobre 1943: cronaca di un’infamia*, Rome 1961, p. 22.

<sup>43</sup> The correspondence is deposited in the Commission Archives

New York, both of which after the war received Jewish books (including those previously stolen) found in the territories of Eastern Europe. Both institutions excluded the possibility that they received volumes stolen from Rome.<sup>44</sup>

5. Regarding the possibility that the books stolen eventually reached libraries outside Europe, the Commission first sent general letters and then documentation with copies of the bookplates and partial catalogues available to the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts at the Jewish National and University Library Jerusalem, the Library of Congress in Washington, and Harvard University Library. The responses were always negative.<sup>45</sup>

Correspondence on the matter was also initiated with the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York and the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati to ascertain the possible presence in their collections of several books (two in each library) bearing the bookplate of the Library Jewish Community of Rome. Only the first library was established their existence (two manuscripts, listed as numbers 12 and 17 of the catalogue compiled by Isaia Sonne). However, the Jewish Theological Seminary was unable to determine their itinerary until they were purchased in 1965.<sup>46</sup>

The Commission also maintained correspondence with the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem regarding the discovery in its manuscript collections of a list of volumes was found to be the topographic catalogue of Italian Rabbinical College Library, written after it was taken to Rome in Thirties.<sup>47</sup> An unsuccessful voluntary search in the archives of the library was conducted to verify the catalogue's origin by Dr. Bruno Portaleone, to whom the Commission extends its gratitude. Apparently it was the catalogue written by Fabian Herskovitz, mentioned above, and that we know was confiscated in 1943 by the Nazis just before the two Roman libraries were stolen. There is a strong possibility that the Catalogue found was the document described as "No 142 - Italian Rabbinical College. Rome. Italian manuscript (book index)" in the "Monthly Report" of the OAD of May 31, 1947, p. 16.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> The correspondence is deposited in the Commission Archives.

<sup>45</sup> The correspondence is deposited in the Commission Archives.

<sup>46</sup> The correspondence – particularly important and which took place between 2003 and 2007 – is deposited with the Commission Archives.

<sup>47</sup> The correspondence, started after indications of Dr. Gisèle Levy, whom we thank, took place in 2005. It concerned the (unconfirmed) possibility that the library contained volumes with stamps or bookplates of the book stolen in Rome. There was further correspondence in 2007-2008 considering the handwritten list of books. The correspondence is deposited in the Commission Archives.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. the collection of the "Monthly Report" of the OAD, preserved in the NARA, Washington, some of which the Commission has in photocopy.

A copy of the stamps and labels on books looted by the Nazi *Institut zur Erforschung der Judenfrage*<sup>49</sup> was obtained from the *Bibliothèque l'Alliance Israelite Universelle*. An inspection of samples of the stolen CRI Library and found later showed that those volumes were not present. This fact seems to indicate that they suffered different treatment from those found in the Alliance library the fact that they arrived later or took a more circuitous route.

6. Regarding the postwar restitution of the books of the Library of the Italian Rabbinical College and the search for the books of the Library of the Jewish Community of Rome made in recent decades, inquiries were made of the Central State Archive, the historical archives of the Chamber of Deputies, the Jewish Community of Rome, the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, and the Casanatense and Angelica Libraries, with a generous response of all these institutions.<sup>50</sup> The Interministerial Commission for the Recovery of Works of Art provided intense, useful collaboration through documentation and information on their international research initiatives.

7. Finally, the Commission corresponded closely with agencies engaged in the research and documentation of Nazi looting of books and works of art. These included the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (Claims Conference) in New York (including with regard to its project "Descriptive Catalogue of Looted Judaica"), the **Österreichische Nationalbibliothek** in Vienna, the Documentation Centre for Property Transfers of Cultural Assets of World War II Victims, and the Central Registry of Information on Cultural Looted Property 1933-1945.<sup>51</sup>

As mentioned above, the Commission informed many scholars and collectors of Jewish books of its activities, receiving in return many suggestions and pieces of information useful in drawing up or eliminating research hypotheses.

Research conducted on behalf of the committee by Prof. Massimo Giuliani and Dr. Charles Gentile was of particular importance. Professor Giuliani voluntarily carried out preliminary research in Washington, DC, in July and August 2003. In his report submitted afterwards, Giuliani gave a summary of the contents of many publications, recent or otherwise, on topics related to the study, as well as various interviews with scholars in publishing or Jewish thought, as well as archivists with special knowledge in the field.

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<sup>49</sup> The correspondence is deposited in the Commission Archives.

<sup>50</sup> The correspondence is deposited in the Commission Archives.

<sup>51</sup> The correspondence is deposited in the Commission Archives.

In the second part of his report, Giuliani indicated several archives that he considered useful for the Commission's research, focusing on those owned by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). He partially described those related to the Offenbach Archival Depot SRO, the storage warehouse established after the war by U.S. authorities in German, to collect and then return the books looted by the Third Reich. It was indeed the SRO that located and returned the books of the Library of Italian Rabbinical College.

Dr. Charles Gentile conducted some research at the NARA in September 2004. He also met with experts who provided additional indications and information. In his report, Gentile described the archival research, based on Giuliani's report. He examined numerous rolls of microfilm, which he either found that were of no use to the Commission or that contained relevant documents, which were then photocopied and attached to his report.

These documents helped the Commission to understand the OAD's operation and the restitution of the Library of the Rabbinical College, but they provided no useful direct information on their arrival in Germany and the subsequent vicissitudes of the looted books.

In 2005, Dr. Gentile, again on behalf of the Commission, conducted a search at the *Bundesarchiv* and *Politisches Archiv* of the German Foreign Office.

The report on that work contains a description of the sources consulted and is accompanied by photocopies of the most relevant documents. Of particular importance are a small group of documents of the *Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg*, proving the existence of his *Sonderkommando Italien*, established in early 1944 (i.e. after the theft of the books in Rome), in a letter dated November 1944 contained a reference to raid the previous year.<sup>52</sup>

The Commission, represented by the President and/or some of its members, also participated in three international conferences presenting the initial results of its investigations and establishing useful, qualified cultural and scientific contacts.

In May 2005, the Commission presented a report at a symposium in Hannover to illustrate its research,<sup>53</sup> which generated interest and curiosity among experts and professionals in the field. On that occasion, the Director of the *Rosenthaliana* Library in Amsterdam surprised the speaker by presenting him with a copy of a Pentateuch printed in Amsterdam in 1680 and found in Hungen.

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. letter dated January 21, 1944 of the ERR Sonderkommando Italien signed by Maier, BundesArchiv, NS30/32; Report of November 28, 1944, *Bericht über den Besuch in Bad Schwalbach und Hungen*, signed Wunder, ERR - Stabsführung/I, Ratibor, Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine di Paris, CXLI-150.

<sup>53</sup> D.Tedeschi, *Research of the Roman Jewish Community's Library Looted in 1943*, in "Jüdischer Buchbesitz Als Raubgut", Klostermann, Frankfurt Am Main, 2006., pp.243-252.



The gesture symbolized the common desire to find and return the cultural heritage stolen or that went missing during the war.<sup>54</sup> The return of the Pentateuch, described elsewhere in this publication, proves that not all the books in Italian Rabbinical College, housed in one of two libraries looted in the synagogue, were returned after the war.

On November 13-15, 2006, the Commission, at the invitation of Dr. Ekaterina Genieva, attended an international conference in Moscow organized by the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation on protection of historic and cultural relations and Russian-European cooperation. On that occasion, the Commission [represented by Dr. Colarossi] updated the international community on its search. In October 2007, a Commission delegation also attended the third Conference of Liberec, Czech Republic Sudetenland, on the restitution of confiscated art. Entitled *A Wish or a Reality*, the conference updated the international community on activities carried out.<sup>55</sup> Particular emphasis was placed on the agreement reached with the Library of Foreign Literature in Moscow. There was a discussion of the Commission's activities and numerous contacts were established with professionals and experts, an international community that is continuously involved in the problems and intentions for research into and restitution of stolen works.

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<sup>54</sup> “*Jüdischer Buchbesitz als Raubgut*”, Zweites Hannoversches Symposium, May 10/11, 2005, Hannover

<sup>55</sup> D.Tedeschi, *The Libraries of the Jewish Community of Rome and the Italian Rabbinical College Looted by the Nazis: The work of the Commission set up for Research by the Italian Government*, in “Restitution of Confiscated Art Works. Wish or Reality”, edited by M. Borák, Prague, 2008, pp.114-122.

## **INQUIRIES CARRIED OUT BY THE COMMISSION IN THE ARCHIVES: THE “ERR” TRAIL**

Based on these hypotheses, the Commission had to consider the possibility that the stolen books were transported:

- 1) to Berlin to the offices of the SS
- 2) to Berlin to the offices of the Amt Rosenberg, with possible subsequent routing to another destination (the library in Frankfurt, or the Central Library of the Hohe Schule, now relocated in Carinthia, or the branch office the "Buchleitstelle" based Ratibor in Silesia)
- 3) Directly to Frankfurt to the IEJ, without passing through Berlin

The Commission’s archival research had therefore, to consider all these hypotheses.

Information on the routes of the stolen libraries was obtained by focusing on maps produced by Nazi state (and in particular those by ERR since it was the organization most involved in library thefts during the Second World War). The Commission concentrated on the library deposits discovered by the victors of the Second World War. A third line of research dealt with the maps produced during negotiations for the restitution or compensation for items stolen.

Reconstructing the dynamics of transport routes of this and other thefts, however, proved extremely difficult, especially because of the fragmentation and dispersion of Nazi documentation. Portions of ERR documentation can be found in Berlin, Nuremberg, Paris, Kiev, Moscow and Washington. It seems that another part of ERR’s correspondence and materials was destroyed during the bombing of Berlin November on 22, 1943. SS papers, e.g. those of the “SD security service command in Italy,” were largely destroyed or lost. Some papers are in Berlin and Rome, or might be found in Berlin, Rome, or are traceable in British interceptions housed in the national archives of London or Washington.

The analysis was made even more complex by the fact that the Commission had to take into account that the books were sent to two separate shipments that took place on different dates. It was therefore necessary to consider that the two shipments followed different routes to Germany. In all

likelihood, the second wagon was sent directly to the IEJ in Frankfurt.<sup>56</sup> The uncertainty is therefore primarily related to the exact path of the first shipment (probably containing the books of the Jewish community, cf. below). Research in the archives always covered the two hypotheses about the looted libraries, i.e. that they could have been sent either to Berlin or to Frankfurt.

One thing however is certain: after the war, a large part of the library of the Rabbinical College was found by the U.S. military in a warehouse in Hessen, specifically in the town of Hungen, and then returned to the Italian Government after careful division of the discovered Nazi loot carried out by the Offenbach Archival Depot. Thanks to the restitution files, we can deduce that the second wagon only contained books from the Rabbinical College. The fate of the library of the Jewish Community of Rome, however, remains unknown.

Since ERR was the Nazi organization involved in this second shipment, close attention was paid to the ERR during the archive research. On the other hand, the Commission could not exclude the hypothesis of an initial transport to Berlin and Silesia. This hypothesis was fueled by the fact that several Jewish libraries that the Nazis stole from a number of European countries and that ended up in hands of Himmler's men were found in post-Soviet Russia (cf. section on bibliographic and archival research conducted in Russia).

It must be stressed, however, that not all books deposited by the Nazis in Hessen then found their way back to Rome. One example is the discovery of the seventeenth-century Pentateuch bearing the stamp of the Italian Rabbinical College, and returned directly to the Commission in 2005.

Moreover, in 2007, a catalogue of books owned by the Rabbinical College in Rome was found at the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem. The Commission obtained a scanned copy of certain pages of this catalog. At the time of writing this report, a microfilm copy of the catalogue was also available. The director of the National Library in Jerusalem stated that the Library could provide no further information on the history of the catalogue.

It may be supposed however that the catalogue also passed through the Offenbach Archival Depot. Since the first transport from Rome (consisting, according to witnesses, of two wagons) there is a high probability that it carried books of the Community and some of those of the some from the Rabbinical College. Since no books with the stamp of the community was found at the Offenbach depot, it is almost certain that the books sorted by Offenbach were on the second shipment in December 1943, when most of the library of the Rabbinical College was transferred to

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<sup>56</sup> Maier Report, mentioned in notes 16 and 52.

Frankfurt for the above-mentioned "Research on the Jewish question" ("Institut der zur Erforschung Judenfrage, IEJ). At this point, the second transport could also have contained the catalogue of books owned by the Rabbinical College.

These two examples are proof that some smaller books (or manuscripts) could have escaped the attention of the staff of the Offenbach Archival Depot, but certainly not an entire library (like that belonging to the Community). Moreover, the two examples are from the Rabbinical College collection.

To find information related to the first transport, archive research had therefore to consider all the ERR papers relating to cases of looting of libraries in occupied Europe. Unfortunately, archival papers on the incorrect not only are fragmented and divided among various archives, but have proved quite sketchy. Part of the material is housed in the *Bundesarchiv* in Berlin (Reference n. NS 30 and NS 8), a part was seized by the Red Army and is now in Moscow (Special Archive of the Military Archives, Reference n. 1401), as well as Kiev (Reference 3674 and 3676). Most ERR documentation is lost. Some information concerning the IEJ staff is located in the city archives of Frankfurt (*Stadtarchiv*). To find more evidence about the transit route, brief visits – preliminary studies, as it were – were made to various archives. The Commission visited Moscow to consult the Special Division of the Russian military archives in 2005. Lutz Klinkhammer visited Washington in October 2006 (after Carlo Gentile's visit in 2004). A visit was also made to Germany (Frankfurt, Berlin and Koblenz in April 2006 (after Carlo Gentile's preliminary work there in October 2004). In addition, a survey was conducted of the contents of the ERR papers in Kiev housed at the Ukrainian National Archives by the Italian Embassy there. Vision of the ERR papers preserved in Paris concerning Italy was requested directly of *Archives du Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine in Paris*. The possible presence of Nazi papers concerning Italy in Prague was excluded by the Czech authorities when they were specifically questioned by the Italian Embassy to the Czech Republic.

The mission to Moscow allowed the study of ERR papers housed in the Special Archive (material that was previously available only to the KGB). The documents were related to other European countries looted, and while useful for understanding the ERR's operations in Italy, did not contain any special information about events that took place during the German occupation of Italy.

The second line of approach to archive research concerned the papers on the material found in Nazi deposits by the armies of the Allied forces.

The papers on the Red Army's discovery of the Nazi deposits in Silesia, probably preserved in the Russian Federal Archive in Moscow, were not available for Commissioners (a vain attempt was made to see them, cf. the research done in Russia). Thanks to the agreements that Ambassador Massolo reached with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, the latter undertook to make an archival search in the archives of the Russian Foreign Ministry concerning news about the library of the Jewish Community of Rome. The Russian authorities then announced that it found no mention of the library.

Instead, free access was available to the papers of the American Office of Military Government for Greater Hessen, preserved in the National Archives in Washington. The papers covered the Nazi deposits found in Hessen, and papers related to the work of the Offenbach Archival Depot.

The third line of archival research was related to the papers produced by the German Federal Republic in the negotiations for the restitution or compensation for stolen items. These papers are in the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz Federal Fund (Treuhandverwaltung KulturGut bei der für OFD München, i.e. material from the Central Collecting Point, Munich, papers from the Ministries in Bonn, and correspondence on requests for restitution or compensation). However they gave no indication of important findings and could not be studied further.

The visits to archive allowed but brief surveys but exhaustive research remains to be carried out.<sup>57</sup> All the papers found during research into the Roman libraries are part of an undoubtedly much larger mosaic that has still be entirely reconstructed. The start of comprehensive and in-depth research would be very desirable, partly to understand the looting in Italy as part of the context of ERR activity during the Nazi occupation.

Taking into account this state of things, we can however try to draw some preliminary conclusions from the material found in archives consulted.

Thanks to the Commission's work it was first established that the plundering (at least at the second half of December but probably also the looting on October 1) was actually carried out by ERR. A document dated January 21, 1944 the Sonderkommando Italien of ERR states that "through a special operation in Rome the rest of the synagogue library was loaded onto a wagon headed to

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<sup>57</sup> There are still some archives to be viewed, especially the archive of the District of Giessen, the Berlin Landesarchiv, and the archive of the Foreign Ministry in Berlin (Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts). The archives of Washington and Coblenz must also be consulted.

the 'Institute of Research on the Jewish Question' in Frankfurt . .... Other material is no longer to be found in Rome"<sup>58</sup>

The initial hypothesis of the ERR operation in Rome was further confirmed by the research carried out on behalf of the Commission in Germany. In the *Bundesarchiv* in Berlin is a reference on a trip to Italy by Dr. Johannes Pohl and Dr. Grunewald before November 15, 1943<sup>59</sup> and Pohl's role is confirmed by the City Archives papers Frankfurt.<sup>60</sup>

The Institute for Research into the Jewish question was played a central role as recipient of stolen Jewish books. The Commission's attention was then directed towards Frankfurt and surrounding areas. With the bombing of German cities the transfer of books to more secure storage areas also increased. A document cited by Joshua Starr<sup>61</sup> at the time shows that the director of Frankfurt had transferred some of the material from Frankfurt to Hungen in the period between October 28, 1943 and January 21, 1944. According to the report by Klaus Schickert<sup>62</sup> part of the library of IEJ was moved to IEJ Hungen and housed in the town's castle, 32 miles from Frankfurt. The transfer of the library began Oct. 28, 1943 and continued until July 1944.<sup>63</sup>

In April 1945, the Americans discovered deposits in Hungen. The papers of the American Office of Military Government for Greater Hessen, preserved in the National Archives in Washington, include in semi-monthly reports of the G-5 officer in the U.S. 3rd Army, a biweekly report of April 15, 1945 regarding the books stolen from Rome. According to the report, the Hungen deposit was visited by American officers on April 9, 1945. In the buildings visited, they were found materials from occupied countries (Amsterdam, Thessaloniki, Lodz, Kiev, Minsk, Norway and other occupied countries").<sup>64</sup> A very important sentence of this report states that "a

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<sup>58</sup> Letter dated January 21, 1994 of the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg. Sonderkommando Italien (A copy of the document, already cited in notes 16 and 52 reached the Commission thanks to the courtesy of the director of the Bundesarchiv of Coblenz upon the request of the Ministry for Cultural Assets). The same letter stated that the library of the "Jew Philippe in Pistoia" contain approximately 1,200 volumes that also contained reports of the sessions of the Italian Parliament starting in 184 of interest to the Zentral Bibliothek Hohe Schule.

<sup>59</sup> Report of November 15, 1943 ERR – Stabsführung II, in: BA, NS 8, vol. 260, p. 148.

<sup>60</sup> Stadtarchiv Frankfurt to. M., "Kulturamt" Section: Johannes Pohl took his vows in 1927; from 1929 to 1932, he had a scholarship in Rome at the Pontifical Biblical Institute (we cannot exclude that he visited the Jewish libraries of the Community of Rome or CRI). In 1934, he renounced his vows and married a German woman born in Jerusalem. In 1939, he worked as a librarian at the Prussian State Library, Berlin, in the oriental section. In 1940, he joined the Nazi Party and in 1941, he was appointed head of the "Jewish" section of the Frankfurt Institute. The same year, he was sent to Greece to oversee confiscation of the books of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki and went to Vilnius and Minsk in 1942 and Belgrade in 1943. In April 1943, he prepared his report on the Frankfurt library and was in Italy between September 8 and November 15 of the same year.

<sup>61</sup> J. Starr, *Jewish cultural property under nazi control*, in "Jewish Social Studies", vol. XII, 1950, pp. 27-48

<sup>62</sup> Bundesarchiv Berlin, Section NS 8, vol. 266, pp. 266. Schickert Report of March 27, 1944.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. *Geheimsache Schloss Hungen. Die Geschichte der geraubten Bücher in Hungen und Hirzenhain (1943-1946)* Hungen 2004.

<sup>64</sup> National Archives Washington (NARA), Microfilm Collection M1941, Roll 31.

trainload with materials from Italy expected but never arrived." The source that led U.S. officials to this was probably the questioning of ERR staff in Hungen.

We also find this fact in a letter of Nazi origin (from ERR, today preserved at the Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine in Paris) in September 1944 concerning a Nazi inspection by Hungen. German officials in that in Hungen stated in the correspondence that they expected the Italian train, but that it never arrived. Along with the Schichkert report, the ERR papers also contained a November 28, 1944 report by Wunder. Wunder<sup>65</sup> was head of the first ERR section and was writing about two loads of books from Rome and Minsk. He stated that very little Judaica has arrived recently and almost no Hebraica. Therefore the enigma of the route taken by the shipments from Rome and Minsk remains since they could hardly have been diverted directly to Hungen.

Although the two statements were made by the same group of people (i.e. ERR officials, but in very different historical moments, i.e., in an internal report in September 1944 and April 1945 in front of American officials) remain extremely important. However, this is not sufficient to resolve the mystery: it is likely that the missing wagon was one of the two shipments<sup>66</sup> in October 1943 and probably contained the library of the Community.

We must remember however that Hungen with its 1.2 million books and objects was not the only rich store of Jewish materials found by the U.S. military. "The former Rothschild Library, Untermainkai 15, in Frankfurt / Main" is still in the center of Frankfurt. And in "the sub-cellars at *Bockenheimer Landstrasse* 70 (the Premises of the former *Institut zur Erforschung der Judenfrage*, founded by Dr. Alfred Rosenberg)" about 130,000 volumes were found, which were also taken on July 10-19, 1945 to the Offenbach Archival Depot (OAD). In the July 1945 report of the Monuments and Fine Arts Division (signed by Lt. Col. George Peddy) SRO also identified 57 libraries. In addition, on August 6 the number of libraries identified increased to 64, mostly German and Austrian Jewish libraries, but collections that also came from the Baltic States, France and the Netherlands, although none were of Italian origin.<sup>67</sup>

After the identification of deposits in Hungen, the Allies sorted the books at the Offenbach warehouse.

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<sup>65</sup> On the activity of Gerd Wunder cf. Patricia Grimsted Kennedy, "Roads to Ratibor. Library and Archival Plunder by the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg", in "*Holocaust and Genocide Studies*", year 19 (2005), pp. 390-458, in particular, note 53.

<sup>66</sup> In a letter dated April 17, 1961 to the President of the Jewish Community of Rome, F. Pitigliani, the firm Otto and Rosoni wrote that all the volumes of the library of the Community and those of the Rabbinical College above it were taken on October 14, and loaded onto two wagons. Therefore, admitted that the missing wagon of September 1944 was one of these, there is no evidence on the other wagon sent from Rome to Germany on October 14. The third wagon, sent on December 23 from Rome, might have been sent to Frankfurt/Hungen.

<sup>67</sup> National Archives Washington (NARA), Microfilm Collection M1941, Roll 32.

During the huge successive job of sorting the collection, the OAD staff eventually found books of Italian origin. The staff took great care, extrapolating the stamps of the libraries of origin found on all the stolen books. The result was a comprehensive picture for each country. For Italy, 19 stamps were found including that of the Library of the Italian Rabbinical College. The stamp bears the designation "Florence" [formerly the site of the College]. Among the other 18 there are even some German libraries (*Kunsthistorisches Institut Florenz*, *Königlich Preussisches Historisches Institut Rom*) and a stamp mistakenly regarded as an indicator of a previous owner (i.e. "free for review").<sup>68</sup>

The complex task of sorting the postwar Nazi loot, however, could not be one hundred percent complete. Of the millions of books stolen, some books could easily escape (although not an entire library!). Even the Pentateuch returned<sup>69</sup> thanks to the work of the Commission, passed through Hungen. Its owner, Oppenheim, survivor of Terezin, had worked with the Allies operating in the district of Giessen sorting books found in Hungen, where an organization for the restitution of Jewish assets was active.

The work on the stamps was so extensive and detailed (thousands of stamps and bookplates were collected) that the absence of the stamp of the Jewish Community of Rome in that material must lead to the conclusion that the books of the Community in 1945 were not found in deposits controlled by the OAD. This would mean that the books of the Community were not found at the end of the war in either Hungen, Frankfurt, or in other deposits discovered by U.S. forces (in conjunction with the allegations of Nazi officials regarding the missing wagon which never arrived). In addition, the stamp on the books of the Jewish Community of Rome was so special that it was completely dissimilar to stamps of the other Jewish libraries. This is another reason that led the Commission to infer that books were not included in the Offenbach material.<sup>70</sup>

This reconstruction of the events of the books from Rome sorted in Offenbach also makes it possible to envisage the route taken by the Rabbinical College catalogue found in Israel. It may have reached Frankfurt / Hungen in the second wagon of December (or in one of the two wagons in October, which contained, according to Otto and Rosoni some of the Rabbinical College books, if we assume that the books of the Community and the Rabbinical College were loaded on two separate wagons October 14).

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<sup>68</sup> The list of "Italian" stamps can be found at NARA, Microfilm Collection M1942, roll 12, pp. 647-648.

<sup>69</sup> The Pentateuch, returned during the Hanover Conference in May 2005, printed in Amsterdam in 1680 Uri Phoebus Levi, was part of the library of the Italian Rabbinical College.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. the list of all the stamps found in NARA, Microfilm Collection M1942, roll 12.



With the reconstruction work of sorting through the book stamps, carefully executed by OAD officials and staff, that the books removed from Rome were included "unidentifiable" material transferred from Offenbach to the United States (or Israel, as reflected in the papers of the NARA and the statements made by Gershom Sholem). That was only possible for books with no stamps.<sup>71</sup> It therefore seems highly unlikely (admitted that the two wagons that left Rome on October 14 actually arrived in Frankfurt) that in October 1943 or later months ERR staff had time to remove all the community stamps from the books, whereas the volumes from the Rabbinical College remained intact and arrived - at least based on this reconstruction – in the same shipment..

Examination of the work done by American officials in Offenbach therefore led to the Commission's conclusion that the Community's library never reached Frankfurt / Hungen (this would therefore also exclude any restitution – made incorrectly but in good faith – to the United States or the State of Israel). Based on these considerations, the Commission once again turned its attention to the hypothesis that the Community library was shipped to Berlin in the fall of 1943.<sup>72</sup> Two possibilities were derived from the Berlin hypothesis. There was the idea that the Community library was taken to Silesia (i.e. to the offices of the *Buchleitstelle* of Ratibor) from the Rosenberg offices in Berlin (or the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* in Berlin, if we were also assume the responsibility, at least for the first wagon that left in October 1943, of the SS rather than ERR). Then, after the war, they were sent to Moscow – via Prague and Kiev. For that reason, the Commission decided to see whether there was any trace of the stolen books in the countries of the former Soviet Union.

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<sup>71</sup> The testimony (also mentioned by Rabbi Murnelstein) of Ernst Grumach, a German Jew forced to work as a librarian for the SS, that he removed the stamps from the books, did not concern the books of the IEJ looted by ERR because the books found in Hungen still had their original stamps. The Nazi officials did not have time to remove the stamps. This procedure was only carried out for books definitively catalogued, but there were few of these at Frankfurt/Hungen and only those that arrived before the fall of 1943.

<sup>72</sup> Another hypothesis – but without any certain proof – is that of the wagon's destruction during transit, either in Germany or Italy.

## RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY THE COMMISSION IN RUSSIA AND THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Russian territory, taking into account the entire extension of the former Soviet Union, was an important line of research from the beginning of the Commission's work. In addition to its attempts to reconstruct the general historical framework, the Commission was motivated to inquire into the "Russian track" by evidence from archival research in other areas and by information obtained in interviews with expert. The latter included a particularly important conversation with Minister Mario Bondioli Osio. In a message of June 19, 2003 Osio, following a meeting with Deputy Minister of Culture Khoroshilova, assisted by the Director of the Library of Foreign Literature in Moscow Ekaterina Genieva, stressed the usefulness and importance of extending the inquiries concerning the destiny of the Library of the Jewish Community of Rome to Russia.<sup>73</sup>

The newly formed Commission on the recovery of libraries looted from the Synagogue of Rome was therefore informed that the Library of Moscow was an authoritative reference, the most accredited and active in research into the works stolen during the Second World War.

Among the lines of research, on the other hand, the Russian hypothesis seemed to be an alternative to investigations conducted in the U.S. according to another theory, namely that the Roman libraries were had ended up in the territories occupied by the Allies.

As mentioned above, the first research conducted by Prof. Massimo Giuliani in the United States on behalf of the Commission confirmed the wisdom of planning studies in Russia. The scholar reported the conversation with Colonel Pomrenze, who was director of the Offenbach Archival Depot and chief organizer of the complex work of returning the looted library materials for the U.S. Army from February to May 1946. The office expressed the belief that some of the material hidden by the Nazis in Germany had been taken to Moscow. Giuliani reported that other scholars were working on a similar hypothesis.<sup>74</sup>

The research conducted by Commissioner Lutz Klinkhammer in the National Archives in Washington also confirmed this hypothesis. During his examination of the papers of the deposit of Offenbach, Klinkhammer noted the exceptional work of sorting the books discovered after the war

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<sup>73</sup> Message from Minister Mario Bondioli Osio dated June 19, 2003, transmitted from the Italian Embassy in Moscow to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Cultural Assets. Commission Archives, Presidency of the Council of Ministers.

<sup>74</sup> Report by Massimo Giuliani to the Commission date July 2, 2003. Commission Archives, Presidency of the Council of Ministers.

by U.S. personnel assigned to the deposit, which extrapolated the stamps of the original libraries for all the stolen books.<sup>75</sup>

The advisability of making inquiries in Russia was further confirmed in a letter to Jack V. Lunzer, a renowned collector and director of the Library of Valmadonna Trust in London. Lunzer, responding to a request for information by the Commission, recalled that he went to Moscow in 1963 to examine the Jewish heritage preserved at the former Lenin Library, today the State Library of Russia. He was not admitted because access remained prohibited until the advent of *perestroika*. On the occasion of the next three most recent visits, Lunzer continued, "... The librarians mentioned to me that they had what they called the *Trophy Library* and when pressed I was told that erstwhile *Trophy Library* was now mixed with the general holdings and was not available for inspection. We know that community libraries were confiscated by the Russian army and the whereabouts you probably know. I hope this information is of interest to you"<sup>76</sup>

The Commission was able to follow this line of research thanks to the support of the diplomatic authorities, which was indispensable in overcoming major obstacles. The inquiries required a great deal of time and procedures aimed at clearly and precisely determining the type and extent of research. The agreement with the Rudomino Foundation took some time given some difficulties regarding how to conduct the research and the financial commitment necessary.

However, the work was not successful. The unsatisfactory results of the research lies not so much in the fact that nothing was found of the looted books, manuscripts and incunabula. If it were possible to objectively ascertain that this heritage was not in Russia, verification of that fact would have been a success, since it would have been reliable and scientific.

Restrictions to the research carried out in Russia were also due to the inaccessibility of many archives and documents. The Library informed the Commission of these restrictions, which are still in effect today. This unavailability primarily concerned contemporary documents, those which more than any other could have traced the routes followed by libraries in the former Soviet territory, and provided guidelines in this investigation.

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<sup>75</sup> Lutz Klinkhammer, Report on Mission to Washington, October 21-27, 2006, Commission Archives, Presidency of the Council of Ministers.

<sup>76</sup> Letter from Jack V. Lunzer to the Tedeschi Commission, July 6, 2006 Commission Archives, Presidency of the Council of Ministers.

There were also negative results for research conducted in the countries of the former Soviet Union through the Embassy of Italy in Vilnius, Tallinn, Tbilisi, Riga and Kiev.<sup>77</sup>

The area of Prague was also a target of research for the Commission. Czech archives preserve the archives of documentation of the German occupying forces and of the former protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. In recent decades, these archives were found to contain a great deal of material from Jewish communities of the Netherlands and Greece. The Commission's participation in the Liberec Conference on the search for confiscated assets reinforced this line of research. The examination of the Czech archives conducted by the Italian diplomatic authorities in the Czech Republic was also negative, inasmuch as nothing was found belonging to or even relevant to plundered Roman libraries.

### *How the research was conducted*

The research was carried out in Russia by the working group coordinated by Ekaterina Genieva on basis of the agreement with the Commission and with financial support provided by UniCredit Private Banking.

The agreement was preceded by laborious negotiations,<sup>78</sup> during which the Commission was assisted by the successive ambassadors at the Italian Embassy to Moscow and the Legal Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Furthermore, during his visit to Moscow on February 7, 2005, the Minister of Foreign Affairs pro tempore urged his Russian counterpart to authorize the work of the Commission.

On occasion of the meetings between the two Foreign Ministers, the Commission sent a "Memorandum on Possible Research in Russia of Books belonging to the Library of the Jewish Community of Rome looted in 1943."

The Italian Embassy also officially sent the First European Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation a copy of the Sonne Catalogue and a list of Talmud Torah books, unfortunately the only partial descriptive instruments available of the lost libraries

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<sup>77</sup> For the documentation, cf. Commission Archives, Presidency of the Council of Ministers.

<sup>75</sup> The documentation is preserved in the Commission Archives. Cf., for example, the letter of the Commission President to Ekaterina Genieva dated July 29, 2003, Commission Archives, Presidency of the Council of Ministers; message of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Italian Embassy in Moscow dated December 15, 2003, Commission Archives, Presidency of the Council of Ministers; message from the Italian Embassy in Moscow to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, December 30, 2003, Commission Archives, Presidency of the Council of Ministers; letter from Ekaterina Genieva to the Commission President via e-mail dated February 13, 2004 by Karina Dmitrieva, Commission Archives, Presidency of the Council of Ministers.

(along with stamps and bookplates). The Commission digitalized the descriptive material of the stolen libraries and the material was also sent to the Library of Foreign Literatures in this format. This was done to facilitate the dissemination, identification, and discovery even of individual books or manuscripts from the Synagogue of Rome.

The project was also considered at the meeting in Moscow of the then Minister of Cultural Assets and Activities with his Russian counterpart. During the meeting, Minister Urbani Shvydkoy confirmed the advisability of consulting the Library of Foreign Literature since it was the organization responsible for carrying out this kind of research in Russia.

During its work, the Commission held numerous meetings with scholars, historians, diplomats, and representatives of Jewish communities and culture, to witness and contribute to the ongoing research. In order to reach the best possible agreement with Moscow, the Commission solicited the opinion of experts in Judaica to gather information on the Russian libraries and institutions that had already been visited but where no Jewish books or manuscripts from Rome were found.

The contacts also included those with Prof. Patricia Kennedy Grimsted of Harvard University, the world's foremost ERR scholar, engaged in an intensive research program in Ukraine. Prof. Grimstead, however, informed the Commission that she had never encountered Jewish materials from Rome or had any direct knowledge of the Rosenberg plundering in Rome. The extensive bibliography on the topic produced by Grimsted confirmed her statements: there was no reference to Italy or materials looted in Italy.

Later, at the end of the Conference of Liberec the publication of a book, acquired in the following months by the Commission, was announced: P. Grimstead, F.J. Hoogewoud and E. Ketel, *Returned from Russia. Nazi Archival Plunder in Western Europe and Recent Restitution Issues*, 2007. There are few references to Italy and they were not relevant to the Commission's research. However, page 66 contains a map of Europe from the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg, dated 1944, clearly indicating with an arrow the removal of materials from Rome.

Regarding the research, it should be noted that in August 2005 the Embassy of Italy in Moscow reported to the Commission the outcome of investigation conducted during the first half of the year following the meetings between the two Foreign Ministers. The result – announced by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation – was negative for all research conducted by

the Russian Ministry of Culture and in particular by the Federal Agency of Culture and the Federal Archive Agency.<sup>79</sup>

In November 2005 a mission to Moscow by a Commission delegation travelled to Moscow, the visit organized by Ambassador Facco Bonetti, who had the Director of Military Vladimir Korotacv met in preparation for the visit. The meeting was attended by the Library director and her colleagues, Ambassador Facco Bonetti and his cultural attaché, and underlined the importance of international research of the Commission. Mrs. Genieva described the research methodology used by the Library of Literature for similar bibliographic and archival projects concerning the library. It was again agreed that the Library of Moscow would prepare a research program and a cost estimate. Two experts of the Italian delegation stayed longer in Moscow to consult the Rosenberg deposits in the Military Archives and some sections of the National Archives where they discovered interesting information and documents, which were not however decisive for the research goals.

On May 21, 2007 an agreement was signed between the Library of Moscow, the Commission and UniCredit Private Banking. The agreement provided for a year's work, quarterly written reports and corresponding transfer of the agreed funding, a total of 30,000 euro. An integral part of the agreement was an attachment that was spelled out the program, research methodology, and sites to explore: seven in Moscow, including archives, museums, and libraries and three in St. Petersburg.<sup>80</sup>

The report of the Director Genieva (the first quarterly report, written by Semen Iakerson expert in Hebrew manuscripts) did not correspond to the Commission's expectations, inasmuch as it presented an essentially descriptive study of the largest collections of Hebrew manuscripts preserved in Russia. Although the report was extremely erudite, the document collections considered were generally considered to be unrelated, both in origin and chronological context, to the Roman bibliographic material stolen in 1943.<sup>81</sup>

The commissioners stressed the advisability of doing research more in keeping with the substance of the agreement, asking that the inquiries take place at the libraries and archives in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

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<sup>79</sup> Verbal note of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation n. 4256/ledn dated July 13, 2005. Commission Archives, Presidency of the Council of Ministers.

<sup>80</sup> *Agreement to sponsor a research project in accord with the Commission for the Recovery of the Library of the Jewish Community of Rome, plundered in 1943, between the M.I. Rudomino Russian State Library of Foreign Literature and UniCredit Private Banking S.p.A.*, Rome, May 21, 2007, Commission Archives, Presidency of the Council of Ministers.

<sup>81</sup> S.M.Iakerson, *Hebrew Manuscripts in St. Petersburg. Collection Development. Histories. Current status*, Commission Archives.

The second report sent from Moscow is entitled: *Part 2: Review of Moscow Repositories*. The authors were K. A. Dmitrieva, I. V. Zaitsev, Deputy Director of the Institute for Oriental Studies, and T. A. Karasova, of the institute's Israel Department.

The introduction to the report was aimed at describing the Jewish books from Rome, but stated: "... Many archival sources telling the story of the relocation and distribution in the USSR of captured books, manuscripts and archives displaced as a result of WWII are still restricted and the material available is rather fragmentary. This is also true of the Jewish book collections that came to the USSR from Germany and other European countries."

The report is divided into the description of four groups: seven archives, including the Military Archive in Moscow, two museums, three libraries including the National Library and three institutes. The brief findings declare the absence of any Jewish Roman material in archives, libraries, museums and institutions examined in the inquiry and indicated the possibility of continuing the investigation at: 1) "closed" archives of the Federal Security Service; 2) the library collections and museums in the Russian provinces; 3) the library collections and museums in the Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia.<sup>82</sup>

The second report did not differ significantly from the first vis-à-vis the objectives of the investigation, but these goals were now explicitly mentioned in the introductory note above.

Regarding the second report, the Commission underscored certain shortcomings, including: 1) the impossibility of carrying out the research agreed on in some archives that were still closed; 2) the choice of some of the sites for the inquiry, which already had produced negative results in previous research; 3) the inadequacy of the Russian Military Archive Research, carried out mainly through published guidebooks.

The Commission then turned again to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to prevail over restrictions on access to documentary sources that might be relevant to tracing the Roman books, especially sources that might have been housed in the Historical Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federal Republic. The Commission obtained the full support of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

At the end of June, the Italian Embassy in Moscow informed the Commission that during research conducted in the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, the

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<sup>82</sup>. I.V.Zaitsev, T.A. Karasova, K.A.Dimitrieva, *Part 2: Review of Moscow Repositories*, Commission Archives, Presidency of the Council of Ministers.

Russian State Military Archives and the State Archives of the Russian Federation no information helpful in tracing the library stolen from the Synagogue of Rome in 1943 had been found.

The Commission received from Moscow the third quarterly report (final report of the research).<sup>83</sup> The report stated that it had nothing new to add to the research already carried out and confirmed the negative results of the investigations.

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<sup>83</sup> *Supplementary to the Report n.2, Part 2: A Review of Moscow Book Storages*, Commission Archives, Presidency of the Council of Ministers.



## CONCLUSIONS

In taking stock of the study and its results, the Commission is aware of the limits inherent in its activity, the obstacles, and the difficulties related to the specific subject of the inquiry. In doing so, it must consider both the results achieved, the problems that remain, and future avenues of research identified.

The work was not sufficient to achieve a precise reconstruction of the story (let alone find the stolen library). However, the Commission believes that it has collected useful information, especially in relation to the complexity and difficulty of the investigation and means at its disposal, for a more precise cultural and documentary picture of the vicissitudes of the library looted in 1943, also in view of the general framework in which it placed its research activities.

It seems possible to say first of all, that thanks to the Commission inquiry, the contacts established with organizations, institutions, scholars, and its participation in international conferences, the question of the library of the Jewish community of Rome (and that of the Rabbinical College Italian) plundered by the Nazis has acquired a new international visibility. This has revived the attention of those concerned with the vicissitudes of Jewish cultural property looted by Nazi Germany, starting with the scholars and experts in the field.

In carrying out its work and during the debate on the documentary material found and the research already completed or in progress on the subject, the Commission noted the marginal role in the international debate on the vicissitudes of cultural and bibliographic heritage Italian and Roman Judaism. Trying to provide answers to this consideration and looking at the historical context, it was suggested that the various reasons might include the special situation in Italy between 1940 and 1945, when it was first an ally of Germany and then, after September 1943, governed by the armistice. Therefore, despite the co-belligerency with Germany starting in October of that year and – at the same time – the Resistance, Italy was still a defeated country. Added to the negative influence of this political situation, we should consider Italy's small Jewish population and the difficulties in material and moral reconstruction after the war. These events appear to have influenced the action taken at the close of the war for the recovery of historical, artistic, and very substantial bibliographic heritage, even though they belonged a small minority, and so later, initiating scientific research in this regard. The cultural framework was equally important. Literature on the history of Jews in Italy in the first half of the twentieth century and the Fascist and Nazi persecution, which began in the early Sixties, has had a real momentum in the last two

decades. It should however be noted that among the many areas to be investigated, little attention has been paid to economic aspects, postwar restoration of rights,<sup>84</sup> and especially the wounds inflicted on the cultural and bibliographic heritage. All this seems to confirm the almost total absence of debate over the library of Rome in the national and international literature on the subject. That was an added stimulus to investigate this matter in-depth.

Archival investigation, sensitizing scholars and authorities to the problem, the relationships created and the Commission's participation in international discussions have helped to give new emphasis to the issue and raise awareness of its importance.

Regarding some of the specific knowledge acquired, clarification of the role of ERR's role in Rome as part of the Nazi policy of removal of library and archives of Jewish communities is particularly significant.

As the Commission tried to explain in its report, in a framework of the lack of documentation and knowledge, insecure and inaccessible, the identification of organization in charge of the operation is an indispensable point of reference for systematic continuation of the research already underway with different outcomes in multiple areas.

Despite only partial results achieved by the work of the Commission, it appears appropriate to reiterate the importance and usefulness of further inquiries. The discovery of the library aside, it is important to reconstruct the story of its removal, as part of ERR activities and the policy of Nazi looting of art works and all documents relating to the history and life of the Jews, not a minor part of German racial policy. Careful reconstruction of ERR activities in Italy, identification of personnel directly involved in the operation, reconstruction of routes, depots, their activities, comparison of the events with those of other libraries and archives looted and lost, but sometimes traced and returned to its rightful owners all seem important and significant aspects of a line of research. However, that research needs to be integrated and supplemented, certainly for reconstruction of this particular story, but also in relation to light it can shed on Nazi policies for the occupation in Italy and the removal of cultural assets and libraries from the other occupied territories. The Commission considers that its work made it possible to trace some avenues of research, which need thorough patient and careful archival investigation, given the fragmentation

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<sup>84</sup> Recognition should be made of the role of the institutions in promoting important research on the subject: *L'abrogazione delle leggi razziali in Italia (1943-1987)*, edited and with an introduction by Mario Toscano, preface by Giovanni Spadolini, Servizio Studi del Senato della Repubblica, Rome, 1988, pp.265; *Commissione per la ricostruzione delle vicende che hanno caratterizzato in Italia le attività di acquisizione dei beni dei cittadini ebrei da parte di organismi pubblici e privati, Rapporto generale*, Rome, 2001, pp.540.

and dispersion of the sources. Among these, priority should be given to a thorough analysis of documents preserved in the archives of the United States and Germany, supplemented by a review of Russian documentation. The latter might be carried out, hopefully, after an end to the limitations to consultation in Russian archives encountered by the Commission during its activity. The outcome would be to reconstruct a chapter of history that can only be understood if fully rooted in the broader context of the events of the Second World War and early post-war years.

In this respect, the Commission believes that continued work by a team of scholars and researchers to develop a research project, based on the Commission's work, acquisition of international scientific literature on the topic with suitable financial support, in order to achieve an accurate historical reconstruction of events based on a general review of the documentation contained in historical archives from the U.S. and Germany would be of particular use. After that, there should be consultation of all those archives, most of which are open to scholars, containing documentation on ERR activity, but also the events of the Institute of Frankfurt and the cataloguing and operations in the deposit. Separate study should be dedicated to consulting state archives divided after the fall of the Soviet Union. As specified in the report, this presents particular problems. In-depth study as to the fate of the missing portion of the Rabbinical College, partly through a comparison of existing texts and those present in the catalogue found in Jerusalem not long before the Commission completed its work.

The realization of such a project would not only make it possible to achieve further results on the investigation into the looting of the library of the Jewish Community of Rome and its subsequent destiny, but also allow significant progress in historical research into a matter of great ethical and civil importance.