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## **From *Il libro della memoria* to “Resistenti ebrei d’Italia”**

### **A Personal Research Journey**

#### **ABSTRACT**

This article retraces the research path that led to a series of studies on the persecution, survival, and resistance of Jews in Italy between 1943 and 1945 that were carried out at the CDEC Foundation in Milan. Through a personal account of projects such as *Il libro della memoria*, *L'alba ci colse come un tradimento*, *Salvarsi*, and the digital initiative “Resistenti ebrei d’Italia,” Liliana Picciotto reflects on the sources, methods, and historiographical questions that shaped this work. Particular attention is devoted to the recent research on Jewish participation in the Italian Resistance, a subject long marginal in both scholarship and public memory.

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No news from the world, or from friends. The isolation is complete [...]. We think of our loved ones, of distant friends [...] all in the same danger, all in hiding, if they managed to escape in time from the ruthless hands of the Nazis. I think of the young people who are with the partisans and I would like to be with them [...] I would like to make the Germans pay dearly [...]. But when the moment of choice came [...] I decided to stay close to my mother. I cannot abandon her, exposing her alone to the dangers of the moment.<sup>1</sup>

Marcello Morpurgo, a twenty-four-year-old from Gorizia who had taken refuge with his mother in Treviso, with a generous family friend, offers this concise picture of the predicament in which many young Jews found themselves between 1943 and 1945: torn between the need to somehow protect their families and the desire to join the Resistance. This testimony encapsulates the three paradigms through which the experiences of Jews in the years 1943 to 1945 were articulated: the relentless persecution to which they were subjected; the search for salvation for themselves and their families; and the choice of rebellion, whenever the opportunity presented itself.

It was around these three trajectories that the CDEC Foundation developed major research projects that, in a certain sense, shaped its civic and ethical mission between the 1980s and the 2020s. Within the broader field of studies on Fascism, Nazism, and the Shoah, these projects marked genuine historiographical turning points. I am referring both to the methodologies adopted—which I shall briefly discuss below—and to the interpretations that emerged from this research and that, in some ways, have since entered common understanding. In brief: it became clear that responsibility for the arrests could not be attributed solely to the German occupiers, but that it must also be assigned to the Italian authorities following the dissemination of the arrest order of 30 November 1943; that the principal destination of the Jews of Italy was Auschwitz, with the exception of Jews belonging to neutral or non-occupied countries; that the survival of Jewish families was due not only to the “good hearts” of Italians, but above all to the capacity of heads of household to react and find their bearings; that the Catholic Church did indeed act with generosity and a spirit of sacrifice, but within the framework of a broader exercise of mercy toward all those in need of protection; and that during the terrible years 1943 to 1945, Jews played a forceful and constitutive role in the Resistance. It is this last issue that chiefly occupies me at present and on which I shall therefore focus in this article.

These research projects resulted in the publication of *Il libro della memoria* (1991) and *L'alba ci colse come un tradimento. Gli ebrei nel campo di Fossoli* (2011); in the publication of *Salvarsi. Gli ebrei d'Italia sfuggiti alla Shoah* (2017); and in the creation of the web portal [www.resistentiebreiitalia.it](http://www.resistentiebreiitalia.it) (2023)—all works that I myself edited.<sup>2</sup> I would also include in this list the making of the film *Memoria* together with Marcello Pezzetti, which was directed by Ruggero Gabbai.<sup>3</sup>

For any scholar, the decision to embark on a particular line of research is always

<sup>1</sup> Marcello Morpurgo, *Valdirose. Memorie della comunità ebraica di Gorizia* (Udine: Del Bianco, 1986), 105.

<sup>2</sup> Liliana Picciotto, *Il libro della memoria. Gli ebrei deportati dall'Italia. Ricerca del Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea* (Milan: Mursia, 1991 and 2002); Picciotto, *L'alba ci colse come un tradimento. Gli ebrei nel campo di Fossoli 1943-1944* (Milan: Mondadori, 2010); Picciotto, *Salvarsi. Gli ebrei d'Italia sfuggiti alla Shoah* (Turin: Einaudi, 2017); *Resistenti ebrei d'Italia*, available at <https://resistentiebrei.cdec.it/>, accessed December 20, 2025.

<sup>3</sup> Liliana Picciotto, “Memoria. Storia di un film memorabile,” in *Le vittime italiane del nazionalsocialismo. La memoria dei sopravvissuti tra testimonianza e ricerca storica*, ed. Filippo Focardi (Rome: Viella, 2021), 225-38. On the film *Memoria*, see also the contribution by Ruggero Gabbai and Marcello Pezzetti published in this issue.

accompanied by a number of external circumstances: the possibility of securing funding; the clarity of the intended objective; the state of the available documentary material; the need, at times, to gather new testimony—as in the case of oral history interviews; the possibility of connecting one's work to an established historiography; and many other factors.

There are also opportunities and coincidences. In 1972, the CDEC was asked by the then mayor of Carpi to provide the Deportee Memorial Museum that was then being created in the Palazzo dei Pio with a selection of 2,000 names to be inscribed on the walls of its rooms. We knew, thanks to the research of Colonel Massimo Adolfo Vitale,<sup>4</sup> that the number of deportees had been far greater.<sup>5</sup> It therefore became necessary to revise the Vitale list and to select one part from the whole.

For me, this became an occasion to begin a comprehensive revision of the names of the deportees, filling possible gaps in our knowledge, correcting erroneous names or data, and adding new cases that had escaped the earliest investigations. In 1976, I had, in fact, inherited a project that was already underway,<sup>6</sup> imagining that I would complete the revisions within a few months. Instead, it became my principal activity for many years, until the study was completed with all the information it was possible to recover on Fascist and Nazi persecutions.

Sometimes, one undertakes a project out of sheer passion; at others, one senses that a certain task must be carried out in response to contemporary political developments or the presence of counter-cultures. My determination was certainly not unrelated to the fact that during the 1970s and 1980s, ideas denying the evidence of the extermination were being widely circulated and propagated.<sup>7</sup>

At that time, the research was based on a handwritten card index containing data on the disappeared and on survivors; on each individual card, corrections or additions were entered by hand as new information gradually emerged. In 1986, the Olivetti company donated to the CDEC one of the very first personal computers to come on the market, the M24, a machine that appeared to us at once mysterious and marvellous. Our work, we were told, would consist in entering the data on our paper cards into the machine so that we could then derive statistics and precise counts from it. For the work we were doing, it was an immensely valuable gift.

With the help of several Olivetti employees, we began looking for personal computer experts—then still quite rare!—capable of setting up a database suited to our needs, at a

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<sup>4</sup> Massimo Adolfo Vitale had been an army colonel, a high-ranking colonial official, and a historian. In the postwar period, he undertook the search for information on deported Jews, compiling the first list. He was president of the Comitato Ricerche Deportati Ebrei (Committee for Research on Jewish Deportees - CRDE), which was active in Rome from 1944 until the early 1950s. See Roberto Bassi, "Ricordo di Massimo Adolfo Vitale. Dal Comitato Ricerche Deportati Ebrei al Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea," *La rassegna mensile di Israel* 45, no. 1-3 (1979): 8-21; Liliana Picciotto, "L'attività del Comitato Ricerche Deportati Ebrei. Storia di un lavoro pionieristico (1944-1953)," in *Una storia di tutti. Prigionieri, internati, deportati italiani nella seconda guerra mondiale*, ed. Istituto storico della Resistenza in Piemonte (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1989), 75-96; Costantino Di Sante, *Auschwitz prima di "Auschwitz."* Massimo Adolfo Vitale e le prime ricerche sugli ebrei deportati dall'Italia (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> According to the investigations Vitale conducted between 1944 and 1953, the total number of Jewish victims deported from Italy and the Dodecanese Islands was approximately 9,000. See: attached register, Fondo Comitato Ricerca Deportati Ebrei, b. 6, CDEC Foundation Archives, Milan (hereafter ACDEC).

<sup>6</sup> For two years, Giuliana Donati collaborated on the project. She had already been active at the CDEC during the period of the major trials of Nazi war criminals in Germany, where she worked as a translator both for correspondence with the German public prosecutors' offices and for testimonies collected in Italy.

<sup>7</sup> On this topic, see the special issue of the journal *Studi Bresciani. Quaderni della Fondazione Micheletti* 9 (1996) entitled "Il nazismo oggi. Sterminio e negazionismo," especially my essay "Memoria della Shoah: Condizionamenti, revisioni, negazioni," 10-29.

time when it was difficult even to imagine what one might “ask” of the machine. In the end, we found two young engineering students, Gianpaolo Sticotti and Alfonso Sassun, who generously came every evening for quite some time to the CDEC offices in Via Eupili in order to set up the database into which we would enter our data. Data entry and verification were entrusted to two CDEC volunteers, who set themselves up in the attic room and used that new “extraordinary” instrument with great skill, transferring the thousands of handwritten entries from our card index to the database. Before long, our research on the deportation of Jews would become much simpler and much faster.<sup>8</sup>

By the end of the 1980s, we had not only succeeded in identifying the 7,172 people arrested in Italy and the nearly 2,000 arrested on the island of Rhodes,<sup>9</sup> but we were also able to list the dates and places of departure of each convoy; the number of people on each transport; how many had been selected and condemned to death on arrival, and how many had instead been registered in the camp. We could even correlate mortality with the differing conditions in the destination camps.

It was a project that grew in my hands, always generously supported and encouraged by the CDEC board, which ultimately took shape in the volume *Il libro della memoria*. Published in 1991, this book contained the long list of victims identified up to that point, alongside a historical reconstruction of the dynamics of the arrest and deportation of Jews in Italy between 1943 and 1945—a reconstruction based chiefly on the documents from the investigation and subsequent judgment in the trial of the Nazi criminal active in Italy, Friedrich Bosshammer.<sup>10</sup> I remember that when we tried to publish that nearly thousand-page work, together with the then president of the CDEC, Luisella Mortara Ottolenghi, I went from one publisher to another without finding anyone willing to take it on. At last, a friend who was director at the Mursia publishing house<sup>11</sup> listened to us and, although certain that no economic benefit could come from a venture that had nothing commercial about it, introduced us to the owner of the firm, Giancarla Mursia, who agreed to publish the book—“out of pure militant spirit,” as she put it.

It took an entire year merely to correct the proofs.

At first, the book had only a limited circulation—it seemed to interest only the descendants of the victims. Many told me: “We keep it by our bedside, to remember our loved ones and to know that now, in this book, they have the grave they never had.” Yet although the work was revolutionary in nature, it was met with scant consideration by historians.

The reconstruction of events that I had undertaken for *Il libro della memoria* was based on documents such as prison registers, lists of deportees, arrest orders, lists of prisoners in provincial camps for Jews, lists of prisoners arriving at the Auschwitz extermination camp, lists of those liberated in various concentration camps of the former German Reich, and much else besides. In reality, beginning in the 1970s, the study of the subjective memory of groups of people who had experienced the same events had also begun to gain ground in Italy, following developments in the United States: a relatively new historiographical

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<sup>8</sup> Here, I wish to express my gratitude to Franca Signorini and Gigliola Colombo Lopez, who made an essential contribution to the realization of the second complete edition of *Il libro della memoria* (2001).

<sup>9</sup> The list of deportees from Italy, which is constantly updated and enriched with new findings, remains to this day one of the focal points of the CDEC Foundation’s work. For several years now, Alberta Bezzan has made a major contribution to this activity. Thanks also to her work, we are now able to provide updated figures on the victims of deportation from Italy and the Dodecanese, namely: 9078 in total, including 1838 from Rhodes.

<sup>10</sup> Investigation of the trial against Friedrich Bosshammer and judgment, *Processo ai criminali nazisti*. Procure di Dortmund e Berlino, ACDEC.

<sup>11</sup> This refers to Alberto Signorini, for whose support I express my sincere gratitude.

methodology that used oral testimony for historical research.

Together with my colleague Marcello Pezzetti—who at the time was mainly engaged in building the CDEC’s video archive—I felt that it was morally imperative, as well as historically fruitful, to try to reach and interview those who had managed to survive following their arrest and deportation from the Italian territories of the time. In the 1990s, we knew that of all those deported from Italy to Auschwitz for racial reasons, at least a hundred of the 684 survivors were still alive. We began this new phase of work using instruments that today seem rudimentary: an analog tape recorder and an amateur film camera lent to us by a friend, only relying on outside television crews on a few occasions. In 1994, we learned that government bodies and public agencies were preparing initiatives for the fiftieth anniversary of the Resistance, which would fall the following year. The then President of the Republic, Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, wanted that anniversary to be commemorated in a special way: with events, conferences, exhibitions, research projects, and initiatives of every kind rooted precisely in the history of the Resistance. The CDEC joined this wave of fervor and submitted a proposal for a documentary on deportation. The project was funded, and this allowed us to plan, with some degree of certainty, a new series of interviews, to be overseen by Marcello Pezzetti and me after a careful study of oral history methodologies. For this, we also enlisted the director Ruggero Gabbai.

Before proceeding with the recordings, we chose to carefully study the experiences of each individual witness, our principal aim being to gather information of a historical nature—rather than to recover personal memories. It was for this reason that the collection of those testimonies came to be called the “Archivio della Memoria.” After two years of filming, of extraordinary moral and emotional intensity, the result was a powerful work: the film *Memoria* (1997).

A few years later, in January 2000, an international forum was held in Stockholm on the initiative of the king of Sweden, a crucial event for the commemoration of the Shoah and for the struggle against antisemitism and racism on a global level. The Forum’s final declaration, known as the “Stockholm Declaration,” underlined the importance of education, remembrance, and research on the Shoah<sup>12</sup> and led to the creation of the International Task Force for Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research, today known as the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). The CDEC formed a delegation of which I was a member, while the Italian government was represented by its highest office holder, Prime Minister Massimo D’Alema. In the same year, on 20 July 2000, the Italian Parliament voted to establish the *Giorno della Memoria* by means of Law No. 211, whose text met with very little opposition.

In that context, I undertook research on the functions and role of the Fossoli camp in the deportation of Jews. Once again, a fortunate coincidence occurred: during a reordering operation in the cellars of the municipality of Carpi, some papers were discovered that appeared to be of no value and were destined for disposal, which were brought to my attention by a capable and attentive archivist.<sup>13</sup> These were invoices written on small handwritten slips relating to provisions supplied to the Fossoli camp. From them emerged with great clarity the quantities of bread, processed cheese, and jam destined for the deportation trains. Around the dates of departure, the scale of supplies increased dramatically, then dropped off sharply in the following days, thus revealing the site’s function as a transit camp. I completed the research by consulting the Police Headquarters fonds relating to the camp at the State Archive of Modena.

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<sup>12</sup> The term used in Anglophone countries to designate the policy of extermination of the Jews of Europe is “Holocaust,” whereas in Western Europe, the Hebrew term “Shoah” tends to be used instead.

<sup>13</sup> The identification of the documentation and the subsequent archival assistance were carried out by Lucia Armentano, whom I thank for her attentiveness and professionalism.

I had gathered enough material for a book, and I contacted the Mondadori publishing house, which readily agreed to publish it. Thus was born *L'alba ci colse come un tradimento*.<sup>14</sup> While I was completing the book on Fossoli, I began to ask myself how it could be that despite the absolute oppression exercised by the Italian and German authorities—so overwhelming as to seem to allow no escape—a significant percentage of the Jews of Italy were nevertheless still alive the day after Liberation. We are speaking, in fact, of a total of 38,994 people, of whom 31,822 survived.<sup>15</sup>

The CDEC Foundation Archives held a vast body of testimonies, written memoirs, and accounts of escapes and rescues of every kind. Many of the Jews who had witnessed that history were still alive. The picture could therefore be completed by new interviews with the protagonists of the period of persecution.

Here too, favorable circumstances played their part. I was contacted by an Italian-American philanthropist who wished to meet the author of *Il libro della memoria*. During the war, his wife, who was of Serbian origin, had been taken in by a peasant family in the province of Parma, and he wished her story to be told. For this reason, he proved willing to finance an entire research project on the rescue of Jews in Italy.<sup>16</sup> I thus began the research for a project that I called “Memoria della salvezza,”<sup>17</sup> for which I interviewed hundreds of people, both in Italy and in Israel. The historiographical findings were important: in Italy, Jews had for the most part survived, and they owed their survival to their integration into the majority society, which—where possible—offered them help; to the ability, and at times the heroism, of heads of households in organizing escape and life in hiding; and to the generosity of religious institutions, which, in exercising indiscriminate mercy toward all those in need, also welcomed many Jews in danger.

That project, which lasted from 2008 to 2017, was as absorbing as the previous ones, but with one substantial difference: the stories that passed through me were all difficult—marked by fear, hardship, and tension—yet they were stories that, in the end, had a positive outcome, because lives had been saved. This time, it was a relief not only to recount these events, but also to listen to them.

That research, which among other things produced a new and extensive collection of interviews and an enormous database, was published by Einaudi in 2017 under the title *Salvarsi. Gli ebrei d'Italia sfuggiti alla Shoah 1943-1945*. The book was very favorably received, also because at that very moment, Italy was preparing to commemorate the eightieth anniversary of the promulgation of the anti-Jewish laws which prompted a flurry of initiatives—promoted by universities, cultural associations, upper secondary schools, public bodies, and political institutions—a virtually unanimous chorus of collective *mea culpa*. In that atmosphere, the *Società Italiana per lo Studio della Storia Contemporanea* (Italian Society for the Study of Contemporary History, SISSCO) recognized *Salvarsi* as the best book on a contemporary historical subject published in Italian.

In 2018, I returned to the theme of the Resistance. Once again, the impulse came from the

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<sup>14</sup> “L'alba ci colse come un tradimento” is a quotation from Primo Levi’s *Se questo è un uomo*. It describes the moment when the prisoners in the Fossoli camp are awakened to be deported to Auschwitz, conveying the idea that the beginning of the new day (dawn) brings no hope.

<sup>15</sup> Picciotto, “L'alba,” 274-275.

<sup>16</sup> Contact with the author was made by Andrew Viterbi, together with his wife Erna Finci, who showed strong interest in the project and supported its initial development.

<sup>17</sup> The working group initially included Jessica Finzi. She was later succeeded by Chiara Ferrarotti (1966-2016), a colleague of extraordinary intelligence who passed away prematurely. Luciana Laudi undertook the systematic survey of memoir literature from the postwar period onward, while Gloria Pescarolo (1944-2024) developed the elaborate system of linked tables that formed the backbone of the database.

orientation set by the President of the Republic. Sergio Mattarella, elected in 2015, had in fact placed the Resistance among the foundational values of the Constitution. In his public statements, he had also broadened the concept of Resistance to categories that included not only armed partisans, but also women, rescuers of Jews, deported soldiers who refused to enlist in the Nazi-Fascist ranks, the soldiers killed on Cephalonia, and entire strata of society, proposing a “Resistance of all” as a basis for national identity.

It seemed the most opportune moment to introduce the theme of the role played by Jews in the Resistance—a segment of civil society almost never considered either in literary writing or in Resistance historiography.<sup>18</sup> Even Claudio Pavone, in his important work on the Resistance, had not taken them into account.<sup>19</sup> And yet, Jewish communities had, in a certain sense, renewed their pact of citizenship with the Italian people in two ways: on the one hand, through the generosity shown by a significant number of Italians in helping and protecting Jews from Nazi-Fascist violence; on the other, through participation in the Resistance. Even so, until the CDEC began this specific research project in recent years, which is bringing to light quantitative findings and highly detailed data Jews were only seen as victims of Fascism and Nazism in Italian history—if they were seen at all. However, in reality, the question of the Jewish contribution to the Resistance had long represented a constant concern, a kind of ever-present undertone in all the research, documentation, and educational work undertaken by the CDEC since its foundation in 1955<sup>20</sup> and in the long-standing plan to create an archive devoted to the subject.

During the “Memoria della salvezza” project, I had interviewed, among others, several people who had been active in the Resistance. At the time, however, I have a different objective, and I asked them only a few limited questions about their militancy. In that context, I had already gathered, for example, the stories of Adelina Provenzali,<sup>21</sup> Aharon Adolfo Croccolo,<sup>22</sup> Vittorio Finzi,<sup>23</sup> Beppe Sajeve,<sup>24</sup> Alberto Terracina,<sup>25</sup> and also Anna

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<sup>18</sup> Numerous works on the history of ideas concerning memory and the Resistance have been published since the beginning of the twenty-first century; see, for example: Robert Gordon, *Scolpitelo nei cuori. L'olocausto nella cultura italiana (1944-2010)*, trans. G. Olivero (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2013)—first published in English as Gordon, *The Holocaust in Italian Culture 1944-2010* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012); Philip Cooke, *L'eredità della Resistenza. Storia, cultura, politiche dal dopoguerra ad oggi* (Rome: Viella, 2015); Manuela Consonni, *L'eclisse dell'antifascismo. Resistenza, questione ebraica e cultura politica in Italia dal 1943 al 1989* (Rome: Laterza, 2015); Filippo Focardi, *Nel cantiere della memoria. Fascismo, Resistenza, Shoah, Foibe* (Rome: Viella, 2020).

<sup>19</sup> Claudio Pavone, *Una guerra civile. Saggio sulla moralità nella Resistenza* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1991).

<sup>20</sup> At the time, the institute was called the Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea (CDEC); it became a Foundation in 1986.

<sup>21</sup> Adelina Provenzali was the granddaughter of the chief rabbi of Milan, Alessandro Da Fano; she distributed leaflets and forged ration cards for the Giustizia e Libertà movement from the Garzanti publishing house in Milan. Adelina Provenzali, interview by Liliana Picciotto, March 6, 2008, Fondo Memoria della Salvezza (hereafter MdS), ACDEC.

<sup>22</sup> Aharon A. Croccolo was an employee of the Ente dell'Energia Elettrica and maintained contacts with the GL movement in Carrara. Aharon Adolfo Croccolo, interview by Liliana Picciotto, La Spezia, March 10, 2008, MdS, ACDEC.

<sup>23</sup> Vittorio Finzi was a partisan inspector for the Garibaldian Pinac Cichero brigade. Vittorio Finzi, interview by Liliana Picciotto, Genoa, 18 February 2010, MdS, ACDEC.

<sup>24</sup> At just fifteen years of age, Beppe Sajeve joined the Resistance in Val Sangone out of a spirit of adventure. Beppe Sajeve, interview by Liliana Picciotto, Boves, March 25, 2008, MdS, ACDEC.

<sup>25</sup> Alberto Terracina was a partisan in the Castelli Romani together with Pino Levi Cavaglione. Alberto Terracina, interview by Liliana Picciotto and Chiara Ferrarotti, Rome, June 14, 2012, MdS, ACDEC.

Maria Levi,<sup>26</sup> Guido Weiller,<sup>27</sup> and several others. Rereading those testimonies, it became evident that a fine thread linked my earlier research to my current work.

The most urgent thing, before it became too late, was to broaden the circle of witnesses and to try to interview other former partisans as soon as possible. In 2018, I launched an appeal, but by then, few were still alive and able to respond: Ugo Berga,<sup>28</sup> a Garibaldian partisan from the anti-Fascist Montagnana family in Turin; Gustavo Ottolenghi,<sup>29</sup> a twelve-year-old courier in a unit of the 5th Autonomous Division under Commander Enrico Martini, known as “Mauri”; Luciano Segre,<sup>30</sup> a partisan courier together with his brother Bruno, and a volunteer in Palestine (not yet the State of Israel) in the Palmach after the war; Enrico Loewenthal,<sup>31</sup> a partisan of the Partito d’Azione (Action Party) who later became the commander of a band in the Aosta Valley; Bruno Segre himself,<sup>32</sup> a GL partisan in the Valle Grana; and Davide Schiffer,<sup>33</sup> a GL partisan in Val Pellice.

However, despite the testimonies already collected, I had not yet formulated a proper research project. I spent an entire year studying local histories and memoirs of the Resistance. In April 2019, I went to Turin to attend a presentation on the ICAR<sup>34</sup> project which planned to create a web portal on Italian partisans based on sources from the RICOMPART archival material.<sup>35</sup> The project envisaged the digitization of the hundreds of thousands of index cards from personal files containing the documentation for the recognition of the status of “partisan” or “patriot.”

A year later, the digitization work was still far from complete. The project involved no fewer than 563,350 cards, to which I was granted access, though the work was still in progress. At the same time, I met an entrepreneur sensitive to Jewish issues, to whom I explained the aims of my research on Jewish resisters. She liked the project and promised to support it by funding three years of work. At that point, I was finally able to launch the research on secure foundations.

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<sup>26</sup> Primo Levi’s sister Anna Maria belonged to the Gruppi di Difesa della Donna; together with Ada Gobetti, she distributed *Giustizia e Libertà* material in Turin. Anna Maria Levi, interview by Liliana Picciotto, Rome, July 2, 2013, MdS, ACDEC.

<sup>27</sup> Weiller was a young partisan in Filippo Beltrami’s band, active in the hills above Omegna. Guido Weiller, interview by Liliana Picciotto, Milan, March 27, 2007, MdS, ACDEC. Guido Weiller, *La bufera. Una famiglia ebraica milanese con i partigiani dell’Ossola* (Florence: Giuntina, 2002) and the podcast dedicated to him at <https://resistentiebrei.cdec.it/storie/guido-weiller/>, accessed December 20, 2025.

<sup>28</sup> Ugo Berga, interview by Liliana Picciotto and Sara Buda, Bussoleno, April 3, 2018, Fondo Ricerca sui Resistenti ebrei (hereafter RREB), ACDEC; Ugo Berga, *Diario partigiano. Dall’8 settembre 1943 alla liberazione. Gli eventi e le persone che coinvolsero la 106° Brigata Garibaldi Giordano Velino* (n.p., 2003).

<sup>29</sup> Gustavo Ottolenghi, interview by Liliana Picciotto and Sara Buda, Genoa, August 10, 2018, RREB, ACDEC.

<sup>30</sup> Luciano Segre, interview by Liliana Picciotto and Sara Buda, Milan, April 15, 2018 and October 18, 2018, RREB, ACDEC.

<sup>31</sup> Enrico Loewenthal, interview by Liliana Picciotto and Sara Buda, Rivoli, 2018, RREB, ACDEC; Enrico Loewenthal, *Mani in alto, bitte. Memorie di Ico, partigiano ebreo* (Arezzo: Zona, 2015). See also the podcast dedicated to him at <https://resistentiebrei.cdec.it/storie/enrico-loewenthal/>, accessed December 20, 2025.

<sup>32</sup> Bruno Segre, interview by Liliana Picciotto and Sara Buda, Turin, July 19, 2018, RREB, ACDEC.

<sup>33</sup> Davide Schiffer, interview by Liliana Picciotto and Sara Buda, Turin, March 27, 2018 and July 19, 2018, RREB, ACDEC; see also Davide Schiffer, *Non c’è ritorno a casa. Memorie di vite stravolte dalle leggi razziali* (Milan: 5 Continents, 2003)—republished with slight changes in 2018.

<sup>34</sup> The ICAR (Istituto Centrale per gli Archivi) carried out the project in collaboration with the Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, the Istituto piemontese per la storia della Resistenza e della società contemporanea “Giorgio Agosti” (Istoreto), and the Istituto Nazionale Ferruccio Parri.

<sup>35</sup> RICOMPART is the acronym for the Servizio riconoscimento qualifiche e ricompense ai partigiani, the office established after the war to assess the applications of those who had taken part in the struggle for Liberation.

The website *Partigiani d'Italia. Lo schedario delle commissioni per il riconoscimento degli uomini e delle donne della Resistenza* effectively constituted a large nominative database. My first thought was that I could begin by searching for cards bearing characteristically Jewish surnames—Coen, Levi, Morpurgo, Sonnino, Finzi, Treves... Once the portal had been completed and published on 15 December 2020,<sup>36</sup> I decided to go through all those hundreds of thousands of cards and create, in turn, a new database devoted exclusively to Jewish partisans and resisters.

Not wishing to be satisfied with the scant information contained on the cards, I asked the researcher associated with the CDEC project<sup>37</sup> to search the Archivio Centrale dello Stato (Central State Archives, ACS) for the files of all the individuals I had been able to identify. At that point, my task was to enter all the available information into my database: the names of parents, the period and place of militancy, the partisan formations to which they belonged, where indicated, the honors they received, and any other information useful in reconstructing a “partisan biography” for each person.

In addition to the ACS files, I drew on other sources, in particular those preserved at the CDEC: the material on anti-Fascists and Jewish partisans,<sup>38</sup> but also a special collection produced during my first research on deportees. For that earlier project, I had in fact collected photocopies from the archives of the various Italian prefectures of the special registrations of Jews carried out by the Fascist government in August 1938,<sup>39</sup> a prelude to the promulgation of the anti-Jewish laws. A further source of investigation was constituted by the interviews conducted by the Shoah Foundation,<sup>40</sup> as well as Anna Pizzuti’s valuable research on foreign Jews interned in Italy between 1940 and 1943.<sup>41</sup>

My database gradually became filled with names and data. The Foundation, however, was short of funds. We had already surveyed Campania and found seven Jewish citizens (Alberto Defez, Leone Defez,<sup>42</sup> Gilberto Terracina, Mario Graziano Terracina, Osvardo Tesoro, and Bettino Volterra) who had taken part in the so-called “*quattro giornate di Napoli*,” the popular uprising that lasted from 27 September to 1 October 1943 and accompanied the German retreat. We then moved on to study the Resistance in Lazio, where I was surprised to find so many Jews active in the Resistance: at least 142 individuals, of whom 20 were killed, with one gold medal awarded to Eugenio Colorni and two silver medals to Claudio Fiorentini and Edoardo Volterra. In Tuscany, I identified 98 resisters, including one gold medal recipient, Eugenio Calò,<sup>43</sup> a partisan leader in the province of Arezzo who was killed, and two others who fell—Bruno Fiorentini and

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<sup>36</sup> In fact, the portal is constantly being supplemented with new records as they are gradually discovered and processed.

<sup>37</sup> Simonetta Carolini, a researcher and expert on the holdings preserved at the ACS, is the author of the important work on the Casellario Politico centrale (Central Political Records Office) entitled *Pericolosi nelle contingenze belliche. Gli internati dal 1940 al 1943* (Rome: Edizioni ANPPIA, 1987).

<sup>38</sup> Fondo antifascisti e partigiani ebrei, 1922-1945, ACDEC.

<sup>39</sup> Fondo Censimenti, 1938-1942, ACDEC.

<sup>40</sup> The interviews conducted in Italy are available on the website *Ti racconto la storia: Voci della Shoah. Le interviste italiane della USC* (University of Southern California) Shoah Foundation. Institute for Visual History and Education, accessible at [www.shoah.acs.beniculturali.it](http://www.shoah.acs.beniculturali.it), accessed December 20, 2025.

<sup>41</sup> Anna Pizzuti, *Ebrei stranieri internati in Italia durante il periodo bellico*, [www.annapizzuti.it](http://www.annapizzuti.it), accessed December 20, 2025. This database offers a precise and comprehensive picture of the more than 9,500 refugees who found themselves in Italy from the late 1930s onward, fleeing German antisemitism and that of other countries in Central and Eastern Europe.

<sup>42</sup> Alberto Defez, *Raccolta di memorie: La famiglia, gli studi, accenni sulla storia degli ebrei a Napoli, la partecipazione alle Quattro Giornate di Napoli*, ed. Susanna Glavas (Doria di Cassano allo Jonio: La Mongolfiera, 2019).

<sup>43</sup> See the podcast dedicated to him at <https://resistentiebrei.cdec.it/storie/eugenio-calò/>, accessed May 6, 2025.

Alessandro Sinigaglia<sup>44</sup>—who were awarded silver medals.

In 2021, I learned of the possibility of applying for further funding from the German Embassy in Rome, which administered a special “German-Italian Future Fund.” We submitted an application in order to continue our research. A few months later, to my great satisfaction, a positive response arrived. This additional funding would cover 2022 and the regions of Abruzzo, Umbria, and Marche, and it was then renewed in 2023 for Liguria and Emilia-Romagna.

Within the project, we also included those who had devoted themselves to civil resistance, showing acts of altruistic generosity or particular courage in taking risks. Our definition of the subjects under consideration was therefore not limited to armed partisans alone, but extended to broader fields: from anti-Fascist political militancy to the effort to devise strategies for saving families, all the way to organized rescue work to assist other Jews in danger.<sup>45</sup> The project was given the title “*Resistenti ebrei d’Italia*.”

Once the two years of support from the German Embassy had come to an end, new funding was needed if the work was to continue. At the end of 2023, the northern regions still needed to be covered if the project was to be completed. During 2024, thanks to a colleague, I learned of the existence of a government agency attached to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and dedicated to anniversaries of national interest.<sup>46</sup> The year 2025 and the seventy-fifth anniversary of Liberation were approaching: the moment was favorable for a new funding application, and this was indeed accepted. We were thus able to continue the research and to include Piedmont (together with the Aosta Valley), Lombardy, Veneto, and Friuli Venezia Giulia in the project

Who are the people on whom this investigation has focused? First of all, the hundreds of partisans who served in Resistance formations from southern to northern Italy, against the backdrop of the Allied advance from south to north. Everywhere, I was able to identify Jewish citizens present from the very episodes regarded as the beginnings of the Resistance: 25 September 1943 at Bosco Martese, in the province of Teramo;<sup>47</sup> 5-6 October 1943 at Lanciano, in the province of Chieti;<sup>48</sup> and 13-15 November that same year in the fortress of San Martino, above Varese.<sup>49</sup>

The project has singled out different types of individuals: adults who were already anti-Fascists by culture and upbringing; desperate people who joined the struggle after members of their family had been deported; boys who served as couriers or took part in combat; women; young people who, already safe in Switzerland, returned to Italy in order to make their contribution; and many other situations besides.

<sup>44</sup> Marco Valeri, *Negro, ebreo, comunista. Alessandro Sinigaglia, venti anni di lotta contro il fascismo* (Rome: Odradek, 2010); see also the podcast dedicated to him at <https://resistentiebrei.cdec.it/storie/alessandro-sinigaglia/>, accessed December 20, 2025.

<sup>45</sup> For example, Giorgio Nissim, active in Pisa and Lucca; Raffaele Jona, active in Piedmont and the Aosta Valley; Matilde Bassani, active in Rome and Florence; Mario Finzi, active in Bologna; Massimo Teglio, active in Genoa. On each of them, see the podcasts at <https://resistentiebrei.cdec.it/storie/>, accessed December 20, 2025.

<sup>46</sup> The government agency is the Struttura di missione per gli anniversari di interesse nazionale (SMAES), established by decree on 2 March 2023 and subsequently renamed to include responsibilities relating to national and international sporting events.

<sup>47</sup> Among those who took part in the battle of Bosco Martese, two foreign doctors also distinguished themselves: Alessandro Gottlieb and Felix Szajkowicz, both graduates in medicine from the University of Padua and interned in nearby Rocca Santa Maria.

<sup>48</sup> Carlo Schoenheim, a partisan, doctor was one of the leaders of the battle of Lanciano.

<sup>49</sup> Alfredo Segre from Milan, a medical student, took part in the defense of the fortress of San Martino (Varese), one of the earliest episodes of the armed Resistance.

We have traced those who were awarded the gold medal *in memoria* or the silver medal and those who became brigade commanders or political commissars. The research project has led to the identification of 839 cases of militancy in the anti-Nazi and anti-Fascist Resistance in Italy: 257 in Piedmont (with the Aosta Valley); 148 in Lazio; 98 in Tuscany; 72 in Emilia-Romagna; 68 in Lombardy; 47 in the Marche; 39 in Friuli Venezia Giulia; 33 in Liguria; 28 in Abruzzo; 27 in Veneto; seven in Campania; six in Umbria; and still other cases besides. Of these, 102 were killed.

On the basis of the accumulated information gathered through our research, we will be able to formulate quantitative assessments: which age groups were involved; what percentage were women; how many were married; how many were siblings, cousins, or otherwise related; to what extent they were conscious of belonging to a Jewish cultural milieu; their motives for entering the struggle; to which political formations they adhered in the majority; whether they remained faithful to their initial formation or changed it over time, and why; whether their entry into the Resistance was preceded by clandestine anti-Fascist activity; whether Jews are also to be found in the upper ranks of the Resistance, as brigade or division commanders and among political commissars; and what their average level of education was.

We now have the possibility to examine under a magnifying glass a case study supported by a remarkable quantity of data. It is a fortunate opportunity, one to be fully exploited, and it will be the subject of the next CDEC book, which is now in preparation. With it, the circle around a cycle of fundamental research on the history of the Jews of Italy between 1943 and 1945 will be closed.