

BENÈ ROMI. THE JEWISH PRESENCE IN ROME IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY



*First General Ledger of Our University of the Jews of Rome, started on September 4, 1699...
Archivio Storico della Comunità Ebraica di Roma*

1. THE ADMINISTRATIVE, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE GHETTO: ATTEMPTS AT REFORM AND CONSERVATIVE DESIRES

by Silvia Haia Antonucci and Claudio Procaccia¹

1.1 The Catholic Church in the eighteenth century and the condition of the Jews of Rome

During the eighteenth century, the changes in European society with its class conflicts and the rise of the bourgeoisie led – as an extreme consequence – to the political decline of the papacy², beginning with the Peace of Westfalia (1648)³ and heightened by the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714).⁴ The *de facto* end of this process came with the invasion of the Papal States by Napoleon's troops (February 15, 1798), the deposition of the pope, and the deportation in France and death of Pius VI (1775-1799).⁵

In the context described above, two hundred and five years after the ghetto was created (1555), an extremely delicate period began for the Jews of Rome.

It should be recalled that, in the century of the Enlightenment, the conditions of the Jews were still marked by the restrictions that regulated the lives of the ghetto's inhabitants. The enclosure in Rome, created during the Council of Trent (1545-1563), was the result of a joining together of the activities of Rome's Inquisitional Court founded in 1542 and the policies of the Counter-Reform.⁶ Still, decades later and despite the major political, cultural, scientific and economic changes that were taking place in Europe of the modern era, Roman Jews of the eighteenth century were forced to live in an area of extremely limited size (about three hectares), in housing that was inevitably overcrowded and unhealthy, with a population of thousands of people huddled inside.⁷ There were very limited legal areas where Jews and Christians could meet in Rome, substantially places for economic transactions since all forms of conviviality were forbidden. Jews were also restricted in their movements throughout the city, freedom of worship and the professions and trades they could practice. They were forbidden to live outside the ghetto walls and they were only permitted one place of worship, located inside the ghetto.⁸ The eighteenth century was also marked by the increase in pressure on the Jews to convert, and there was a sharp rise in the number of forced conversions.⁹

It was only at the end of the century that the inhabitants of the ghetto experienced freedom similar to that of non-Jews, during the brief period of the Roman Republic (1798-1799).¹⁰

Consequently, despite the progressive affirmation Enlightenment ideals, the papacy's attitude towards the Jewish community of Rome did not show any inclination towards a more liberal attitude. This was in contrast to the events in many countries in Europe where the process of Jewish emancipation was underway.¹¹ Quite the contrary, the last quarter of the eighteenth century was marked by harsher norms regulating the life of the Jews.¹²

In the eighteenth century, the Jewish community continued its slow decline, even though there were no severe economic or social crises, with the exception of the so-called "*Moed di piombo*" (1793).¹³ Actually,

¹ Claudio Procaccia wrote paragraphs 1 and 2; Silvia Haia Antonucci wrote paragraphs 3 and 4.

² MARTINA, 1989, pp. 154-156.

³ Cf. CULTRERA, 1955; CRISTINI, 2007; PAGES, 1993; PARKER, 1994; POLISENSKY, 1982; WEDGWOOD, 1998.

⁴ Cf. POMETTI, 1898; ROTA, 1934.

⁵ FIORANI, 1998; FRASCA, 1997, pp. 11-65; TOTTI, 2002.

⁶ SEGRE, 1996, pp. 709-778.

⁷ In the eighteenth century, the number of Jews residing in the ghetto varied between 3,600 and over 4,000 people.

⁸ Cf. MILANO, 1964.

⁹ Cf. SPIZZICHINO, *infra*.

¹⁰ MILANO, 1964, pp. 397-414.

¹¹ Cf. FOA, 1995; ISRAEL, 1991; TOAFF – SCHWARZFUCHS, 1988.

¹² Cf. SPIZZICHINO, *infra*.

¹³ *Ibid.*

adaptation to the papal system did allow the Jews to survive for centuries in the ghetto, partly due to the lack of any ecclesiastic policy aimed at expelling the Jews from Rome, in comparison to what happened in the early modern period in the territories under control of the Spanish crown.¹⁴

1.2 The administrative, economic and financial situation in the Papal States and the University of the Hebrews

For the entire eighteenth century, the ecclesiastical authorities attempted to reform the system of the Papal States with the goal of ensuring greater control over its lands. Their aim was to reduce the negative effects of aristocratic and municipal privileges, and simplify the complex customs system. They were attempting to modernize and improve operations in the administration and the economic structure of the ecclesiastic state,¹⁵ partly by balancing papal accounts, reducing tax burdens, improving land conditions by draining the Pontine marshes near Rome¹⁶ and reinforcing infrastructures important for the economy, such as the ports of Ancona¹⁷ and Civitavecchia.¹⁸

As with the general situation, the structure of Rome's Jewish community required major reforms to bring recovery to a body with a disastrous financial situation. The *University of the Hebrews* was an institution managed by the wealthier members of the community. From a political and administrative point of view, the University was, in some cases, similar to the guilds, while in others it could be compared to a municipal organization. However, its activity had a much wider range because it regulated and controlled every aspect of the lives of Rome's Jews.¹⁹ The organization was in charge of relations with ecclesiastic and city institutions, and of ensuring order within the ghetto, partly with the support of institutions such as the Confraternities (*Chevrot*) and the synagogues (*Scole*), which provided material and spiritual assistance, particularly to the ghetto's poorer classes.

The situation of the group living inside the walls in the eighteenth century was extremely difficult. The Jewish Community's finances were in critical condition with a growing "public debt" due primarily to the money owed to the Apostolic Camera.²⁰ Moreover, the community's tax revenues were partially reduced by the abolition of the Jewish loan banks, ordered by Pope Innocent XI in 1682.²¹

All this made preservation of acceptable living conditions problematic, even for the standards of the times. Still, the economic situation of the Jews never degenerated into a poverty that compromised the ghetto's very existence.

In fact, from an economic and social point of view, the intervention of the Papal States was marked by a distinct paternalism. This was greeted positively by the Roman population, thanks to the validity of city's standard system of assistance, which guaranteed the survival of its citizens and reduced food riots.²²

Among other things, the system allowed the survival of the Jews despite widespread poverty and severe restrictions on personal and group freedom, even though they were not prevented from practicing some trades. Here, it should be noted that, in the eighteenth century, most of the Jews of Rome were tailors, primarily remodeling used clothing. Many others kept small shops, and still others were craftsmen, producing objects in wood and leather, and buttons.²³ In addition, in contrast to the regulations listed in the edict of 1555, for much of the eighteenth century, some families of Jews living in Rome obtained licenses to import goods from various regions of Europe, including spices, fabrics, cordage, leather, and so forth.²⁴ As well as allowing these Jewish merchants to amass considerable wealth for themselves, this trade let them help keep most of the ghetto's inhabitants alive through the taxes they paid.

¹⁴ FOA, 1995, pp. 95-140.

¹⁵ Cf. DEL PANE, 1959; VOLPI, 1983; WEBER, 1994.

¹⁶ D'ERME, 1989.

¹⁷ NATALUCCI, 1975.

¹⁸ CALISSE, 1983.

¹⁹ Cf. MILANO, 1935, pp. 324-338 and pp. 409-426.

²⁰ MILANO, 1964, pp. 144-152.

²¹ PROCACCIA, 2003, pp. 129-146.

²² GROSS, 1990, p. 9.

²³ MILANO, 1964, pp. 99-101.

²⁴ Cf. FERRARA, PROCACCIA, 2007, pp. 173-194.

It should however be pointed out that the economy of the city and the Papal States in general suffered from a backwards system, based on large estates and the trade guilds. It was a system incapable of creating a market economy based on abolition of feudal ties and the transformation to a modern industrial system.²⁵

All this had a negative effect on the already difficult conditions of Rome's Jews. Their material situation grew worse with the ban published by Pius VI in 1775 restricting the scope of their activities, including the profitable import sector, mentioned above.

The social-economic decline of the Jews in Rome was interrupted for a brief period by the Roman Republic, but the attempt to re-establish the prior status quo threw the Jews into conditions similar to those preceding the period of the French occupation.

1.3 The Jewish Confraternities

Like Christian society, the Jewish Community felt a strong need to create organized groups to help its weaker members. During the Ghetto period, the system of the so-called Confraternities was reinforced.²⁶ Theirs were duties of assistance and mutual aid for their own members and non. They operated in various sectors, including education and rites of worship.

The increase in the number and importance of Christian confraternities between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries should be seen within a significant process of reorganization and centralization of their duties within the ecclesiastic state,²⁷ born of the need to control poverty. A similar phenomenon also took place within the Jewish Community. There, through the activity of the Confraternities, the problems of social instability associated with poverty were reduced. Once the ghetto was established in 1555, the social and health conditions of Jews declined in comparison with the previous decades.²⁸ These conditions were also worsened by a series of economic and financial crises in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which struck the city population as a whole and brought it to its feet. Here, we should note that "In the eighteenth century, slightly under forty associations were active simultaneously at the service of a population of five or six thousand souls... there was the greatest expansion both in the number and fields of activities of these confraternities, not because the spirit of solidarity was greater in the eighteenth century than before, but because at the end of the seventeenth century and during the following one, the increasingly depressed conditions in the ghetto of Rome gave more impetus to the creation of new organizations of mutual aid and the growth of those already existing..."²⁹

The most important confraternities included the *Moshav Zekenim* (Old Age Home), founded in 1725 by Rabbi Tranquillo Vita Corcos.³⁰ In the eighteenth century, the councils that ran two of the major confraternities, *Talmud Torah*³¹ and *Gemilut Chassadim*, were considered second in the community hierarchy, immediately following the Congregation of the University. Following them in importance came the *Ozer Dallim* and the *Moshav Zekenim*. In 1745, the Confraternity *'Etz Chaim* was founded with the aim of "assuming the burden of providing teachers of the Holy *Torah* to poor girls."³² In the nineteenth century, as the economic situation of the ghetto worsened,³³ the University decided to reorganize the confraternity system,

²⁵ GROSS, 1990, pp. 97-102.

²⁶ While the Jewish term *tzedakah* is erroneously translated as "charity", it has the same Hebrew root as *tzedek* i.e. "justice". According to Jewish tradition, helping others implies the reconstruction of a broken order, in other words, rectifying a situation where justice was violated. ANTONUCCI, PROCACCIA, SPIZZICHINO, 2004.

²⁷ MILANO, 1964, p. 236.

²⁸ Over 2,000 Jews were closed in when the *Clastrum Haebreorum* was established. At the time of the proclamation of Rome as the Capital of a united Italy, the number had reached 5,000 people. In the three hundred years when they were enclosed in the Ghetto, the area of residence underwent a series of transformation and expansion, the last in 1825. However, this did not essential change the precarious living conditions. Cf. BACHI, 1939; BACHI, DELLA PERGOLA, 1984, pp. 155-191; LIVI, 1918-1920.

²⁹ MILANO, 1964, p. 236.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

³¹ ANTONUCCI, 2007.

³² MILANO, 1964, pp. 249-250.

³³ Regarding the economic and social conditions of the population of the City of Rome in the nineteenth century, cf. FRIZ, 1974; FRIZ, 1980; BARTOCCINI, 1985; CARVALE, CARACCILO, 1978.

creating the *Shomer Emunim* (1857), which was set up to incorporate confraternities in difficulty. Between 1882 and 1885 after the Emancipation, the University reorganized all the confraternities, keeping the major ones active,³⁴ and reorganizing the others under the Central Charity Agency, an institution that is still active today.

1.4 The *Scole*

During the Ghetto period, the synagogues were called *Scole* or *Schools*, a term that underlined their purpose as places of worship and study. In the Jewish tradition, education is closely tied to the liturgy and observance of religious precepts. These represent symbols of the system of values that must be studied, understood and applied to daily life. In Judaism, *Torah* study is not an end to itself, but is aimed at the practical application of rules contained in the Pentateuch and the related commentary. This explains the name *Scola*.

Throughout the age of ancient Rome, and during subsequent eras, Jews from various regions of the known world came to Rome, and from the time of antiquity, each “ethnic” group founded a synagogue with its own variations of Jewish ritual. The history of Rome’s synagogues is largely unknown,³⁵ even during the Middle Ages and the number of Jewish places of worship is uncertain. Following the expulsion from Spain (1492), a group of Jews arrived who soon tried to organize their own place of worship.³⁶ At the beginning of 1518, there were 11 synagogues in Rome.³⁷

The papal bull *Cum nimis absurdum*, issued in 1555 under the papacy of Paul IV, clearly stated that every ghetto present in the Papal States was allowed to possess no more than one place of worship: “*Et in singulis Civitatibus, Terris & locis, in quibus habitaverint, unicam tantum Sinagogam in loco solito habeant nec aliam de novo construere, aut bona immobilia possidere possint*”. In Piazza Mercatello, later renamed Piazza della Cinque *Scole*, there were five synagogues: the *Scole* Castigliana, Catalana, Siciliana, Tempio³⁸ and Nova.³⁹ They remained there for three and a half centuries, all under one roof as if they were a single place of worship. This forced co-habitation often led to tirades and controversy, almost always resolved by arbitration within the community, but occasionally brought before the Court of the Vicar of Rome.⁴⁰ In the *Scole*, the main role of the rabbi, a scholar who knew the sacred Scriptures and Jewish law (*Halachah*), was to teach, resolve conflicts between community members, and finally decide the correct interpretation of Jewish law in relation to the regulations issued by the institutions that governed the community. After the Renaissance (though it is unclear how), the rabbi became an official of the Community. However, until the Great Synagogue was inaugurated in 1904, daily prayers were led by individuals belonging to the *Scole*, who rotated in that duty according to need.

The *Scole* also provided assistance to their members. Their income consisted of weekly collections and legacies. Following the Emancipation, the area of the former ghetto was demolished and, starting in the 1880s, it was reconstructed in four city blocks. The works were terminated in 1911, and the Great Synagogue inaugurated during this period (1904).

³⁴ These were: *Ghemiluth Chasadim* (in Hebrew, Pious Work, also called *Hessed Vemet*, i.e. Company of Charity and Death); *Talmud Torà* (Study of the *Torah*, also called, School of the Children); *Ozer Dallim* (Help for the Poor); *Moshav Zeqenim* (Old Age Home); *Shomer Emunim* (Custodians of Faith). Cf. MILANO, 1964, p. 237.

³⁵ Cf. PAVONCELLO, 1984.

³⁶ Cf. PAVONCELLO, 1992.

³⁷ ASR, *Coll. Not. Cap.* 501, f 49, in ESPOSITO, 1995, p. 279.

³⁸ ANTONUCCI, 2009.

³⁹ Cf. PAVONCELLO, 1979; ANTONUCCI, 2008.

⁴⁰ Cf. MIGLIAU, 1990, pp. 191-205; MIGLIAU, 1984, pp. 442-447.

2. THE GHETTO AND THE AUTHORITIES: A DIFFICULT COEXISTENCE

by Giancarlo Spizzichino

2.1 Forced baptisms

From the very first centuries of the Common Era, Christianity – setting itself against Judaism – developed a theory of “substitution”. It declared itself Judaism’s natural heir and the “*verus Israel*” whose task was to act as successor of what was once the “Chosen People”.⁴¹

However, the Church Fathers, whose efforts were dedicated to finding acceptance from a still pagan world, did not attempt to force Jewish conversion. The first known case of forced baptism dates back to attempt of the Visigoth king Sisebut, who converted from Aryanism to Christianity. In 613, he issued an edict to forcibly convert the Spanish Jews. The conversion was held to be valid by a Council in 617, although Gregory the Great opposed this practice and underlined the need for spontaneous desire for the conversion to be valid. The principle that a baptism could not be refused once carried out, and that therefore it was valid however it was carried out, therefore has antique origins, as does the practice of forced baptism.

In Rome, during the Ghetto period, relations between Jews and Christians were ambivalent, based on periods of relatively calm daily life and phases of violent compulsion.

After the Council of Trent, when the drive for conversion got the upper hand, there were innumerable cases of conversions of children and youngsters torn forcibly from their parents and families by guards who entered the ghetto at all hours of the day and night and took them to the House of the Catechumens.

With the creation of this institution, founded by Paul III (born Alessandro Farnese) in 1543 and suggested by Ignatius of Loyola, pressure on the Jews to abandon the religion of their fathers grew increasingly intense.

The chance to escape the poverty-stricken life of the ghetto and the enticements offered those who decided to abandon their ancestral religious, together with the hope of improving their social position, impossible under ghetto life, were great incentives to conversion. There were also many who, after a forced stay for indoctrination at the House of the Catechumens, were unconvinced and returned to their homes and their “perverse religion”. It is estimated that, between 1614 and 1798, 1,126 Roman Jews and 1,085 Muslims were converted⁴²: practically speaking, in the years from 1614 to 1679, approximately 10 Jews a year.⁴³ This number increased in the following century. For the entire period under examination, the percentage of converts for every generation between the end of the Seventeenth Century and 1740 fluctuated between 3.5% and 5%. The numbers demonstrate that use of this method to eliminate the Jewish people was a failure. However throughout the period, there was great anguish for what was seen as a constant danger.

After a few years, Prospero Lambertini, elected as Pope Benedict XIV, authorized baptism of children without their parents’ consent, based on the theory of *favor fidei*,⁴⁴ i.e. the “defense of the faith”. This however contradicted the principle instituted by St. Thomas that the baptism of children is invalid *invis parentibus*.

2.2 The Holy Office and the disappearance of the sixth *Scola*. The Portaleone Synagogue (1731-1735)

In the years 1545-1555 the Church, involved in a counterattack against the rise of Protestantism, decided to demonstrate its new position with the institution of the Ghetto of Rome. It affirmed that the battle against the Luteran heresy required harsher treatment of the Jews living in the lands it governed. Likewise, during the 1730s, the Church’s fight against the Enlightenment immediately provoked more severe restrictions

⁴¹ AULISA (ed.), 1998.

⁴² CANONICI, 1998, pp. 234-271.

⁴³ FOA, 2004, p.49.

⁴⁴ *Letter to the currently Reigning Msgr Archbishop of Tarso regarding the baptism of the Jews, children or adults, of February 28, 1747 and Letter to His Holiness Pope Benedict XIV to Msgr Pier Girolamo Guglielmi regarding the offer made by the neophyte of some of his Jewish infant grandchildren to the Christian faith of December 15, 1751.*

I Favori del ghetto di Roma consegnaranno
 al nostro servitore Latoro del presente Ordine
 La Gisella Mazaldò Bonaventura Orfana di Ba-
 dre e Madre sorella di Sabato Bonaventura (ca-
 cumeno, dal quale viene offerta, altrimenti) Questa
 di 20 Settembre 1757
 Giulio N. Capponi.

La Sud. di Torino La Sera dell' 19. Set. 1757

Order to take Mazaldò Bonaventura to the Vice Comptroller, "offered by his brother Sabato who was baptized, so that she could be taken to the House of the Catechumens (1757). Museo Ebraico di Roma, on permanent loan from the Archivio Storico della Comunità Ebraica di Roma.

Favori di ghetto consegnare
 rete Malchà Sona-
 tore Moglie di Be-
 nedetto di Castro
 Rachele di Castro Fi-
 glia
 Bella Isella alora
 figlia
 Isacco Samuele al-
 tro figlio.
 Questo di 9. Maggio 1775.
 J. A. V. di Milano.

Order to take Malchà Sonatore, wife of Benedetto Di Castro, and their children Rachele, Bellastella and Isacco Samuele to the Vice Comptroller, so that they could be taken to the House of the Catechumens (1775). Museo Ebraico di Roma, on permanent loan from the Archivio Storico della Comunità Ebraica di Roma.

against the University of the Jews of Rome. This took the form of all possible objections to close a tiny synagogue that had always operated openly, thanks a papal license paid for with a thousand gold scudi, a lease with the owner of the premises and a long period of existence, approximately a hundred eighty years, without any objections from the papal authorities.

In 1730 the Holy Office undertook a wide-ranging study of all the debts that the Roman Jewish Community owed the Reverend Apostolic Camera. It amounted to 537,349 scudi, a third of which was interest payable.

However, the Reverenda Camera was displeased with that interest in economic-financial matters, which it considered its own domain. In order to study ways of lightening the debts of the University of the Jews and their settlement,⁴⁵ the pope created a commission with representatives of the Holy Office, the Reverenda Camera and the Vice Comptroller of Rome. On February 2, 1732, the day when the commission was instated, those most hostile towards the University of the Jews proposed a previously decreed edict⁴⁶ containing all the dispositions and limitations against the Jews, as a sign of opposition to the commission's aims.

The Community of Rome, and the Scola Portaleone in particular, could have been the area of dispute between two different notions of how to behave with the Jews. The first was ideological, and espoused keep-

Cf. CAFFIERO, 2004.

⁴⁵ ROSA, 1989. Cf. also ROSA, 1997, p. 1071.

⁴⁶ BIBLIOTECA CASANATENSE, *Raccolta di Editti, Bolle, Bandi, year 1733*, n. 17.

ing the Jews in oppressive and continuous subjugation, denying them any possible rights. The other stance, more practical, wanted to avoid exasperating a situation which – if pushed to the limit – might have forced the Church to support another roughly four thousand people, in addition to the abundance of beggars in the lands it ruled.

A document states that the Scola Portaleone was located, “Near the street door of Via dei 4 Capi, as it is commonly known ... [there] ... is a street called Portaleone where there is a street door to enter a building whose only exit is towards the stalls of SS.i Savelli that exit above the Tiber...”⁴⁷

On July 23, 1731, thanks to the initiative of the Holy Office, Rabbi Sabato Di Segni and two of the Co-Presidents of the University, Benedetto Panzieri and Laudadio Di Segni, were notified of an order stating that the synagogue located in the Ghettaello was to be evacuated within eight days. In the building, the Jews had rented “warehouses and storage rooms” to preserve wine, flour, unleavened bread, old and rented items as well as a room used for worship.

A five-year debate before the Holy Office began. The community took out the documentation of a suit against them before the Vicariate Court in 1620. Accused of the same crime back then, it was found innocent the following year. The community affirmed that the synagogue, which had already existed at the time of Paul IV, was reopened with the permission of Gregory XIII after the forced closure ordered by Pope Clement VIII upon payment of a thousand gold scudi. The Community believed that it would win again this time as well. The Holy Office replied that the thousand scudi was not a royalty to reopen the synagogue, but a fine for having opened it in the first place since – starting with Paul IV – no papal disposition allowed more than one synagogue in the Ghetto. Moreover, the Holy Office affirmed that all the documentation that the Jews declared to have submitted in the 1620 suit was not really included, but only explained verbally. This, it claimed, was demonstrated by the absence of the ancient trial papers of a legal clause that gave strict instructions on how to annex legal papers. The University of the Jews made one last attempt to demonstrate the need for the Scola Portaleone, citing the lack of space for the five *scole* in the large ghetto. This however proved to be a false step that the prosecution readily used for its own ends. A few days later, a commission sent by the Holy Office went into the five synagogues in the large ghetto to survey the premises⁴⁸ and stated in the minutes that they could hold 1,217 people and not 1,023 as the University had claimed in a previous survey.

That same year, in minutes⁴⁹ dated November 10, Rabbi Sabato Di Segni declared that, since the Congregation of Sixty could no longer oppose the Holy Office, he had decided that “the circa hundred eighty souls of men who met in the suppressed Scola Portaleone” should be divided among the other *scole*.

That document ratified the end of the Scola Portaleone. It continued to exist for some time in the memory of the descendents of the people who attended, but only a century later, the recollections were few and confused.

2.3 Moed di Piombo: an escape from danger (1793).

Giovanni Angelo Braschi was raised to the throne of St. Peter on February 1775. However, by this time, winds hostile to the Papal States were blowing throughout Europe, and the principle of papal authority was in question. The response of Pius VI was to unearth everything that had been decreed against the Jews in the past, adding some more elements. Thus, on April 5, 1775, the *Edict on the Jews* was issued. The edict repeated and expanded all the restrictions passed since the time of Paul IV, regulating every aspect of the lives of the “people of deicide” in 44 articles. In Rome in particular, great attention was paid to the articles regarding forced baptism, continuing a practice expounded on by Benedict XIV, who theorized the principle of *Favor Fidei*.

But the decisive dispute that led to the incident of the *Moed di Piombo*⁵⁰ was one that Pius VI had with

⁴⁷ ASCER, Fondo *Miscellanea*, b. 2 L c, fasc. *Scuola Portaleone 1731-1735*, doc. P : *Vicino al Portone dei 4 Capi così chiamato dal volgo vi è una strada chiamata Portaleone...*, f. 1 v. and r.

⁴⁸ ASCER, *Miscellaneous Deposit*, b. 2 L c, fasc. *Scuola Portaleone 1731-1735*, doc. M : *Die p.ma septembris 1735, In ex[ecuti]onem Decr[et]i Cong[regatio]nis sub die 24 augusti 1735.*

⁴⁹ ASCER, *Miscellaneous Deposit*, b. 2 L c, fasc. *Scuola Portaleone 1731-1735*, doc. N : *Io so[ttoscri]tto Rabbino dell'Uni[versi]tà dell'Ebrei di Roma fo.fede come la sera di mercoledì 9 del corr[ent]e mese di Nov.^{re}*

⁵⁰ The name “*Moed di Piombo*” (Festival of Leadis) apparently due to the leaden color of the sky when the rain fell that put out the fires set by the Roman rioters. SPIZZICHINO, 2008.

France, with the revolution and its ideals, which he believed were surreptitiously approved by the Jews. Their emancipation, approved by the French National Assembly, was – for those absolutely determined to preserve the status quo in Europe – the tip of the iceberg. This was a set of new ideas deemed subversive for a model of life that the papacy wanted unchanged. His opinion was fully shared by the masses of Rome. They had been accustomed for centuries to seeing papal rule as the only possible, acceptable form of government. Moreover they were accustomed to seeing the Jewish people embody the cosmopolitan principles that were found in the new ideas coming from France.

Nor, in the years prior to 1793, was the news from nearby Tuscany at all reassuring. In Livorno, the Jewish community, larger than that of Rome, shocked by the threats and aggression of the common people who accused them of trading objects Christian worship, was saved by paying out a large amount of money.⁵¹ In Soragna, in the province of Parma, in mid-1792, the Jews were “insulted, roughed up, cudged and had rocks thrown at them”⁵².

With Pope Pius VI, the anti-Jewish atmosphere had become extremely tense. In 1775, a pamphlet entitled *Attempt on the Life and the Martyrdom of San Simone, boy of Tento* was reprinted in Rome. The atmosphere in Rome in the early 1790s was therefore very hostile towards the Jews. This was in contrast to what was happening in other European countries, such as Austria, the Duchy of Tuscany, and Piedmont, where cautious and timid liberal overtures had been enacted by the rulers.

On that fateful day of Sunday, January 13, 1793 (2 Shevat 5553), the Frenchman Hugo de Basville and his wife and son were seen walking along Via del Corso with tricolor rosettes pinned to their clothing. They had just left the Church of San Carlo and were walking towards Piazza Venezia when a menacing crowd surrounded them and took them to Palazzo Palombara, the home of the French banker Mout. The mob, with increasing fury against people who dared them by wearing the hated symbol of French liberty, got into the palace and killed Basville. Then, the rabble-rousers set off towards the Academy of France which was sacked. With growing violence, they set off towards the ghetto.

According a chronicle of the times,⁵³ a rumor ran through the city that crates full of weapons for the French were stored in the warehouses of Pellegrino Ascarelli – who had a contract to supply uniforms to the militias – when actually the storage rooms contained boots and berets. When Ascarelli heard the rumor he rushed to the Vatican’s Secretary of State Cardinal Zelada with his father-in-law Isaia Di Castro (one of the community’s three Co-Presidents) and Rabbi Laudadio Modigliani. The Cardinal believed their denials of possession of arms. The next day, Monday, April 14, after again assaulting and sacking the Academy of France and heading towards the ghetto with faggots to set it on fire, a throng of people from the wards of “Trastevere, Monte and Regola”⁵⁴ met two monks who “with gentle words” miraculously convinced the crowd not to assail the doors of the ghetto. Dissuaded for the moment, the crowd returned about 7 o’clock that evening⁵⁵ and again encountered the two monks who convinced them once more to go back home. At 9 PM⁵⁶ the demonstrators again tried to break down the door of Regola and the Quattro Capi, but the guards sent by the authorities pushed them back, no without keeping some Jews from being beaten up and wounded. The Trastevere group captured a certain Salomone Di Segni, whom they ordered to “die or become Christian”. In order to save his life, he let them take him to the House of the Catechumens from where he returned after a stay of forty days. Reinforcements were sent, about 2,500 guards and militia. Headquartered at the hospital Fatebenefratelli, they started to station themselves around the Ghetto after the masses had killed a carthorse left unguarded and set fire to three carts at Piazza Tartarughe, fleeing with the arrival of the militia. There was another attempt to set the Regola door on fire but the Jews put it out, throwing water on the flames from inside. Unable to succeed in its intent, the crowd headed towards the

⁵¹ DELLA PERUTA, 1997, p. 1136.

⁵² Report of the auditor of the Prince of Soragna, June 8, 1792. COLOMBI, 1975, pp. 290-292.

⁵³ SERENI, 1935-36, pp. 100-125.

⁵⁴ Inhabitants of the wards of Trastevere, Monti e Regola.

⁵⁵ Seven o’clock at night, i.e. 12 MA. Until 1846, the year when Pius IX adjusted the method of telling time to that used through Europe, known as the “French” way, the “Italian” way was used in the Papal States. Used since the beginning of the thirteenth century, the system called for the new day to start at sundown, in conformity with the precept of the Torah in Bereshit 1,5.

⁵⁶The “Italian” 9 o’clock in the evening, coincides with the “French” 2 o’clock in the afternoon. COLZI, 1995, pp. 94-102.

Quattro Capi bridge, armed with faggots to “set the Jews on fire.” This new attempt was also repressed. An attack from the river using two boats full of wood to set the *mignani*⁵⁷ of the windows near the Quattro Capi bridge on fire was easily stopped by the soldiers with a few rifle shots.

Finally, at about 6 at night,⁵⁸ a heavy rainstorm broke out with frightful thunder and lightning, and the tired, drenched mobs withdrew from the battlefield. The government authorities, after quelling the popular uprising with the presence of soldiers, tried to calm them by sending four preachers “one to San Carlo a’ Cattinari, one to Santa Maria del Popolo, the third to Santa Maria ai Monti and the last – Father Fanaglia – to Santa Maria in Trastevere.”⁵⁹ Despite the fact that the anti-Jewish uprising was put down, the ghetto remained closed for eight days. Apparently neither its inhabitants nor the authorities thought that the mood of the rabble-rousers had quieted down definitively. Within the walls, the situation was dramatic, and a special tax was imposed on family heads to cover the needs of the most needy and help those who were unable to work, since they could not leave the ghetto. Meanwhile, outside, while the most violent spirits were less agitated, the same was not true of the common people. They demanded the restoration of the ancient, hateful restrictions against the Jews. The Pope wasted no time in once more proposing the *Edict on the Jews*, issued in 1775, which included a return of the yellow sign, replacement of the two sacred images set up in Piazza Giudia⁶⁰ and walling up some of the windows in buildings facing each other. The cost of the latter was, naturally, borne by the community and non-compliance would have meant the arrest of its leaders.



⁵⁷ Balconies at the windows.

⁵⁸ The time 6 o'clock at night coincided with 11 PM.

⁵⁹ Note that the preachers were sent to churches in the wards of Regola (San Carlo ai Catinari), Monti (Santa Maria ai Monti) and Trastevere (Santa Maria in Trastevere), i.e. the areas where the most violent rabble-rousers lived.

⁶⁰ Outside the ghetto.