Descent from Paradise: Saul Steinberg’s Italian Years, 1933-1941

by Mario Tedeschini Lalli

Abstract

The aesthetic persona of Saul Steinberg (1914-1999), who became one of America’s most beloved artists, began to take shape in Milan during the 1930s. Steinberg arrived there in 1933 to study architecture, having left his native Romania and its virulent anti-Semitism. In 1936, while still an architecture student, he started contributing gag cartoons to popular Italian humor newspapers and soon became renowned for his clever visual wit. These first years in Italy, which he would later remember as a “paradise,” turned rapidly into “hell” in 1938, with the institution of racial laws that deprived him of income, a profession, and a legal residence. Forced to live as an unwanted “foreign Jew” and unable to obtain the visas necessary to leave Italy, by late 1940 he was under threat of imminent arrest; a few months later, he spent several weeks in an internment camp before finally managing to flee the country.

This crucial period in Steinberg’s biography has until now remained largely unknown because of Steinberg’s own reluctance to discuss it. The present essay, building on an earlier study by the same author and using several unpublished archival sources, sheds light on these fraught years, while also examining Steinberg’s sometimes contradictory attitudes to political events as well as art. The essay is illustrated by photographs, documents, and Steinberg’s drawings, many of them from a journal he kept during his last nine months in Italy. The text of this journal is also published here in English for the first time.¹

¹ The point of departure for this essay was my earlier “Fuga d’artista: L’internamento di Saul Steinberg in Italia attraverso il suo diario e i suoi disegni”, Mondo Contemporaneo n. 2 (2008): 91-127. I am grateful for assistance received from many quarters. First, to The Saul Steinberg Foundation, New York, and its executive director, Sheila Schwartz, who was constantly available to explain nuances of Steinberg’s life and art, shared artistic and archival material, and authorized the publication of the journal entries and drawings. Aldo Buzzi, Steinberg’s friend and confidant for sixty years, generously welcomed me to his home on many occasions to speak about his friend; Buzzi died on October 9, 2009. Cristiana Facchini and Michele Sarfatti helped me fine tune this edition by offering additional information and asking probing questions. Thanks also to Mario Toscano for bibliographical and archival suggestions. For graciously providing information and assistance, I am indebted to Piervaleriano Angelini, Emanuele Ascarelli, Bruno Coen Sacerdotti, Carlo Di Cave, Luca Dello Iacovo, Domenico Frassinetti, Susanna Gadd, Italia Iacoponi, Verena Kustatscher, Margareta Latis, Bruno Monguzzi, Pasquale Rasici, Francesca Pellicciari, and Paula Weber. Andi Casson ably translated the original essay into English. The present version – expanded, updated, and largely rewritten – could not have been realized without the enthusiasm and substantive
I didn’t want to accept the reality, the betrayal  
— the way dearest Italy turned into  
Romania, hellish homeland.²

Life as Art

For most of his adult life, Saul Steinberg (1914-1999) drew maps – maps of real or imaginary locations, maps of words and of concepts. Often the maps are of actual places refracted through the artist’s mental constructs, as in View of the World from 9th Avenue, his famous March 29, 1976 New Yorker cover, which, reprinted as a poster, copied, and appropriated for many other cities of the world, became his personal nightmare; even today, it remains the icon that most easily identifies him.¹ There is, however, another splendid map, completed ten years earlier; although intended for The New Yorker, it was never fully published in Steinberg’s lifetime (Fig. 1).⁴ Entitled Autogeography, it is a bird’s-eye view of a green territory dotted with the names of many locales, large and small, from every corner of the world. A very blue, winding river flows through the territory, and on the bottom right it skirts a small lake with an island. On the island is the word “Milano,” while on the shore northeast of the island we find a locality named “Tortoreto (Teramo).”

Young Steinberg lived for more than seven years in Milan (1933-41), arriving from his native Bucharest to enroll in architecture school. In Milan, he studied, loved, began to draw and publish, and formed enduring friendships. By mid-1938, however, the institution of the Fascist racial laws made his Italian sojourn perilous, and he began to seek safe haven elsewhere. In late April 1941, he was arrested as a Romanian Jew and sent to an internment camp in the small Abruzzi town of
Tortoreto in the province of Teramo. The experience would continue to haunt him and to punctuate his correspondence. But never – at least not during his lifetime – did it translate into a coherent and conscious narrative. Steinberg feared “autobiography – the last refuge of the scoundrel.”

Nevertheless, in the mid-1970s, Steinberg’s friend Aldo Buzzi convinced him to tape record memories of his life, which Buzzi planned to edit for publication. However fascinated Steinberg was by this exercise, as well as admiring of Buzzi’s editing skills, he never allowed the book to be published. As late as 1995, four years before his death, Steinberg thanked the Italian publishing house Adelphi for its willingness to print the book, but rejected the idea of seeing “a tragic part of my life treated with allegria!” He was especially hostile to a public airing of his Italian period, including the cartoons he published in the later 1930s in Bertoldo and Settebello, humorous satirical newspapers (Figs. 4, 5). Such works represented a moment in his past too much involved with “jokes.” But he could also be more vehement on the subject of publishing these cartoons. To one proposal he responded angrily, ‘what a bad idea! Blackmail!’; he feared that “dark horrors” might be exposed.

5 “Temo sempre l’autobiografia – l’ultimo rifugio del furfante,” an obvious reference to Samuel Johnson’s aphorism, “Patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel”; Steinberg to Buzzi, November 24, 1978, Lettere, unpublished. And again on December 23, 1978: “Dirò che la parte pericolosa, Le Memorie, sono un po’ come la Bandiera, the last refuge of the scoundrel” – “I would say the risky part, The Memoirs, they are somewhat like The Flag, the last refuge of the scoundrel”; ibid., December 23, 1978, discussing his discontent with a typescript of the autobiographical book that would be posthumously published as Reflections and Shadows (see note 10).

6 Steinberg to Roberto Calasso, May 15, 1995, copy to Buzzi, in Lettere, unpublished: “I was very pleased that Adelphi was willing to publish my booklet [sic], first 20 years ago and now again. Aldo Buzzi, my colleague…who remains a dear friend who stays in touch with visits & letters, taped my monologue 1975 ca. Translated & edited sounded charming, a prank, and after enjoying the pleasure of acceptance I wisely said no. Recently the sight of Gadda’s Lasciatemi nell’ombra, a perfect booklet, red soft covers, good type, many virtues. I was envious. I asked Buzzi who generously prepared a shorter version [of the Steinberg transcript]. Again I read it with pleasure. But I immediately realized that I had no desire to read it again. A true test. It’s NO again. In conclusion: (and I have the duty to explain my teaser act) the tragic part of my life treated with allegria! I’m glad to discover I made some evolution during my old age, a surprise….”

7 Steinberg’s comment about “jokes” (barzellette in Italian) is from my interviews with Aldo Buzzi, May 24, 2007 and January 18, 2008. See also Francesca Pellicciari, Critic Without Words: Saul Steinberg e l’architettura, thesis (Istituto universitario di Architettura di Venezia: 2004-05), 27 [copy at SSF]; and Joel Smith, Saul Steinberg: Illuminations, exh. cat. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 82, 242 note 3, citing 1961-62 correspondence from Rizzoli, which had wanted to publish a book on Steinberg’s Bertoldo work. For Steinberg’s angry remarks about “blackmail” and “dark horrors,” see p. 324 and note 39 below.
Even in calmer moments, Steinberg remained averse to biographical inquiries, so that until his death, only fragments of his life story have surfaced. Some things he told to interviewers, others in the chronology he dictated for the catalogue of his 1978 retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Such autobiographical comments, however, were often designed to be more provocatively concealing than informative. Other hints about Steinberg’s life could be found in his art, where he hid clues (as in Autography), but these clues are incomprehensible without biographical facts.

Only after the death of his friend did Buzzi publish the short book entitled Reflections and Shadows, an edited version of Steinberg’s taped narrative of the 1970s, followed by a selection of the letters Steinberg wrote to him over a fifty-year period. Since then, the work of Joel Smith has greatly expanded our store of biographical data. Yet the Italian period of Steinberg’s life remains the least known.

The present essay seeks to shed light on that time, from Steinberg’s enrollment in 1933 as an architecture student in Milan to his imprisonment and flight from Italy in 1941. What happened during that seven-year sojourn is both a personal history – Steinberg’s happy embrace of Western culture and the beginning of his career as a draftsman – and, with the imposition of racial laws in 1938, part of a collective history of Fascist anti-Semitism. His was one case among

8 Harold Rosenberg, Saul Steinberg, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art: 1978), 234-45. For interviews with Steinberg, see the list in Smith, Saul Steinberg: Illuminations, 276. In 1960, Steinberg agreed to be interviewed by Raimond Rosenthal and Moishe Ducovny for the American Jewish Committee’s Oral History Library; the long interview was never published. The original transcript, now at The New York Public Library, was made from five tapes and runs to 180 pages long; it offers interesting biographical details, although many were later published elsewhere. The transcript is undated, but can be dated by internal evidence to the summer of 1960, with a possible follow up in October of that year. Henceforth cited as “Steinberg, AJC-OHL.”

9 Pellicciari, Critic Without Words, 25, notes that in another famous map, Looking East, 1986, a view of the world from his worktable, Steinberg includes a fragment of Milanese topography from the area around his neighborhood of Piazza Carlo Erba. But if you look lower in the sketch of Italy, Tortoreto is noted as well, the only area on the map south of Modena. For another example of autobiographical clues in a drawing, see below, note 105.

10 Saul Steinberg, with Aldo Buzzi, Reflections and Shadows, translated by John Shepley (New York: Random House, 2002). Originally published as Riflessi e ombre, (Milan: Adelphi, 2001). The book is divided into four parts: the first concerns Steinberg’s youth and family; the second, the war period in Milan and Tortoreto; the third, Washington, D.C. and America; and the fourth, reflections on art.

11 Smith, Steinberg at The New Yorker, and Smith, Saul Steinberg: Illuminations. Both books introduce scholarly analysis to the study of Steinberg’s life and work, including Bertoldo and his art from the war years.
thousands in the most widespread and dramatic historical event that befell foreign Jews living in Italy at the beginning of World War II. Steinberg’s arrest and internment, his struggle to obtain the necessary papers, and his final escape are recorded in the journal he kept from late 1940, which is published here, along with some of the drawings that illustrate it. Enlivening the entries are the constant shifts between the pleasures or irritations of daily life and the dread of being entrapped in Mussolini’s racial policies.

A Romanian Jew in Italy

Saul was the son of Moritz Steinberg, a printer-bookbinder who had a small business manufacturing boxes and cardboard wrapping materials. His birth certificate says he was born on June 15, 1914 (Julian calendar), in Râmnicul Sărat, Romania (100 miles north of Bucharest; on the great river of life in Autogeography, the town is located near the river’s narrow source at left). But he was to grow up in the Romanian capital, attending elementary school, then high school, and spending one year as a philosophy student at the university, before seeking admission to the School of Architecture at the University of Bucharest. Decades later, speaking to his former schoolmate Eugen Campus, he explained his decision to study architecture and his failed attempt at the admission exam:

“If I had declared that I wanted to dedicate myself to art, my parents would have not supported me in school. So I declared that I wanted to study architecture. My parents agreed to this serious and prestigious profession, almost on the same level with medicine. Matchmakers started to show up at our house, offering rich partners for the future architect, even agreeing to sponsor my studies for a prolonged duration. Fortunately, I did not pass the admission examination, and so I left for Milan.”

He left in November 1933. Steinberg’s Jewishness may have had something to do with his failure to pass the entrance examination. Since

---

12 The birth certificate is reproduced in Steinberg, Lettere a Aldo Buzzi, 175. An official copy is in his personal student file at the Politecnico di Milano, Archivio generale d’Ateneo, Fondo Fascicoli studenti e Registri carriera scolastica, folder “Steinberg, Saul” (AGA, copy at SSF).
the early 1920s, anti-Semitic groups in Romania had been clamoring for the institution of *numerus clausus* in universities: a limit to “foreign” (e.g., mostly Jewish) students to further the “Romanization” of professions. *Numerus clausus* was not introduced until 1938, but in 1933 – the very year Steinberg’s application was rejected – “special entrance examinations were introduced and Jewish candidates were deliberately failed.” Even the few Jewish students who managed to get admitted (four out of 160 at the School of Medicine in 1935) were subject to physical attack by fellow students and militants and were hardly able to attend classes. That was Steinberg’s own experience: “I was a college student for a year,” he would recall later, “but I hardly went to school because there was an atmosphere of brutality.” More and more young Romanian Jews thus emigrated to France or Italy for their studies.15

This increasingly anti-Semitic climate of Romania was something Steinberg would remember all his life; coupled with an occasional expression of nostalgia for a childhood home was a vehement rejection of the society, culture, and language of the country.

“My childhood, my adolescence in Romania were a little like being a black in the state of Mississippi.

It will be difficult…to understand – especially for a child – life in an anti-Semitic country such as Romania….The country is a cesspool.

In [the Romanian] language I have been humiliated, beaten, cursed and worse – for being Jewish, the only satisfaction those savages had…. 

I have what they call phantom pain, that is, strong and specific pain in the big toe of a leg amputated years before. It’s the pain of the Romanian patriot I was until the age of 8 or 10, when the anti-Semitism of the place made me renounce that fucking nation forever, remaining faithful only to the landscape, the smell, the house on Strada Palas.

I was embarrassed to be part of a primitive civilization, and pledged that I would save myself from it – [by 1933], in fact, I was in Italy, and in

---


America by ’42.”

So the nineteen-year-old Saul abandoned Bucharest for Milan; in his valise were “a pink, green and blue box of sugary treats, and some drawings.” On December 16, 1933, he enrolled in the Regio Politecnico as an architecture student, ID number 33-34/81. Steinberg was later to speak of the Milan period as his middle years, in which he carried out his transformation from “Easterner” to “Westerner.” He lived in a series of rented rooms, then in a student residence, and finally in a room on the top floor of the Bar del Grillo, a little place once at 64, Via Pascoli, a short distance from the Politecnico (Figs. 2, 3).

In some of Steinberg’s recollections, these first years in Milan have a nostalgic, bohemian tone: “I don’t recall if I even had plates or flatware. During my first year, at the pensione, I ate gigantic portions of *rigatoni al sugo* with sage twigs and all the bread you could eat, followed by goulash or stew drowned in red sauce, which you mopped up with the endless bread.” But in more candid reflections, he remembered 1934 and 1935 as unhappy years of loneliness and poverty. He had to wait until 1936 to have a good year, indeed an “excellent” one, a “paradise” year.

---

16 Sources for the five quoted passages: Steinberg, *Reflections and Shadows*, 3; Steinberg to Buzzi, May 31, 1982, *Lettere*, unpublished; Ibid., May 24, 1996 (the words are an emotional reaction to an invitation just received from the Romanian Academy, described elsewhere in the letter. The Academy had proposed awarding a medal to Steinberg and erecting a statue in his honor); Steinberg to Buzzi, January 4, 1990, in Steinberg, *Lettere a Aldo Buzzi*, 188 (the Steinberg family lived on Strada Palas); Ibid., November 20, 1987, 165.


18 Steinberg’s student identification card is among the Saul Steinberg Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, Uncat. Mss. 126 (YCAL), box 73, folder “SS Biography.” The papers remain uncatalogued; box and folder numbers cited were current as of May 2011.

19 See Steinberg to Buzzi, January 8, 1959, in Steinberg, *Lettere a Aldo Buzzi*, 50, referring to the later transformation of his sister and family, who had recently emigrated to France from Romania: “In Paris I saw sister & children. The poor things are making the transformation from Easterners to Westerners…. It’s an experience that I know…..” In an unpublished transcript of his tape-recorded memoirs of the 1970s, SSF, Steinberg speaks of his train journey from Bucharest to Milan in 1933. Arriving in Vincovici (Croatia), he saw “a scruffy dance hall with music and dancing all night long: a farewell party for the Orient. The West began with Carso [the border plateau between Slovenia and northeast Italy], a rather lugubrious landscape. Next the train passed the castle of Miramare [Trieste], complete with reflections in the sea, which was already a fantasy of Western kitsch. Then came Venice, the more convincing thing.”

20 November 26, 1992, Steinberg, *Lettere a Aldo Buzzi*, 219. For Steinberg’s own list of his Milan residences, see note 115 below.

21 Steinberg to Buzzi, February 15, 1986, *Lettere*, unpublished: “I remember that 1935 was not very good, or rather, sad, whereas 1936 was excellent.” Ibid., July 6, 1991:
In July 1936, the first issue of Bertoldo came out, a satirical humor newspaper published by Rizzoli that brought together some of the best young writers and artists of the time and was to have tremendous success. One of the paper’s writers, Carlo Manzoni, recalls that one day there appeared at the office

“a young man with a blond mustache and glasses. He has a large portfolio under one arm. He puts the portfolio on the table and pulls out a paper with a drawing of a little man, a cartoon cloud exiting from his mouth: “I would like to illustrate a short story by [Giovanni] Mosca,” says the cloud. He pulls out more drawings and [Giovannino] Guareschi looks at them and places them aside. “O.K.” he says, “when Mosca arrives I will show them to him. Give me your address.” The young blond man says that he’s studying architecture, that he lives in the student residence, and that his name is Saul Steinberg.”

Steinberg, continues Manzoni, “is immediately taken in by the group of friends.” His first drawing appeared in the newspaper on October 27,

“Writing about 1934 seems like writing about antiquity. It was an ugly year of loneliness and poverty for me. I was in paradise in ’36. Then as we know the worst and worse yet happened in ’39,’40,’41,’42!”

22 Italy had an active tradition of humor and satirical newspapers, which used a mix of cartoons and articles with strong, even radical political tones. After the advent of Fascism in 1922, most of them were forced to close, and in their footsteps followed new, more pliant newspapers; the most popular was Marc’Aurelio, published in Rome. For the government’s control of such newspapers, see below, pp. 321-322 and note 31. Marc’Aurelio achieved notable success, so much so that Angelo Rizzoli decided to publish a similar newspaper himself, luring to Milan two of the best young writers of Marc’Aurelio – Giovanni Mosca and Vittorio Metz, who were to become the coeditors of Bertoldo. Andrea Rizzoli, the son of Angelo, managed to assemble at Bertoldo a team of talented young writers and artists, with Giovannino Guareschi as managing editor. For a recent survey of Italian humor newspapers before and during the Fascist years, see Guido Conti and Giorgio Casamatti, Giovannino Guareschi al “Bertoldo”: Ridere delle dittature, 1936-1943, exh. cat. (Brescia: Museo di Santa Giulia; Parma: MUP Editore, 2008), 16-40.

23 Carlo Manzoni, Gli anni verdi del Bertoldo, (Milan: Rizzoli, 1964), 28. On Bertoldo, see also Cinzia Mangini, Paola Pallottino, Bertoldo e i suoi illustratori, (Nuoro: Glisso Edizioni, 1994), and Carlotta e Alberto Guareschi, Milano 1936-1943: Guareschi e il Bertoldo, (Milan: Rizzoli, 1994). Carlo (“Carletto”) Manzoni (1909-1975) was a humorist writer, who worked for newspapers and was an author of books and radio and television programs. Giovanni (“Giovannino”) Guareschi (1908-1968), journalist, humorist writer and cartoonist. As its managing editor, he was the real power behind Bertoldo. After the war, he would try to resuscitate the Bertoldo experience by creating Candido. He wrote many books and gained international fame for his Don Camillo series. Giovanni Mosca (1908-1983), journalist, humorist writer and cartoonist. He was co-editor of Bertoldo and later worked with Guareschi at Candido. He edited and wrote for different newspapers; through the 1970s he kept drawing and publishing his distinctive editorial cartoons.
1936 (signed with the pseudonym “Xavier”). \(^{24}\) From that moment to the end of his official collaboration with the newspaper on March 19, 1938, Steinberg was to publish at least 204 cartoons in both Bertoldo and its supplement, Arcibertoldo (Fig. 4). \(^{25}\) The number he actually created, however, may have been higher if the figure of “250 or more a year” later cited by the artist is correct. \(^{26}\) The lonesome, cash-strapped student was no more: “For those years and for my conditions,” he said twenty-two years later, “we were always very well paid. I could make a living, I could eat and sleep, buy neckties…” \(^{27}\) These were years of intense activity – twice-weekly newspaper deadlines, summer visits to Romania, and participation in a rich and lively intellectual ambiance. \(^{28}\) By the spring of 1938, Steinberg was a star in his field: he quit Bertoldo for its competitor, Settebello, published by Mondadori, where he was officially part of the editorial committee (comitato di redazione), working not only as an artist but as the intermediary in managerial matters between the newspaper’s two editors, Achille Campanile in Rome and Cesare Zavattini in Milan. He drew the ad for the renovated newspaper, and his first cartoon appeared on April 23. \(^{29}\)

---

24 Reproduced in Mangini and Pallottino, Bertoldo e i suoi illustratori, fig. 138. Of this drawing, Steinberg later recalled: “I only discovered my talent when my first drawing was published in Milan. It took me ten minutes to do, but when it appeared in the paper, I looked at it for hours and was mesmerized”; quoted in Pierre Baudson, introduction to Steinberg, “The Americans,” Panneaux de l’Exposition universelle de Bruxelles, 1958, exh. cat. (Brussels: Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, 1967), 1-2.

25 Piervaleriano Angelini, L’attività italiana di Saul Steinberg, thesis (Università degli Studi di Pavia: 1981), 58 (copy at SSF), Bertoldo was published from July 1936 through the beginning of September 1943. Until issue n. 9, 1939, it was published twice a week; from issue 10/1939 through 27/1939, it became a weekly; from issue 28/1939 through 54/1939 again twice a week (but one of the two weekly editions was dubbed the “Edizione letteraria,” or literary edition); from issue 55/1939, it went back to weekly publication until the final issue on September 10, 1943. Arcibertoldo was a yearly supplement. See Carlotta and Alberto Guareschi, Milano 1936-1943: Guareschi e il Bertoldo, 10.

26 “The good American press has the advantage of having the material possibility (money) to choose quality over quantity, and thus I make about 35 drawings a year for The New Yorker instead of the 250 or more that I did in one year for Bertoldo”; Steinberg to Buzzi, July 23, 1947, Letters, unpublished.

27 Steinberg, AJC-OHL, T2 36.

28 Besides the men at Bertoldo, Steinberg mingled with, among others, Leo Longanesi (journalist, and maverick publisher) and Indro Montanelli, who would become Italy’s best known and most widely read journalist after the war. Teachers, of course, among them Piero Portaluppi, Tommaso Buzzi, Gio Ponti, formed part of his milieu, as did his classmates such as Aldo Buzzi, Luigi Comencini, and Alberto Lattuada; the latter two would become famous film directors. Before long he was introduced to Cesare Zavattini, who became a leading figure in postwar Italian literature and cinema, humorist Achille Campanile and designer Bruno Munari (Zavattini and Campanile co-edited Settebello, to which Munari contributed).

29 The weekly Settebello, founded in 1933 in Rome by Oberdan Cotone, was bought by
These years of “paradise” for Saul Steinberg were also the years of popular consensus in Italy for the Fascist regime, a consensus that peaked with the invasion and conquest of Ethiopia (October 1935-May 1936) and the consequent diplomatic isolation of Italy. The first issue of *Bertoldo*, July 14, 1936, carried on the front page a large cartoon against the League of Nations, and the second issue mocked the ousted emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie. Likewise, the front page of the October 27, 1936 issue, where page 3 had Steinberg’s first cartoon, printed a huge reproduction of a telegram to Benito Mussolini: “44 MILLION ITALIANS EXPRESS THEIR GRATITUDE” (for the anniversary of the founding of the Fascist party). One should remember that all newspapers in Italy had to be authorized by the government and remained under the strict control of the propaganda authorities, which periodically sent out very detailed guidelines about what to stress and what to omit in order to conform to the official political line. Most
often, the largest illustration on page 1 of Bertoldo was devoted to a political cartoon. Cartoons exploiting traditional anti-Semitic stereotypes also appeared, even before the enactment of the 1938 racial laws. Afterwards, however, such cartoons acquired a particular nastiness. Still, the newspaper and its authors managed to walk the thin line between compliance and satire and succeeded in sometimes mocking, albeit with highly cautious indirectness, the pomp and pretentiousness of some features of the Fascist regime. Over and over, for example, Bertoldo artists would poke fun at monuments, drawing horses riding humans or triumphal arches too small for the passage of a military procession. Also, writers mocked the rhetoric of some patriotic literature for boys and girls as well as the Fascist directive to Italianize all foreign words; this latter policy the Bertoldo editors pushed to the extreme, with hilarious results.

How Steinberg felt at this time about working in such a political environment is not publicly recorded, except in a discussion he had with Eugen Campus in Bucharest during the summer of 1937. As Campus later recalled, Steinberg said that artists living under a dictator such as Mussolini were free from the need for “demagoguery.” It was, Campus thought, as if Steinberg were advocating a sort of “truce” in the fight against Fascism, albeit as a “paradox.” Steinberg would privately admit such newspapers operated, see Oreste del Buono, introduction to Bertoldo 1936, (Milan: Rizzoli 1993), n. p., a facsimile reprint of the 1936 issues of Bertoldo.

32 From the very beginning, two years before the racial laws, Bertoldo was running cartoons playing on traditional anti-Semitic stereotypes: Jews were usually characters with big noses, curly black hair, and an excessive love of money. Three cartoons appeared in 1936, and five more in 1937. The first two, for example, showed a stereotypically ugly Jew called “Abramo” trying to sell his goods (ice cream and a salve for burns) even in hell. Another one had a boy identified as “Son of Samuel” bargaining hard with his teacher about a homework assignment, as if it were a piece of merchandise (July 29, September 15, and November 11, 1936). But by 1938 not only had the number of anti-Semitic jokes increased fivefold (see the list in Guareschi, Milano 1936-1943: Guareschi e il Bertoldo, 480), but it had spread from cartoons to short stories and mock “Jewish” newspapers (see “Il Samuelino” by Guareschi, reproduced in Conti and Casamatti, Giovannino Guareschi al “Bertoldo”, 90). And some Bertoldo authors transformed their standard productions into overtly “political” themes. Thus Giovanni Mosca in the September 6, 1938 issue – the very same period when the government was announcing the first discrimination laws – used one of his usually very funny strips in the “Charo Paolino” series (which pretended to be letters written by a young boy, illustrated and badly misspelled) to peddle the new party line: “In the governing body of the University of Milan,” little Mario informs his friend Paolino, “there are four Jews out of seven members, while Dad says that according to the proportion of one in a thousand [the proportion of Jews to the total Italian population] the Jews in the governing body should be only 0,007, that is, only a foot and a little piece of a Jew’s leg.” The strip is reproduced in Guareschi, Milano 1936-1943: Guareschi e il Bertoldo, 80; pages 78-81 offer other examples, though the book downplays the meaning of the anti-Semitic cartoons.

33 Campus recalls that the conversation took place during a long walk in Bucharest, after
that at that time he lived in a “political vacuum,” while “there were other people who saw better than I did – who participated, who understood” what was happening. 34

A few years later, however, newly arrived in America, Steinberg had to explain to government officials how a young Jewish artist had lived happily and worked so successfully for newspapers in Fascist Italy – newspapers which, in 1941, even used some of his drawings (unsigned) in the propaganda war (Fig. 5) 35 While his later refusal to make public his Bertoldo and Settebello cartoons had, he claimed, a cultural basis (their concern with “jokes” being implicitly too lowbrow), the aversion may be also rooted in the fraught and nuanced politics of the 1930s – a complex situation unlikely to be understood by wartime American authorities or even by later generations. In 1942, impatiently awaiting a visa to enter the United States, Steinberg asked his cousin Henrietta Danson, who was in New York working on his behalf, not to mention “any of my work [sic] in wartime Italy” to the authorities. 36 By 1944, a politically correct spin –

Steinberg had begun publishing his drawings in Bertoldo; it was the last time they met before the war (Campus fixes the date as the summer of 1934 or 1935, but it must have been the summer of 1937, the only summer during his Italian sojourn that Steinberg visited Bucharest after beginning to publish in Bertoldo): “During this long walk, you talked openly, as usual, about your life in Milan. You were beginning to publish drawings in Italian magazines… You made a paradoxical argument, which you held maybe for the sake of being paradoxical, but also because it justified your exclusive undertaking, namely the quest for your true path in art. You would argue that in a democratic or pseudo-democratic regime, everyone has access to politics. Everyone feels it’s their duty to have a political opinion. In the fascist Italian regime, politics was available exclusively only to Mussolini. Thus, if you refuse to do politics, if you limit yourself to domains that have remained neutral, you can practice art that has not been vulgarized by the demagoguery of the present political struggle. I never forgot that discussion. I understood your argument, but I didn’t agree. I couldn’t accept this indirect truce. Like you, I wanted to maintain the freedom of personal integrity at any cost, to maintain a certain distance that was necessary to objective judgment. But that didn’t imply giving up on fighting fascism”; Campus, “Afinitati elective”, 369. Steinberg was evidently embarrassed that Eugen Campus remembered his remarks about Fascism and art in the 1930s and pretended that he suffered a “terrible amnesia, which covers the entire first, unpleasant part of my life”; Campus, “Afinitati elective”, 369.

34 Steinberg, AJC-OHL, T3 75-76.
35 The Churchill sendup in Fig. 5 makes a pointed Napoleonic gesture, while a small British flag waves from the top of his paper hat. Through the window on the back wall one can see an urban landscape in flames and four Tommies marching in a line. Another line of British soldiers, wearing their typical flat helmets, as well as flower pots over their lower bodies, marches in a later cartoon entitled “Prudenza del nemico” (“The Enemy’s Caution”), with the caption: “Hush! We are camouflaged”. In the background sky, an airplane with RAF insignia on its wings is tumbling to earth (Bertoldo, April 11, 1941, repro. in Guareschi, Milano 1936-1943: Guareschi e il Bertoldo, 364).
not to mention a promotion—had been put on his Italian newspaper activities. An officer in U.S. Naval Intelligence and the OSS for almost a year, he was introduced to new superiors as one who in Italy had been “editor and publisher of a well known paper violently opposed to Fascism.” As late as 1978, in the chronology of the Whitney Museum retrospective catalogue, he still felt it necessary to explain his employment in the 1930s: “In Fascist Italy, where the controlled press was predictable and extremely boring, the humor magazines were a way of knowing other aspects of life, which, by the nature of humor itself, seemed subversive.” Just two years later, recalling the pressure he put on Sandro Angelini to keep Angelini’s son Piervaleriano from publishing a thesis on the Bertoldo and Settebello work, he would privately use strong language that may have been provoked by more than mere aesthetics—“Who knows what dark horrors will surface?” “The horrible work... which uncovered my past... Blackmail!”

Steinberg’s only other public response to his experience in Fascist Italy

37 Typewritten copy of a letter from Commander R. Davis Halliwell to Morton Bodfish, January 27, 1944, National Archives, Washington (NARA), RG 226, OSS Personnel Files 1941-45, Box 742, Entry 224, folder “Saul Steinberg.” Both the political and the personal “upgrading” may have been the work of Harold Ross, founder and editor of The New Yorker, who helped him get his commission in the Navy and then a posting back to Washington in late 1944. For Ross’s behind-the-scenes machinations on Steinberg’s behalf through his friend and head of the OSS, General William Donovan, see Smith, Saul Steinberg: Illuminations, 30, 237, notes 42 and 52.

38 Steinberg, “Chronology”, in Rosenberg, Saul Steinberg, 235. Smith, Saul Steinberg: Illuminations, 27, suggests that “Zia Elena,” the powerful matron with the square jaw who in the pages of Bertoldo ordered around little lost men, could also be seen as a “veiled caricature of Mussolini.” In the collection of original Steinberg drawings for Bertoldo and Settebello (some unpublished) owned by Bruno Coen Sacerdotti (see note 60 below), there is a Roman emperor strutting forward with a militaristic air. His face bears so many Mussolini-like traits that, in the Sacerdotti family tradition, the figure was always considered a sendup of Il Duce; emails from Bruno Coen Sacerdotti to the author, March 12 and 30, 2008.

39 L’attività italiana di Saul Steinberg (see note 25) was a dissertation for a history of art degree that consisted of two volumes: one gave some biographical detail of Steinberg’s life in Italy and catalogued his work at Bertoldo and Settebello; the other was a photocopied collection of all Steinberg’s cartoons published by the two papers until September 1938. The unsigned works published in 1940-41 were not known at the time. Steinberg’s effort to prevent publication of the thesis is recounted in two unpublished letters to Buzzi. In the first, July 11, 1980, reporting on a planned visit by the two Angelinis, Steinberg wrote that “the idea of a work on my past in Italy now seems wrong to me. Who knows what dark horrors he may have dug up?” Then, on March 28, 1983, after the thesis had been completed: “Speaking of Bertoldo, the horrible work of Angelini’s son which uncovered my past, what a bad idea! Blackmail! It certainly contributed to my melancholy. A two-volume thesis of Revelations, the humble past of Saul. I interrupted [this letter] to call you up, got Angelini’s number and I immediately talked to him, and made him promise that his son wouldn’t publish the work.” To the continued detriment of Steinberg scholarship, that promise was kept.
came three decades after his flight, in a series of memory drawings of Milan. Some of them have a pretense of objectivity, with the streets and the buildings of the city rendered in postcard-like fashion, urban perspectives that seem to capture the architectural style of the times. But in other Steinberg drawings that very style became a retrospective political statement. He consolidated the different modes of architectural modernism practiced in Italy between the wars into what he would mockingly call “Milanese Bauhaus”: perspectives are exaggerated, churches and apartment buildings are transformed into monstrous caricatures, all portholes, balconies, cantilevers, curved corners, and jutting verticals. “Milanese Bauhaus” often seasoned by Steinberg with Art Deco elements, symbolizes the whole of modernist architecture prevalent during his Italian years – Bauhaus, rationalism, Novecento, monumentalism. Such symbolic reductionism – a typical Steinbergian device – omitted the often complex and opposing realities of the Italian architectural scene of those years, not to mention the different artistic as well as political choices of some of the participants. Many architects coming of age in the 1920s, who wanted to transform an ossified cultural environment, did adhere to Fascism, hoping that its claim to revolution would help modernize Italian architecture. But as the regime evolved, academic design morphed into a rhetorical monumentalism that invaded Italian cities. Rationalist architecture managed to express some interesting – indeed, beautiful – examples, but was definitely on the losing side. By the end of the Fascist period, with the war ravaging the country and Nazi Germany ruling half of it, abetted by Mussolini’s republic in the North, some of these people would choose to fight against Fascism – and would die in the struggle. In the 1970s, however, Steinberg consolidated the stylistic realities of prewar Italian architecture (not to mention aesthetic links with similar movements in other countries) to create an architecture that stood for Fascism.

Mocking modern architecture as nonsensical was a common pastime with the Bertoldo and Settebello staff, who did not distinguish among the different styles or schools. “Case Novecento” (houses built in the twentieth-century style) became a stereotype in itself, and many cartoons used the expression as a common slur. Typical is a detail in one of Steinberg’s “Il Milione” drawings for Settebello (June 4, 1938; Angelini, L’attività italiana di Saul Steinberg, no. 210), where a building with some Bauhaus elements is dubbed both “Casa razionale” (“Rationalist house”) and “900” (a reference to the Novecento movement, which was actually opposed to the rationalist movement). For Steinberg jabs at modernist architecture in the pages of Bertoldo, see Conti and Casamatti, Giovannino Guareschi al “Bertoldo”, 191, 194; parodies by other artists are reproduced on pages 72-78, and 190-95.

For a general artistic/political assessment of Italian architecture in the interwar period, see Carlo Melograni, Architettura italiana sotto il fascismo. L’orgoglio e la modestia contro la retorica monumentale 1925-1945, (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2008). For the participation in the Resistance movement see pages 310-317.
To stress his rejection of an architecture that he linked to a pompous and repressive political regime – which may not have been evident to his public in the 1970s – Steinberg populates the drawings with telling figures (Fig. 6, 7, 8): powerful soldiers marching, somber men of mystery (usually rubber-stamped), mustachioed men in black shirts and fez who leap to exchange Roman salutes and, in one drawing, goose-step in front of a building resembling the Palace of Justice in Milan, from which flies, for good measure, an Italian flag imprinted with the fasces.42

Paradise Lost

The above paragraphs measure Steinberg’s prospective and retrospective response to Fascism. In real time, however, his situation was neither coolly theoretical, as he averred in 1937, nor politically activist, as his wartime statements and later images imply. His was most probably just the good life of a young student, who eventually managed to have money to spend and mingle with interesting intellectuals in a large European city, a city whose anti-Semitic currents were not yet as evident or as aggressive as those of the intra-war Bucharest he had escaped from. His future seemed Italian, and he even began using an Italian name: Paolo, instead of Saul. 43 Whether this was also a conscious effort to underplay...
his Jewish roots, or just a way to feel and sound “like everyone else” is impossible to know. In either case, this good life would not last. With the imposition of racial laws in the middle of 1938, the world of “Steinberg Saul of Moritz – Romanian Jew” changed radically, and the “paradise” he found in Italy began to topple. “It was horrible,” he recalled two decades later, “you had the stupid society turning against you.”

By the fall of 1938, foreign Jews were told to leave the country within six months. But, as in Steinberg’s case, refuge elsewhere was increasingly difficult to find. And Steinberg watched with growing panic as the situation of even Italian Jews (37,000 by the 1938 official census) deteriorated. After the legal emancipation of Jews in the mid-nineteenth century, the Italian Jewish community had become arguably one of the most assimilated in Europe – which must have given the young Romanian immigrant a welcome sense of belonging and reassurance when he arrived in 1933. All the more shocking, then, when the Mussolini regime began its racial discrimination and persecution campaign, a campaign that culminated in the Italian role in the Shoah. There were at the time Jews in the army, the judiciary, throughout the state administration, and in the Fascist party itself. Even though discriminatory measures against Jews had begun much earlier, and a racist campaign appeared in the press months before it became official policy, many Jews were caught by surprise when they found themselves demoted to second-class citizens, or worse.

44 Steinberg, AJC-OHL, T3 74-75; “Steinberg Saul of Moritz – Romanian Jew” is the heading on Steinberg’s file in the papers of the Italian police in the Italian State Archives, the Archivio Centrale dello Stato, (ACS). Steinberg’s dossier is in the papers of the Ministero dell’interno (Ministry of Interior papers, MI), Direzione generale di Pubblica sicurezza (Directorate for Public Security, PS), Divisione Affari generali e riservati (General and Covert Affairs Division, AG), Categoria (Category, Cat.) A16 Ebrei stranieri (Foreign Jews) busta (folder, b.) 270, fascicolo (file, f.) “Steinberg Saul di Moritz.” Note: Originally (March 1941), Steinberg’s records were filed under the A4bis category, which included the personal files of people interned in Italy as a consequence of the declaration of war. But the file was moved on July 1, 1941 to category A16, “Ebrei stranieri” (foreign Jews), after he left Italy. In the initial archival position (ACS, MI, PS – AG, cat. A4bis, b. 38, f. “Steinberg Saul di Moritz”), there is now only the empty cover of the original file, with a note pointing to the new position. Copies of the entire Steinberg ACS file are at SSF.

45 Michele Sarfatti, Gli ebrei nell’Italia fascista, 33-34. The number of Jews in Italy then is not easy to calculate, since there were different legal and administrative definition of who was considered a “Jew,” but in August 1938 there were 46,656 “actual” Jews who were enrolled in the community or at least declared themselves in the census; 37,241 were Italians and 9,415 were foreigners.

46 Sarfatti explains that the “Attacks on Jewish Rights” began roughly with the Italo-
razza (“Fascist Manifesto on Race,” also known as the Manifesto degli scienziati razzisti or ‘Manifesto of Racist Scientists’), was published on July 14, 1938 in Il Giornale d’Italia (issue dated July 15) and then reprinted in the other major newspapers. It claimed a pseudo-scientific justification for the Aryan purity of Italians; Jews were not Italians because they had non-European racial elements.

The restrictive laws against Italian Jews came thick and fast. By June 1939 Jews in all professions were banned from working for non-Jewish clients. Of course, Steinberg, as a foreign Jew, could not work at all, since foreign Jews were under an expulsion order. But in fact he was already out of business. His last signed drawings had been published in the September 10, 1938 issue of Settebello, just a few days after the meeting of the Council of Ministers that resulted in the first anti-Semitic law.47

That summer, it seemed possible that Steinberg would not even be able to complete his studies. On August 6, a month before foreign Jews were ordered out, Giuseppe Bottai, the Minister of National Education, had closed university courses to all foreign Jewish students, “even those who had enrolled in previous years,” starting with the academic year 1938-39. This draconian rule, however, had diplomatic repercussions since it affected foreign citizens studying in Italy, and the Italian government feared similar restrictions on Italian students abroad. Thus, a month later, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs intervened, announcing that foreign Jewish students who had already begun their university studies and had been properly enrolled for the 1937-38 academic year could “carry on with their studies until they finished their degree.” It took until January 16, 1939 for the Ministry of National Education to issue an official clarification, but Steinberg had clearly gotten a reprieve: he could remain in Italy until he completed his degree, so long as he met one condition of the Ministry: that those behind in their coursework had to catch up

---

47 For Steinberg’s four September 10, 1938 drawings in Settebello, see Angelini, L’attività italiana di Saul Steinberg, nos. 264-267; also Smith, Saul Steinberg: Illuminations, 236, note 30.
within the academic year 1938-39. At this point, Steinberg was in the fifth year of a five-year program for a degree in architecture—and he had a lot of catching up to do. From the day his first drawing appeared on the pages of Bertoldo in October 1936, he had essentially stopped studying: from that moment through January 1939 he had managed to take only one of his seventeen scheduled exams, even though his student ID card shows stamps for six academic years, 1933-34 to 1938-39. 1938-39 was, therefore, his first year beyond the official five-year program, and the last year in which the new rules allowed him to enroll at the Politecnico and thereby maintain his legal residence in Italy. From the moment the January 16 ruling was issued, Steinberg was in a race against time—to complete his degree and, at the same time, find some part of the world willing to welcome him.

Steinberg’s forced departure from the pages of Settebello after September 1938 left him seriously short of funds. Documentary confirmation of his impecunious state only begins in early 1939, but his circumstances in the previous months could not have been any different. His parents in Romania had been sending him money, but in the last couple of years he had depended on income from his cartoon work. Friends now occasionally lent him money, while others secured him work, most of it

---

48 Sources for the documents cited in this paragraph: Circolare (written instructions to subsidiary offices) no. 19153, August 6, 1938, by Giuseppe Bottai in ACS, MI, PS – AG, cat. A16, Ebrei stranieri, b. 3, f. B/1 “Ebrei stranieri – Disposizioni in genere.” Ibid. for the circolare no. 8 from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, signed by Minister Galeazzo Ciano (Mussolini’s son-in-law), September 9, 1938, sent to all Italian embassies, with copies to the Ministry of the Interior and to other central administrative offices. (German-Jewish students, however were excluded from this concession and could not continue their studies.) Ibid. for circolare 6408, signed by Bottai, October 6, 1938, confirming that foreign Jewish students could enroll for the new academic year. Ibid. for circolare no. 532 of 16 January 1939, signed by Bottai.

49 Author’s count of the scheduled exams, based on the original transcript of Steinberg’s years at the Politecnico, AGA. For the ID card, see note 18.

50 Three of the few surviving letters Steinberg wrote to his parents in Bucharest during this period concern their financial support. January 29, 1939: “I still haven’t received anything from you. But there was a message from the bank so that in 4-5 days I will receive the money.” January 6, 1940: “I hope to get some money on time from you through the National Bank. Send me more than usual.” February 9, 1940: “Today I finally received the notice from the Bank and in 5 days I can get the money. It arrived in time because if they had been late a few more days, I would have lived pretty badly. Please make sure to send me the rest as soon as possible.” Both letters at YCAL, box 12, folder “Letters from Milano and Santo Domingo”. Steinberg family correspondence, most of it written in Romanian, is at YCAL. Iain Topliss provided scans of the letters to The Saul Steinberg Foundation. They were translated by Emil Niculescu; translations and copies of the originals at SSF. Henceforth cited as “Romanian letters”.

329
more closely tied to his studies in architecture. He was, he reported to his parents, “picking up some architecture or interior design jobs together with a colleague of mine,” although he didn’t like it. In a résumé compiled for the US Navy in 1945, he describes himself also as a “designer” and adds: “Occasionally I made designs for interior decorations.” Little was known about such activities until a few years ago, when Francesca Pellicciari found an original sketch by Steinberg in the archives of the celebrated graphic design-advertising agency Studio Boggeri (Fig. 9). Pellicciari, who published the sketch for the first time, makes the plausible suggestion that it must have been Erberto Carboni, a famous member of the agency, who brought Steinberg in. Steinberg later remembered him with gratitude: “A true aristocratic man, even in his appearance. During a rough time he gave me work.” Another one of
these drawings, until now unpublished, can be found among the Steinberg papers at Yale: a clipping from the newspaper La Stampa, containing an advertisement for gas, “Dynamin, the Super Shell” (Fig. 10). It shows an urban street with a car stopped at an intersection. The print advertisement is signed at lower left with Carboni’s name, but attached to the clipping is a sketch on thin cardboard with a similar theme definitely executed in Steinberg’s hand (Fig. 11). The clipping is of the advertisement published in the June 24, 1939 issue of La Stampa (Fig. 12); Steinberg’s drawing was the basis for another ad published on August 5. Of the four other Dynamin ads signed by Carboni, most, if not all, are equally Steinbergian.56

The journal recounts at least two other jobs. In one case, it clears up repeated references in his postwar correspondence to a “colored panel” made “for Latis,” possibly “for a house in Viareggio.”57 Vito Latis was an architect who found employment for Steinberg at this critical moment.58 The journal entry for May 7, 1941 (which briefly summarizes the events between January and April) informs us that shortly before being arrested by the police, Steinberg had finished a “panel for Rappallo” [sic] and, further on, that it has to do with “a panel for Sacerdoti [sic]. Drawing for a shutter door for a bar. Thanks to Lattis [sic].” The archives of the Latis Studio confirm the existence of a contract for furnishings in a Villa Sacerdotti in Rapallo (which Steinberg later misremembered as Viareggio, another seaside resort).59 The heir of the villa’s owner now

work. I saw him again, I can’t remember when, it was the era of my arrogance. It wasn’t clear from your letter, but if he’s still alive, give him my most cordial greetings and regards”; the italicized passage was edited out of the published volume but appears in Steinberg, Lettere, unpublished. In a footnote to a letter of November 30,1979, where Steinberg again recalls Carboni, Buzzi explains: “As a friendly gesture, he had commissioned Steinberg to make drawings for advertisements”; Steinberg, Lettere a Aldo Buzzi, 106, note 1.

56 Steinberg’s drawing and the clipping are in YCAL, box 39, folder “Vecchi disegni SS.” The other four Dynamin ads appeared on June 16, June 20, July 1, July 22 (a repeat of June 20) and July 29. See the online archives of La Stampa: http://www.archiviolastampa.it

57 Letter to Buzzi, January 26, 1946, Steinberg, Lettere, unpublished. A year and a half later Steinberg asks again: “do you know whatever happened to the big painting I did for Latis (for a house in Viareggio, I think) in 1941? I am curious to know if it exists”; Steinberg, Lettere a Aldo Buzzi, May 26 and 29, 1947, and, for the italicized passage, Lettere, unpublished.

58 Conversation with Aldo Buzzi, January 8, 2008.

59 Confirmed by Margareta Latis, widow of Vito Latis, conversation with the author, spring 2008. Vito Latis, born only two years before Steinberg, had graduated from the Politecnico by 1935. He was active in a group of students and young professionals who advocated a modern approach to Italian architecture. His first important building, a villa on the Ligurian coast, was built in the style that Steinberg would later call “Milanese Bauhaus.” As a Jew, he could only keep a very low professional profile after
possesses the painting Steinberg refers to (132 x 117 cm). It depicts a resort town (maybe Rapallo itself, in Liguria), seen from the sea, with bathers in the Mediterranean and conversational couples strolling the streets. In the same summation of May 7, 1941, Steinberg tells us that he made a “beautiful drawing with bottles and flowers for a bar for [Pietro] Chiesa (Fontana Arte).”

Help also came from another professional source, Cesare Civita, briefly alluded to in the journal entry for May 20, 1940. Civita had been the co-director of the Mondadori periodicals (which published, among other magazines and newspapers, the Walt Disney cartoons in Italian), as well as a friend and collaborator of Alberto Mondadori. A Jew, he had fled Italy in 1938; a year later he was in New York, where he established himself as an illustrator’s agent. From across the Atlantic, he worked hard to get Steinberg published in the pages of American journals. And he succeeded: thanks to Civita’s advocacy, Steinberg’s work appeared in *Harper’s Bazaar* (March 15, 1940), *Life* (September 27, 1940), and *Town & Country* (October 1940), as well as in South American magazines.

the racial laws came into effect, working mainly for other Jews, like the Sacerdottis. In the autumn of 1943, when Northern Italy was occupied by the Germans, he fled to Switzerland, where he remained until the end of the war. Latis was also a painter. See Maria Vittoria Capitanucci, *Vito e Gustavo Latis: Frammenti di città*, (Geneva - Milan: Skira, 2007), 37-47, 181; the Sacerdotti commission is mentioned on page 188. 

Photos sent to the author by Bruno Coen Sacerdotti, who explains: “My father used to tell me that he was a great friend of Steinberg, and that this painting…was a gift from Steinberg in thanks for his boat ticket to the United States that my father (who was also Jewish) paid for”; email from Bruno Coen Sacerdotti to the author, March 12, 2008. We shall see that the reference to the “ticket” must be understood loosely.

Pietro Chiesa was the artistic director of the famous interior design house Fontana Arte, which to this day produces home accessories and lighting. A pencil drawing of a similar subject (bottles, flowers and clocks), given by Steinberg to Latis, is now in possession of Margareta Latis. It may have been a study for the Fontana Arte work.

See “Cesare Civita 1905-2005”, Fondazione Franco Fossati-Museo del Fumetto e della comunicazione [http://www.lfb.it/fff/fumetto/edit/c/civita.htm]; the entry on Civita in *The Internet Movie Database* [http://www.imdb.com/name/nm2635965/]; and the email from his daughter, Barbara Civita to SSF, February 6, 2007. Among other projects, in 1935 he had collaborated with Alberto Mondadori and Mario Monicelli on a film adaptation of *The Paul Street Boys*, the novel for adolescents by Ferenc Molnár. Civita left for Argentina in 1941, where he established a publishing house; after the war, it became the hive of many talented cartoonists – and the publisher of the Spanish-language edition of Steinberg’s first book, *All in Line*. His New York office continued to represent Steinberg into the 1950s. In Argentina, he was known as “César,” and the stationery of his New York office at this time bore the imprint Cesar Civita. Victor Civita, Cesar’s brother, ran the New York agency after Cesar left for Argentina; in the postwar years he moved to Brazil, where he founded the publishing company Abril.

See the feature on Steinberg’s drawings in the first issue of the Brazilian journal *Sombra*, December 1940-January 1941, for which Civita was the American correspondent. Steinberg’s work made *Sombra’s* cover – five years before his first cover for *The New Yorker*, the *Sombra* cover is reproduced in *Serrote*, no. 1, 2009, 66.
There was one other source of income from publications. Steinberg’s friends at Berloldo and Settebello were able to resume publishing his cartoons in November 1940 by concealing his authorship, as Erberto Carboni had done – in this case, by printing them without signature (though readers of the newspapers no doubt recognized Steinberg’s hand). The journal speaks of such cartoons, which he was making up until the day before his arrest in April 1941. The entry for December 18, 1940, for example, notes: “five of my gags in an issue of Bertoldo” – the same entry where he announces, “I’m broke.”

No Exit

Forced by the decree of the Ministry of Education to bring his coursework up to date during 1938-39, Steinberg crammed sixteen exams into one year and managed to graduate with the presentation of a theater project. The project has not turned up in the archives, but Vittorio Metz, Berloldo’s co-editor, remembered that next to the building’s entry, Steinberg drew a stick figure with a lance in its hand, straddling a cow – “to indicate the proportions,” he claimed. It was March 4, 1940, probably the last possible thesis examination date for the academic year 1938-39, thus still on time according to the university rules established by the racial laws.

Graduation, however, meant that Steinberg’s legal residence in Italy was officially over, and he became more anxious than ever to get out. His diploma (Fig. 13) was inscribed to Saul Steinberg, “of the Hebrew race,” “printed,” he commented later, “in excellent taste, handsomely set in

Steinberg’s drawings also appeared in the Argentine satirical magazine Cascabel, though none have yet been documented during his Italian years. For these North and South American publications, see also Smith, Saul Steinberg: Illuminations, pp. 27 and 237, note 34, and the “Features and Illustrations” section in Smith’s chronological bibliography, pages 269-70. Some of the money Steinberg earned was paid to him directly, some used to purchase his passage out of Italy; see note 71.

64 See the entries transcribed below for December 6, 12, 18, 23, and 30, 1940; April 26 and 27, 1941. Fig. 5, unsigned, may be one of those, though it also may have been pulled out of files in the Bertoldo office. Fifty-four unsigned Bertoldo drawings are listed in an appendix to Guareschi, Milano 1936-1943: Guareschi e il Bertoldo, 491-92. Those for Settebello and the other newspapers Steinberg mentions have not yet been documented. Some sketches and original drawings can be found in the Giovannino Guareschi archives at Roncole Verdi (Parma); see Pellicciari, Critic Without Words, 84, note 1.

65 Metz’s account appears in Domenico Frassinetti, Steinberg, thesis (Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Università di Roma, 1966-67), 7, 34 note; copies at SSF and YCAL, box 37, folder “Steinberg’ a dissertation by Domenico Frassinetti.” Steinberg’s thesis project is not preserved in the Politecnico archives, but his personal file notes the topic he was supposed to address in his esame di laurea: “Architectural and urbanistic organization of an urban center. Development of a representative building.” The building may have been the theatre Metz referred to.

333
Bodoni, which rendered it even more sinister.” These words transformed the traditional language of such degrees – “for all legal purposes” – into a condemnation and a bureaucratic oxymoron: in the Italy of racial discrimination, the effect was to negate the diploma’s validity. It became a diploma for working in a profession that was not open to Steinberg. Forty years later, he would wax ironic about that piece of paper. Since he never worked as an architect, and since “Vittorio Emanuele III, King of Italy and Albania, Emperor of Ethiopia,” under whose power the degree was granted, no longer ruled these lands, nothing of the diploma remained valid except for the reference to the “Hebrew race.” So it was, in sum, a “diploma of Jewishness.”

Accounts of Steinberg’s efforts to leave Italy have occasionally been hampered by fiction. The Italian journalist Indro Montanelli reports an encounter in this period with Steinberg and Ugo Stille, the late editor of Corriere della Sera. The place was the newsroom of Omnibus, the first modern illustrated magazine in Italy, edited by Leo Longanesi. With brilliant but mean-spirited phrasing, Montanelli recounts:

“With [Stille], another Jewish boy began to poke his head into the newsroom occasionally, a refugee from Bucovina, and one destined to be talked about as the greatest caricaturist and cartoonist of the century: Steinberg. Together they had so much affection for Italy that they didn’t want to leave, not even when Italy joined the war as a German ally. “But what sort of Jews are these two?” yelled Longanesi, “Jews are, by definition, wanderers, and these don’t want to wander, not even if you kick their a…..!” Finally we succeeded in persuading them to seek American visas just in time to escape the Gestapo’s raids.”

---

66 Letter to Buzzi, August 12, 1985, in Steinberg, Lettere a Aldo Buzzì, 141.
67 See Steinberg’s recollections quoted by Robert Hughes, “The World of Steinberg,” Time, April 17, 1978. In 1985, Steinberg and Primo Levi exchanged copies of their equally useless diplomas; letter to Buzzi, August 12, 1985, in Steinberg Lettere a Aldo Buzzì, 141, which contains similar concepts and uses the same phrase, “diploma di Ebreo” – “diploma of Jewishness.” In Italian, the phrase alludes to the standard description “diploma di Architetto,” “diploma di Ingegnere,” etc. – i.e., the paper that declares the recipient an official member of the stated profession.
68 Indro Montanelli, “Un russo in Usa: Cremlinoologo alla Casa Bianca”, Il Corriere della Sera, June 3, 1995, [http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/1995/giugno/03/russo_Usa_cremilino_logo_alla_casa_Bianca_0_95060310610.shtml](http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/1995/giugno/03/russo_Usa_cremilino_logo_alla_casa_Bianca_0_95060310610.shtml). The same story, with Longanesi’s words slightly modified, was repeated by Montanelli a few months later in the answer to a reader in the Letters to the Editor column (“Per favore mi parli di Stille”, Il Corriere della Sera, October 10, 1995, [http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/1995/ottobre/10/Per_favore_parli_Stille_co_0_9510104406.shtml](http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/1995/ottobre/10/Per_favore_parli_Stille_co_0_9510104406.shtml)). Regarding Steinberg’s alleged visit to the newsroom of Omnibus, although such a visit would have been possible, we have no confirmation, and no
Well told, like all of Montanelli’s stories, but untrue – at least with regard to Saul Steinberg. We know, in fact, that in late 1939, Steinberg had begun contacting relatives and friends in an attempt to leave Italy. Harry Steinberg, a paternal uncle who had emigrated to America in the 1890s, received a phone call from an Italian claiming he had news of Harry’s nephew, whom the uncle had last seen as a twelve-year-old boy. The man was Cesare Civita, who soon visited the Steinberg family in the Bronx with the news that he had been sent by Saul to ask their help in emigrating to America. Young Steinberg would find great success as an illustrator and cartoonist, he assured them. Civita’s visit mobilized drawing that could be attributed to him appeared in its pages in the first two years of the weekly (1937-38). Indro Montanelli (1909-2001) was arguably one of the most renowned Italian journalists, from his beginnings in the 1930s until his death. A political conservative, he began writing for newspapers while serving during the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. He was imprisoned in 1944 during the German occupation of Northern Italy, and after the war he kept reporting from many different places. He was also victim of a terrorist attack by the Red Bridges group in the 1970s. Late in life, he founded his own newspaper (Il Giornale Nuovo) as a conservative response to what he perceived as a tilt to the left of Il Corriere della Sera. When Silvio Berlusconi entered politics in 1994, Montanelli left the editorship of Il Giornale, which Berlusconi at that point owned. He then, paradoxically, became an icon of liberal journalists. See, among others, John Francis Lane, “Indro Montanelli”, The Guardian, July 24, 2001 (obituary: http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/2001/jul/24/guardianobituaries1 ). Ugo Stille (1919-1995) was the pseudonym of Mikhail “Micha” Kamenetzky. A Russian Jew, he emigrated with his family to Italy in 1921. He began his career in the 1930s, writing with friend Giaime Pintor under the pen name “Ugo Stille.” As a consequence of the Italian racial laws, the family emigrated to the US. Stille came back to Italy as a sergeant in the US Army’s Psychological Warfare Branch in 1944. In 1946, he became the New York correspondent for Il Corriere della Sera, becoming its editor-in-chief in 1987, serving until 1992. See, among others, Wolfgang Achtner, “Obituary: Ugo Stille”, The Independent, June 12, 1995. (http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituaryugostille-1586103.html)

69 Every reference to Steinberg in Montanelli’s article seems – to say the least – poorly remembered: from the little things like his supposed birth in Bucovina or the visa for the United States, to the tale of his (and Longanesi’s) encounter with both Stille and Steinberg in Milan after the war: “One day shortly after Liberation,” goes Montanelli’s account, “I was walking with Longanesi in the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele [in Milan], which was filled with more or less self-declared partisans, agit prop, and Anglo-American military, when two of the latter appear in front of us, blocking our way: they were Stille and Steinberg, wrapped in the most shabby and crumpled uniforms imaginable. ‘What a great country, America!’ shouted Longanesi, ‘if it won the war with soldiers like you?’”; Montanelli, “Un russo in USA”. In fact, Steinberg had left the Italian theater in September 1944, long before Milan was liberated on April 25, 1945; he did not return to Italy until 1946, and certainly not in uniform.

70 These events were reconstructed by the son of Henrietta, Lawrence Danson (“An Heroic Decision”, Ontario Review, no. 53 [Fall-Winter 2000-01], 58-62), on the basis of family memories and on correspondence in his possession, copies of which are at SSF.
Steinberg’s cousin Henrietta, her husband, Harold Danson, as well as other relatives in Colorado, all of whom worked, along with Civita, to obtain a visa for Saul and pay for his passage.\(^{71}\) From the moment Civita first contacted the Steinberg-Danson family, however, almost two years would pass before Saul managed to actually leave Italy, and more than a year after that before he arrived in the United States.

In those two years, Steinberg was one of thousands of foreign Jews who found themselves stranded in Italy. In the autumn of 1938, about 3,100 of them were permitted to remain in the country, while about 8,800 were ordered to leave; some five to six thousand still managed to enter Italy from Germany or German-dominated countries on a “transit” or a temporary “tourist” visa. By June 1940, when Italy joined the war, about ten to eleven thousand had managed to leave, but close to 4,000 were left behind.\(^{72}\)

Many of these Jews, along with Italian Jews deprived of citizenship by the racial laws, wanted to leave – for their own safety and in compliance with the laws – but they lacked the money or the papers to do so. And the outbreak of war in September 1939 made things all the more difficult, even if Italy had not yet joined the battle. Only those few who made the immigration quota for their country of birth were able to gain entry to the United States, while a handful of visas were obtained for some Latin American countries. In the meantime, international transportation – especially across the Atlantic – became more complicated. When Italy entered the war, on June 10, 1940, transatlantic passenger ships ceased departing from Italy, so instead of sailing from Genoa, it became necessary to pass through Portugal to reach a ship bound for America. But this indirect route required transit visas – visas that were sometimes dependant on other visas, which often expired before the whole journey was completed. Furthermore, the available boat

\(^{71}\) See note 76 for the family’s contribution to the cost of Steinberg’s passage. But Steinberg himself helped pay for his ticket, albeit indirectly. Civita’s “Statement Account Steinberg up to March 1, 1942” (YCAL, box 1, folder “1942 Correspondence”) has a “Debits” column, which records $63.10 cabled to Steinberg in Italy in April 1940 and a total of $358.18 “Paid to Mr. Danson for ticket.”

\(^{72}\) Michele Sarfatti, Gli ebrei nell’Italia fascista, 187. See also the reference book on the matter: Klaus Voigt, Il rifugio precario: Gli esuli in Italia dal 1933 al 1945, 2 vols. (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1993, 1996). Voigt’s comprehensive, study was originally published as Zuflucht auf Widerruf: Exil in Italien 1933-1945, (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1989-93). The seemingly paradoxical granting of temporary entry visas to a country trying to get rid of its foreign Jews was the result of bureaucratic entanglements and economic pressure. On the one hand, the Foreign Ministry feared possible reprisals against Italian citizens abroad, according to the well-established law of “reciprocity” in diplomacy. On the other hand, the tourism industry tried successfully to defend its business: many refugees, for example, lived in Merano in the Alps and in Abbazia on the Adriatic coast, while navigation companies struggled to keep the flow of passengers from going to foreign competitors; see Voigt, Il rifugio precario, vol. I, 312.
passages were few and expensive. Many Jews were aided by DELASEM, the Delegation for the Assistance of Jewish Emigrants (Delegazione per l’assistenza agli emigranti ebrei), founded in December 1939, with headquarters in Genoa and offices throughout Italy. It was an official organization created with government authorization, under the auspices of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities (then “Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane,” now “Unione delle comunità ebraiche italiane”). DELASEM’s aim was to give foreign Jews in Italy financial and administrative assistance with the emigration process. In the first seven months of its existence, DELASEM aided approximately 9,000 Jews – residents or those in transit – and about 2,000 managed to leave with its help, the majority of them on Italian ships. However, when Italy declared war in June 1940, there were still about 3,800 foreign Jews in Italy, among them Saul Steinberg. Steinberg apparently did without financial aid from DELASEM. But the organization lent crucial assistance at the very end of his internment in June 1941, which suggests that he had been in touch with them earlier about his paperwork. The practical matters of dealing with consulates and the Italian authorities could be frustrating and complex, all the more so after Steinberg’s graduation from the Politecnico, which marked the

74 The organization had contacts with the Italian authorities and with international humanitarian groups, such as the American Joint Distribution Committee, which provided funds to assist Jews within Italy, and the Hias Ica Emigration Association (HICEM), which funded the voyage out of Italy; Voigt, Il rifugio precario, 335-50, and, for DELASEM, 336, note 1. As for the DELASEM archives, they were unfortunately dispersed and could not be found after the war. Some papers relating to general and administrative problems are gathered in the Archives of the Unione delle Comunità ebraiche italiane (AUCEI) in Rome. For the organization’s budget and date of founding, see a copy of the long report from DELASEM to the Ministry of the Interior, July 22, 1940 in AUCEI, “Attività dell’Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane dal 1934”, b. 45B, f., “Rapporti col ministero”. For a more detailed history of DELASEM, see Sandro Antonini, DelAsEm: Storia della più grande organizzazione ebraica italiana di soccorso durante la seconda guerra mondiale, (Genoa: De Ferrari, 2000).
75 DELASEM, “Attività dell’Unione…”, report cited in note 74. For the estimate of foreign Jews in Italy in June 1940, see Voigt, Il rifugio precario, vol. II, 30.
76 As mentioned above (note 71), the air and boat tickets were partly paid for by Steinberg himself out of earnings from drawings published in America. The rest was covered by his family members; see Danson, “An Heroic Decision”, 61-62. Danson also tells of an angry exchange of letters between his father and the Colorado branch of the family in April 1941: with Saul’s arrival constantly postponed, the latter demanded the return of the money they had contributed for the voyage. The money was originally collected and sent – with great warmth and enthusiasm – by various Colorado family members in August 1940; see the letter from Lucy (Mrs. Martin) Steinberg to Henrietta Danson, August 16, 1940, YCAL, box 22, first folder, “Lica Correspondence 1975”. Martin Steinberg was another of Saul’s uncles.
end of his legal residence. Now the young Romanian Jew anticipated being stopped and expelled from one moment to the next: “In the spring of 1940, shortly before Italy entered the war, I expected to be arrested.”77 And surely the prospect of being forced back to that “fucking nation,” where the anti-Semitic measures were doubling daily, and which was soon to be marshalling its troops with Nazi Germany, added fear to bureaucratic tangles. So much so that Steinberg began to regret having stayed in Italy through graduation, instead of leaving before the war “when everything was simple. Now,” he added, “it’s too late, it’s impossible to leave and I don’t know if the degree of architecture will be useful to me in the present or future situation.”78 An attempt in April 1940 to get a visa for the United States failed. So did an attempt to get to Portugal in May, when the authorities denied him a tourist visa because he was a Romanian Jew.79 Thus, in the weeks preceding and following Italy’s declaration of war, Steinberg’s American supporters came up with the idea of having him emigrate to Santo Domingo, bringing him one step closer to the United States. He tried unsuccessfully to obtain a visa himself from the Dominican consulate in Genoa. On

---

77 Steinberg, Reflections and Shadows, 26. In a letter to his family announcing that he would soon graduate, Steinberg is aware that he might have to return to Romania: “In a month I’m completely done with school… I may come home after February”; Saul Steinberg to Moritz and Roza Steinberg, January 6, 1940, “Romanian Letters”.

78 Ibid., Saul Steinberg to Moritz and Roza Steinberg, August 12, 1940.

79 The April 1940 effort to secure a US visa is documented by a letter, dated April 23, 1940, written on Steinberg’s behalf by Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jr., to the American consul in Naples; copy at YCAL, box 89, folder “Miscellaneous 1940-42”. Steinberg’s cousin Henrietta Danson worked for Vanderbilt, a well-known publisher. The whole story of the Portuguese tourist visa was reported in 1999 in a study on Portuguese consuls and Jewish refugees (Avraham Milgram, “Portugal, the Consuls, and the Jewish Refugees,1938-1941”, Yad Vashem Studies Vol. XXVII Jerusalem 1999, 123-156. Online at http://www1.yadvashem.org.il/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%20%203230.pdf , but it identified Saul Steinberg just as a “Romanian student.” So did a more recent book: Irene Flunser Pimentel, with the collaboration of Christa Heinrich, Judeus em Portugal durante a II Guerra mundial. Em fuga de Hitler e do Holocausto, (Lisbon: A Esfera dos Livros, 2006), 96, 126. In 2009, after my earlier study mentioning Steinberg’s problems in Lisbon appeared in Italian, Alberto Dines (“Black Friday”, Serrato, no. 1 [2009], 69-72) made the explicit connection between the “Romanian student” and the renowned artist, and published the actual documents. All sources mention a classified letter dated May 11, 1940, from the Portuguese Foreign Ministry to the secret police concerning the request of the Portuguese consul in Milan to issue Steinberg a tourist visa. The visa application is to be rejected, the letter explains, because Portugal did not want to become a safe haven for Romanian Jews: “Romania is facing a serious problem, which they are actively trying to resolve, of disposing of an undesirable, numerous and mounting population of the Jewish race.” The official reason given was different: the application had expired – thus a handwritten note on a telegram dated May 15, 1940, from the Portuguese consul in Milan, responding to the consul’s new proposal that Steinberg now be issued a transit visa instead of a tourist visa. For the consequences of this correspondence, see pp. 343-344 and note 100.
June 7, the Dominican Republic Settlement Association, writing to one of those supporters about the required documents for a visa, observed that the matter could wind up being “purely academic, as it is questionable whether there will be any boats out of Italy from now on.”

Even Cesare Civita feared that it was “too late now to get Saul out of Italy,” but he insisted on trying to get him a visa: “perhaps he might find some way we can not foresee to reach San Domingo or Ecuador.”

The paperwork went ahead, and on July 8 the Association telegraphed Henrietta Danson that the visa for Saul was ready at the Dominican Legation in Milan.

Steinberg’s Dominican visa is dated July 26, 1940, seven weeks after Italy entered the war against France and England. It must have been a precious document to him because it promised deliverance from an alarming consequence of the declaration of war, the internment of civilians deemed dangerous to the Italian regime: subjects of enemy countries capable of carrying arms, those suspected of espionage, or with questionable political affiliations. People were arrested, brought to a police station or a jail, and then transferred to the so-called “places of free internment” or to the campi di concentramento (internment camps), organized and run by the Ministry of the Interior.

“Free internment” meant that the detainee was deported to a small village and forced to live within its boundaries, subject to such constraints as curfews and roll calls. The internment camps were collective places of confinement, with the internees allowed only limited contact with the population. Most of the camps were situated in southern Italy or in isolated Central Italian regions, distant from possible war fronts and prying eyes. The physical facilities differed widely—villas, apartment houses, convents, even theaters had been taken over and adapted for the purpose; in other

---

80 Rebecca Hourwich Reyher to Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jr., June 7, 1940, copy at SSF. Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jr., again at the behest of Henrietta Danson, had written to the Dominican ambassador in Washington, who suggested the family turn to the Dominican Republic Settlement Association of New York; see Danson, “An Heroic Decision”, 60, and the relevant correspondence, copies at SSF.

81 Civita to Mrs. [Henrietta] Danson, n. d., but certainly from mid-June 1940, copy at SSF.

82 Telegram from Rebecca Hourwich Reyher to Mrs. H. Danson c/o Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jr., July 8 (the year is missing), copy at SSF. Steinberg’s visa is in his passport, YCAL, box 89, folder “SS Romanian Passport 1939”.

83 For a detailed account of the policies of internment, see Capogreco, I campi del duce, especially 56-84 and 283-94.

84 The term campo di concentramento means literally “concentration camp,” but historians have made a distinction between “internment” camps, which kept some measure of formal and legal justification, and concentration camps, based on abuse and denial of human rights; see the discussion in Capogreco, I campi del duce, 49-53. The distinction should be kept in mind when we read in official papers, and in Steinberg’s own writings, the term campo di concentramento.
cases, fenced-in barracks were built, such as the camp of Ferramonti di Tarsia in Calabria, which eventually held over 2,000 prisoners (see below, p. 350).

Italian Jews as a whole were not considered candidates for internment, but they came to represent 11.7% of all Italian internees, about ten times the proportion of Italian Jews to the general population: much harsher criteria were clearly used to assess their supposed risk. Foreign Jews like Steinberg presented a complicated problem, since they had been directed to leave the country but lacked exit papers. Although the policy of the Ministry of the Interior was to facilitate the departure of foreign Jews, the breakdown in international communications after Italy’s entrance into the war radically changed the situation. A DELASEM report to the Ministry, dated July 22, 1940, announced that there were 150 Jews with visas for the United States, 50 with visas for Santo Domingo (within four days, Steinberg’s would arrive), and a few others with visas for Palestine or Shanghai – but no one knew how to get them out of Italy. War had no sooner been declared than the government decided to ease the worsening logjam by subjecting foreign Jews to internment as well, justifying the practice with a dose of racism. On June 15, the chief of police ordered the arrest of Jews “from countries with racial policies” and of stateless persons between the ages of eighteen and sixty: “These so-called undesirable elements,” he wrote in a telegram to the prefects and the police commissioner in Rome, “filled with hate toward totalitarian regimes, capable of any deleterious action, must be immediately removed from circulation in defense of the State and public order.” “Hungarian and Romanian Jews,” he specified further on, “must be” – in the euphemistic language of the Ministry – “removed from the Kingdom.”

The beginning of the round-ups shattered both Jews and their organizations. “In the last few days the arrests spread like wildfire,” wrote Gastone Polacco, a DELASEM official in Milan to headquarters in Genoa on June 20, 1940. On July 22, he described a recent roundup in Milan:

“There were about 100 arrests made, more than half of these [people who] voluntarily presented themselves [to the police] on the basis of lists

85 Voigt, Il rifugio precario, vol. II, 11
86 DELASEM to the Ministry of the Interior, July 22, 1940; copy in AUCEI, cited in note 74.
given to us [by the authorities]. We have managed to have jail time reduced to the minimum possible, so that now those arrested are sent to their destinations usually on the second night following the arrest. We were unable to do anything about the manner in which the prisoners are accompanied: however, it appears to us that as soon as they board the trains, they are freed of their chains and it seems that the chains are not put back on...."

By August 12, Polacco reported that “our situation is to be considered absolutely terrifying and could give way to the most tragic and unthinkable consequences, as we must provide, practically forever, for the upkeep of nearly nine hundred persons, without any arrangements of any kind.”

Saul Steinberg certainly witnessed the fate befalling fellow foreign Jews in his own city, and it shattered the illusion that he had found a real home in Italy. “I didn’t want to accept the reality, the betrayal – the way dearest Italy turned into Romania, hellish homeland.” But this was written more than half a century later, and in a private letter. His public descriptions of life in post-1938 Italy were recast as amusing anecdotes. In the 1970s, he breezily recounted how he managed to escape the classic arrest hour, between 6 and 7 am, by waking up a little before 6, riding around Milan on a bicycle borrowed from Giovanni Guareschi, and then returning to bed at 7. But one morning, just as he was about to go out, the youngest of the four sisters who ran the Bar del Grillo, where he was staying, warned him that the police had arrived. He managed to flee by means of a secondary exit; returning at 8 am, he was “welcomed like a hero.”

“They told me that one of the policemen, a real Sherlock Holmes, had felt the bed and said, “It’s still warm.” The policemen were poor devils, southerners who did this job without taking any interest in it. But their laziness, the fact that the organization did not function well, resulted in an inefficiency that would then be converted into a lack of injustice.”

---

89 Letter of June 20, 1940, Gastone Polacco in Milan to Dante Almansi in Rome, AUCEI, s.f. “Genova.” July 22, 1940, Polacco to the Genoa office of DELASEM, in AUCEI, s.f. “Milano.” August 12, 1940, ibid., for the copy sent to Rome. The statement concerning collaboration with the authorities appears in the July 22 letter.

90 Steinberg to Buzzi, June 26, 1995, in Steinberg, Lettere a Aldo Buzzi, 277-78.

91 Steinberg, Reflections and Shadows, 27, 32, for the quoted passage and the preceding details. The entire second chapter of this very short book concerns Steinberg’s arrest and internment. A longer, typewritten version of this chapter, headed “San Vittore e Tortoreto,” can be found at YCAL, box 78, folder “Tortoreto, trans. by Adrienne Foulke”. Only here (pages 1, 2) can one read the details about the bicycle borrowed from Guareschi, or notes like this one, which follows the passage cited above: “For a
The stereotypical observation about the good-humored inefficiency of Italian bureaucracy sidesteps the repressive force that the Ministry of the Interior managed to exert with studied *souplesse*, as it tried, and to a certain extent succeeded, in forcing its victims to collaborate in the arrest process.

**An Aborted Escape**

With his Dominican visa in hand, Steinberg now had to find a way to get to Lisbon, where he had passage booked on a boat to New York. A ticket awaited him. DELASEM had proposed to the Ministry that refugees heading for America board their vessels in Lisbon, and that they get to the Portuguese capital on ships bound for Spain, or fly via Barcelona “using the services of the Ala Littoria.” The proposal was accepted, but Spanish ships no longer provided real passenger service, and Ala Littoria flew to Barcelona only once a week; furthermore, the flights were expensive, and the few available seats were often reserved for diplomats and official delegations. Between June 10 and November 30, 1940, only 202 people managed to leave Italy by these means. But Saul Steinberg was one of those who made it out, if only briefly. On August 26, Cesare Civita sent him a telegram: “Intervention by State Department at the American Consulate should authorize it to grant transit visa for the United States; even if you do not have it by Tuesday, depart nevertheless for Lisbon. Civita” – which Steinberg did, since there is no US visa in his passport, only a Portuguese transit visa stamped on August 29, and a Spanish one dated September 3. On Friday, September 6, he managed to leave on an airplane for Lisbon, via Barcelona-Madrid. But at the Lisbon airport something dramatic happened. Portuguese authorities denied him entrance and sent him back...
to Italy the next day on the very same plane. This was to remain a catastrophic event in Saul Steinberg’s life. The diary published here begins on December 6 with the statement: “3 months since my return from Lisbon,” and a little later Christmas is described as “a day as sad as the 6 and 7 of September.” Decades after, he still spoke of September 7 as a “most dramatic disaster – my black Friday.” 97 In the autobiographical notes prepared for his 1978 retrospective at the Whitney Museum, there is not the slightest mention of the Lisbon disaster. Nor can it be found in Steinberg’s narration in Reflections and Shadows, where he merely notes that in the quest for visas to leave the country, “the only one missing was the Italian one, which they wouldn’t issue without my physical presence, proof of having obeyed the law.”98

The missing Italian “visa”, however, probably refers to his second flight from Italy several months later. In the summer of 1940, it would have been unthinkable for a foreign Jew to board an airplane from Rome without an official exit permit.

The real reason for the September disaster in Lisbon has only recently come to light in the form of Portuguese documents, which tell a story Steinberg probably never knew. When he had applied for a tourist visa in May, the Portuguese Foreign Ministry denied it, fearing that the country would become a dumping ground for “undesirable” Romanian Jews. 99

As a result of the Foreign Ministry’s letter to the secret police (PVDE, a powerful body during the autocratic regime of António de Oliveira Salazar), Steinberg was put on an unwanted list. To the “great surprise” of the border police at the Sintra airport near Lisbon, the artist showed up on September 6, carrying a valid passport and a valid visa signed by the Portuguese honorary consul in Milan, Giuseppe Agenore Magno, three months after the first refusal. The police went by the book and denied him entry, while the consul – one of a number of Portuguese diplomats who helped Jews finding safe havens – was disciplined for his action. 100

The fact that Steinberg was supposed to board a ship bound

97 Saul Steinberg to the art historian Leo Steinberg (no relation), September 7, 1984, original at SSF. Actually, September 7, 1940 was a Saturday. In his journal, there are references to “Fridays” as days on which to expect bad luck.

98 Steinberg, Reflections and Shadows, 32.

99 See p. 338 and note 79.

100 Foreign Ministry to PVDE, May 1, 1940 (see also note 79); PVDE to Foreign Ministry, September 7, 1940. Both documents are published in Alberto Dines, “Black Friday”; Dines gives the archival locations as: “Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lisbon, 2nd floor, A/43, M/17”. From the reproductions of the two documents, it can be inferred that Steinberg’s file at the Foreign Ministry was given the reference number 5521. The problems for Magno began with the Steinberg affair, according to Milgram, “Portugal, the Consuls, and the Jewish Refugees”, 26-29 (see note 79 above), but it was not the only one. Magno was relieved of his functions in January 1941 and substituted by a vice-consul who never took up the post. As a matter of fact, though, Magno kept the consulate open until after the war and he kept issuing visas, since the last Portuguese
for New York but did not have an American transit visa may have reinforced decision of the police, who would have been unwilling to let in another refugee lacking the papers to leave. This is probably what he himself thought had happened, since two years later, just before his actual arrival in the United States, Civita’s secretary had to reassure him: “As to your documents, please believe that they are now in perfect order, and that there is not the slightest danger that the events of Lisbon will again take place.”

On the Paperwork Trail

September 1940: Saul Steinberg was back in Milan, without a job, without permission to stay in Italy and, most important, aware that he could be arrested and interned at any moment or forcibly sent back to the “primitive” and detested Romania, where a change of regime – for the worst – had just taken place. In Bucharest on September 6 and 7, the very days when Steinberg was at the Lisbon airport, General Ion Antonescu and the extreme right-wing group known as the Iron Guard staged a coup that ousted King Carol II and set up the so-called “National Legionnaire State” along Fascist-Nazi lines, and the Italian press was awash with coverage. To make things even more clear to the young Romanian Jew in Italy, the Conducator Antonescu explained in an interview to an Italian newspaper that extreme anti-Semitism was now official policy: “I will solve the Jewish problem (…) by gradually substituting Jews with Legionnaires who will ready themselves in the meanwhile. Most Jewish property will be expropriated and compensated. Jews who arrived in the country after 1913 (…) will be sent away as soon as possible, even if they have become Romanian citizens, while the others – I repeat – will be gradually replaced.”

Steinberg spent this period living at home in the apartment above the Bar del Grillo and in the houses of friends, in particular the studio of his colleagues Aldo Buzzi and Luciano Pozzo on Via dell’Annunciata. As visa on Steinberg’s passport carries his signature and was stamped on June the 7, 1941 (see note 106). On Magno, see also Rui Alfonso, “Count Giuseppe Agenore Magno”, Portuguese Studies Review 5/1 (1996).

101 Gertrude Einstein to Steinberg, May 25, 1942, YCAL, box 1, folder “1942 Correspondence,” cited in Smith Saul Steinberg: Illuminations, 237, note 35. Steinberg’s American family, meanwhile, hypothesized that he had been sent back from Portugal because he had been mistaken for another Steinberg, a Communist; see Danson, “An Heroic Decision”, 61.


103 “Some of my friends showed great courage and they… kept me, they hid me….My friends, that’s something else. You can’t call them Italians. Anybody who’s a friend is
we have seen, he managed to work a little under the table for newspapers, did some advertising assignments and commissions for
architect colleagues, and seems to have received financial help from his
friends and acquaintances. His romantic life was filled with the woman
whose name punctuates the journal, Ada or, in the affectionate
diminutive, Adina (Fig. 14). Ada Cassola probably met Steinberg in 1937.
Six years older than he, she was married (and later went by her husband’s
name, Ongari) and a Catholic. Their relationship was intense, an
admixture, as the frequent journal entries show, of longing and
occasional annoyance.

The main task for Steinberg in the fall of 1940 was to renew now-
expired visas so that he could leave once more for Lisbon. He seems to
have been aiming for a late December departure, since his journal for

not an Italian, is not English, it’s nothing, it’s a friend, it’s a mensch, it’s something”;
Steinberg, AJC-OHP, TP3 87. The reference to the studio is in Steinberg to Buzzi,
November 23, 1945, Lettere, unpublished, apparently responding to a letter in which
Buzzi mentions some drawings of Steinberg’s that he still has: “I had forgotten, but
now I recall that I left some in Via Annunziata [sic] 7 (by the way, does the studio still
exist?).” Gio Pozzo, son of Luciano Pozzo, confirmed that his father also was in that
studio, email to Sheila Schwartz, SSF, January 26, 2003, as did Aldo Buzzi, interview
with the author, January 18, 2008.

104 Ada Cassola was born in 1908 in Vigentino, a small town near Milan later
incorporated in the larger city. She was married to Giovanni Ongari, two years her
senior. She died in Erba, in the province of Como on January 16, 1997 (copies of
official certificates from the Erba municipality with the author and SSF). See also Iain
(Strasbourg: Musée Tomi Ungerer, 2009), 19.

105 In Steinberg’s correspondence with Buzzi, there are frequent references to Ada, up
until a letter of May 3, 1990, Lettere, unpublished. He stays in touch with her and even
contributes to the cost of her nursing home; see, for example, the unpublished parts of
the February 1, 1990 letter. There are occasional, but revealing hints of Ada in
Steinberg’s work. In a famous New Yorker cover of October 18, 1969, a Seurat-like man
admires a painting by Georges Braque (Smith, Steinberg at The New Yorker, 125). A huge
thought balloon, occupying almost all of the page, explodes from the man’s head in a
stream-of-consciousness series of mental associations, alliterations, and graphic games
with linked meanings, beginning with “Braque, baroque, barrack…..” In this verbal
game, which gave Umberto Eco the subject of a seminar in the 1980s, autobiographical
references appear, some so intimate that it would be hard to understand them without a
detailed knowledge of the artist’s biography. Two-thirds down his logical-formal chain,
Steinberg inserts “…Dada, Ada, Hedda, Betty Parsons…” “Dada” seques into “Ada,”
the woman he was forced to abandon when he fled Italy, and whom, to some measure,
he betrayed when he met “Hedda” in New York in 1943. Hedda Sterne is the
Romanian painter who became his wife in 1944, while Betty Parsons had organized a
show of his work the previous year and later became one of his dealers. Umberto Eco’s
seminar is recalled by Stefano Bartezzaghi, “Steinberg Talkboy/Thinkboy”, Saul
Steinberg, ed. Marco Belpoliti, Gianluigi Ricuperati, special issue of Riga, no. 24 (Milan:
Marcos y Marcos, 2005), 335-46, where the author discusses the significance of other
words in the balloon.
December 8 records that the USS *Siboney*, which made trips between Lisbon and New York, was scheduled to sail in twelve days. On November 17 he got a “Transit Certificate” stamp by the US Consul in Milan; on the 27th, having somehow cleared his position with the authorities in Lisbon, he managed to receive another Portuguese transit visa, this time from the Consul in Genoa. But his Romanian passport, reissued the previous year, was to expire two days later, on November 29, 1940, and the Romanian Legation in Rome would not renew it, “without giving any reason therefore,” according to Steinberg. What he may not have known was that the Legionnaire regime, as part of its anti-Semitic policy, was now targeting Romanian Jews even abroad: “passport renewals were denied for a wide range of reasons (not having paid military taxes, for instance), and return to Romania became more difficult.” Discovering that Steinberg’s passport was no longer valid, the Spanish consulate cancelled a transit visa it had just granted, as he explains in the December 6, 1940 journal entry; the newly issued visa on p. 12 of his passport bears a large blue X and a red-pencil “Anulado.” He had to start all over again: “I had a Rumanian passport, it was no good at all, it was like an indictment.”

In the meantime, however, the situation in Portugal had become chaotic. At the end of October, a famous American journalist arriving in Lisbon found the city to be “an international whirlpool into which were swept from every direction, people of all nationalities, races, colors and tongues, none wishing to stay, but all forced to remain long days, weeks, and sometimes months awaiting transportation.” There were refugees who lacked valid visas for their countries of destination as well as visa-holders who could not find a berth on a ship. So many people were flocking to Portugal that the authorities cut off entry into the country.

---

106 Both the US transit stamp and the Portuguese transit visa are in his passport at YCAL (note 82). The new Portuguese visa was granted by the authority of the political police: in signing the third, and last, visa issued to Steinberg a few months later (June 7, 1941), the consul in Milan wrote above his signature, “Authorization by PVDE [the secret police] telegramsed to the Portuguese consul in Genoa.”

107 Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 259. On December 5, the Romanian regime formally abolished military service for Jews, and at the same time ordered them to forced labor under military authority. Those “physically incapable of labor service were required to pay a military tax”; ibid., 27.

Steinberg’s statement that the Romanians gave no reason for not renewing his passport appears in the travel affidavit he signed on January 16, 1941 at the American Consulate, Milan; the original is in his passport (note 82).

108 Steinberg, AJC-OHP, T4 154-155

109 Harry W. Flannery, *Assignment to Berlin* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1942), 3. Flannery was on his way to Berlin to run the CBS bureau there. He arrived in Lisbon on a PanAm Clipper and apparently left for Madrid on the Ala Littoria weekly flight. For a more general perspective, see Irene Flunser Pimentel, *Judeus em Portugal durante a II Guerra Mundial* (note 79).
even for those with legitimate transit visas until February 1941. Steinberg’s journal for these later months of 1940 tells of his comings and goings between Milan, Rome, and Genoa to renew visas and permits, and of an uneasy relationship with the American Consulate. In the December 30 journal entry, the Vice Consul had been “tightlipped” when Steinberg applied for a transit visa earlier in the month, but on January 16, the US Consulate issued a “Affidavit of Travel,” with a photograph and biographical details that somehow could be used as a corroborating identification with his now-expired passport. But the journal entries also speak of films he has seen (Stagecoach, Piccolo mondo antico, Jamaica Inn), of visits to galleries, of air raids, of the bombs on the Porta Ticinese neighborhood, and of his hopes to work again for Settebelle, he writes of his disappointments as well, and of his clearly complex relationship with Adina. We learn, from the journal and elsewhere, of his friends’ efforts to make the police authorities go easy on him. In an unpublished passage of the dictated memoirs that became Reflections and Shadows, Steinberg describes a “pact with the police headquarters” set up “through Mondadori and Mondadori’s acquaintances,” ensuring that he be treated well at the moment of his arrest. “I believe,” he adds, “a certain Captain Vernetti was helpful to me.” Vernetti appears also in the journal entry for January 8, 1941 as the bearer of “extensions” and of both good and bad news; then, on April 24 and 27, as the police officer who arrested him and brought him to prison.

In fact, between hiding out and moments of accord with the local police, Steinberg was ignored by the central authorities until February 1941. What then happened to him can be reconstructed from the documents in the “Steinberg Saul di Moritz” folder still in the Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome. On February 21, a telegram from the Prefect of Milan informs the Ministry about this young Jew who, “having been warned to leave the Kingdom,” now declares that he cannot do so since his passport has expired; and even though he has a travel affidavit for the United States, he has not yet obtained new transit visas for Spain and Portugal. This conundrum seems to create some kind of bureaucratic embarrassment, and the Prefect asks Rome for “directives”; in reply, the Ministry asks the Prefect to “formulate concrete proposals.” Two weeks later, the Prefect proposes that, as “the foreigner in question is unable to leave the Kingdom,” he should be “assigned to a concentration

---

111 “San Vittore e Tortoreto”, typescript, p. 2, YCAL, box 78, folder “Tortoreto, trans. by Adrienne Foulke”.
112 Prefect of Milan to the Ministry of the Interior, February 21, 1941, in ACS, MI, PS, AG, Cat. A16 Ebrei stranieri, b. 270, f. “Steinberg Saul di Moritz”; ibid., initialed draft, Ministry of the Interior to the Prefect of Milan, February 27, 1941.
This last memo from the Prefect is covered with annotations in various hands (Fig. 15). Scrawled across the top is “nulla a debito”—there was “nothing against the subject.” Another, dated March 25: “Transfer to concentration camp Tortoreto.” The actual order is found in a memo dated March 31, though it was not immediately enforced. Steinberg, in the meantime (as he explains in the journal entry of May 7), spent from late February until April 16 “awaiting Rome’s decision”; he may, sometime in April, have been taken by the police for a short time and then released (“April 16, already out,” he notes). Another ten days passed before Steinberg, who was hastening to complete work projects, showed up at the police station. He turned himself in on April 27, was taken to San Vittore, Milan’s central prison, and from there to the camp of Tortoreto in the province of Teramo.

**Internment**

“As a child, I dreamed of being the Count of Montecristo, of writing my diary with my own blood. When I found myself in prison I understood I had become an interesting subject for a novelist,” even amidst the “sadness that was permanent.” In sum, a romantic “grand adventure” in the San Vittore prison, which Steinberg described in his journal entry of April 28 (in ordinary fountain pen ink) with punctilious curiosity: the chamberpot and the arrival of the *scapino*, the prisoner assigned to clean it; playing cards with a deck made from tobacco papers, the red ink drawn in blood; the schedule for prisoner checks and the “enormous trafficking” of cigarettes and news. And all this illustrated with drawings. The sketches of the three-man cell 111, second wing, along with views down corridors and through barred windows, are brief and informative (Fig. 16), the first in a series of graphic notations Steinberg would make in the following months about his new places of residence.

---

113 Ibid., Prefect of Milan to the Ministry of the Interior, March 12, 1941.
114 Ibid., initialed copy, Ministry of the Interior to the prefects of Milan and Teramo, March 31, 1941.
115 Whatever happened on April 16, it must have been very important since the date is also noted (without explanation) in a very short handwritten list of addresses where he lived in Milan. The year 1940-41 only includes dates, beginning with September 6 and ending with his arrival at and departure from Tortoreto; YCAL, box 2, folder “Santo Domingo 1942”.
116 “San Vittore e Tortoreto”, typescript, p. 4. Also: “I found consolation in that sort of Huckleberry Finn or Tom Sawyer impersonation of the Count of Monte Cristo right away…. [I] kept a diary, of course. As soon as you go to jail [laugh] you keep a diary [laugh]. It’s classic [laughter]. Tried to behave like a mixture of Devil’s Island, Foreign Legion, what have you, an adventure”; Steinberg, AJC-OHP, T3 74-75. The “diary” Steinberg described to his interviewers is the journal published here.
His verbal and graphic inventory of prison life dodges the real horrors of the San Vittore jail, where he spent four days, though some prisoners remained there for several weeks before being transferred. They were treated like the common criminals with whom they lived, an experience described as “the most harsh and humiliating of the entire adventure.”117 On July 2, 1940, the Ministry sent a memo to police headquarters, urging the officials to transfer the detainees to the internment camps as soon as possible.118 Prisoners incarcerated in San Vittore were not informed of their final destination. Steinberg’s biggest fear, noted in his journal on April 30, was that he would be sent to “Ferramonte,” that is, Ferramonti di Tarsia, the large camp in the province of Cosenza (Calabria), about 150 miles south of Naples.119 The only purpose-built camp, it was located in a marginal and depressed area, with malaria a constant menace, as the Milanese Jewish community had just learned from a first-hand observer.120 Steinberg was not shipped to Ferramonti; on May 1, accompanied by two policemen, he was taken on a train headed for Tortoreto, a small Adriatic town in the Abruzzi. In Reflections and Shadows, he recounts his journey in tones that personalize geography: “During that wonderful trip I saw perilous mountains for the first time, with the train going ever so slowly along the edge of the abyss, which was precisely my situation.”121 In the journal entry for May 1, however, there are no adventurous voyages described, only a simple itinerary Milan-Bologna-Rimini-Ancona, along a route that is actually very flat.122 He spent the night at the

117 Capogreco, I campi del duce, 64. See also Mario Avagliano, Marco Palmieri, Gli ebrei sotto la persecuzione in Italia: Diari e lettere 1938-1945, (Turin: Einaudi, 2011), for an inside description of internment life by Jews in Urbisaglia (130-38), Campagna (139-48), and Ferramonti (149-51).
118 Capogreco, I campi del duce, 289.
120 Capogreco, “The Internment Camp of Ferramonti-Tarsia”, 163. On March 30, 1941, Israele Kalk, the organizer of the so-called Mensa dei bambini (the children’s mess), which helped Jewish refugee families survive in Milan, was allowed to visit Ferramonti for a few days. Thus, when Steinberg was arrested one month later, the Milan refugee community had already received first-hand news about conditions in the camp; ibid., 167.
121 Steinberg, Reflections and Shadows, 35. Like a good travel writer, he goes on to describe the embarkation of a procession of penitents and their ecstatic songs; they were probably pilgrims to the holy shrine at Loreto, not far from the train route.
122 The image of the train traveling along a precipice in Reflections and Shadows could be a conflation with Steinberg’s later journey from Tortoreto to Rome upon his release in June 1941. On that voyage, the train would have climbed through the Apennines, along
Ancona station, where he managed to send his parents a postcard, written in an upbeat tone, which says nothing about his internment: “I’m constantly on the road in my attempt to leave. I hope I’ll succeed soon. I’m well and hope to give you good news. In any case, even if I don’t succeed right away, I’ll console myself with the idea that sooner or later I’ll succeed.”

He arrived in Tortoreto, his journal tells us, at 10:30 in the morning on May 2: “I see the sea, beautiful.”

In the township of Tortoreto, there were two different camps: one in the center of Tortoreto Alto, a village up in the hills; and one in Tortoreto Stazione, to which Steinberg was headed, located in the area around the railroad station, which after the war became known as Alba Adriatica.

The camp, he tells us in Reflections and Shadows, “was a villa from which you could see the sea, but you weren’t allowed to go to it. The camp was small, with perhaps fifty internees: a few Jews, White Russians, gypsies, stateless persons, refugees, being held there in a fairly makeshift and human fashion as compared with the other camps. I was lucky.”

The “villa” was the Villa Tonelli, not too far from the station (Figs. 18, 23). A two-story building with a large garden in front, a living room, kitchen, ten large rooms on the first floor, ten on the second, and nine other habitable rooms; the police authorities deemed it suitable for interning seventy-five people. It was not fenced in, and the prisoners were allowed, under escort, to walk about for an hour a day. Officially, fairly tortuous routes, such as Pescara-Sulmona-Rome. This was the same route that he took in the opposite direction in 1955 when he went back to visit Tortoreto (see entries of March 24 and 25, Yearbook 1955, Box 3, YCAL; in Reflections and Shadows, he would also wrongly remember the trip as having taken place in 1957).

123 The postcard, written to his parents, is dated May 3, even though Steinberg was in Ancona on May 1-2; Romanian Letters. The postal stamp is incomplete, but it seems to suggest May 2; this may be among the earliest instances where Steinberg, who cared little for chronological precision, inadvertently misdated a document or artwork.

124 For information about the camps at Tortoreto, see the outline in Capogreco, I campi del duce, 222-23, as well as Costantino Di Sante, Dall'internamento alla deportazione: I campi di concentramento in Abruzzo (1940-1944), n.d., paragraph 2.15, on the web at: (http://www.associazioni.milano.it/aned/libri/di_sante.htm). The papers regarding the organization and the management of the camps are in ACS, MI, PS, AG, Cat. Massime M4, b.136, f.16, “Camps di concentramento,” s. f. 2 “Affari per provincia,” ins. 41 “Teramo,” ss. ff. 9 “Grande fabbricato (Villa) nel comune di Tortoreto Stazione,” and ss. ss. ff. 11 “Fabbricato di proprietà del Sig. De Fabritiis Nicola nel comune di Tortoreto paese.”

125 Steinberg, Reflections and Shadows, 35. “There were no fences, nothing. Anybody could have escaped, nobody was fool to escape, we were kept there”; Steinberg, AJC-OHP, T3 93-94

126 Elena Zanoni, Alba Adriatica e la sua gente: Un secolo di eventi e di ricordi, (Rome: Pioda Imaging, 2006), 151-52. Steinberg later quipped to friends and relatives that “the
contact between prisoners and the residents was prohibited, but Elena Zanoni, then a girl living in the villa next door, tells of strolling with her friends one day, when they became aware of a new arrival, a “romantic young man who fascinated all the girls on account of his good looks.” Some quick detective work revealed he answered to the name of Saul Steinberg. He was so remarkable and noticeable that the few weeks Steinberg spent in Tortoreto were enough for “the town girls” to use his first name, in the Italianized version of “Paolo.”

Life went on in the form of daily roll calls, attempts to fill the empty hours, and the search for food (Fig. 17). Prisoners with no money were given a daily stipend of 6.5 lire, which was raised to 8 lire a little before Steinberg’s arrival—a raise for which the prisoners sent a thank-you note to Mussolini, illustrated by the architect Walter Frankl, a fellow inmate (Fig. 18). These funds went to the common mess, where, Steinberg recalled, “there was quite a traffic in bread: fresh bread, dry bread, all kinds of bread. Grass and herbs, a bit of onion, were added to make bread soup, bread pies.” Playing music was permitted, even if it had to be somewhat muted, and violinist-prisoners entertained their companions.

“At night we had curfew, and these thirty people gathered together in the

---

127 Zanoni, Alba Adriatica e la sua gente, 154. For Steinberg’s own account of the sensual women of Tortoreto, see Steinberg, Reflections and Shadows, 38-39.
128 The note, on a large sheet of paper (40 x 44cm), is dated April 28, 1941. At the center, an ink and watercolor drawing by the architect Walter Frankl depicts the Villa Tonelli at Tortoreto Stazione, surrounded by the signatures of the internees. “Duce!” one reads above the drawing, “the prisoners of this camp, profoundly moved by your magnanimous gesture, express their most heartfelt thanks, and consider this measure, beyond its material value, a new sign of that human treatment, which everyone, without exception, will remember forever.” Another similar though smaller note, dated May 1, 1941, was sent by the inmates of the Tortoreto Alto camp. In this case the drawing, by another inmate, shows the clock tower of the town. Both documents are reproduced in Pasquale Rasici, Alba Adriatica: I primi 50 anni, Ieri-Oggi 1956-2006, (Colonnella [TE]: Grafiche Martinotype, 2005), 71, 75. The originals are among the papers and memorabilia in the Gianfranco Moscati collection, which documents anti-Semitic persecution in Italy and Europe at large. The collection is now at the Imperial War Museum, London; the two notes are in folder 79, items 18 (Tortoreto Stazione) and 19 (Tortoreto Alto). The same documents are also detailed in the inventory of the papers of the Italian Ministry of the Interior, but the indicated folder (ACS, MI, PS, AG, Cat. Massime M4, b. 136, f. 16 “Campi di concenatamento,” s.f. 2 “Affari per provincia,” ins. 41 “Teramo,” ss.ff. 9 “Grande fabbricato (Villa) nel commune di Tortoreto Stazione”) contains only the cover letter from the Prefect of Teramo, with “seen by the Duce” noted in the margin.
129 Steinberg, Reflections and Shadows, 38. Three decades later, Steinberg recalled the stipend as smaller, adding to the above passage, “The pope gave us six lire a day as an allowance, and for his own peace of mind.”
dining room with the lights off, and there was one man there who was a good violinist, he had a fiddle with him, and he played the fiddle with a… mute, and played very quietly so that the guard wouldn’t wake up, and in the dark played… he played some Beethoven, some classical music. It was beautiful. It was the most beautiful… I still have goose pimples about that music.”

The violinist was probably Alois Gogg, an Austrian who would eventually be freed along with Steinberg, and, like him, sail from Lisbon to New York.

Steinberg spent his time drawing, painting, writing, receiving letters, and handling the paperwork necessary to secure his missing visas. At the time of his internment, he had a new reservation on a ship scheduled to embark from Lisbon on June 20. He therefore asked for authorization to leave Tortoreto to complete his paperwork: on May 3, to go to the Portuguese Consulate in Genoa for a transit visa; on May 21, to go to Milan to revalidate his American transit visa, which the American Consulate had demanded he do in person. Such requests were not

130 Steinberg, AJC-OHP, T3 83
131 Two decades later, Gogg wrote of his time in Tortoreto: “In the attic I found myself a roomy place and there studied and practiced. My friends often cooked for me and brought me the meals up to my ‘Studierstube’ so I could work for hours and hours. From my ‘study’ I had a beautiful view of the sea, but it got frightfully cold in winter & we would spend the day in bed, so as not to freeze”; note written to his wife and to his daughter, December 6, 1965, copy kindly provided to the author by Gogg’s widow, Paula Weber. Steinberg speaks of Gogg as a “mysterious man, because he remained in good spirits and always had faith; he never had a moment of silence or lack of courage”; “San Vittore e Tortoreto,” p. 6, and a briefer description in Steinberg, Reflections and Shadows, 35. Two pages on in the latter book, Steinberg recounts that Gogg also enlisted in the American army, but changed his name. After the war, Steinberg tried to contact him under the name “Warner,” but was unsuccessful and lost track of him. Gogg, however, had taken the name Milton Weber and settled in Wisconsin, where he taught music in a college and directed a symphony orchestra; he died on October 28, 1968. See also the entry for another prisoner from Tortoreto, Maximilian Balter, on the site dedicated to the memory of the many Jews who lived up until 1938 in a certain apartment building in Vienna: http://www.grossestadtgutgasse34.at/balter.html. In a journal entry of June 20, 1941, Steinberg writes: “Excalibur with Gogg and Isler”, which seems to suggest that Gogg boarded the S.S. Excalibur in Lisbon with him. Although they had shared a hotel room in Rome on the journey out of Italy (see note 137 below), passenger manifests show that Gogg departed Lisbon after Steinberg, on July 11, aboard the S.S. Exeter (copy of the manifest supplied by Paula Weber). Steinberg’s two friends probably just accompanied him to the boarding pier.

132 Mail in the camps was subject to censure, which in some camps proved particularly oppressive, but it does not seem that Steinberg had any difficulty corresponding by mail.

133 All this correspondence is in ACS, MI, PS, AG, Cat. A16 Ebrei stranieri, b. 270, f.
unusual, given that government policy was to help foreign Jews leave Italy.\footnote{Voigt, \textit{Il rifugio precario}, vol. II, 131.} In Steinberg’s case, the Prefect of Genoa advised against allowing him to travel to the city, while a few days later the Ministry agreed to let him travel to Milan.\footnote{Prefect of Genoa to the Ministry of the Interior, May 28, 1941, in ACS, MI, PS, AG, Cat. A16 Ebrei stranieri, b. 270, f. “Steinberg Saul di Moritz.”} All these efforts, however, became unnecessary, thanks to the intervention of DELASEM. On June 4, the DELASEM office in Rome wrote to the Ministry requesting an immediate release for Steinberg so that he could catch a plane in Rome on June 12 in order to make his scheduled departure from Lisbon on June 20. Permission was granted on June 6, and Steinberg boarded a train for Rome two days later with Alois Gogg.\footnote{DELASEM to the Ministry of the Interior, June 4, 1941; Ministry of the Interior to the Prefects of Milan, Teramo, and to the head of police administration in Rome, June 6, 1941; and, from the Prefect of Teramo to the same three offices, June 9 and 12, 1941, announcing that Steinberg had left for Rome on the 8th. The departure date of June 8 is confirmed in his journal entry for that day. All documents in ACS, MI, PS, AG, Cat. A16 Ebrei stranieri, b. 270, f. “Steinberg Saul di Moritz.”} Writing to his friend a few months later from Santo Domingo, Steinberg would remember the train journey from Tortoreto, the excitement, the tension, even the people on board chanting prayers for family members who were fighting at the front: “It was an ugly period,” he said, “which, remembering it now, becomes beautiful, especially for me, since I was going to Milan to see my girlfriend.”\footnote{Steinberg to Gogg, September 30, 1941, in Italian. Copy kindly provided to the author by Paula Weber; copy also at SSF. In Rome, Gogg shared a room with Steinberg at the Albergo Pomezia; in Fig. 20, Steinberg’s drawing of that room, Gogg's name is written on one of the two beds, while a photo on the nighttable is identified as “Adina.”} More than fifty years later, he reminisced to Aldo Buzzi:

“How lucky I was to be saved… I took a night train from Rome, seated, with all the perils, police, documents. Arrived safely in Milan, spent the day with Ada, while Natalina scolded me: What poor things you have in your suitcase, ingegnere! She had seen my worn-out socks etc. in the wardrobe. At night I returned to Rome, a crowded train, nameless hotel, on Via dei Chiavari, I think, in the Ghetto. Saved from minute to minute by a miracle. The only thing remaining in my mind is the beautiful maid in the hotel, going up and down the narrow staircase.”\footnote{Steinberg to Buzzi, June 26, 1995, in Steinberg, \textit{Lettere a Aldo Buzzi}, 278. Natalina is Natalina Cavazza, the second of the four sisters who ran the Bar del Grillo, cited also in the journal entry for Sunday, December 29, 1940, and in Steinberg to Buzzi, April 6, 1987, ibid., 159.}
Between Milan and Rome, Steinberg collected the last of his missing documents (Fig. 19). He stayed in Rome at the Hotel Pomezia in via dei Chiavari (Fig. 20) from June 12 until June 16, when he once more got on an Ala Littoria flight for Barcelona-Madrid-Lisbon. This time, the Portugese authorities allowed him entry. Arriving in Lisbon, he stayed at the Hotel Tivoli (Fig. 21), and on June 20, he boarded the S.S. Excalibur, a ship of the American Export Lines. Ten days later, the boat arrived in New York Harbor, but Steinberg could not get permission to disembark and was forced to remain on Ellis Island. On July 5, he was once again at sea, now bound for Ciudad Trujillo, as Santo Domingo was then known. There he spent one more year, working and hoping for an American visa, until the summer of 1942, when he finally flew to Miami and boarded a bus to New York. After two years of frustration and fear, he had done it. And he was one of the lucky ones: between December 1, 1940 and October 15, 1941, only 210 other foreign Jews managed to leave Italy.

In the United States, Steinberg began to work for the American government, and in February 1943 he received both US citizenship and a commission in the Naval Reserve. Assigned to the intelligence services, he was sent to China, India, Algeria, and finally, in mid-1944, to Italy, having literally gone around the world from east to west in less than three years. But that is another story, which interests us only because in Bari in 1944, wearing an American officer’s uniform, Steinberg ran into a

139 The new Portuguese and Spanish transit visas in his passport (note 82), in fact bear the respective dates of June 7 and June 10. The presence of the visas on his passport refutes the claim, which circulated for many years in print (and probably originated with Steinberg), that he was able to leave thanks to a passport “slightly falsified” with a stamp of his own making; see, for example, Sarah Boxer, “Saul Steinberg, Epic Doodler, Dies at 84”, *The New York Times*, May 13, 1999 (http://www.nytimes.com/1999/05/13/arts/saul-steinberg-epic-doodler-dies-at-84.html).

140 Telegram from the Rome police headquarters to the Ministry, in ACS, MI, PS, AG, Cat. A16 Ebrei stranieri, b. 270, f. “Steinberg Saul di Moritz.”

141 On July 2, 1941, he wrote to his parents in Bucharest that he had been met by “[Harold] Danson, Harry’s son-in-law, and Civita. Now I’m waiting on Ellis Island, I can’t enter New York because I’m in transit; still, Harry and Sadie and their girls with their husbands and Civita with his family visit me daily. They’ve bought me everything, I’m well equipped, they are all very nice and polite and very attentive. Saturday I embark [on] the ship for Santo Domingo, it’s not far, I hope to get there well and to start working right away because I have a lot of hope and potential to succeed – have hope, have confidence in me, I will do everything for you” “Romanian Letters”.

142 DELASEM report “Statistiche degli israeliti espatriati dal 1 dicembre 1940 al 15 ottobre 1941,” cited by Voigt, *Il rifugio precario*, vol. II, 50. Voigt, 51, also considers it “realistic to calculate 700 to be the [overall] number of ‘foreign Jews’ who, persecuted by Fascist racial policies, left Italy after June 10, 1940 to transfer overseas.”

143 See Smith, *Saul Steinberg Illuminations*, 30-32.
fellow detainee from Tortoreto who was selling stamps from a street stand. The man, without recognizing Steinberg, said that he had survived because, with the fall of Mussolini on July 25, 1943, he had gone south, while others had traveled north, straight into Nazi hands.  

The night before his departure from Tortoreto, Steinberg’s companions had made a dinner in his honor, offered him a “special supper,” with “lots of bread and the sweetest tea,” and a folded farewell pamphlet with a dedication: “A souvenir of Tortoreto. Cordially dedicated to Mr. S. Steinberg from his comrades” (Figs. 22, 23). Inside was a drawing of the Villa Tonelli, surrounded by the signatures of those destined to remain. Thirty years later, Steinberg looked at the pamphlet once more:

“We are all there, I am in the title. And the signatures seem to be from the XIX century, signatures that give an idea of the importance, of the dignity of man, to the very last one. These poor men. I hope that many of them were saved on July 25.”

The signature on the drawing of the villa is that of the Viennese architect Walter Frankl, the same man who had created the thank you note to Mussolini for having raised their daily stipend, “a new sign of that human treatment, of which everyone, without exception, will remember forever” (see above p. 351, Fig. 18). That “forever” did not last long. In October 1941, as a “family reunion” measure, Frankl was transferred to the village of Castelnuovo Garfagnana (northern Tuscany), so that he could live with his wife, Elisabeth. But at the end of 1943 the region was

---

144 Steinberg, Reflections and Shadows, 37. The camps at Tortoreto had been dismantled in May 1943, and approximately ninety prisoners, mostly Jews, were transferred to the nearby camp in Nereto; see Capogreco, I campi del duce, 222. When Mussolini fell on July 25, 1943, the few Italians interned in Nereto were freed, while the 158 foreign internees – mostly Yugoslavs – were kept in the camp; after the armistice (September 8) and the creation of the Fascist republic in the north of Italy, conditions in the camp became harsher, until, on December 21, 1943, the director of the camp handed the Jews over to the German troops who had occupied the town; ibid., 220. Steinberg’s friend had probably been transferred elsewhere before the end of July – as was Max Balter, a Tortoreto internee and signatory (as “Balter, Massimo”) to both the thank you note to Mussolini (see above p. 351 and note 128, Fig. 18, second row from top, third signature) and the “Ricordo” for Steinberg (see Fig. 23, top row, fourth from left). Balter was transferred to a camp in Istonio Marina (now Vasto, Abruzzo) in June, managed to escape in the summer of 1943, crossed over to Allied lines and ended up in a displaced persons camp not very far from Bari in the winter of 1944; see Sylvia/Maximilian Balter, in “Gedenkprojekt Große Stadtgutgasse 34”, http://www.grossestadtrutgasse34.at/balter.html.

145 Steinberg, Reflections and Shadows, 36.

146 The original is in YCAL, box 89, folder “Tortoreto 2”.

147 “San Vittore e Tortoreto”, typescript, p. 7.

148 See note 128.
taken over by the Nazis. On December 6, with the other Jews who were living as “free internees” in Castelnuovo, the Frankls were sent to a nearby camp, then transferred to Milan’s San Vittore prison. On January 30, 1944, they were on the transport that left a special underground section of Milan’s central railway station bound for Auschwitz. Neither would ever come back.149

Saul Steinberg’s Journal, December 1940-June 1941

Between the end of 1940 and the summer of 1942, Saul Steinberg kept an occasional journal, in Italian, on loose sheets of paper. Often they were only hurried notes, or after the fact reconstructions that followed long periods of silence. Along with the written entries, he sometimes added sketches of the places he was describing. The journal is among Steinberg’s papers at YCAL.150 Here we publish the first part of the journal, which covers the period between December 6, 1940 and June 20, 1941.

The more or less continuous narration is interrupted at the end of December 1940 and picks up again on April 27, 1941 with a brief interlude dated “Tortoreto, May 7,” referring to events during the intervening period. Steinberg seems to have returned to the journal once he had arrived at Tortoreto, picking up the thread again from his arrest on Sunday, April 27; afterwards, on May 7, he wanted to fill in the interim of four months using the available space on the bottom of December’s page, and a little of the reverse of that same sheet of paper. The dates are highlighted in boldface and a line separates one page from

149 Walter Frankl, the eldest brother of renowned neurologist and psychiatrist Viktor Frankl (1905-1997), had managed to leave Austria in July 1939 with his wife, only to find himself interned in Tortoreto one year later. For his full story, see Veronika Pfölz, “Nach Italien emigriert – drei Künstlerinnen und Künstler”, Zwischenwelt. Literatur – Widerstand – Exil, nos. 1-2 (August 2005): 61-63. A summary of this material can be found in “Gedenkproject Große Stadtgutgasse 34” (see note 144), note 8. In the repertory of Jews deported from Italy (Liliana Picciotto, Il libro della Memoria. Gli ebrei deportati dall’Italia 1943-1945, [Milan: Mursia 2002], 299), the name is spelled Fraenkel, and his wife’s name is italianized into Elisabetta (née Weisz). In the report filed by his brother Viktor with the “The Central Database of Shoah Victims’ Names” of Yad Vashem (http://207.232.26.141/YADVASHEM/17031933_362_4648/204.jpg), the wife’s name is recorded as Else. See also the “Frankl, Walter” file in the database of the “Documentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes” (http://de.doew.braintrust.at/db_shoah_55041.html).

150 The pages of the journal are divided between two folders in box 89, “Tortoreto 1940-42” and “Miscellaneous 1940-42”; since the Steinberg papers are not yet catalogued, the pages are out of chronological order.
the other. Editorial notes are in brackets.

**Milan, December 6, 1940** [Originally 7, corrected to 6]

3 months since the return from Lisbon – Today – as if to celebrate the date, the Spanish consul cancelled the visa already issued because [my] passport [was] expired. Accusation of bad faith. Enough.

I spoke with [Giovanni] Guareschi about gags, even drawings.

Evening at [Giovanni] Mosca’s, where I lost 100 lire playing cards. Today I couldn’t see Adina – After much time, in the afternoon, I went to the cinema *(Ombre Rosse* [Stagecoach, by John Ford]). Always falling lower –

I received from Albisola 3 rather ugly ceramics.¹⁵¹

I notice that more and more often Friday brings me bad luck. Friday departure for Rome, Friday departure for Lisbon. Today, pitch-black day, Friday.

God will help me get through these years

**added May 7, 1941** (Tortoreto)

_Friday_ May 2, arrive in Tortoreto.

----------------------------

**Saturday, December 7**

Yesterday naturally was the 6th. The 6th and Friday. It all [the bad luck of the day] still holds and even more so.

Afternoon with Adina at home. She told me small things that she shouldn’t have told me because they’re inconsequential.

I am anxious right now and as always when something eludes me my desire for it grows stronger.

Evening at [Giovanni] Mosca’s [a Bertoldo colleague] – I had already sent him some little cubes of wood, painted, which he liked.

I appear to be courting him because I am interested but I do it without this idea in mind.

Fiorio and his wife were also there. Tonight I wondered whether Fiorio was the one who looked at Adina on the tram.

They talked about a baby who put a bean in his nose and the bean sprouted roots and spread through the inside of the nose, way up.

I finished reading *I Promessi Sposi* which is a great and fine book.¹⁵² – Still haven’t received anything from home.

¹⁵¹ Albisola is a seaside resort on the Ligurian coast. The local ceramics industry dates from the sixteenth century.

¹⁵² *I Promessi sposi* (The Betrothed) by Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873) is the most renowned and influential novel in Italian literature.
Sunday, December 8

The “Siboney” leaves in 12 days.\footnote{The USS \textit{Siboney}, a troop transport in World War I, returned to passenger service on routes between the United States and the Caribbean. In 1940-41, it was leased to the American Export Lines, and made trips between Lisbon and New York; see “USS Siboney”, Wikipedia, consulted May 9, 2010, \url{http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SS_Siboney}.} Got up at noon. Malaise. In the afternoon I tried to make a few gags. [Aldo] Buzzi came. He doesn’t think I ought to work with them [“da loro,” i.e., people, though it is not clear who]. I would not treat a friend this way. I feel more and more empty in the head. We have beautiful, moonlit nights, but there are no more alarms [air-raid sirens].

Thursday, December 12

Yesterday and today were good days. I will see later if they really are good. So: Monday Adina was here in the afternoon. Then I went to [Pietro] Chiesa\footnote{See note 61 above.} to finish the drawing then, following a phone call with the Panamanian Consul, went at 10 in the evening to Rome. I arrived at 8 in the morning and went to the Romanian Legation without any result. Spent 3 hours in the waiting room. I saw in passing two magnificent gates, in a beautiful green, next to the Teatro Marcello near the gate of the Ghetto. I returned late on Tuesday evening. Then on Wednesday, telephoning Mosca, I learned that [Angelo] Rizzoli bought Il Settebello and that they are well-disposed toward me. In fact, in the afternoon, going to [the office of] the newspaper, Andrea [Rizzoli] said, in an absent-minded way, speaking to others, that his father agreed and that I will begin on the first of January. I was very happy, it felt like the good [old] times. Today I saw Adina a little. We met and had tea downtown.

--------------------------

Thursday, [December] 12

Toward evening, I saw, with Buzzi, the exhibition of Birolli and Carrà.\footnote{Two Italian painters: Renato Birolli (1905-1959) and Carlo Carrà (1881-1966).}

\footnote{Two Italian painters: Renato Birolli (1905-1959) and Carlo Carrà (1881-1966).}
Hmmm…
Crosignani left.
Monday received a letter from home. I have to answer. Harry wrote them an ugly version about the Lisbon business. I also have to write to Ciucu.
I’m happy. Tomorrow I will go to the newspaper with “Candide” for Carletto [Manzoni] and 4 packs of tarot cards that I took from Clerici.
Tomorrow is a bad day, I’ll be careful. It’s Friday the 13th.

Friday, December 20 [he recaps the previous week]
Friday the 13th nothing happened to me.
Saturday [the 14th] with Adina, and Sunday too.
Tuesday [the 17th] at Mosca’s, evening.
Wednesday [the 18th] at 2 in the morning alarms. In a shelter with everyone on our floor. Saw some beautiful tracer bullets [from anti-aircraft fire]. Bombs at the Porta Ticinese. Fighting with Adina because yesterday evening she was with her girlfriends on the 1st floor.
Today I should have left from Lisbon on the Siboney – I was at the US Consulate, which will write to the Romanian Legation in Rome. If it doesn’t get results, they’ll get a Travel Affidavit for me.
I’m broke – I get up late these days. I am reading The Life of Benvenuto Cellini – Buongiardino from the architecture school brought me Town & Country with one of my drawings – I made a painting for [Cesare] Civita using an earth brown–tempera.
Five of my gags in an issue of Bertoldo.

156 His American uncle, Harry Steinberg.
157 “Ciucu” Perlmutter was a childhood friend who studied with Steinberg in Milan. At the beginning of 1940, he left Milan without graduating; see Steinberg’s 1940 letters to his parents, especially March 6, 1940, “Romanian Letters”. Subsequent letters from Steinberg’s parents and Perlmutter’s sister document his peregrinations, to Portugal and eventually Australia.
158 Clerici is probably the Italian surrealist painter Fabrizio Clerici (1913-1993), who also briefly worked as an architect in Milan in the thirties and the forties. The reference to “Candide” is unclear.
159 He is referring to a line drawing of a hunter on horseback published Town & Country, October 1940, 50, illustrating a story by Oliver Wainright, “The Shot Heard Round the Country.”
160 The five drawings are probably the group entitled “Drammi del Mare,” published a month earlier in the November 22, 1940 issue of Bertoldo, listed in Guareschi, Milano 1936-1943: Guareschi e il Bertoldo, 491, in the appendix to unsigned drawings published in 1940-41.
Monday, December 23 [he recaps the previous days]

Saturday [the 21st] evening, alarm, nothing happened. They went over Fiume and Venice.
Had a fight with Adina in the evening.
Buzzi was at my place.

Sunday [the 22nd] I got up late and in the afternoon Giorgio shot pictures of me and other “artistic” ones.
In the evening I called Adina 2 hours in a row but the phone was always busy. Evening alarm.
Mama writes me from home that she would like to come to me. She’s afraid because I will leave.
Today, Monday, I was at Bertoldo in the late morning and toward the evening. [Mario] Brancacci\(^\text{161}\) was there and others from Ecco [another magazine].
Disgusting! At midday with Mosca in the Galleria to buy a book.
In the afternoon, Adina came to see me. I made her talk.
I’ve done nothing else, not even work.
I’m an idiot, a real idiot. Even spent this evening chattering with Natalina etc.\(^\text{162}\) Telling them about my business.
Now I go to bed. I will pray to God.

-------------------------------

Monday, December 30, 1940

Nothing special this week except Sunday: Sunday, December 29, 1940.
Yesterday evening I made the first 2 drawings for Bertoldo, useless and ridiculous work = It will last for one more issue and then that’s it. Then yesterday I spent the whole day with Adina – I want to sate myself.

Saturday evening[the 28th] with Adina to see Jamaica Inn with Laughton at the Impero [Alfred Hitchcock’s Jamaica Inn, 1939.]

Wednesday Christmas. Tuesday evening at Mosca’s to eat – [Gilberto] Loverso, game with Milly, Zenoni, Fiorio, Mangeri, Achille\(^\text{163}\) –

\(^{161}\) An Italian writer (1910-1991) who worked for Bertoldo and Marc’Aurelio.
\(^{162}\) Natalina Cavazza; see note 138 above.
\(^{163}\) Gilberto Loverso was one of Bertoldo’s writers. After the war, he worked for a few years in the publishing company founded by Cesare Civita in Buenos Aires, then returned to Italy, where he continued writing; he also became one of the directors and writers for the new Italian public broadcasting company, RAI; see Fausta Leoni, Oltre il Karma (1969), (Rome: Gremese Editore, 2002), 27, 31-33. “Achille” may be a reference
Today Archangeli [sic] tells me that we need a telegram for Lisbon. This morning at the US Consulate where [William L.] Krieg [American Vice Consul] is very tightlipped – Sad day, like the 6th and 7th of September. Today I sent the ticket to Genoa.

These days usually get up at 10. Cappuccino and brioche, read Corriere [della Sera] and [La] Stampa and buy, depending on the day, Marc’Aurelio, Bertoldo, Oggi (these 3 now free) Guerino, [Il] Travaso, Domenica [del] Corriere. I eat at Il Grillo midday and evenings, spaghetti, cutlets and fruit now cost 10 lire – In the evening I buy L’Ambrosiano and La Stampa Sera.164 – I played billiards a lot until last week.

Tomorrow is New Year’s Day–For the first time I write 1941. I hope to be able to go on to see in 42 whether 41 has been good or bad for me -- 1940 for sure was a bad year, the worst so far -- Still, I got my degree, learned a little English, enough to understand a headline, but it’s still good, [and] I published some stuff in America.

Certainly 1941 will begin badly: January 8. The day when school begins after vacation.

[At this point, having arrived in Tortoreto, he summarizes the events of January-April]

May 7, 1941 Tortoreto. January 8 I got other postponements with Vernetti.165 Always blowing hot and cold every 8-10 days – Then an interval between the end of February to April 16 awaiting decisions from Rome – April 16 I was already out. Thursday [April] 24, presented myself with Vernetti after a painful week in which I made the panel for Rapallo.

Got two more days – Sunday, April 27 went to S. Vittore166 – Saturday the 26th with Adina to see “Piccolo mondo antico”167 and then to eat at Il Grillo

Did everything in a hurry. Saturday the 26th had Adina for the last time–Dear girl.

I worked for Bertoldo up until the last issue [for him], published in the

to Achille Campanile; see note 28 above.

164 Newspapers mentioned: [Il] Corriere [della Sera], the most important Italian daily; [La] Stampa, the leading daily in Turin, La Stampa Sera was its evening edition; Oggi, a weekly magazine published by Rizzoli; Guerino [Guerin Meschino] and [Il] Travaso [delle idee], humor newspapers; Domenica [del] Corriere, weekly illustrated magazine published by Corriere della Sera; L’Ambrosiano, Milan daily, noted for its coverage of the cultural and arts scenes.

165 For Vernetti, see p. 347.

166 For the prison of San Vittore, see p. 349.

week of April 16. Then [Carlo] Manzoni continues by imitating my
drawing. Also made a cartoon for an issue of Settebello.
Recently, 2 cartoons for Tempo. Gags for : Guerino, Tempo,
Bert[oldo] and Settebello.

-------------------
Continuation [on the back of the same page]

Made a painting for Radaelli (and 3 already published drawings framed
with colored glass).
Panel for Sacerdot[t]i. Drawing for a shutter door for a bar. Thanks to
Lattis.169
Sold 5 cartoni at the newspaper: Guareschi, Manzoni, Andrea, Parini,
Loverso.
Beautiful drawing with bottles and flowers for piece of bar furniture
Chiesa (Fontana Arte).171

-----------------

Milan [top left side, in a box]

**Sunday April 27** [originally “Thursday,” corrected to “Sunday”]. I go with
Vernetti to S. Fedele –10 in the morning –11 o’clock with a policeman
to S. Vittore (by taxi).
Until 9 in the evening in a security room with 36 others – I sleep on the
ground floor with three others in the cell. Three: one [there] because of a
fine – two thieves to be interned in the islands.

**Monday, April 28** – transferred to the 2nd floor, 2nd wing with
Zessevich and Erdös. The first a Soviet Russian – inside for 56 days.
The other a Hungarian for 50 days. Both under suspicion waiting for
[their] repatriation or liberation. Playing cards with tobacco papers, bread
crumbs and soup, white paper on top, all drawn with a copying pencil.
The red [ink] made with blood. String to hold up the trousers. Lots of
tobacco. I learn to play Scopa [Italian card game]. Newspapers: Gazzetta

---

168 A weekly magazine created and edited by Alberto Mondadori. It seems clear from
context that the two cartoons were newly drawn.
169 Vito Latis; see pp. 331-332 and note 59.
170 The meaning of *cartoni*, used only in this journal entry, isn’t clear. When Steinberg
refers to cartoons or gags, he consistently says *vignette* and *battute* – the common words
at the time. He may have meant preparatory drawings, or drawings painted on
cardboard (*cartone*), which he sold to his five friends at the newspaper.
171 Pietro Chiesa; see p. 332 and note 61.
172 Then the headquarters of Milan’s police (*questura*).
dello Sport, Guerino, Domenica [del Corriere], Corriere [dei] piccoli. 173 Marmalade, chocolate, dried figs, walnuts, beer, wine, cheese, bread, cigarettes, only Swedish matches, soap, warm milk. Scoppino (cleaner of chamber pots). 174

[Steinberg’s four drawings of San Vittore, Fig. 16, appear at this point, running horizontally across the page. Inscriptions:]

Second drawing from left, captioned “2nd wing, cell 111.” On the long mattress is written “Io” (me), and described, to the right, as “straw mattress on floor, 3 blankets, 2 sheets.” The mattress above is identified as that of “Zess[evich],” the gridded one to the right as that of “Erd[ös].” The objects on the floor contain, clockwise from lower right, “wine,” “washing bowl,” “water,” and “soup.” Drawing at right: “Milk at 8, inspection of cell bars at 3pm, 3 checks per night – soup at 11, 2 loaves of bread (500-600 gr.) in the morning walk 9-10, lots of traffic, cigarettes, news, the scrivano [prisoner-scribe], pencil, razorblade, nail, in the hair - lice, fleas, bedbugs, cockroaches.”

**Wednesday, April 30,** 11 am, am advised that departure will be tomorrow. Great fear of Ferramonti.175

**Thursday, May 1,** downstairs at 9. Shave. In a taxi with two policemen. Telephone Adina. She already knows, dear girl, she was at Ferraro’s. Station, Buzzi with the suitcases. Adina sees me suddenly, does a little jump. Gray overcoat, black dress with her aunt’s brooch. Donizetti in mourning: death of his mother.176 Truly feel for him. Saw her just a few days ago, at their house. Don. gives me medicines.

I kiss Adina lightly, wet mouth, she cries – I won’t see her any more—Dear Adina —

Sicilian officers— Change at Bologna, then Rimini, where we eat at the dopolavoro.177

---

173 *Gazzetta dello Sport*, Italy’s leading sports daily; *Corriere dei Piccoli*, weekly illustrated newspaper for children, published by *Corriere della Sera*.

174 By *scoppino*, Steinberg means the *scopino*, literally, the “sweeper,” who was the prisoner in charge of cleaning the cells.

175 Ferramonti di Tarsia; see pp. 349-350 above.

176 Dr. Pino Donizetti; Steinberg would often ask his friend Buzzi about him in the postwar period. After the war Donizetti, a radiologist, was active in many publishing enterprises. He was the author of an illustrated medical quiz published in the medical magazine *Tempo Medico*, beginning in 1958; the illustrations were by Guido Crepax.

177 The Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro (“Afterwork”) was the national R&R organization created by Fascism for workers. Among other things, it also organized messes and bars in specific work places. Steinberg and his guards therefore ate their meal at the Dopolavoro mess of the Rimini railway station.
Arrive Ancona at midnight. Sleep in the station until 6:30 in the morning. Arrive Tortoreto 10:30.

**Tortoreto** [in a box on the left margin] I see the sea, beautiful – **Friday (again), May 2**, I begin at Tortoreto

**Saturday, May 3** I write to Buzzi, to the committee, [send a ] telegr[am to the] committee.

**Sunday, May 4** I write Buzzi a letter

**Monday, [May] 5** Can’t go out today because of the fair– I look at a photogr[aph of] Adina

------------------------

**Tuesday May 6** - Receive a letter from Adina. She writes “Tortoretto.” She was in Genoa for me, dear girl. I answer a bit uneasily. Dear Adina. Read “Huck Finn” by Mark Twain. Tom Sawyer takes off his hat as if taking the lid off a box of sleepy butterflies. Then [Hugh] Walpole’s “The Joyful Delaneys.”178 Try to buy a little table and chair to work. I clean the oily brushes, with turpentine. I begin to smoke Popolari.179

**Wednesday, May 7** Unpredictable weather. Wind. I’m beginning to get used to things. I do everything with great calm, in no hurry. So do all the people in town.

**Thursday, [May] 8** Receive letters from Adina and Buzzi – Dear Adina.

**Friday, [May] 9** It rains, I work on the little painting. It’s one week I’m at Tortoreto.

**Saturday, May 10** Today “10 mai” I finished the little painting. Still life on a table in the foreground, in the background, rooms, families, the usual things. The self-portrait on the table, not bad – all a little messy and confusing in color – Adina –

[The drawing of the dormitory at Tortoreto, Fig. 17, fills the rest of this page. It is headed “Room No. 2,” and circled at right, “ten of us.”]


179 The cheapest cigarette brand available.
Tortoreto. Friday, May 23 No answer from Rome – Few hopes of leaving. Yesterday went to Tortoreto Alto – Dentist – Met Levitan, a Russian, nice guy. Anghel Dumitru from Galati. Adina, always thinking of her – At nights, I put my head under the covers, start to think. I greet her, Hi, Adina – Adina sends me a 50 lire money order perhaps from her own money. Poor dear Adina, I love her very much. I painted a horizontal picture with lots of things. Made a good tree from life.

Saturday [May] 24 Adina writes me the same day. She regretted having written me badly a few hours before. That’s good, dear. Received [a letter] from Buzzi. Says that a telegram arrived at Il Grillo from Lisbon. Received [a letter] yesterday from home, from mama. I had bad forebodings – I received a package with paper and cardboards.

Wednesday, May 28 Receive letter number 1 from Adina. Yesterday I sent 2 temperas to Buzzi. I dream that I return home – No news about the departure. If I don’t leave, I’ll die of heartbreak. Toothache.

Thursday, May 29. 5 months since December 29. Passed quickly. Tomorrow, Friday the 30th, I will receive bad news for sure.

Friday, [May] 30 Instead, Delasem sends a telegram that the Portuguese visa was received. Very happy. All of a sudden, I change the way I do things. Too much. Fear that I will have many disappointments and will have to eat my words of joy – Nothing from Adina.

Thursday, June 5 –We’ve made it - await Friday the 6th, tomorrow, with terror.

Friday, [June] 6 8 o’clock, beautiful day – woke up early 10 o’clock, perhaps 2 more hours. Ate cherries. Sent postcard to Adina with a view of the market date underlined – 10 minutes to 12 6 PM – nothing has happened so far - At noon Delasem Rome writes that [the time] until the 20th is very limited. They have to have the plane

180 Cime di cose, literally, the tops, or summits, of things. This may be Steinberg's idiosyncratic version of montagne di cose, a mountain of, or lots of, things.
ticket and I messed things up. The day still isn’t over– Something bad may have happened today and I will learn about it tomorrow or the day after --

**Saturday, [June] 7** I’m working, calmer. 10 o’clock–[Alois] Gogg calls me from the street\(^{181}\) – We leave together tomorrow. The “commissario” calls me –Tomorrow you leave for Rome – Dear Adina

[At the bottom of the page, probably added afterwards:]

**Ciudad Trujillo Thursday, July 24.** I arrived here Sunday July 13–Dear Adina

------------------------

**Drawing of his room at the Hotel Pomezia, Rome, Fig. 20. Inscriptions:**

**June 8 Tortoreto–Rome**

2 days **June 10 and 11** in Milan Adina.

**From June 12 -16**

Rome Albergo Pomezia Via dei Chiavari

**Sunday, June 15** at [Mario] Ortensi’s at 4 [went] to C.I.T.\(^{182}\)

*On the far bed: “Gogg”; the photo on the nighttable is labeled “Adina”*

------------------------

**Drawing of his room in the Hotel Tivoli, Lisbon, Fig. 21. Inscriptions, top to bottom:**

**Monday, June 16-20 (4:30 pm) – 20 (Friday) 3pm**

Lisbona Hotel Tivoli [in circle:] no 80. 3:00 in the afternoon.

Avenida Liberdade

Diary of Lisbon

\(^{181}\) For Gogg, see p. 352 and note 131.

\(^{182}\) Mario Ortensi was one of the original writers of *Bertoldo*, who later moved to Rome. Compagnia Italiana Turismo (CIT) was a state owned tourism and travel agency.
Mario Tedeschini Lalli

Rua Aurea
Rossio
Edi Isler----------150 esc. ($)
Yellow tram 0,50 (Esc)
Estoril–Cascais

With Isler at the little restaurant in the westernmost tip of the city"

[Friday, June 20–Excalibur with Gogg and Isler - (Gogg arrived Thursday, 19).

_____________________

Mario Tedeschini Lalli is a journalist and scholar of contemporary history. His long journalism career includes 35 years as a reporter and editor, mostly on foreign affairs; he later served as editor for various digital and multimedia news outlets, primarily with the Gruppo Editoriale L’Espresso, of which he is now Deputy Director for Innovation and Development. His scholarly publications include essays on the history of the Middle East, Italy, and the media. He is presently working on a lengthy essay about Saul Steinberg’s service with the OSS during World War II.

How to quote this article:
Mario Tedeschini Lalli, Descent from Paradise: Saul Steinberg’s Italian Years (1933-1941), in “Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC”, N. 2 October 2011
url: www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=221
List of Illustrations

Fig. 1: *Autography*, 1966. Ink, gouache, and watercolor, 29 ½ x 20 ¾ in. The Saul Steinberg Foundation, New York.
Fig. 2: Milano—My Room—Bar del Grillo, 1937. Ink, 9 x 11 3/8 in. YCAL
© The Saul Steinberg Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS) New York
Fig. 3: Steinberg at his drawing table in his room above the Bar Il Grillo, Milan, 1930s. YCAL.

Fig. 4: *Arte Pura*, published in Bertoldo, August 8, 1937. “I told you, Madam, that for my watercolors I use eau de Cologne.” © The Saul Steinberg Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS) New York
Fig. 5: Churchill, Steinberg cartoon in “Bertoldo”, January 3, 1941. “He wants to address another appeal to the Italian people. Is this a serious condition, doctor?”
© The Saul Steinberg Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS) New York
Fig. 6: *Milano Bauhaus*, 1971. Pencil, colored pencil, ink, and crayon, 22 5/8 x 28 ¾. Originally published in *The New Yorker*, October 7, 1974
© The Saul Steinberg Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS) New York
Fig. 7: "Via Ampere 1936", SSF 12. © The Saul Steinberg Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS) New York.

Fig. 8: Via Pascoli a Milano, 1971, SSF 65921. © The Saul Steinberg Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS) New York.
Fig. 9: Drawing for unknown Studio Boggeri project, ca. 1938-40. Archivio Boggeri, Milan.
© The Saul Steinberg Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS) New York
Fig. 10: Clipping from La Stampa, advertisement for “Dynamin, the Super Shell,” signed “Erberto Carboni” YCAL.
Fig. 11: Steinberg’s drawing for Fig. 12, YCAL
© The Saul Steinberg Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS) New York
Fig. 12: Clipping from La Stampa, August 5, 1939, advertisement for “Dynamin, the Super Shell”, signed “Erberto Carboni”.
Fig. 13: Steinberg’s diploma from the Regio Politecnico, Milan, Faculty of Architecture, 1940. YCAL.

Fig. 14: Steinberg and his girlfriend, Ada Ongari, c. 1936-40. YCAL.
Fig. 15: Memo from the Prefect of Milan to the Ministry of the Interior: Steinberg, March 12, 1941, with annotations in various hands. Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome.
Fig. 16: San Vittore prison, Milan, from Steinberg’s journal, April 28, 1940. YCAL. © The Saul Steinberg Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS) New York

Fig. 17: Steinberg’s dormitory at the Villa Tonelli, Tortoreto, from his journal, May 10, 1940. YCAL. © The Saul Steinberg Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS) New York
Fig. 18: Walter Frankl, drawing of the Villa Tonelli on thank-you note to Mussolini, April 28, 1941, detail. Imperial War Museum, London.
Fig. 19: Page from Steinberg’s passport with Spanish transit visa, dated June 10, 1941.
YCAL.

Fig. 20: Steinberg’s room at the Hotel Pomezia, Rome, from his journal, June 12-16, 1940. YCAL. © The Saul Steinberg Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS) New York
Fig. 21: Steinberg’s room at the Hotel Tivoli, Lisbon, from his journal, June 16-20, 1940. YCAL. © The Saul Steinberg Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS) New York
Fig. 22: Cover of farewell pamphlet to Steinberg from his fellow prisoners, Tortoreto, June 6, 1941. YCAL.

Fig. 23: Inside of farewell pamphlet, with signatures of the prisoners remaining; drawing of the Villa Tonelli by Walter Frankl. YCAL.