

**The documentation kept
in the Historical Archive
of the Jewish Community of Rome (ASCER)
"Giancarlo Spizzichino"**

ASCER is considered one of the most important archives in Europe for what concerns the history of Jews and, in 1981, the Ministry for Cultural Heritage declared it of "considerable historical interest".

It mainly preserves documents relating to the period from the beginning of the Ghetto age (1555) to the years immediately following the Second World War. The consistency of the material is 284 linear meters, divided into two sections – according to the last order made in 1963 by Daniele Carpi – one is related to the Medieval and Modern period, and the second concerns the Contemporary age, from Emancipation to the second mid-twentieth century.

The Medieval and Modern Archive, while providing different information on the daily life of the Jews, on the activities of the "Cinque Scole" (five Schools or Synagogues) and of the Confraternities of the ghetto, is characterized by the strong presence of economic, financial and fiscal information. There are plenty of papers concerning the tax regime imposed on Jews by Ecclesiastical authorities, both as regards direct taxation on capital, and as regards taxes on profits deriving from economic activities, as well as on consumption. There is also a wealth of material concerning the administration of the Community, and the legal and civil status of Jews within the Papal States. Of great interest are the papers relating to *Jus Gazagà*, the loan against interest and the management of pawn shops. There are numerous documents relating to

false accusations of ritual murder, clandestine and forced baptisms, relations with the Casa dei Catecumeni (House of the Catechumens), restrictions on the holding of Jewish books, and the various harassments to which the Jewish population was subjected during the Carnival and during other Catholic holidays. The Contemporary Archive mainly preserves administrative, accounting and tax documentation, material relating to racial persecution, the construction of new synagogues, the legislation of the Jewish Community of Rome and the Confraternities, which then merged into the Deputation of Assistance, to the Asili Infantili Israelitici (Israelite Kindergartens), to the minutes of the meetings of the Community Council.

The ASCER also preserves a Photographic Archive that contains images from the era of the Ghetto in the periods immediately preceding its destruction to today, including photos of the Land of Israel taken in the early decades of the 1900s; and a Music Archive which includes 740 scores.



The building of the Major Synagogue in Rome,
headquarters of the ASCER

The history of the Jewish community of Rome

The Community of Rome is the oldest in Europe; already existed in the II century b.c.e. before the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem (70 c.e.), the first historically documented contacts between the Jewish people and Rome date back to 161 b.c.e., the year in which the ambassadors sent by Judah Maccabeus to the Roman Senate, concluded a treaty of alliance between Rome and the Jewish people in revolt against the Seleucids.

Their life was not always easy: during the Roman Empire, in 212 c.e., the Jews acquired Roman citizenship, guaranteed by the Edict of Caracalla, which extended this right to all free men of the Empire.

In the Middle Ages they suffered economic and religious restrictions, from 1555 to 1870 they were forced to live in the Ghetto, socially and economically limited by the power, laws and religious pressures of the Popes. Among the various forms of discrimination, there was an obligation for Jews to wear a badge on clothing so as to be recognized on sight (4th Lateran Council, 1215); moreover, during the Carnival celebrations, the Jews were subjected to ridicule and harassment.

Between the XV and XVI centuries, the life of the Jews in Rome was characterized by a substantial prosperity and relative freedom, guaranteed by the tolerance of the Popes of Renaissance Rome.

However, this favorable situation changed within a few years due to the establishment of the Inquisition Court in Rome (1542), and the beginning of the Counter-reformation (1545). Excluding the short periods of freedom during the French domination between the XVIII and XIX centuries, the Jews obtained the

equalization of rights only with the dissolution of the Papal State (1870).

Between the XIX and XX centuries the possibilities of insertion into civil and political life increased considerably.

The Jewish participation, in percentage, both in the Risorgimento and in the First World War was considerable: when the homeland, to whose constitution the Jewish component had responded with enthusiasm, needed to be defended, the Jews responded en masse by reporting a number remarkable of honors.

The First World War, and the subsequent economic crisis, worsened the already difficult conditions of the Roman community.

In those years, those anti-Jewish feelings, never completely dormant, reawakened, which led, in 1938, to the notorious Racial Laws.

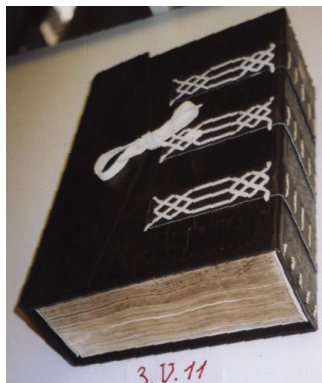
In the period between October 1943 and June 1944, the Nazi invasion and deportations profoundly affected the Jewish community (during the round up of October 16, 1943, 1022 Jews were deported, of which 15 men and 1 woman survived. Out of 40,000 Italian Jews were deported more than 7,000, about 20%, about 800 returned).

With the proclamation of the Republic, the process of normalization and reconfiguration of the Community began, which slowly assumed its current structure.

In 1982 the Community of Rome was marked by a Palestinian terrorist attack carried out at the exit of the Temple, in which a child died and about 40 people were injured.

In 1996 John Paul II was the first Pope to visit the Major Synagogue, in 2010 Benedict XVI was the second, in 2016 Francis was the third. Today's community has about 15,000 members, while Jews in Italy are around 30,000. The

organization of the Italian Communities is recognized by a 1989 state law.



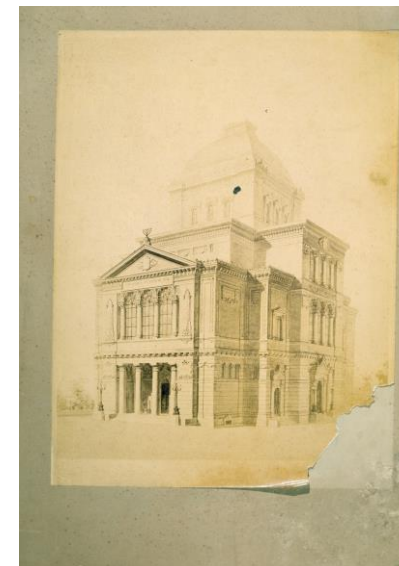
Scuola Catalana. Libro nuovo dei decreti, 1641



Machazor Bene' Romi' (of the sons of Rome, also known as the Italian Rite) collects the prayers of the whole year, was one of the first to be printed (1485); in 1540 it was reprinted in Bologna with the comment of Rav Yochanan Treves, with Talmudic quotations, fundamental for rebuilding the Minhag (the Italian liturgical tradition)



Archivio Storico della Comunità Ebraica di Roma
"Giancarlo Spizzichino"



ASCER, Archivio Contemporaneo, Fondo *Comunità Israelitica di Roma*, Project realized by Costa and Armanni for the construction of the Major Synagogue (1901-1904)

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Timetable: Winter opening (September-May): Monday-Thursday: 8.30-18.00 - Friday and Sunday: 8.30-12.30 - Saturday: CLOSED. **Summer opening (June-August):** Monday-Thursday: 8.30-17.00 - Friday: 8.30-12.30. Saturday and Sunday: CLOSED. **Planned annual closings:** Jewish holidays (see Official Gazette)