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# QUEST

**ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY JEWISH HISTORY**
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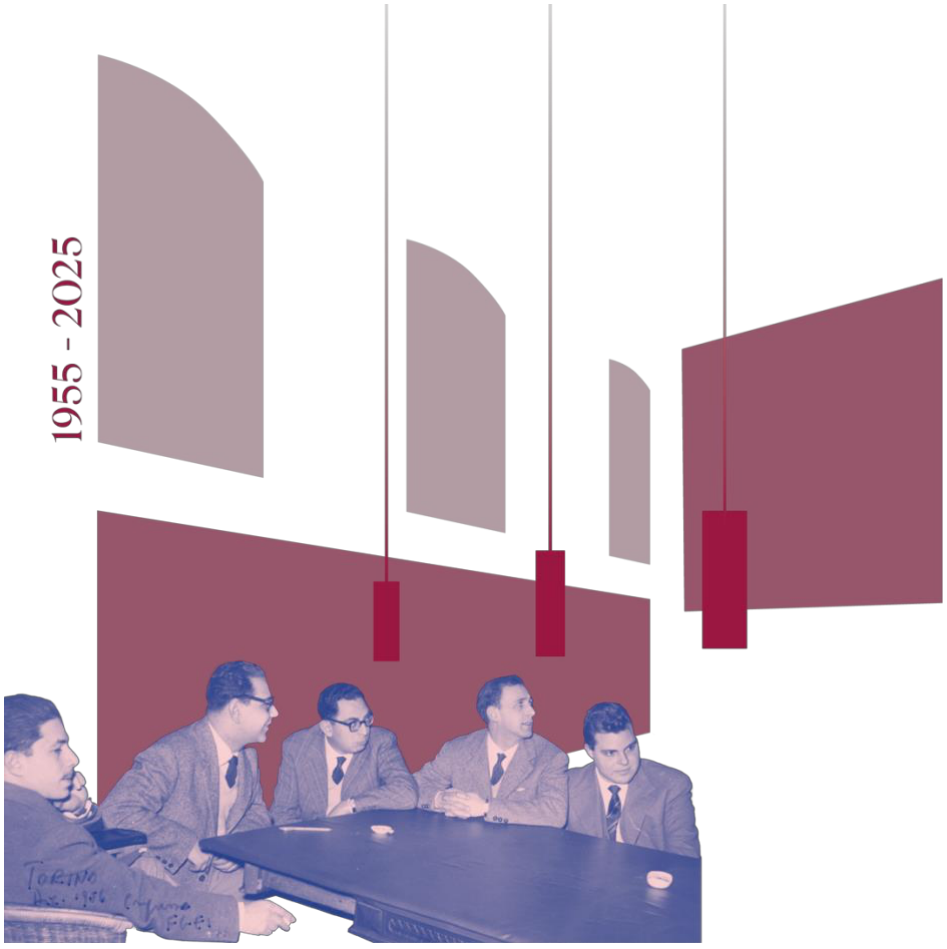


**SPECIAL ISSUE FOR THE 70TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CDEC FOUNDATION**
edited by CDEC Foundation

CDEC

**QUESTIONI DI STORIA EBRAICA CONTEMPORANEA**
RIVISTA DELLA FONDAZIONE CDEC

## QUEST. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC

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Piazza Edmond Jacob Safra 1, 20125 Milano Italy
tel. 003902316338 – fax 00390233602728
www.quest-cdecjournal.it
questjournal@cdec.it


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The historic photo of the Congress of the Italian Jewish Youth Federation (FGEI) held in Turin in 1956, juxtaposed with a graphic design of the current CDEC Foundation Library. Graphics by Sara Radice.

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## Special Issue for the 70th Anniversary of the CDEC Foundation

QUEST ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY JEWISH HISTORY
JOURNAL OF THE FONDAZIONE CDEC

**Gadi Luzzatto Voghera**
Fondazione Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea, CDEC
direzione@cdec.it

# Introduction

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This issue of *Quest* differs from those that have preceded it. It is a special edition through which we aim to reflect upon and offer a multifaceted perspective on the seventy years of the CDEC Foundation. For this occasion, we have chosen to depart from the structure that has thus far characterized our journal. This is not a monographic issue, nor can it be considered a miscellany. Instead, we have invited collaborators of the Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea to contribute essays and in-depth analyses that highlight some of the principal trajectories that have defined the institution's work over the decades: the collection and enhancement of sources, the construction of research tools, the role of testimony, and the relationship between historiography, public memory, and education. The contributions gathered here do not aim to provide an exhaustive reconstruction of the institution's entire history; rather, they seek to illuminate some of its most significant dimensions through perspectives that intertwine institutional history, historiographical reflection, and the analysis of specific archival and cultural projects.

From this perspective, we present an issue divided into three conceptual sections. The first, devoted to a historical retrospective, includes contributions by Sara Buda, Laura Brazzo, and Patrizia Baldi. The second section is dedicated to professional testimonies, presented via papers by Liliana Picciotto, Marcello Pezzetti, and Ruggero Gabbai, and concludes with an interview with Michele Sarfatti and Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, the directors of the institution over the past forty years, conducted by Guri Schwarz. Finally, a third section is devoted to current research projects conducted at the CDEC, presented in essays by Bianca Ambrosio, Riccardo Correggia, and Chiara Renzo.

This issue of *Quest* also introduces another innovation: its graphic design has been significantly revamped. Readers will notice improved readability and more accessible navigation across the various sections.

The Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea was founded in Venice in 1955 and today represents one of the principal reference points for research on the history of

Jews in contemporary Italy, anti-Jewish persecution during Fascism, the memory of the Holocaust in the Italian public sphere, and antisemitism. Over more than seventy years of activity, the institution has progressively expanded its scope, evolving from community-based documentary initiatives into a nationally and internationally recognized research center, engaging in archival preservation, historical research, the analysis of anti-Jewish prejudice, digital humanities, and Holocaust education. After its early years in Venice, the Center moved to Milan, first to premises within the Jewish community and later to a building on the Via Eupili that had formerly housed the Jewish school. Since 2022, it has been located at the Memoriale della Shoah within the Central Station complex, incorporating a large library that also houses the archive.

To fully understand the significance of the Center's history, it is essential to situate it within the broader evolution of Holocaust studies in Italy.[1] For a long time, the persecution of Italian Jews did not occupy a central position in national historiography. In the postwar period, public memory of the war and the Fascist dictatorship was strongly shaped by the paradigm of the Resistance, which privileged the narrative of liberation and antifascist struggle as the founding moment of the new republican democracy. Within this framework, anti-Jewish persecution often remained in the background, perceived either as a secondary episode in the history of the regime or as a reflection of Nazi policies rather than as an integral part of Italian history.

It was within this context that the initiative leading to the creation of the CDEC took shape. From the early 1950s, some members of the Federazione Giovanile Ebraica d'Italia (FGEI) felt an urgency to collect documents, testimonies, and materials relating to the persecution of Jews and their participation in the Resistance. This project formed part of a broader climate marked by the emergence of institutions and commissions dedicated to documenting the Holocaust in several European countries, as well as in Israel and the United States. The objective was not only to preserve a memory that would otherwise risk dispersal, but also to create the conditions for future historical research grounded in solid and systematically collected sources.

Sara Buda's essay reconstructs this initial phase, analyzing the process that led to the foundation and early structuring of the Center between 1952 and 1957. She situates the birth of the institution within the dynamics of Jewish society in postwar Italy and highlights the generational and cultural tensions that characterized that context. The young promoters of the project, who had grown up under Fascism and were marked by the experience of persecution, sought new forms of civic and political participation, identifying the documentation of persecution as a field of both cultural and civic engagement.

The initial momentum toward historical documentation soon found an essential complement in another form of civic and cultural commitment: the monitoring of contemporary antisemitism. From the second half of the 1960s, figures within the Center, including Eloisa Ravenna and Adriana Goldstaub, undertook pioneering work in the systematic collection of warning signs—newspaper articles, anonymous letters, cartoons, and public speeches expressing evolving forms of anti-Jewish prejudice. In the absence of

[1] Marcello Flores, Simon Levis Sullam, Marie-Anne Matard-Bonucci, and Enzo Traverso, eds., *Storia della Shoah in Italia: Vicende, memorie, rappresentazioni*, 2 vols. (Turin: UTET, 2010).

established models or a shared analytical vocabulary, this work relied on empirical and qualitative observation. As Goldstaub later recalled in an oral testimony, the aim was not merely "to preserve," but also "to denounce and interpret."[2] In 1973, at the Fourth Conference of Progressive Judaism in Paris, Eloisa Ravenna denounced the alarming intensification of neo-Fascist antisemitism and warned against hate campaigns that were avoiding the term "Jew" and substituting it with "Zionist," thereby constructing hostile representations, which, as she cautioned, could lay the groundwork for future crimes.

In subsequent decades, the CDEC's activities became increasingly intertwined with the development of historical research on the Holocaust in Italy. Laura Brazzo's essay offers a detailed reconstruction of the ways in which research initiatives were launched, beginning with collaboration with the Public Prosecutor's Office in Dortmund, Germany, which in the early 1960s initiated legal proceedings against members of the German Security Police stationed in Verona between 1943 and 1945, who were responsible for the arrests and deportations of Jews from Italy. Through this work, the CDEC collected dozens of testimonies—particularly against SS-Sturmbannführer Friedrich Bosshammer—which have since constituted one of the primary sources used by the Center's researchers to reconstruct the history of persecution in Italy.

From the 1970s, and especially the 1980s, the persecution of Jews began to receive increasing attention from historians.[3] The opening of new archives, the renewal of historiography on Fascism, and the emergence of a broader international debate on the Holocaust contributed to stimulating new research and reshaping established interpretations. Alongside its archival dimension, this issue of *Quest* also addresses the themes of testimony and memory. Since the 1980s, the CDEC has progressively established itself not only as a repository of sources, but also as a center for historiographical production.[4] Research promoted by the institution has helped clarify many aspects of anti-Jewish persecution in Italy, from the racial laws of 1938 to the deportations following the German occupation in 1943. At the same time, the collection of documentation has enabled the creation of one of the most important archives dedicated to the history of Italian Jews in the twentieth century.

In recent decades, oral history and the collection of audiovisual testimonies have assumed an increasingly central role in Holocaust studies, transforming the ways in which it is narrated and transmitted. The contribution by Marcello Pezzetti and Ruggero Gabbai

[2] Adriana Goldstaub, unpublished oral testimony, CDEC Foundation Archives. One of the first works produced by the CDEC on this subject was the translation of Léon Poliakov's *De l'antisionisme à l'antisémitisme* (*Dall'antisionismo all'antisemitismo* [Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1971]).

[3] Anna Bravo and Daniela Jalla, eds., *Una misura onesta. Gli scritti di memoria della deportazione dall'Italia 1944–1993* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1994); Centro Furio Jesi, ed., *La menzogna della razza. Documenti e immagini del razzismo e dell'antisemitismo fascista* (Bologna: Grafis, 1994).

[4] Klaus Voigt, *Israel Kalk e i figli dei profughi ebrei in Italia* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1990); Liliana Picciotto, *Il libro della memoria. Gli ebrei deportati dall'Italia (1943–1945)* (Milan: Mursia, 1991); 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); Michele Sarfatti, *Gli ebrei nell'Italia fascista. Vicende, identità, persecuzione* (Turin: Einaudi, 2018); Marcello Pezzetti, *Il libro della Shoah italiana. I racconti di chi è sopravvissuto* (Turin: Einaudi, 2009).

reconstructs the creation of the Archivio della Memoria ("Archive of Memory") and the project to collect filmed testimonies of survivors. Through the experience of creating the documentary film *Memoria*,[5] the authors demonstrate how audiovisual testimony has become a fundamental tool for transmitting the memory of the Shoah to younger generations.

The connection between historical research and the analysis of the present became dramatically evident in 1982, a year that marked a crucial turning point. In a climate exacerbated by the war in Lebanon, the delegitimization of Israel converged with a form of political antisemitism that directly targeted Italian Jews, identifying them as collectively responsible. On October 4, a bomb exploded outside the CDEC headquarters on the Via Eupili, causing significant damage; a few days later, on October 9, an attack by a Palestinian commando on the synagogue in Rome resulted in the death of a child, Stefano Gaj Taché, and injuries to thirty-seven people. For the first time since the postwar period, Italian Jews were the target of direct political violence on national soil.[6] These events provided the decisive impetus for the establishment of a dedicated office for the study and monitoring of anti-Jewish hostility, later known as the Osservatorio Antisemitismo (Observatory on Antisemitism). It was no longer sufficient to collect material; it became necessary to analyze, understand, and explain it. From the trauma of 1982 emerged a new phase, marked by the creation of a database, the definition of analytical categories (such as denialism, economic stereotypes, and the delegitimization of Israel), and conceptual harmonization with international research centers, transforming an empirical archive into a genuine analytical tool. Since the early 2000s, the Observatory has addressed the challenges posed by the digital revolution and new vectors of hate. Over the past fifteen years, analysis has extended to social media, where antisemitism manifests in hybrid, viral, and sometimes mimetic forms, as seen in the trivialization of the Shoah by very young users. Attention has also focused on the intersectional nature of hate, as demonstrated by coordinated campaigns of antisemitism, ageism, and misogyny targeting public figures such as Senator Liliana Segre. In this context, the Observatory has combined academic rigor with civic engagement, providing analytical support to parliamentary commissions—such as the one established by Segre in 2018—and contributing significantly to the drafting of the National Strategy to Combat Antisemitism, which was adopted by the Italian government in 2021 and again in 2025. The terrorist attack of 7 October 2023 and the subsequent resurgence of antisemitism in Europe have further confirmed the necessity of this work, which now benefits from a robust network of collaborations with European observatories and projects aimed at building a comparative framework for memory and the monitoring of hate at a continental level.

Reflection on the relationship between archives, sources, and historical research constitutes one of the guiding threads of this issue. Riccardo Abram Correggia's

[5] Ruggiero Gabbai, *Memoria*, 1997, produced by the CDEC Foundation and Forma International based on material written by Marcello Pezzetti and Liliana Picciotto, accessed December 20, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_RBlqfvGlk&t=2066s.

[6] Adriana Goldstaub, ed., *Dossier verde* (Milan: Cdec Foundation, 1983), accessed December 20, 2025, https://www.osservatorioantisemitismo.it/approfondimenti/la-guerra-nel-libano-e-lopinione-pubblica-italiana-confusione-distorsione-pregiudizio-antisemitismo-6-giugno-8-ottobre-1982/.

contribution, devoted to the archival collections of the socialist-Zionist Hashomer Hatzair youth movement in Italy, offers a significant example of the research potential opened by new archival acquisitions. Through the analysis of selected materials—including periodicals, internal documents, photographs, and testimonies—this article reconstructs the formation of the collection and highlights its value for the study of Jewish youth life in postwar Italy. Historiographical reflection is further deepened in the essay by Liliana Picciotto, which retraces her research trajectory—entirely developed within the CDEC—on the persecution of Jews in Italy. Beginning with her pioneering work *Il libro della memoria*,[7] she highlights the methodological transformations that have shaped this field and the progressive expansion of research perspectives, which now encompass not only the dynamics of persecution, but also strategies of survival, networks of solidarity, and various forms of Jewish resistance.

Another central dimension of the CDEC's activity concerns its educational commitment. From its origins, the institution has combined historical research with extensive outreach and training initiatives aimed at schools and the broader public. Patrizia Baldi's contribution analyzes the development of these initiatives over the decades, showing how Holocaust education has become one of the Center's primary areas of intervention. Through educational programs, teacher seminars, and student-oriented projects, the CDEC has made a significant contribution to the dissemination of historical knowledge about anti-Jewish persecution in Italy.

This volume offers two further contributions. Bianca Ambrosio opens a particularly innovative perspective on the contemporary use of historical archives. The project in question, which is being carried out in Milan's San Vittore prison, involves inmates in activities engaging with testimonies of individuals who were detained in the same institution during the Second World War. This initiative demonstrates how archival and testimonial heritage can be employed in non-conventional educational contexts, fostering critical reflections on history, individual responsibility, and the dynamics of persecution. Finally, Guri Schwarz presents a comprehensive interview with Michele Sarfatti—who directed the CDEC from the mid-1980s to 2016—and the undersigned, the Center's current director. This operational perspective offers insights into the cultural, political, and managerial challenges the CDEC has faced in recent decades.

Taken together, the essays collected here offer a plural perspective on an institution that has played a fundamental role in the development of studies on Jews in contemporary Italy. From the collection of the first postwar testimonies to the construction of digital archives, from historical research to educational and cultural activities, and the ongoing study of antisemitism, the history of the CDEC reflects broader transformations in the relationship between history, memory, and society in both the Italian and European contexts.

[7] Picciotto, *Il libro della memoria*.

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**Sara Buda**
Istituto Nazionale Ferruccio Parri
sara.budax@gmail.com

# The Foundational Groundwork of the CDEC

## A Jewish Youth Documentation Initiative in a National and Transnational Context

**ABSTRACT**

This article explores the early development of foundational groundwork that led to the establishment of the Contemporary Jewish Documentation Center (CDEC) from 1952, when the project first emerged, to its first Statute in 1957, via its official foundation on 25 April 1955. It examines its symbolic and structural foundations, its guiding models, and the strategic choices that enabled a youth-led initiative to overcome significant challenges within the postwar and early Cold War context. The analysis situates the CDEC within the milieu of its founders, a group of young members of the Italian Jewish Youth Federation, providing insight into the challenges and debates at the heart of postwar Jewish reconciliation in Italy. It also explores the generational tensions experienced by those who had grown up under Fascism and sought a renewed civic and political identity through postwar engagement. Furthermore, it draws a close connection between the Centers foundations and the efforts to document and interpret the memory of the persecution affecting groups targeted by Fascism and Nazism, particularly that of the Istituto per la storia del movimento di liberazione in Italia (Institute for the History of the Liberation Movement in Italy). Finally, the CDEC's documentary mission is contextualized within a transnational framework of Jewish historical commissions and documentation centers across Europe, the United States, and Israel, setting the standards to preserve, analyze, and disseminate the memory and history of the Shoah.

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Keywords: Shoah and Resistance Inheritance, Postwar Italy, Public History, Historical Institutes, Federazione Giovanile Ebraica d'Italia (FGEI)

## Postwar—The Work of Researching and Collecting Documentation on the Shoah

With the end of the Second World War, the countries overwhelmed by the conflict soon found themselves forced to confront a profoundly new element: the elaboration of the diverse memories that had emerged from the fractures introduced by totalitarian regimes. While the processing of mass mourning had already been experienced after the First World War, the situation was now different: individual countries were unable to ritualize the past under a single, unified national symbol.[1] In the return to freedom, therefore, a series of new identities emerged, shaped by recent political and racial persecutions.

On a transnational level, some common needs became apparent: the recovery of archives seized by the Nazis, the collection of evidence of what had happened, and the effort to give meaning to the past and to the injustices suffered by activating processes of memory work. Within this context arose the phenomenon of the proliferation of institutes for history and historical documentation, which, following different methods and timelines, emerged across the world, starting from the places where the affected communities were reconstituting themselves.

As the German historian Lutz Raphael has pointed out, in the postwar period two major tendencies shaped the historiographical elaboration of these events: in some countries, such as France or the Federal Republic of Germany, it was the state that assumed responsibility for researching and elaborating the recent past; in others, such as Italy, this task was left to the initiative of individual groups.[2] Thus, taking as an example the institutes for the preservation and promotion of the history of the Resistance, in France we find the Comité d'histoire de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale (CH2GM),[3] a central, Paris-based government-sponsored institute, while in Italy, a series of independent institutes was established throughout the national territory.[4]

Raphael's insight outlines a framework within which we can place the case of the Jewish documentation centers and historical commissions that arose in various countries, at very different times and in very different ways. Like the other institutes created in this dynamic, they were born with the aim of seeking, collecting, and preserving documents and testimonies concerning the experiences of local Jewish communities during the 1930s and 1940s. Some were created during the war itself, as acts of resistance against the tragic prospect of the extermination of European Jewry; others emerged immediately after liberation, once national Jewish institutions had resumed functioning and the extent of the tragedy had been understood; still others were founded some years later, inspired by related experiences.

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1 On this matter, see at least Peter Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation: Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe, 1945–1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

2 Lutz Raphael, "Militancy and Pluralism: Party and Church Institutes of Contemporary History in Western Europe since 1945," in *Setting the Standards: Institutions, Networks and Communities of National Historiography*, eds. Joe Tollebeek and Ilaria Porciani (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 240-265.

3 Henri Michel, "Le Comité d'Histoire de la deuxième guerre mondiale," *Revue historique* 233, no. 1 (1965): 127-138.

4 Gaetano Grassi, ed., *Resistenza e storia d'Italia. Quarant'anni di vita dell'Istituto nazionale e degli Istituti associati. Annuario 1949–1989* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1993).

Within these small differences lies the profound divide between the two dimensions of the Shoah highlighted by Omer Bartov: the eastern one, where Jewish extermination unfolded in ghettos and city streets, and the western one, where deportation created a distance, an unknown factor that made the process of understanding the scope of the genocide much slower.[5] It was in the discovery of the Shoah's transnational dimension that these centers and commissions came into contact with one another. The common questions and the shared methodologies and objectives make it possible to hypothesize that there is a specifically Jewish phenomenon that can be situated and studied within the framework outlined by Raphael. Annette Wieviorka and Laura Jockusch, in their respective studies, inaugurated research into the reciprocal contamination that developed among these documentation initiatives, highlighting the crucial role played by the "Polish paradigm."[6] Poland was the origin of the first scholars of Jewish history, some of whom had initiated documentation and archival projects during the German occupation.[7] Their expertise and experiences spread along the migratory routes of Polish Jews fleeing persecution, and later, postwar antisemitic violence. Following this exodus, and similar initiatives undertaken in several Western European countries, a significant number of institutions assumed the task of collecting and preserving testimonies of the recent Jewish experience.

The phenomenon becomes even more interesting when considering that some of the main initiatives in this field were brought together at the Première Conférence Européenne des Commissions Historiques et Centres de Documentation Juifs, held in Paris between 30 November and 10 December 1947, with the dual aim of comparing methodologies and results, as well as establishing a European coordinating body for research and documentation on the Shoah.[8] This latter goal, however, proved too ambitious given the conditions in which Europe found itself at the end of the 1940s. Nonetheless, together with the conference, it revealed a specifically Jewish dynamic, which is worth examining both within the broader framework of the proliferation of historical institutes in the postwar period and within the more specific context of Shoah historiography.

The participants of the conference themselves showed a keen awareness of this dual framework within which their research initiatives were taking shape. Reflecting on the complexities of the context in which research on the genocide of the Jews was being established, Isaac Schneersohn, founder of the Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine (CDJC) and president of the conference, declared:

> Can we be reproached for confining our research to marginal areas, for in some way justifying the racial doctrine by writing a racial history, for erecting a

[5] Omer Bartov, "L'Europa orientale come luogo del genocidio," in *Storia della Shoah*, vol. 2, eds. Marina Cattaruzza, Marcello Flores, Simon Levis Sullam, and Enzo Traverso (Turin: UTET, 2005), 419-459.

[6] Annette Wieviorka, *Déportation et génocide. Entre la mémoire et l'oubli* (Paris: Plon, 2013); Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record! Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[7] On the historiographical impulse given by Polish Jewish historians: Samuel D. Kassow, *Chi scriverà la nostra storia? L'archivio ritrovato del ghetto di Varsavia* (Milan: Mondadori, 2009), 25-31 and 61-105.

[8] The conference presentations are collected in the volume *Les Juifs en Europe (1943–1945). Rapports présentés à la première conférence européenne des commissions historiques et des centres de documentation juifs* (Paris: Éditions du Centre, 1949).

> monument to a single martyrdom—that of Jews? No. […]
>
> There have been other horrors, other acts of bestiality, other iniquities; they certainly deserve the same indignation, the same revolt of conscience. Yet while the leveling of humankind takes place through suffering and death—since all are alike in the unity of flesh and in the fragility of life—one may say that Jews have earned, more dearly than anyone else, before humanity, the right to respect and equality. That is what the work of our conference will demonstrate, affirm, and impose upon the reflection of honest people throughout the world.[9]

In these words lies the entire effort to underline the specificity of the Jewish experience while safeguarding the equality and belonging of Jews to the broader society: a complex stance, which raises the question of Jewish identity in post-Shoah Europe and of the reconstruction of relations with national institutions and civil society.[10] Indeed, Jewish initiatives most often originated from grassroots efforts rather than institutional intervention, reflecting the difficulty of seeking justice for the wrongs suffered while also avoiding undermining the process of reconciliation.

Such dynamics can also be found in the Italian context, where the work of documentation began in the very first months after the liberation of Rome in June 1944, though the first publication on the recent national Jewish experience emerged only in 1960, with the *Storia degli ebrei sotto il fascismo* by Renzo De Felice (Einaudi, 1960).[11] This was a long and complex project involving the key figures engaged in research and documentation in postwar Italy. First and foremost was Massimo Adolfo Vitale,[12] the leading figure behind the earliest and most systematic documentation initiative. Serving the Union of Italian Jewish Communities (UCII) through a special body tasked with searching for and repatriating missing and deported Jews—the Comitato Ricerche Deportati Ebrei (CRDE)—Vitale and his collaborators assembled the first and most valuable documentary collection on the Italian Jewish experience during the Shoah.[13] For this reason, the former colonel soon became the foremost expert on Jewish deportation from Italy, beginning the study of the sources he had gathered while also collecting the first testimonies of survivors from extermination camps.

When the trials against Nazi officials whose crimes concerned Italy began, Vitale managed to attend some of the proceedings. In 1947, he attended the trial of Rudolf Höss,

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[9] Ibid., 17-18. The translation from the original French text was made by the author.

[10] Rebecca Clifford, *Commemorating the Holocaust: The Dilemmas of Remembrance in France and Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[11] For an accurate reconstruction of the events: Michele Sarfatti, "La Storia della persecuzione antiebraica di Renzo De Felice: Contesto, dimensione cronologica e fonti," *Qualestoria* 32, no. 2 (2004): 11-27.

[12] Massimo Adolfo Vitale (1885-1968), a career officer in the Italian army and later an official at the Ministry of the Colonies, was expelled in 1939 due to anti-Jewish laws. He then engaged with antifascist networks in England, France, and Morocco, providing intelligence to the Allies, and returned to Italy after the Liberation of Rome in 1944. Resuming service at the Ministry of Italian Africa, Vitale, though not closely connected to institutional Judaism, collaborated with the Union of Italian Jewish Communities to support the search for and repatriation of deported or missing Jews. It is likely that Vitale was seen as the most suitable figure to head the CRDE because the Ministry was one of the Italian governmental bodies involved in repatriating displaced Italians.

[13] For further information on Vitale: Costantino Di Sante, *Auschwitz prima di "Auschwitz." Massimo Adolfo Vitale e le prime ricerche sugli ebrei deportati dall'Italia* (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2014).

commandant of Auschwitz, whom he was authorized to interview.[14] From this experience came his report *Missione in Polonia*, one of the first and most accurate Italian reconstructions of the functioning of the camps and the history of Auschwitz.[15]
Vitale then dedicated himself to dissemination and research, also engaging in the organization of the aforementioned first international conference for Jewish documentation centers and historical commissions. Precisely because of this leading role in documentation work, the UCII put him in touch with the youth of the Federazione Giovanile Ebraica d'Italia (FGEI), who in 1952, following a regular motion passed at their congress, committed themselves to developing a project aimed at highlighting the "contribution given by Jews to anti-fascism and to the Resistance in Italy"[16]: the embryo that a few years later would mature into the Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Italiana (CDEC).

## 1952—The FGEI, the Resistance, and the Liberovici Period

Compared to the rest of the population, for Jews living in liberated Italy, the postwar years marked a period of reconstruction, both symbolic and identity-related. The discrimination introduced in 1938 had already produced a sudden upheaval in the very conception of Italian Jewry and its future.[17] For the younger generation in particular, the general disorientation was intensified by the inability to find reassurance from their parents, who themselves were distressed and incapable of providing certainty. The different experiences, and consequently the differing interpretations of the Fascist period, opened a deep rift between parents and children, who no longer shared a common language or frame of reference for interpreting the past and imagining the future of Jewish life in Italy.[18]
To an older generation of Jews who had experienced integration during the Risorgimento and the First World War, there stood opposed a mass of young people, born and raised during the height of Fascism, plunged into a state of profound confusion, with problems and questions left unrecognized.[19] From this deep generational fracture and the search for new points of reference, a renewed push toward youth associations emerged—taking on new dimensions and characteristics, both within and beyond the Jewish world.[20]
Thanks to the organizational process that began in the summer of 1946, led by figures such

[14] The interview, accompanied by comments from the author, is included in M. A. Vitale, *Pellegrinaggio fra l'orrore*, 7-8, Massimo Adolfo Vitale, b. 6, CDEC Foundation Archive (henceforth ACDEC), Milan.
[15] M. A. Vitale, *Relazione. Missione in Polonia*, March-April 1947, Massimo Adolfo Vitale, b. 1, ACDEC.
[16] "Le mozioni più importanti approvate dal Congresso dei CGE," *Israel* 18 (8 January 1953): 3.
[17] Guri Schwarz, *Ritrovare se stessi. Gli ebrei nell'Italia post-fascista* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2004), 77.
[18] Ibid., 71-85.
[19] In his contribution to the volume published for the FGEI's eightieth anniversary, Paolo Foa recalls that "for the FGEI at that time, Italian Judaism was represented by 'dinosaurs' […] the word 'dinosaurs' became synonymous with obtuseness, rejection of the new, closure to dialogue, and attachment to positions of power." Foa, "La FGEI e le Istituzioni (1957–1963)," in FGEI, *Quarant'anni, 1948–1988* (Florence: Giuntina, 1988), 63.
[20] Marco De Nicolò, ed., *Dalla trincea alla piazza. L'irruzione dei giovani nel Novecento* (Rome: Viella, 2011).

as Leo Levi,[21] some young people found a space in which they could question and confront their Jewishness. This need was confirmed by their enthusiastic response, which within months gave strong momentum to these spaces, structuring various youth movements and creating the Federazione Giovanile Ebraica d'Italia, which would later play a central role in the founding of the CDEC.

The Documentation Center experiment was born precisely from the search for symbols and reference points through which to give new meaning to Jewish identity. The majority of the FGEI's young members came from families who were deeply integrated into Italian society, where Jewish tradition was practiced privately, often only minimally maintained. While some Jewish youth were drawn to the Zionist paradigm relaunched by the arrival of the Jewish Brigade, the FGEI's young people were more strongly attracted to the rise of mass parties, to the values of antifascism, and to the memory of the Resistance.[22] This dynamic further sharpened the generational divide, leading to a latent conflict with the highest Jewish institution in Italy, the UCII, which held pro-government and conservative positions aimed at shielding Jews from national political storms.

The Youth Federation thus developed a model of Judaism grounded in public participation as a commitment to building a better world, within the framework of an "indissoluble Judaism-antifascism binomial" emerging from recent history.[23] Hence the intent to preserve and valorize the past in order to act in the present—an element that became a cornerstone of the FGEI's activity. Enthralled by the heroic narrative of the Resistance, on which the renewed sense of national unity was founded, the FGEI's youth saw the recovery of Jewish participation in the Resistance as a chance to connect to this new foundational myth and thus to contribute to the Jewish reintegration into Italian society.

Among the various FGEI initiatives shaped by this Jewish antifascism was the official decision to commit to creating a permanent archive regarding the Jewish contribution to the Resistance. The proposal first appeared in the pages of *Hatikwà*, the Federation's magazine, in an article published by the twenty-two-year-old Sergio Liberovici (1931-1991)[24] in May 1952.[25] In the two-column piece, he reflected on the difficulties faced by the magazine, which, launched in 1949 as an insert to the Jewish weekly *Israel*, was struggling to publish regularly and was proving unpopular among young readers. Beyond the material and structural challenges for the newspaper and its editorial team, Liberovici

[21] Leo Levi, *Contro i dinosauri. Scritti civili 1931–1972*, ed. Arturo Marzano (Naples-Rome: L'Ancora del Mediterraneo, 2011).

[22] Schwarz, *Ritrovare se stessi*, 89-100.

[23] Enzo Levy, "La nostra strada," *Hatikwà* 21 (11 March 1954): 3.

[24] From the limited biographical information available today, we know that Sergio Liberovici was born in Turin in 1930 and died there in 1991. At the age of just fourteen, he joined the partisan struggle and later became a member of the Italian Communist Party (PCI). He pursued a distinguished career as a musician and ethnomusicologist, dedicating himself to the study of rural, working-class, and partisan oral traditions. In this context, toward the end of the 1950s, he participated in the creation of the *Cantacronache* project, a precursor to the Italian singer-songwriter movement. His success in music coincided with the period during which he was leading the documentary collection, as emerges from his correspondence, in which he himself notes that the time and energy he could devote to the FGEI project gradually declined due to the increasing demands of his other commitments and the emotional stress they entailed.

[25] Sergio Liberovici, "Appunti d'organizzazione. Critiche e proposte riguardanti 'Tikwà' e l'attività dei CGE in generale," *Hatikwà* 9 (5 May 1952): 5. The complete collection of the journal is available online via the CDEC Digital Library: http://digital-library.cdec.it/cdec-web/biblioteca/hatikwa.html (accessed November 24, 2025).

also noted the lack of compelling content and therefore proposed identifying "a central theme of great interest and relevance. Example: the publication of a 'History of the Contribution of Young Italian Jews to the War of Liberation'," [26] thus inserting the project into a wider postwar trend within Italian Jewry.[27]

In Liberovici's proposed framework, *Hatikwà* would have the task of publicizing the initiative among young people, while the Jewish Youth Centers (CGE) established in Italian cities could begin preliminary local work in preparation for the publication. This would involve engaging local youth in organizing lecture series held by those already working on the topic, as well as starting the collection of documentation: letters, names, testimonies—which, the author emphasized, were widely available.[28] Such work would have the dual advantage of involving young people, thanks to the relevance of the subject, while also fulfilling an action of high symbolic value for what the author described as an "almost debt of honor toward the many, many coreligionists who fell on the front of Liberty and Human Rights."[29]

This passage allows us to highlight another key aspect of the FGEI youth's relationship with their past. Deeply engaged with the ongoing memorialization process and the debate on legislative measures in this field—culminating in the approval of the so-called Terracini Law, which equated all the victims of deportation[30]—the FGEI promoted a reading of the whole Jewish experience under the sign of the Resistance. Persecuted, deported, and resisting Jews were indiscriminately described as having "fallen on the front of Liberty and Human Rights." For this reason too, the main themes of the future CDEC would oscillate between the Jewish contribution to the liberation struggle and the Shoah—already outlining a characteristic dynamic of the Center's future work.

Another significant element in Liberovici's article is his acute awareness of the broader memorial context in which his initiative would fit. The work would have particular relevance in view of the upcoming tenth anniversaries of the Liberation and of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising—foundational moments in this process of re-signifying the past and Jewish identity-building initiated by the FGEI—as well as in relation to work then being carried out in Israel to highlight the Jewish contribution to European Resistance movements during the Nazi occupation.[31]

Liberovici also mentioned a second possible research project concerning "racism in Italy from 1939 to 1949," to be carried out via the newspapers of the time—material which, he stressed, should not be left to deteriorate further. This once again confirmed the inseparable intersection between persecution and Resistance, demonstrating the existence of individuals and circles driven by a need that contrasted with the widespread tendency

[26] Ibid.

[27] Schwarz, *Ritrovare se stessi*, 111-172.

[28] Liberovici, *Appunti d'organizzazione*.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Law 10 March 1955, n. 96, "Provisions in favor of anti-fascist or racially persecuted individuals and their surviving family members," *Gazzetta Ufficiale Serie Generale* 70 (26 March 1955), 988-989.

[31] The reference is to Kibbutz Lohamei Haghettatot ("the fighters of the ghettos"), founded in Israel by former Jewish fighters from the ghettos of Europe, which played a fundamental role in collecting and preserving the relevant documentation.

to "draw a curtain" over the horrors that had been experienced.[32] The proposal, and later the CDEC project, thus played an important role in showing how Jewish narratives and the memory of the Shoah continued to remain alive and circulate, albeit within specific memorial communities.[33]

Liberovici's article was followed by responses from FGEI members supporting the initiative, highlighting its educational and political function in the face of the rehabilitation of fascist ideas and groups in both student and political settings,[34] as well as amid the complex process of reintegrating the Jewish minority.[35] At that very time, the specter of Fascism seemed to be returning through the rightward drift of segments of the Christian Democrats and the electoral successes of the Italian Social Movement (MSI). For this reason too, the UCII's cautious attitude appeared particularly unacceptable to the most active of the FGEI youth, as emerged in a series of articles.[36]

This new trend, however, also created tensions within the FGEI, which by statute committed itself to guaranteeing "absolutely apolitical spaces and full freedom of conscience to its members."[37] On the one hand, the Federation gave voice to a strong Jewish youth presence pushing for political participation; on the other, this voice did not represent the majority of its members, who had mostly joined in search of spaces for socialization shielded from political divisions.[38]

Liberovici, in an article published in *Hatikwà* on 17 July of the same year, returned to the project on the occasion of the enactment of the so-called Scelba Law, which introduced legal sanctions against anyone attempting to reconstitute the Fascist Party or overthrow the democratic order.[39] He wrote that "it is not enough, it will not be enough on its own," underlining the need for educational projects and the creation of a united national front, by selecting "the healthy circles of our homegrown antifascism."[40] In this passage, one can already perceive the fractures within the Italian left, some of whose factions were aligning with the USSR, which by then had shifted its stance toward the State of Israel and Zionism more generally. Liberovici also stressed the relevance of the project in view of the "absolute lack in Italy of clear, official, chronologically ordered documentation on the period of history

[32] Clifford, Commemorating the Holocaust, 80.

[33] On this topic, which is the subject of intense historiographical debate, please refer at least to Hasia Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945–1962* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); David Cesarani and Eric J. Sundquist, eds., *After the Holocaust: Challenging the Myth of Silence* (London: Routledge, 2012); Clifford, *Commemorating the Holocaust*, 31-43 and 79-91; François Azouvi, *Le mythe du grand silence. Auschwitz, les Français, la mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 2015). On the Italian case: Robert S. C. Gordon, *Scolpitelo nei cuori. L'Olocausto nella cultura italiana (1944–2010)* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2013).

[34] Angelo Della Seta, "Un passato che non deve tornare," *Hatikwà* 10 (12 June 1952): 3.

[35] The reintegration of the Jewish minority in Italy was a slow and painful process for Jews who had survived the Holocaust. On this subject, see at least Mario Toscano, ed., *L'abrogazione delle leggi razziali in Italia (1943–1988). Reintegrazione dei diritti dei cittadini e ritorno ai valori del Risorgimento* (Rome: Senato della Repubblica, 1988); Alberto Cavaglion, "Sopra alcuni contestati giudizi intorno alla storia degli ebrei in Italia," in *Il ritorno alla vita*: *Vicende e diritti degli ebrei nell'Italia dopo la seconda guerra mondiale*, ed. Michele Sarfatti (Florence: Giuntina-Fondazione CDEC, 1998), 151-65; Schwarz, *Ritrovare se stessi*, 11-12.

[36] Roberto Di Castro, "Hai dimenticato…," *Hatikwà* 10 (12 June 1952): 3.

[37] *Progetto di Statuto per la Federazione Giovanile Ebraica d'Italia*, 1949, FGEI, ACDEC.

[38] Foa, "1953-1964," 16.

[39] Liberovici, "Ricordare i nostri Eroi," *Hatikwà* 11 (17 July 1952): 4.

[40] Ibid.

running from 1939 to 1945."[41]

Meanwhile, during the autumn and in anticipation of the Federation's annual congress in late December, an operational note published in *Hatikwà* introduced several topics for discussion, among which was the development of the documentation project. In this short piece, written by Angelo Della Seta, an FGEI Council member, the goal was more clearly articulated: to organize an archive with the purpose of publishing the collected information and documents, together with the creation of a traveling exhibition.[42] An invitation was therefore delivered to the CGEs to begin discussions and form small committees to examine available materials, so that at the congress, the delegates' ideas could be heard and efficient selection and collection work could be initiated.

In preparation for the congress, Liberovici, writing to FGEI's general secretary Elio D'Angeli, outlined the objectives that were taking shape in his vision for the project:

> 1) To counter the dismissive attitude maintained by certain official Jewish circles in Italy toward our recent history;
> 2) To prevent the loss of many extremely important documents and testimonies concerning that particular period of our history;
> 3) To strengthen, on the basis of the collected documents, our antifascist educational work for the younger generation;
> 4) To direct the FGEI (this chaotic organization of ours, this amalgam of differing opinions, this body with countless varied activities, etc.) toward a project and initiative that could, thanks to unanimous approval, become the very backbone of the FGEI—or rather, direct the FGEI into a line of work capable of overcoming its congenital lack of a clear, unequivocal orientation.[43]

The first objective, then, stemmed from the need to engage in the process of constructing the history of Italian Jewry, a process that Jewish institutions were having great difficulty carrying forward. Indeed, in the summer of 1952, the first of Antonio Spinosa's essays was published in the journal Il Ponte, under the direction of Piero Calamandrei—an initiative that involved the Union from the outside, as the latter's own project had stalled.[44]

In December 1952, at the FGEI congress in Genoa, a dedicated Resistance Commission was established, presenting a motion to launch the project proposed by Liberovici, which was approved by the voters.[45] The foundations of the project therefore seemed to have been laid, all the more so as the congress was attended by Raffaele Cantoni, president of the UCII, who pledged the Union's support. At the beginning of 1953, the mandate to start the work was therefore given, and coordination of the initiative was entrusted to its main promoter.

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[41] Ibid.

[42] Della Seta, "Cari amici," *Hatikwà* 13 (20 November 1952): 3.

[43] Liberovici to Elio D'Angeli, Turin, 17 December [1954], FGEI, ACDEC.

[44] Antonio Spinosa, "Le persecuzioni razziali in Italia," *Il Ponte 8*, no. 7 (1952): 964-978; no. 8: 1078-1096; no. 11: 604-1622; *Il Ponte* 9, no. 7 (1953): 950-968. On the subject of the publication: Sarfatti, "La Storia della persecuzione antiebraica di Renzo De Felice"; Schwarz, *Ritrovare se stessi*, 161-164.

[45] "Le mozioni più importanti approvate dal Congresso dei CGE."

Liberovici himself was highly motivated: he had been a very young partisan in the IX "Giustizia e Libertà" Division, was a member of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), had been active in the FGEI since its earliest days, and was a member of its Council between 1952 and 1953. Through *Hatikwà*, the documentation campaign was launched in a highly pragmatic fashion: each CGE was to report the name of the person in charge of collecting documents and material on the contribution of Jews to the Resistance in their city "as soon as possible" to the editorial staff of FGEI's newspaper. The editorial staff would then provide a preliminary outline of the work to be undertaken.[46]

However, despite the commitment and the tools put in place, over the course of a year Liberovici was unable to secure the participation of the CGEs—with the sole exception of Venice, where Roberto Bassi, a key figure in the future CDEC, became active. In general, both the central and local structures of the FGEI showed little involvement, while the Union, by contrast, became increasingly overbearing. In exchange for its support, collaboration with the central Jewish institution took the form of work geared toward the Union's own purposes. For the documentation project, therefore, Liberovici was put in contact with Colonel Vitale, and the young researchers were tasked with collecting and organizing documentary material to be added to what had already been written by Spinosa, who continued publishing his essays until 1954.[47] In this context, the first meeting between Liberovici and Vitale took place in the early months of 1953. Following that meeting, Vitale sent the documents gathered by the CRDE to Liberovici, who soon afterward proposed a first classification scheme to help define the themes to be addressed in the future publication.[48] Yet the Union's influence weighed heavily on the collaboration: in May, the assignment of supervisory roles over Liberovici's work passed on to Benvenuto Terracini and Raffaele Jona, and this shift led to a redefinition of the project and the request that he break away from both Vitale and even the FGEI itself.[49] To this was added the demand to include the theme of Jewish adherence to Fascism, a topic far removed from the sensibilities of the FGEI youth, who were instead intent on emphasizing the inseparable link between Judaism and antifascism. In March 1954, Liberovici also became entangled in what he and his collaborators referred to as the Kalk Affair: according to his account, the Union attempted to use the FGEI initiative to gain possession of valuable documents belonging to Israel Kalk, founder of the Mensa dei Bambini (Children's Canteen). These documents might have shed light on some problematic decisions made during the war by leading figures of Italian Jewry and thus deepen young researchers' distrust of the institution.[50]

On the eve of the December congress in Venice, aware of the dead end reached with the Union, Liberovici sought to relaunch the initiative by attempting to separate its spheres of competence from those of the FGEI. To this end, he wrote a long memorandum addressed

[46] "Gli Ebrei e la Resistenza," *Hatikwà* 15 (29 January 1953): 4.

[47] Liberovici to anonymous recipient, 16 December [1953], FGEI, b. 9, ACDEC.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Dante Lattes to Benvenuto Terracini, 6 July 1953, supplemented by Terracini and then forwarded to Sergio Liberovici, who received it about a month later. The letter is forwarded from Liberovici to an unknown recipient, 16 December [1953].

[50] Liberovici to D'Angeli, 13 March [1954], as well as D'Angeli's reply to Liberovici, 29 March 1954, FGEI, b. 9, ACDEC.

to the FGEI's secretary, in which he stated: "The archive is today a reality [...] as is the specialized library."[51] After describing the positive aspects of the initiative and its initial results, he sought to demonstrate the Union's incompatibility with the project, proposing a new beginning. He then described the archive, which, despite being "piled up in a corner of [his] room" and not yet well organized, already contained around a thousand valuable documents, along with a specialized library consisting of about ten books from his personal collection. Much of the material had come from Colonel Vitale, who had preserved such precious documents that the young activists "solemnly committed themselves to making good use of them and continuing decisively along the path he had charted."[52] To move forward, Liberovici set out his firmest and most urgent point: breaking off collaboration with the Union, or alternatively involving it only externally, so as to preserve the Federation's independence. To sustain the research, the FGEI would need to allocate a fixed annual contribution to allow the research body to consolidate autonomously. On this last point, Liberovici returned in a letter dated 16 December 1953, in which he also described the project for a periodical publication titled *Documenti*, designed to give value to the "very interesting and unpublished" materials collected—including the diary of Emanuele Artom, which the young researchers had likely obtained during that period.[53]

The structure of the periodical was envisioned to have several sections: *Testimonies* and *Essays*, with contributions from international experts and scholars; *Reviews*, among which Liberovici cited Léon Poliakov's *Le bréviaire de la haine. Le IIIe Reich et les Juifs*, from the CDJC in Paris; and *Echo of the Press*, which would include reports from journals of other similar institutes, such as the Istituto Nazionale per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione in Italia, the CDJC, and other international Jewish institutions. Such examples demonstrated the attempt to place the initiative within a national and international network of valorizations of Italian Jewish history. It is clear that Liberovici's intent was not only to motivate and engage his Federation peers, but also to confront the "natural distrust of the so-called official organs of Italian Jewry" toward a youth-driven and alternative initiative.[54] Underlying all this was his conviction that the effort for autonomy would be repaid by the merit of creating "a periodical of extreme, general, and current interest" in Italy, "with incalculable educational value."[55]

The Venice congress, held in the final days of 1953, reaffirmed the values and significance of the documentary research initiative, ratifying the commitment of all FGEI youth to its development. However, the hoped-for collaboration was slow to materialize. In a new proactive move, Liberovici once again addressed the FGEI's secretary, proposing four new actions.[56] The first point emphasized the need to create a "Historical Archive (with an attached specialized library) on official, serious, and permanent foundations." To give the project form and credibility, Liberovici suggested giving it a title. Here, for the first time

[51] Liberovici, *Nota per il Segretario Generale della FGEI*, FGEI, b. 9, ACDEC.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Liberovici to unknown recipient, 16 December [1953].
[54] Liberovici, *Nota*, 5.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Liberovici to D'Angeli, Turin, 6 January 1954, FGEI, b. 9, ACDEC.

among other possible names, appeared the one that would become the name of the future CDEC, meaning, "Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea (Italian Section)." The plan included organizing "roundtable conferences, pamphlets, *Hatikwà* notebooks, specialized periodical publications," and so forth. Attached to the document was a budget report showing the concreteness of the work and some early results, including the purchase of complete collections of the periodicals *La Difesa della razza* and *La Nostra Bandiera*—valuable sources for studying Fascism and its relations with Italian Jewry—demonstrating the sensitivity and maturity of the young researchers' work. However, Liberovici's hopes were once again frustrated by the secretary of the FGEI's position, who responded by reaffirming the necessity of involving the UCII in the initiative.[57] The only concession was the allocation of a provisional FGEI fund, pending Union contributions.

Over time, an irreparable rift opened between Liberovici—who struggled with the Union—and the rest of the Federation, which was increasingly expressing its desire to build a productive collaboration with the Jewish institution. This distance reached a point of no return at the FGEI gathering in Livorno in April 1954, where the overwhelming presence of institutional authorities definitively sanctioned the new course of relations between the FGEI and the Union. Disappointed and disheartened by the marginalization of his position, in July Liberovici left the Federation, sending a bitter letter in which he highlighted the lack of collaboration and the sense of failure.[58] However, before he left, he compiled a final document to clarify his work, which he sent to the FGEI's secretary at the end of the summer.[59] This represented the final act of the first phase of the project. After demonstrating, through numerous excerpts copied and pasted from letters, the good faith that had guided his actions, Liberovici denounced the betrayals and speculations that had undermined the initiative, concluding decisively: "The initiative to collect documents, testimonies, publications, etc., for the creation of a permanent archive dedicated to the history of the Jewish contribution to the Resistance in Italy and to the history of Nazi-Fascist persecution of Jews in Italy, can today be considered a complete failure."[60]

[57] D'Angeli to Liberovici, Genoa, 24 January 1954: 2, FGEI, b. 9, ACDEC.

[58] Liberovici to D'Angeli, Turin, 1 July 1954, FGEI, b. 9, ACDEC.

[59] Liberovici, "Relazione sulle ricerche storiche (da presentare integralmente)," spring-summer [1954], 3, CDEC, ACDEC.

[60] Ibid., 1.

## 25 April 1955—Birth and Development of the Contemporary Jewish Documentation Center (Italian Section)

The Seventh Congress of the F.G.E.I., having taken note, with regret, of the poor results achieved thus far in the work on the history of antisemitic persecutions and the Jewish contribution to the Resistance, as well as in the publication of the material already collected, commits the FGEI Council to examining the work carried out thus far and to resuming the interrupted activity as soon as possible. It calls on all CGEs to give their fullest support to this essential task of the FGEI.[61]

With this motion, the December 1954 congress gave fresh impetus to the historical research promoted by the FGEI, in a new general context marked by the decision to abandon the political neutrality of the initial phase and by preparations for the celebrations of the first decade since Liberation. The figure identified to coordinate the relaunch of the initiative was Roberto Bassi, who had collaborated with Liberovici and who, during the congress, insisted on reading the report compiled by the project's first coordinator.

Bassi (1931-2025) was a young medical student in Venice, part of the first generation of the FGEI and representative of a more moderate faction within the organization.[62] He came from a family that was both deeply integrated into Italian society and strongly attached to Jewish tradition and Zionism—elements that led him to take on increasingly important roles, from president of the Jewish Community of Venice to vice-president of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities.[63] Bassi, moreover, was a member of the Socialist Party (PSI), a sufficiently distant position from the PCI, in which his predecessor had been active. This did not mean that he rejected the motivations that had led Liberovici to abandon the project, but rather that his integration into the institutional life of Italian Jewry and his more moderated political ideas allowed for greater mediation.

In the early months of 1955, Elio D'Angeli mobilized to reactivate the group that had been working on the historical research. Among those he involved was Enzo Levy (1922-1958), a survivor of deportation and a leading figure in Jewish associational life. A young president of the Turin CGE, he became a member of the FGEI Council in 1953, and, in 1954, of the Turin Jewish Community Council. Levy was part of the FGEI's most militant current: he authored the article introducing the inseparable bond between Judaism and antifascism. A staunch supporter of the principle of equalization for all deportation victims, Levy openly clashed with the UCII, emphasizing the need for an independent FGEI.[64] From February 1955, he facilitated the handover between Liberovici and Bassi and later introduced the Center to networks of former deportees, such as the Fédération Internationale des

[61] "Le mozioni approvate al termine del Congresso," *Hatikwà* 30 (10 February 1955): 3.

[62] Bassi, "Due precisazioni," *Hatikwà* 34 (16 June 1955): 4.

[63] Bassi, *Scaramucce sul lago Ladoga* (Palermo: Sellerio, 2004); interview with Roberto Bassi by Liliana Picciotto, Venice, 16 November 2010, Memorie della Salvezza, ACDEC.

[64] This distance was certainly increased by the reluctance with which the Union viewed pilgrimages to the extermination camps, in line with the position of the government and the Italian authorities. In 1952, Levy traveled to Auschwitz with other former internees, while in 1954, together with Primo Levi, he participated in the pilgrimage to the Buchenwald camp, to which both were invited as representatives of the Turin community. "Notizie dai CGE," *Hatikwà* 10 (12 June 1952): 4; "Omaggio ai martiri," *Hatikwà* 25 (15 April 1954): 3.

Résistants and the Associazione Nazionale Ex Deportati.[65]

In the spring of 1955, Guido Di Veroli, who would become one of the most important figures in the CDEC's history, joined its first core team. Besides wanting to deepen his knowledge of recent Jewish history, he immediately grasped the educational potential of the Center's work for the younger members of his CGE. Although heavily engaged in his studies, he offered the CDEC his time and energy alike, bringing new resources and unexpected results and contributing to the theoretical definition of the Center's scope. After the first months of collaboration, he became Bassi's point of contact for everything concerning relations with Vitale and with the Union.[66]

Working alongside him was Lello Anav (b. 1932), an engineering student from Rome and a member of the Rome CGE Council since 1953. A leading figure within FGEI, he represented the opposed current to Levy's: he believed the future of Judaism lay in Torah study and *aliyah* as the only antidotes to assimilation. Together with Di Veroli, he aimed to coordinate the collection work that had hitherto been carried out by the Rome CGE, handing the collected material over to Bassi.[67] Anav had in fact curated the gathering of testimonies from survivors of the raid on the Roman ghetto on 16 October 1943, which the Rome CGE organized in 1955. These testimonies were recorded on vinyl discs, now preserved in the CDEC archive, and probably constitute the earliest oral sources available on this event.[68]

Meanwhile, Elio D'Angeli, having been admitted to the Union's Council, brought the institution's attention back to the FGEI's historical research during the March session.[69] He announced the appointment of the new coordinator, the decision to establish the Contemporary Jewish Documentation Center, and requested confirmation of funds previously approved but never disbursed. The FGEI's secretary also sat on the committee organizing the celebrations for the tenth anniversary of Liberation, established within the Union by special authorization from the government.[70] The committee began organizing commemorations of key figures in the Jewish Resistance and preparing a ceremony to award honors to Italians who had distinguished themselves in aiding persecuted Jewish citizens.[71]

Thanks to the renewed support from the Federation and its secretary, the re-establishment of a core team, and the strong desire to take part in the tenth anniversary celebrations, on 25 April 1955, the first official communication from the Contemporary Jewish Documentation Center – Italian Section was sent out and the Center was officially

[65] Levy to Bassi, Turin, 2 February 1956, CDEC, b. 2, ACDEC.

[66] It was thanks to the work begun by Guido Di Veroli in the summer of 1955 that the CDEC was able to obtain the CRDE papers once again, which Liberovici had in the meantime returned to Vitale. Bassi, "Relazione sul lavoro per la Resistenza (8° Congresso F.G.E.I. Roma 23/26 dicembre 1955)," 1, CDEC, b. 1, ACDEC.

[67] Guido Di Veroli to Bassi, Rome, 8 May 1955, CDEC, b. 2, ACDEC.

[68] Now digitized, the recordings are accessible online: https://www.cdec.it/16-ottobre-1943-le-registrazioni-complete-delle-testimonianze-dei-sopravvissuti/, accessed June 20, 2025.

[69] D'Angeli to UCII, Genoa, 1 May 1955, CDEC, b. 2, ACDEC.

[70] Paola Bertilotti, "L'Unione delle Comunità e la commemorazione della Resistenza (1944–1948)," *La Rassegna mensile d'Israel* 74, no. 1-2 (January-August 2008): 173-190.

[71] *Committee for the Celebrations of the Tenth Anniversary of Liberation*, UCII, 1-2, FGEI, b. 9, ACDEC.

established.[72] Through this communication, the new coordinator informed both Jewish and non-Jewish institutions, national and international alike, of its foundation. One preserved copy bears handwritten notes listing the recipients, which reveal the network within which the young organizers aimed to place the CDEC. Besides the FGEI, these included Keren Kayemet LeIsrael, the Zionist Federation, the Israeli Legation, Keren Hayesod, the UCII, the World Jewish Congress, Histadrut HaMorim, and the Association of Jewish Women of Italy, while on the media side, they included *Israel*, *Hechalutz*, *Bollettino della Comunità Ebraica di Milano*, *Ha Zofè*, *L'Incontro*, *Hamim*, and the journal of the *Istituto Nazionale per il Movimento di Liberazione in Italia*.[73]

Yet, as Bassi noted in his end-of-year report, the response consisted mainly of "many kind words of encouragement, few offers of collaboration."[74] His frustration was evident, particularly in a letter he sent to Fabio Della Seta, editor of the journal *Israel*, regarding the failure to publish the CDEC announcement.[75] Even within the FGEI, initial support was limited. The first months were therefore devoted to promoting the Center and building a network of relationships essential to its success.

After the summer break, Bassi met for the first time with Massimo Adolfo Vitale to resume collaboration on the publication project envisioned by the UCII.[76] As Bassi himself recounted, the meeting revealed a profound generational gap, but also a courteous willingness to cooperate—thus beginning a slow process of building mutual trust.[77]

As mentioned, 1955 saw a proliferation of initiatives for the tenth anniversary of Liberation, including the publication of the Italian translation of Léon Poliakov's work—one of the first historiographical reconstructions available in Italian.[78] Bassi reviewed it in *Hatikwà*, signaling both the maturity of the Center's work and its intention to monitor issues related to recent Jewish history.[79] The proliferation of initiatives on the Jewish Resistance, however, posed a challenge to the CDEC, which struggled to make itself known and recognized. Significant in this regard was an article published in *Israel* by Settimio Sorani, in which he lamented to the Union the absence of an Italian institution comparable to the French CDJC.[80] In his reply article, Bassi highlighted key aspects of the younger generation's critique of their elders and the institutions. Certainly, he wrote, the Italian Center

> cannot compete with those of other countries […] due to the lack of material resources and the inexperience of us young people […] but we have good will […] a quality unfortunately lacking (with the exception of the excellent work carried

[72] *Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea – Sezione Italiana, 25 aprile 1955*, CDEC, b. 1, ACDEC.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Bassi, "Relazione sul lavoro per la Resistenza," 1.

[75] Bassi to Fabio [Della Seta], Venice, 24 May 1955, CDEC, b. 2, ACDEC.

[76] 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 (January-March 1979): 8-21. The meeting is also mentioned in Bassi, "Relazione sul lavoro per la Resistenza," 1.

[77] Bassi, "Ricordo di Massimo Adolfo Vitale," 17.

[78] Léon Poliakov, *Il nazismo e lo sterminio degli ebrei* (Turin: Einaudi, 1955).

[79] Bassi, "Il breviario dell'odio," *Hatikwà* 33 (5 May 1955): 6.

[80] Settimio Sorani, "Leggendo il Poliakov," *Israel* 41, no. 1 (22 September 1955): 3.

> out by Col. Vitale and his Committee for Research on Deportees) among those who, with far greater authority and means, should have undertaken this work as early as 1945![81]

Spurred on by these dynamics, the Center's activity intensified from September onward. In a letter to Vitale, Bassi reported:

> I plan, at the beginning of next month, to begin a definitive effort to collect and catalogue all Jews who took part in the Resistance. We have printed specific forms [...] to make the work more methodical and thorough.[82]

He added, hoping to lend further credibility to the effort: "This is above all to provide Avv. Ottolenghi with the material needed for the commemorative publication he intends to release early next year."[83]

By late September, then, a project for a broad and systematic census of Jewish Resistance fighters was already underway. Around the same time, the Venetian coordinator reached out again to the CGEs across the country, and within a month, he had succeeded in creating the network needed to launch nationwide grassroots research. It was during this period that Guido Neppi Modona, a Jewish student from Turin who was still in high school and who would soon take on significant responsibilities within the CDEC, joined the team.84 In almost every city with a CGE or Jewish community, Bassi established a point of contact. On 28 October 1955, he issued the first circular, launching the data-collection campaign and clearly defining the CDEC's structure: "The Center's most urgent task [was] to achieve a definitive census and a wide collection of data on the Jewish contribution to the fight against fascism."85 The work was carefully organized: each correspondent received a mandate, separate questionnaires for fallen and surviving Resistance members, and a letter of introduction signed by the coordinator.

In October, one of the key events organized by the Commemorations Committee took place in Verona: the commemoration of Rita Rosani. In agreement with Elio D'Angeli, Bassi took part, establishing important relationships—especially with the UCII president Giorgio Zevi and the committee president Giuseppe Ottolenghi. On that occasion, he also attended a committee meeting and proposed the CDEC as an authoritative partner in research on Jewish partisans and the history of anti-Jewish persecution.

Autumn marked major progress for the Center, and Bassi began reflecting on its sustainability and authority. Among the options considered was the possibility of making the CDEC the "Italian Section" of Yad Vashem, showing an awareness of the international scope of Holocaust and Jewish Resistance research.[86] Meanwhile, negotiations with the Union led to a new agreement: on the condition of distancing itself from the FGEI, the

[81] Bassi to Carlo Alberto Viterbo, 27 September 1955, CDEC, b. 2, ACDEC.
[82] Bassi to Massimo Adolfo Vitale, Venice, 22 September 1955, CDEC, b. 2, ACDEC.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Bassi to D'Angeli, Venice, 21 October 1955, CDEC, b. 2, ACDEC.
[85] *Circolare n. 1*, Venice, 28 October 1955, CDEC, b. 2, ACDEC.
[86] Bassi to D'Angeli and Guido Di Veroli, Venice, 14 November 1955, CDEC, b. 2, ACDEC.

Union would provide financial support, guarantee the cooperation of the communities, and confirm the CDEC's location in Venice—at least until the completion of its initial work, after which the archive would be transferred to Rome.[87] Through the second circular, Bassi informed his collaborators that the FGEI would make the CDEC autonomous, entrusting it to a board of directors composed of Bassi, D'Angeli, Di Veroli, Levy, and Aldo Luzzatto.[88] The CDEC would thus come under the Union's authority, with Vitale as its official representative.

By the end of 1955, the volume of activity had grown considerably, and during the December FGEI congress, Bassi organized the first national meeting of collaborators and correspondents.[89] In the winter of 1955 to 1956, Di Veroli worked on cataloguing Vitale's collection, while the Center received several documentary collections and began important collaborations with authoritative bodies such as the Istituto per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione and the Italian public broadcaster RAI.[90] Thanks to this new, though delicate, stability, the CDEC was able to hire its first paid collaborator: Bruno Di Porto, a history student from Rome, tasked with systematically processing the material held by the Union. The CDEC's work took on an increasingly defined shape, culminating in April 1956 with the publication of the first booklet presenting the sixteen thematic sections of the archive under construction and mapping the national network of fourteen cities where collaborators were active.[91] The booklet also introduced the board of directors and set out the CDEC's objectives for the first time:

> To collect the largest possible number of testimonies, documents, publications, etc., capable of shedding light on the vicissitudes of Italian Jewry from the advent of Fascism to Liberation […]. The ultimate goal of the CDEC is to provide the scholar and historian of tomorrow with broad and exhaustive documentation on the preparation and unfolding of the Jewish tragedy in Italy, and to make known to a wider public—through means and formats yet to be determined (exhibitions, publications, etc.)—the events affecting Jews in Italy and their contribution to the cause of freedom.[92]

Over the course of 1956, Bassi also began work on the Statute, in order to strengthen the functioning of the board, which was struggling to guarantee continuity. The Statute was finally approved in September 1957, establishing that the CDEC was an autonomous body, created by the FGEI and operating under its aegis, with oversight from the UCII.[93] The

[87] Bassi to D'Angeli, Venice, 23 November 1955, CDEC, b. 2, ACDEC.
[88] *Circolare n. 2*, Venice, 30 November 1955, CDEC, b. 2, ACDEC.
[89] "Il Centro di Documentazione," *Hatikwà* 39 (19 January 1956): 4.
[90] Bassi, *Relazione sull'attività del Centro di Documentazione nei mesi di novembre e dicembre 1955*, 1, CDEC, b. 1, ACDEC.
[91] *Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea – Sezione Italiana*, April 1956/Nissan 5716, 2, CDEC, b. 1, ACDEC.
[92] Ibid., 3.
[93] *Statuto del CDEC approvato dal Consiglio della Federazione giovanile Ebraica d'Italia (Torino, settembre 1957)*, FGEI, b. 9, ACDEC.

governing body was the board of directors, composed of five members appointed by the FGEI, plus two representatives—one from the Federation and one from the Union—serving with full voting rights. Most of the Statute's articles concerned the board's operations, with mechanisms to ensure continuity and overcome management crises.

The CDEC's path toward consolidation would encounter many further challenges in the following years, but thanks to the FGEI's efforts, the foundational groundwork made would allow the Contemporary Jewish Documentation Center to develop its activities and establish itself as an indispensable point of reference for the preservation, study, and dissemination of the history and memory of Jewish life in Italy from unification to the present day.

QUEST ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY JEWISH HISTORY
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**Laura Brazzo**
Fondazione Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea, CDEC
laurabrazzo@cdec.it

# "If not us, who?"

## The CDEC and the German Investigations into the Deportation of Jews from Italy: The Bosshammer Case (1963-1967)

ABSTRACT

This article reconstructs the investigation into the deportation of Jews from Italy launched by the Dortmund prosecutor's office in 1964, highlighting the roles played by the CDEC Foundation and Eloisa Ravenna in particular. Drawing on the correspondence between Ravenna and the German prosecutors, it shows how the organization of the Milan hearings of May 1967—which involved nearly fifty witnesses—was largely entrusted to the CDEC, effectively making it the investigation's operational hub.

This article then examines the testimonies collected during these hearings, comparing the Italian transcripts produced in 1974 with the original recordings, which were rediscovered in 2022. This comparison shows that while the transcripts present linear and coherent accounts, the recordings reveal a more complex process shaped by translation, hesitation, interaction, and the crucial role of interpreters.

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## Introduction

> Interpreter: We are police officers, acting on behalf of the public prosecutor's office in Dortmund, charged with investigating those responsible for the arrests, deportations, and killings of Jews in Italy during the period of occupation. The majority of Jews were deported to concentration camps such as Auschwitz, where they were killed. The principal person accused of these actions against the Jews in Italy is SS commander [comandante] Bosshammer, who is under investigation for murder, and we are grateful that you have accepted Dr. Ravenna's invitation to give a statement.[1]
> Beniamino Costi:[2] But who are these gentlemen? I don't quite understand…
> Interpreter: They are official representatives of the German judiciary.
> Costi: Ah, judges from the Federal Republic of Germany, I see.
> Interpreter: You are certainly aware that most deportees ended up in Auschwitz…
> Costi: Well, my wife was in Auschwitz.[3]
> Interpreter: An investigation is currently underway against SS-Sturmbannführer Bosshammer, accused of murder, and we are therefore very grateful that you have been willing to give up some of your time so that we may put a number of questions to you.[4]

On 19 May 1967, in Milan, on the top floor of an elegant building just off the Corso Sempione, in the offices of the Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea (CDEC), two officials from the public prosecutor's office in Dortmund—Wilhelm Kaup and "Herr Schaffrath"—sat facing Beniamino Costi, one of approximately fifty witnesses whose testimonies they planned to hear over the following ten days. Beside him sat an interpreter, who was in turn accompanied by Eloisa Ravenna, the general secretary of the CDEC.

[1] Handwritten text in pencil, with corrections, in the Fondo Processi ai criminali nazisti. Procure di Dortmund e Berlino, box 5, file 51, CDEC Foundation Archives (henceforth, ACDEC); typescript copy in the Fondo Processi ai criminali nazisti. Procure di Dortmund e Berlino, box 5, file 52, ACDEC. All translations into English are the author's unless otherwise stated.

[2] Beniamino Costi, Jew, born in Smyrna on 14 June 1924, was arrested in Milan on 2 February 1945. He was taken to the San Vittore prison and subsequently transferred to the Bolzano camp, where he remained until its liberation by the International Red Cross on 29 April 1945.

[3] Stameta Besso, born in Corfu on 15 April 1926, was deported to Auschwitz from Corfu in 1943. See the interview she gave for the Shoah Visual History Foundation (Los Angeles), http://www.shoah.acs.beniculturali.it/index.php?page=View.ObjectMetaData&id=shoah%3A42962 (accessed December 20, 2025).

[4] Beniamino Costi, May 19, 1967, Giuliana Donati's transcript (1974), Fondo Processi ai criminali nazisti. Procure di Dortmund e Berlino, box 5, file 52, ACDEC.

*Fig. 1. The two buildings at 6 and 8 via Eupili, Milan. Both buildings housed the Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea, 1965-2022., A. D. Schaumann's photographic collection (unprocessed collection). CDEC Foundation Archives.*

The questions were put by Wilhelm Kaup, while "Herr Schaffrath" was responsible for recording the information, both manually and by means of a reel-to-reel tape recorder. Eloisa Ravenna listened, occasionally intervened to clarify, and consistently took handwritten notes of everything that was said during the hearing.

Kaup and Schaffrath had been sent to Milan by Günther Obluda, a public prosecutor from the Dortmund court, who since 1964 had been conducting investigations for the purpose of bringing proceedings against Friedrich Bosshammer. The aim of the hearings was to gather information that could be used to establish the role and responsibility of Bosshammer[5] and of the Nazi officials operating in Italy under his command, who were involved in the arrest, deportation, and killing of Jews after 8 September 1943.

The hearings took place between 19 and 29 May and involved forty-nine witnesses, including former deportees and what might be termed "indirect" witnesses—prison guards from San Vittore, antifascists who had assisted Jews, and family members able to testify about their relatives' experiences. For decades, the transcripts, produced in 1974 by Giuliana Donati—one of Ravenna's closest collaborators—remained the only trace of these

[5] For a brief biography of Friedrich Robert Bosshammer (1906–1973): Sara Berger, "Selbstinszenierung eines 'Judenberaters' vor Gericht: Friedrich Boßhammer und das 'funktionalistische Täterbild,'" *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 17 (2008): 243-268; see also Berger, "Il BdS, l'Ufficio IV B4 e la persecuzione degli ebrei," in *I signori del terrore. Polizia nazista e persecuzione antiebraica in Italia (1943-1945)*, ed. Sara Berger (Verona: Cierre Edizioni, 2016), 93-118.

hearings, and they became a key source for subsequent research on the deportation of Jews from Italy, including Liliana Picciotto's foundational *Il libro della memoria*.[6] The original recordings, however—the ones made on tape—were long considered lost: the reels had officially been declared "missing."

However, as sometimes—and indeed often—happens in archives (and in our own homes), a move brought to light what had long seemed irretrievably lost.

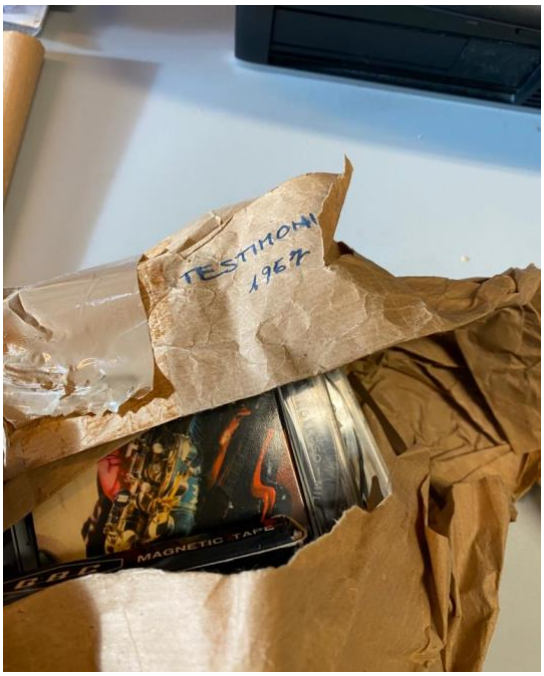



*Fig. 2. The brown paper envelope bearing the handwritten label reading "Testimoni 1967." Photo. by L. Brazzo.*

In 2022, during the transfer of the CDEC archives from via Eupili to the Memoriale della Shoah in Milan, the reels containing the recordings from May 1967 resurfaced. Inside a box, sealed and pushed to the back of a cabinet, a package wrapped in brown paper and sealed with adhesive tape was found, bearing a handwritten label: "Testimoni 1967." It contained seven reel-to-reel magnetic tapes (*Geloso* model), on whose cases were written several names and, in some instances, precise dates. Every indication suggested that these were the missing recordings. Only through digitization was it possible to confirm both the good state of preservation of the tapes and the correspondence between the labels and their actual contents.[7]

If the digitization process had confirmed the integrity of the tapes and their expected contents, listening to them brought back the voices of numerous witnesses—voices that, in some cases, had not been heard since then; the unknown voices of the officials Kaup

[6] Liliana Picciotto, *Il libro della memoria. Gli ebrei deportati dall'Italia (1943–1945)* (Milan: Mursia, 1991 [1st ed.]; 2002 [2nd ed.]). In the first part of the volume, Picciotto reconstructs the different phases of the research: that of the Comitato Ricerche Deportati Ebrei between 1944 and 1953; that of the CDEC carried out by Giuliana Donati between 1972 and 1974; and finally another phase by the CDEC carried out by Picciotto herself between 1979 and 1990. The research phase conducted by Giuliana Donati resulted in the volume edited by the CDEC, *Ebrei in Italia: Deportazione, Resistenza* (Florence: Giuntina, 1975).

[7] The concern that the tapes might have been overwritten or otherwise reused primarily stemmed from the word "Beatles" having been written on one of the tape boxes.

and Schaffrath, those of the interpreters and of Eloisa Ravenna; and also the ambient sounds, the pauses, the incidental exchanges, the emotional states.
Listening to the recordings brings to light a dimension of testimony that written transcripts could not—and were never meant to—convey, and which, when considered alongside a renewed reading of the extensive correspondence between the CDEC and the Dortmund prosecutor's office, opens up new lines of analysis, not so much on the strictly historical level—where many of the facts are now well established—as on the historiographical one.
Listening to the hearings and re-examining this correspondence not only make it possible to add a further element to the reconstruction of a particular historical phase—one in which historians and judges worked side by side, and in which even the smallest detail could constitute a discovery—but also, on the basis of this case, to bring back into focus the relationship between judicial investigation and historical research.[8]


*Fig. 3-4. Reels "Geloso" model. Photo. by L. Brazzo.*

[8] On this, see, among others, Carlo Ginzburg, *Il giudice e lo storico* (Turin: Einaudi, 1991); Devin O. Pendas, *The Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial, 1963–1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Rebecca Wittmann, *Beyond Justice: The Auschwitz Trial* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); Annette Wieviorka, *L'ère du témoin* (Paris: Plon, 1998).

## "A basic groundwork is needed…"
## The CDEC and the Beginning of the German Investigations into the Deportation of Jews from Italy

The issue of the persecution and deportation of Jews from Italy had been brought to the attention of the Dortmund judiciary by Dieter Zeug, a public prosecutor working at the *Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Aufklärung nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen* in Ludwigsburg.[9] Zeug had begun to take an interest in the matter in the autumn of 1962, following the discovery of a file concerning the awarding of the War Merit Cross to nine SS officers in the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz.[10] At the top of the list was the name Friedrich Bosshammer.[11]

In the justification for the award—signed on 31 July 1944 by Wilhelm Harster, head of the Security Police and Security Service in Italy (*BdS Italien*)[12]—it was stated: "Since February 1944, Bosshammer has been conducting the struggle against the Jews in Italian territory *[die Bekämpfung der Juden im italienischen Raum*], distinguishing himself personally in numerous actions and acquiring significant merits in the Endlösung der Judenfrage."[13]

Following this discovery, Zeug initiated a first attempt to gather information on Italy. The available material consisted largely of documentation produced for the Eichmann trial,[14] which, however, proved insufficient for the purposes of opening formal judicial proceedings. What was needed were more specific elements concerning Bosshammer and, above all, witnesses—because, as Zeug wrote to Eytan Otto Liff of the Tel Aviv Police Unit for the Nazi Crimes, "the majority of the accused claim to have been unaware of the purpose and destination of the transports."[15]

For Zeug, therefore, it was essential to clarify the timing and modalities of the deportations

[9] Between 1959 and 1961, Zeug conducted important investigations for both the Treblinka and Sobibor trials. In 1961, he followed the trial of Adolf Eichmann as an observer on behalf of the Federal Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany. The twenty-nine reports he drafted on the proceedings in Jerusalem also contain observations on the modus operandi of the state attorney, Gideon Hausner. On this, see in particular Ruth Bettina Birn, "Fifty Years after: A Critical Look at the Eichmann Trial," *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law* 44 (2011): 443-473, https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/jil/vol44/iss1/21, (accessed December 20, 2025).

[10] Berger, "Selbstinszenierung eines 'Judenberaters' vor Gericht."

[11] The other eight individuals deemed worthy of the War Merit Cross were Schoffmann, Schaberl, Mang, Heisner, Holz, Koch, Donner, and Wartha. See the photographic reproduction of the document in Berger, "Il BdS," 99-100.

[12] Befehlshaber der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD Italien.

[13] Berger, "Il BdS," 100 and 112.

[14] Bosshammer's name had already been mentioned during the Eichmann trial, in the hearing on the "Italian case." It had been cited in connection with a letter from Horst Wagner to Heinrich Müller, in which he reported on a conversation that had taken place in early December 1943 between Eberhard von Thadden, Theodor Dannecker, and Bosshammer concerning the position to be adopted vis-à-vis the government of the Repubblica Sociale Italiana (RSI) with regard to the treatment of Jews in Italy. According to this account, Bosshammer had suggested requesting from the Fascist government "the simultaneous extradition of all Jews gathered in concentration camps for evacuation to the eastern territories." See report by Dieter Zeug, 19 June 1963, B Rep. 057-01, p. 21, Landesarchiv Berlin, Berlin.

[15] Dieter Zeug to Eytan Otto Liff, February 22, 1963. This correspondence is attached to Zeug's letter to Guido Valabrega of 12 March 1963, Corrispondenza, 1963, Fondo Archivio istituzionale, [unprocessed collection], ACDEC.

from Italy, as well as to verify whether killings of Jews had taken place on Italian soil. In an attempt to gather this information, through a network of contacts, in March 1963, Zeug reached Guido Valabrega, then secretary of the CDEC.[16] He asked him a series of precise and direct questions: How many transports carrying Jews had departed from Italian territory to the Auschwitz extermination camp? What was the fate of the deportees? Had they, for the most part, been gassed? Had there been transports to other camps? Beyond the events at Lake Maggiore,[17] had other killings of Jews taken place in specific locations in Italy? And who was responsible for them?[18]

Valabrega pointed out that these questions were extremely complex and far from admitting of any rapid answer. As he wrote on 12 March 1963:

Most esteemed counselor, the problems you raise are, as I believe you are aware, extremely complex. Not only has a considerable amount of time now passed since the events took place—which makes the search for witnesses and documents difficult—but even those who remember and might be able to testify were not, at the time during the war and the persecution—in a position to fully understand what was happening around them.[19]

As for the "existing literature" and the available documentation, the former—Valabrega

[16] Guido Valabrega, a historian, served as director of the Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea from 1960 until October or November 1963. On how Zeug came into contact with Valabrega, see Alessandra Minerbi, "Le carte del processo Bosshammer," in *Enzo Collotti e l'Europa del Novecento*, ed. Simonetta Soldani (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2011), 121-132.

[17] Between 15 and 23 September 1943, units of the 1st SS Panzer Division Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler carried out the first massacres of Jews in Italy following the German occupation. In the towns of Meina, Stresa, Baveno, and Arona, on Lake Maggiore, more than fifty people were killed. The massacre of Meina, one of the best known, was recounted by Marco Nozza in *Hotel Meina. La prima strage di ebrei in Italia* (Milan: Mondadori, 1993), largely based on sources for the Osnabrück trial collected by the CDEC. From Nozza's book, Carlo Lizzani later made the film of the same name, Hotel Meina (2007).

[18] In the final part of his long letter, Zeug reported the information available to him: "According to the findings obtained thus far, a total of 7,496 Jews were deported from Italy, the majority of them presumably to the extermination camp of Auschwitz. Only 610 persons returned, so that the total number of Italian Jews killed in labor and extermination camps should amount to 6,886" (Dieter Zeug to Guido Valabrega, March 12, 1963, Corrispondenza, 1963, Fondo Archivio istituzionale, [unprocessed collection], ACDEC.

[19] Guido Valabrega to Dieter Zeug, 23 March 1963, CDEC Foundation Archives, Fondo Archivio istituzionale CDEC. Corrispondenza, 1963 (unprocessed collection). In some ways, Valabrega's observation echoes the words of Primo Levi in *The Drowned and the Saved*: "Surrounded by death, the deportee was often in no position to evaluate the extent of the slaughter unfolding before his eyes" (Levi, The Drowned and the Saved, trans. Raymond Rosenthal [New York: Vintage Books, 1988], 8).

observed—was still largely lacking,[20] while the latter, although held at the CDEC,[21] remained in a "raw state": it was necessary "to take them out of the archive, to organize them, to study them, to look for others—many others—in order to arrive at a precise assessment. "In particular," he added, "in order to reconstruct the places and stages of the deportation, it is necessary to read the testimonies of former deportees in our possession." In short, what was required was to "carry out a basic groundwork," ["*lavoro di base"*] something that the CDEC, at that time, was not in a position to undertake.[22]

That "groundwork," which was necessary to respond to Zeug's questions, would in fact be taken up by the new secretary of the Centre, Eloisa Ravenna,[23] following a renewed request for collaboration—this time from the public prosecutor's office in Dortmund. This marked the beginning of a new phase.

[20] On this point, see Guido Valabrega, "Appunti sulla persecuzione antisemita in Italia durante l'occupazione nazista," *Il Movimento di Liberazione in Italia* 74 (1964): 21-22: "In general, we believe it may be said that Italian writing on the participation of the Nazis in the persecution of the Jews oscillates between two poles: either it focuses primarily on certain diplomatic aspects [...] or it tends to emphasize particular episodes of an especially grave and bloody character (the events at Meina, the action of 16 October in Rome, the tragedy of deportation). What is lacking, instead, is an inquiry that directs attention first and foremost to the Germans, examining not their remote aims, but their immediate ones, the ways in which they intended to carry out their plans, and the organizational structure on which they relied to implement them." More generally, along the same lines, see also the contribution by Vittorio Giuntella in the first issue of *Quaderni del Centro Studi sulla Deportazione e l'Internamento*: "A study of the role of the Italians in the deportations, and of the specific features of their presence within the the German concentration camp system [*universo concentrazionario tedesco*], presents particular difficulties, since in Italy there was no comparable effort to collect documentation of the kind undertaken in other countries; nor have Italian historians of the Second World War thus far shown interest in this specific field of research. The only available source of information (public archives still being inaccessible) is the relatively abundant body of memoir literature, which flourished above all in the years immediately following Liberation" (Giuntella, "Per una storia degli Italiani nei lager nazisti," *Quaderni del Centro Studi sulla Deportazione e l'Internamento* 1 [1964]: 9).

[21] "The initial nucleus of the archive [of the CDEC] was, from the very moment of the Centre's establishment, the documentation collected by the Comitato Ricerche Deportati Ebrei [...] that collection became the basis for a more properly historical archive, and the starting point for further research" (Eloisa Ravenna, "Il Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea," *Quaderni del Centro Studi sulla Deportazione e l'Internamento* 4 [1968]: 3-11).

[22] "[...] it is my duty to make clear to you that our Centre, although supported by the Italian Union of Jewish Communities [Unione delle Comunità Israelitiche Italiane], cannot afford, given the scarcity of its resources, a systematic, thorough, and conclusive study of the highly interesting research topics that you indicate" (Guido Valabrega to Dieter Zeug, March 23, 1963, Corrispondenza, 1963, Fondo Archivio istituzionale, [unprocessed collection], ACDEC.

[23] Eloisa Ravenna (1930-1973), born in Turin and already a collaborator of the CDEC during Valabrega's tenure, was appointed director (Segretaria generale) in November 1963, at a delicate moment in the Centre's early history: "The Centre is closed and not functioning [...] the concrete fact that the Centre is no longer able to do anything, to respond to public requests, to process files, or to carry out its normal activities seems to me worthy of reflection" (Guido Valabrega to Eloisa Ravenna, 27 October 1963, CDEC Foundation Archives, Fondo Guido Valabrega, box 18, file 75 [digital copy kindly provided by Istituto Parri Milano; original reference: Istituto Parri]). For a portrait of Ravenna, see Liliana Picciotto, "Eloisa e il CDEC," *La Rassegna mensile di Israel* 47 (1981): 9-44.

## "If Not Us, Who?"
## Eloisa Ravenna and the Investigations for the Dortmund Prosecutor (1964-1967)

Toward the end of September 1964, a long typewritten letter in German arrived at the CDEC, addressed to Guido Valabrega and signed by Günther Obluda. He explained that the proceedings concerned former members of the Security Police and the SD command operating in Italy, with particular reference to the headquarters in Verona, and that he had taken over the case from the *Zentralstelle* in Ludwigsburg.
Obluda reported that despite having already conducted numerous interrogations, the investigations had so far produced insufficient results[24] to bring the case to trial: most of the accused continued to claim that they had no knowledge of the deportations or that they believed them to have been initiatives carried out by the Italian authorities. In order to give a decisive impulse to the investigation, he requested the CDEC's support in locating documentation and testimonies relating to eleven points, which he summarized as follows:

> A list of names and information concerning the personnel of the office of BdS Italien in Verona and of its external branches in central and northern Italy.
> Documents concerning the so-called Jewish referents (for example, Dr. Bosshammer and Dannecker in Verona, in Milan, etc.) employed at these offices, and concerning their activity (correspondence, orders, directives, reports, and communications).
> Orders, directives, instructions, circulars, guidelines, and correspondence issued by German offices, in particular the BdS, concerning the so-called measures against the Jews in Italy.
> Testimonies, reports, publications, official records, etc., concerning persons

[24] Particularly significant is Obluda's account of the information at his disposal, also for the tentative language that characterizes it and effectively conveys the still uncertain state of knowledge, at the time, regarding the deportation of Jews from Italy. The Italian translation is also notable for its occasionally unstable or imprecise phrasing, which suggests the absence, at the time, of a fully developed vocabulary for describing such events: "From Central and Northern Italy, during the period of the German occupation, several thousand Italian Jews must likewise have been deported and died in the camps of Auschwitz, Dachau, Mauthausen and Flossenbürg. From documents of the then Ministry of Foreign Affairs and of the German Embassy in Rome it appears that the measures against the Jews in Italy were intensified from March 1943 [*sic*; read 1944]. Since the Italian authorities had evidently initiated proceedings against the Jews only reluctantly and acted only sporadically, the Security Police of the BdS Italy had to be deployed more intensively. For this purpose, in the spring of 1944, Dr. Bosshammer, SS-Sturmbannführer, must have been assigned as officer in charge of Section IV B4 (Jewish Affairs) to the BdS in Verona (probably as Dannecker's successor). Furthermore, around February 1944, the Fossoli camp c/o Carpi-Modena, previously an Italian prisoner-of-war camp, was converted into a "police transit camp" ["campo di passaggio di polizia"] of the BdS Italy and placed under the command of SS-Hauptsturmführer Tito. In this camp, and after its evacuation ["abbandono"], in the police transit camp of Bolzano, the Jews of Central and Northern Italy must have been assembled and from there transported to the above-mentioned extermination camps (Günther Obluda to Guido Valabrega, September 22, 1964, Italian translation of the German original prepared by the CDEC [1964], Fondo Processi ai criminali nazisti. Procure di Dortmund e Berlino, box 2, file 4, ACDEC. The English translation follows as closely as possible the Italian translation of the German original, preserving its phrasing and any inaccuracies).

arrested in various locations in Italy, indicating the exact date, the names and number of those arrested, the names and positions of those who carried out the arrests, and the German personnel and units involved.
Documents concerning the subsequent fate of these persons (transport lists, notifications of arrival, release notices, collection lists, prisoners' letters, death notices, testimonies, etc.).
Documents concerning the establishment, composition, and dissolution of the camps of Fossoli and Bolzano,[25] and possibly of other "concentration camps" run by the Germans in Italy.
Documents concerning the names of the camps[26] and their guards, as well as the relations of command and subordination.
Information, documents, and testimonies concerning the number of Italian Jews interned in the camps, the number of transports to Germany and to extermination camps, and the dates, executions, and destinations of the transports.
Names of the persons and German units that accompanied these transports from the camps in Italy to the German extermination camps.
Copies of judgments issued by Italian courts in which Germans had been convicted of actions against Jews in Italy (for example, Kappler in Rome, Schuster in Bolzano).
Texts of laws and regulations issued by the Italian authorities after August 1943 concerning the treatment of Jews in Italy.[27]

The eight pages Obluda sent were received not by Valabrega, but by Eloisa Ravenna, who had replaced him at the end of 1963. Given the state of knowledge at the time, and the "extremely modest resources" ["*modestissime risorse"*] of a young institution such as the CDEC—which relied largely on voluntary work—this was a request of extraordinary

[25] At Fossoli di Carpi, in the province of Modena, a camp for the detention of Jews arrested following Order n. 5 of 30 November 1943 was established as early as December 1943. From the end of February 1944, the camp was transformed into a *Polizei-Durchgangslager* ("police transit camp") and remained in operation until 1 August 1944. With the closure of Fossoli, the *Polizei-Durchgangslager* at Bolzano came into operation, remaining active until the end of April or early May 1945. On the Fossoli camp in particular, see, among others, Liliana Picciotto, *L'alba ci colse come un tradimento. Gli ebrei nel campo di Fossoli. 1943–1945* (Milan: Mondadori, 2010).

[26] It should be noted that the original German text reads: "Dokumente über die Namen der Führer und Wachmannschaften dieser Lager sowie über die Befehls- und Unterstellungsverhältnisse dieser Lager," whereas the Italian translation produced at CDEC in 1964 renders this as: "documenti sui nomi dei campi e delle guardie di questi campi così come sulle condizioni di comando e dipendenza di questi campi." In this case, the Italian version contains a significant inaccuracy (notably the rendering of "Führer" as "campi"). Although the Italian version is imprecise, it is retained here because it formed the basis of the documentation used at CDEC at the time. The English translation provided here therefore follows the Italian version rather than the original German. Unless otherwise indicated, this approach has been adopted throughout the present study.

[27] Günther Obluda to Guido Valabrega, September 22, 1964, Fondo Processi ai criminali nazisti. Procure di Dortmund e Berlino, box 2, file 41, ACDEC. The translation from German into Italian was carried out within the CDEC (1964). The German original of the letter is attached to the translation.

scope.[28] Nevertheless, after an initial brief and preliminary reply,[29] she devoted herself fully to the task.

It was, in her view, a responsibility that went far beyond the mere search for documents. "If not us, who?" she would say a few years later in an interview for the Swiss Italian Radio [*Radio della Svizzera Italiana*]. Who else could undertake such work? How could a trial on the deportation of Jews from Italy take place without the contribution of Italian Jews themselves—"without testimony from us, without help from us…?"[30]

[28] It is worth noting that from December 1964 onward, the CDEC was also involved in the Osnabrück court's investigations into the massacres at Lake Maggiore. The *Zentralestelle* in Ludwigsburg entrusted these investigations to Prosecutor Wachter (see Wachter to Eloisa Ravenna, 10 December 1964, Fondo Processo ai criminali nazisti. Procura di Osnabrück, box 1, file 2, ACDEC). Alongside its research on Bosshammer for the Dortmund court, the CDEC therefore also carried out research for Osnabrück. In this case, the trial took place in 1968 and resulted in life sentences for the defendants. In 1970, during the appeal proceedings in Berlin, the crimes were deemed time-barred and the convictions were annulled. On this, see the already cited Nozza, *Hotel Meina*, as well as the documentation in the CDEC Foundation Archives, Fondo Processo ai criminali nazisti. Procura di Osnabrück, in particular boxes 3 and 4 relating to the 1968 judgment and the statute of limitations.

[29] Eloisa Ravenna to Günther Obluda, 12 October 1964, Fondo Processi ai criminali nazisti. Procure di Dortmund e Berlino, box 2, file 41, ACDEC. Since all the correspondence between Ravenna and Obluda is preserved in the same file, subsequent references will indicate only the correspondents and the date given at the head of each letter (draft copies, in the case of letters sent by Ravenna). The Italian translations of the correspondence are, unless otherwise indicated, the official versions transmitted by the German judicial authorities, received by Ravenna and preserved in the file. In the cases of letters available only in German, the Italian translations were prepared by collaborators of the CDEC. For the purposes of this study, the Italian translations preserved in the files have been adopted.

[30] "Senza la testimonianza nostra, senza l'aiuto nostro…?" Interview with Eloisa Ravenna for Radio della Svizzera Italiana, February 1973, ACDEC.

*Fig. 5. Eloisa Ravenna (1930-1973), Laura Ravenna Tedesco, Photographic collection, ACDEC.*

It was evidently with this feeling, at its core, that Ravenna began her excavation work in the still "raw" archive of the CDEC. In 1964, the requests formulated by Obluda—which today might appear relatively straightforward to address—implied a painstaking process of reconstruction, detail by detail, starting from a base that was, in many respects, almost non-existent.

The correspondence between Ravenna and Obluda offers an extraordinarily rich and eloquent record of this slow process of gathering and piecing together clues and information. It is precisely with the intention of showing the gradual construction of knowledge—the literal discovery of names, places, and events that are today taken for granted—that I quote from it at length here. Through it, one can clearly see how Ravenna's work did not consist merely in what might be called "digging" in the archives, but also in the selection, reading, comparison, verification, and organization of heterogeneous and almost always fragmentary sources.

From this correspondence, it is possible to grasp, in an almost photographic manner, the state of the CDEC Foundation Archives (and Library) in the early 1960s; at the same time, in some cases, it makes it possible to restore the context and provenance of documents

now preserved in the CDEC's collections that are still lacking such information. From October 1964 onward, Ravenna engaged in an intense exchange of letters with Obluda, often accompanied by a substantial number of documents—sometimes sent as copies, sometimes on loan. In a letter dated 29 October, for example, she announced the imminent dispatch of documentation relating to the San Vittore prison and the Bolzano camp, together with testimonies of former deportees preserved at the Centre:

> In the next few days, I should be able to send you [...] photocopies of several pages from the registration records of inmates at San Vittore for the period March-November 1944, indicating those who were Jewish, as well as some from a similar register from the Bolzano camp, together with information on both places of detention (materials that I have only been able to locate in recent days). As for direct testimonies from some former deportees, these are held at our Centre, and it will certainly be possible to provide you with copies. I know that Dr. Enzo Collotti, whom you have already contacted, has already sent you a publication of his entitled "Dati sulle forze di polizia fasciste e tedesche nell'Italia settentrionale nell'aprile 1945."[31]

In the following weeks, the flow of documents became more substantial. On 19 November, Ravenna sent two publications concerning the deportation of Jews from Rome:

> Today, I am sending you two publications concerning the deportation of Jews from Rome, which may perhaps be of use to you: one is a brochure [*sic*] published by the Jewish Community of Rome, entitled "*Ottobre 1943: Cronaca di un'infamia*," containing a report by the president of the community, Ugo Foà, on the racial measures implemented in Rome directly by the German occupation authorities after 8 September;[32] the other is a study by Tagliacozzo entitled "*La Comunità di Roma sotto l'incubo della svastica. La grande razzia del 16 ottobre 1943*," published in a volume issued by our Centre (1963).[33]

On 25 November, she then sent a detailed dossier on the Bolzano camp:

> With reference to points 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 of your letter of 22.9.64, I am sending you the material collected so far on the concentration camp of Bolzano [...] a

[31] Eloisa Ravenna to Günther Obluda, October 29, 1964. Enzo Collotti's article, "Dati sulle forze di polizia fasciste e tedesche nell'Italia settentrionale nell'aprile 1945," was published in *Il movimento di liberazione in Italia* 71 (1963): 51-72.

[32] A copy of this report is held in the Fondo Comunità ebraiche in Italia, box 5, file 38 ("Roma"), ACDEC. A copy of the brochure "Ottobre 1943: Cronaca di un'infamia" is preserved in the Fondo Goffredo Roccas, box 1, file 1, ACDEC.

[33] The article was published in *Gli ebrei in Italia durante il fascismo* 3, ed. Guido Valabrega (1963), issued by the Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea (CDEC). The first two *Quaderni*, published under the same title, had appeared respectively in 1960, edited by Paolo Foà for the Federazione Giovani Ebrei d'Italia (FGEI), and 1962, edited by Guido Valabrega for the CDEC.

> photocopy of a list of Jews who were in the Bolzano camp (5 pages)[34] […]. I have attached a photocopy of the cover of the register to the sheets of the list. The designation "Ebrei" is legible on the second page of the list, in the bottom right. It is likely that this list dates from the final months of the camp's activity, since on the second page, one may read the name of the internee De Benedetti Leblis Anna, an elderly Jewish woman who survived deportation. A handwritten testimony by her on the "Life of the Bolzano Camp" is preserved in our archive, of which I am sending you a typed copy.[35]

The material, as can be seen, included, among other things, internment registers, handwritten testimonies, nominal lists, clandestine correspondence, and administrative documentation. Ravenna emphasized its fragmentary nature and the difficulty of interpreting it, while nevertheless attempting to extract potentially useful information from it, even from the smallest details: the designation "Ebrei" [*Jews*] appearing in the registers, the markings used in the camp, the information transmitted clandestinely to the outside, and the cross-references between testimonies and local sources.[36]
On 10 December 1964, Ravenna sent another letter, which contained a great deal of information. The importance of this communication—also for the subsequent development of the investigation—is such that it is worth quoting from it at length:

> Dear Mr. Obluda, to follow up my letter of yesterday, I am sending you documentation concerning Jews in the San Vittore prison in Milan.[37] First of all, I

[34] Documentation on the Bolzano camp is preserved in the Fondo Carceri, Località di internamento e Campi di Concentramento in Italia, box 3, file 49 ("Bolzano"), ACDEC

[35] Eloisa Ravenna to Günther Obluda, November 25, 1964.

[36] The letter continued as follows: "In a separate mailing, I have sent you a copy of the journal Il Cristallo from Bolzano (June '64), containing some testimonies on that camp. In the piece by E. Pedrotti ('Il "lager" di Bolzano'), on p. 10, reference is made to clandestine activity within the camp, and to committees responsible for transmitting information and lists of detainees to the outside from time to time […]. I enclose a photostatic copy of a letter dated 4 April ('45), 'Cara Anita,' with one of the aforementioned lists of names, in which two Jewish names appear (Renzo PORTALEONE and WAKTOR Enrico, marked with 'giallo L': yellow mark, because Jews, 'L' as in 'Lavoratore,' likely a translation of 'Arbeiter'). According to a former female internee in the camp, from whom I obtained this and the following documents, there was a small group of Jews in the camp—around ten—who wore a yellow armband with the letter 'A,' while all the others wore only a registration number); and a copy of a letter dated 14.12.44, signed Taura, informing her husband of the deportation of Mrs. Lucia (Debenedetti, Jewish), who did not return […]. I further enclose: – a list of deaths that occurred in the camp from 1 January 1945, recorded at the Municipality of Bolzano (2 sheets), in which the names of ten Jews appear; – a copy (4 sheets) of a testimony preserved in our archive, by a certain Amerigo Sedun [*sic*; read Sadun] of Florence, formerly interned in Bolzano […] – an extract from the report of Criminal Commissioner Arthur Schoster of 21 June (6 sheets), which, although it does not refer to Jews, may nevertheless be of use to you for the mention of certain names. In your letter of 22 September, under point 10, you mentioned a certain Schuster who was reportedly tried and convicted in Bolzano for having carried out measures against Jews: since no one has been able to tell me anything either about the trial or about the defendant, I thought that this may instead refer to this Arthur Schoster, a German appointed by the Allied authorities to conduct an inquiry for the Criminal Court established in Bolzano in 1945" (Eloisa Ravenna to Günther Obluda, November 25, 1964, originally in Italian).

[37] After 8 September 1943, three of the six wings (*raggi*) of the San Vittore prison in Milan were requisitioned by the German occupying forces: two wings were reserved for political prisoners (wings IV and VI) and one for Jews (wing V) awaiting deportation. The remaining three raggi of the prison remained under the administration of the Milan police headquarters (*Questura*) and were reserved for civilian or political detainees (see Liliana Picciotto, *Gli ebrei in provincia di Milano 1943/45. Persecuzione e deportazione* [Milan: Provincia di Milano, 1992],

am sending you a photocopy of twenty-three pages from the Registration Registers [*Registri di Matricole*].[38] which were compiled, by order of the prison administration (the SS German administration), by the Registration Office (an internal office of the prison). On the basis of the records kept by the Registration Office, the prison administration updated its "card index," in which the detainees were recorded.

The originals of the four registers from which I was able to make these reproductions cover the period from 11 March 1944 to 14 November 1944, and are still preserved in Milan: one is held by a municipal museum,[39] three are the property of Don Franco Rimoldi […], who was arrested and detained in San Vittore for political reasons in 1944.

[…]

In a signed statement preserved at this Centre, Don Franco Rimoldi recalls the particular treatment reserved for Jews in the [San Vittore] Prison:[40] the humiliating body searches carried out in order to locate money and valuables; their confinement in the large dormitories on the top floor and their complete segregation from other detainees; the different treatment in the distribution of food, reduced to a minimum (whereas other detainees received three portions of food during the day, however meagre, Jews were given only the morning coffee and the midday soup); the lack of food distribution in the hours preceding departure from the prison (and sometimes the wait lasted for many hours!); the ill-treatment, at the moment of departure, inflicted even on weak, sick, and elderly persons (a pregnant woman was kicked in the abdomen by an SS man; children were literally thrown onto the trucks, on top of others, due to lack of space, etc. etc.); there is a recollection of a Jew who was flogged to death by an SS man for having been "suspected" of attempting to escape.

From the period in which he was detained in San Vittore, Don Rimoldi recalls that the prison administration was headed by two SS men: Klims[41] (or Klinzer?) and FRANZ [*sic*].[42] Some years after 1945, according to information obtained through

28; Picciotto, *Il libro della memoria*, 887-889). From September 1943, the first commander of the German sector was SS-Hauptscharführer Helmuth Klemm; from December 1943, he was assisted by SS-Oberscharführer Leander Klimsa. Klimsa was promoted to director in February or March 1944, while Klemm was transferred to the Milan IV B4 office, under SS-Hauptscharführer Otto Koch. Klimsa's deputy was SS-Rottenführer Franz Staltmayer (see also Luigi Borgomaneri, *Hitler a Milano. I crimini di Theodor Saevecke capo della Gestapo* [Milan: Datanews, 2000], 70).

[38] A photocopy of the register, together with other documentation relating to the San Vittore prison, is held in the Fondo Carceri, località di internamento e Campi di Concentramento in Italia, box 7, file 59 ("San Vittore"), ACDEC.

[39] This appears to refer to the Museo del Risorgimento in Milan.

[40] This is a handwritten deposition in Eloisa Ravenna's hand, signed by Don Franco Rimoldi. It is preserved in the Fondo Carceri, località di internamento e campi di concentramento in Italia, box 7, file 59 ("San Vittore"), ACDEC

[41] The correct name is SS-Oberscharführer Leander Klimsa, initially deputy commander and, from February or March 1944, commander of the German sector of the San Vittore prison (see Picciotto, Il libro della memoria, 821 and 887).

[42] This refers to SS-Rottenführer Franz Staltmayer, who served at San Vittore as deputy director of the German section from spring 1944 (see Picciotto, *Il libro della memoria*, 821 and 887).

a network of informants that had formed among members of charitable organizations (Opera Pontificia, etc.), former resistance fighters, and private individuals interested in following the fate of these criminals, FRANZ [*sic*] was in Berlin, employed in a corps of civic guards[…].
Also with regard to the conditions of Jews in San Vittore, I had the occasion to speak with Dr. Cesare Gatti of Milan, who at the time was a doctor at the [San Vittore] Prison and who told me that he had been strictly forbidden to treat Jews. Despite this prohibition, Dr. Gatti nevertheless tried to visit them when necessary, and was reprimanded twice (by Saevecke[43]): once because he had opposed the departure of a pregnant Jewish woman, and once because he had arranged for milk to be given to very young children.
As for testimonies, many more could be collected (and it will also always be possible for me to provide you with names and addresses of persons still living and still able to testify). Here, I limit myself to sending you only a few items, for information purposes and, one might say, by way of example.
I enclose, for example, a typed copy of the testimony given to this Centre by Mrs. Guglielmina Basevi[44] concerning the deportation of her mother, Enrichetta Forti, after a period of detention in San Vittore. And a photocopy of the testimony of Dr. Giuseppe Lanza concerning the deportation of his mother-in-law, aged seventy-six, which took place after several weeks of detention in San Vittore.
I am also sending you photostatic copies of certain passages taken from three memoirs by former deportees who were detained in San Vittore:
– From the book *Triangolo rosso* (3rd ed. – Milan, 1953) by Don Paolo Liggeri, now director of the "La Casa" Institute in Milan, arrested in March 1944 at the Opera Pia Cardinal Ferrari, which he directed and in which he sheltered Jews and organized their escape, I have had the following pages reproduced: 50-51, 53-54, 68-69, 85, 86, 99, 200-201, which are relevant to the subject of your investigation.
– From the book *Dal Carcere di S. Vittore ai lager tedeschi sotto la forza nazifascista* (2nd ed., 1954) by Gaetano De Martino, arrested probably for political reasons (he was an anti-fascist, but the reason for his arrest was not communicated to him), I have had the following pages reproduced: 43-44, 65-66, 97.
– From the book *Un uomo a tre numeri* (Edizioni Avanti, 1955) by Enea Fergnani,[45] arrested on 10 December 1944 and deported for political reasons, I have had the following pages reproduced: 20-21, 23-24, 44-45-46-47-48-49, 62, 78, 83, 97-98-99-100.
– From the book *Un popolo piange (La tragedia degli ebrei italiani)* by G. Ottani,[46] I had begun to have a photocopy made of p. 37 (on San Vittore), but since there are numerous passages that may be of interest to you, I am sending you the book

[43] SS-Hauptsturmführer Theodor Saevecke, head of the Security Police (SIPO-SD) in Milan.
[44] See Fondo Vicissitudini dei singoli, box 10, file 279, ACDEC.
[45] In the CDEC library catalogue, only the edition published in 1945 by Speroni (Milan), with a preface by Luigi Gasparotto, is recorded.
[46] Published in Milan in 1945 by S. Giovene, this volume forms part of the CDEC Foundation's library collection.

on loan, marking in pencil the passages relating to the subject of your investigation […].

I also enclose several copies of documents collected by Dr. Giovanni Melodia, secretary of the Associazione Nazionale Ex Deportati Politici nei campi nazisti […]:[47]

– On the two sheets entitled "Caso Saevecke" (signed: G. Melodia), there are some references to Koch,[48] Hans, Franz, Gratzach. Mention is also made of Antonio Ingeme and Gina Righi, arrested, detained in San Vittore, deported, and died in Germany after being accused of assisting Jews (their entry into San Vittore is recorded on p. 25, 24 March 1944, of the above-mentioned registers, and the page is among those enclosed).

– In the "Notiziario per la Stampa" (22.2.1962), on p. 2 the SS Klinzer [*sic*], Klem (Klemm), Mosner, Franz are mentioned, and on p. 4, Gratzach.

– From the "Deposizioni del giorno 22.3.1963," given in the presence of Dr. Melodia himself and Dr. Wiedemann (official of the Ministry of the Interior in Germany), I am sending you the testimony of Mr. Aldo Ravelli (Via Borgogna 7 – Milan), for certain remarks that may be of interest to you.

In the testimony of Prof. Giuliana Cardosi concerning the deportation of her mother, Clara Pirani (4 pages, with annexes),[49] the texts [both] of circular no. 3968/442 of the Ministry of the Interior (7 March 1944)[50] and of an order by Koch (8 May 1944) are reproduced […].

In addition to the material already mentioned in my letter of 25 November, I am preparing a list of dates of departures from the Fossoli camp for Germany (departures, that is, of convoys of deportees); in this regard, it should be recalled

[47] In 1963, the Associazione Nazionale Ex Deportati (ANED), based in Milan and chaired by Giovanni Melodia, was involved in the investigations into the case of Theodor Saevecke initiated by the Zentralestelle in Ludwigsburg. The public prosecutor Gerhard Wiedemann was sent to Milan and collected a number of witness statements at the ANED, including those of Giovanni Melodia, Aldo Ravelli and Guido Valabrega. For a detailed reconstruction of the entire affair, see Borgomaneri, *Hitler a Milano*. See also Fondo Guido Valabrega, box 2, file 10, ACDEC [digital copy kindly provided by Istituto Parri Milano; original reference: Istituto Parri].

[48] From September 1943, SS-Sturmscharführer Otto Koch served as Judenreferent—that is, the official in charge of Jewish affairs—at the Aussenkommando in Milan (see Carlo Gentile and Lutz Klinkhammer, "L'apparato centrale della Sicherheitspolizei in Italia: Struttura, uomini e competenze," in Berger, *I signori del terrore*, 36-68).

[49] In all likelihood, these documents correspond to part of the material now held in the Fondo Vicissitudini dei singoli, series I, box 20, file 589, ACDEC.

[50] "ACS, MI, PS, Massime (category R9 'Razzismo'), box 183, file 19, 'Ebrei da internare,' Chief of Police Tamburini to all provincial prefects, telegram no. 3968/442, 7 March 1944: Following a similar communication received from the General Directorate for Demography and Race, and with reference to telegraphic circular no. 1412/442 of 22 January, it is confirmed that Jews of pure blood, both Italian and foreign, must be sent to concentration camps, with the exception of those over seventy years of age and the seriously ill. Excluded from this measure are Jews from mixed families, including foreign Jews married to Italian Aryans or to Aryan citizens of any nationality. Also exempt are those who, pursuant to Law no. 1204 of 13 July 1939 (still in force), have obtained a formal declaration of not (repeat: not) belonging to the Jewish race. It is further added that the Jewish property regime has been assigned to the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Finance and will be regulated by the Duce's legislative decree dated 4 January. Chief of Police Tamburini" (see Matteo Stefanori, "Ordinaria amministrazione: I campi di concentramento per ebrei nella Repubblica Sociale Italiana" [PhD diss., Università degli Studi della Tuscia-Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense, 2012], 123) (originally in Italian).

> that these convoys generally included both Jews and non-Jews: 7,495 Jews[51] were deported from Italy, but overall, including both Jews and non-Jews, approximately 33,000 Italians were deported to Germany (among civilians), and also lists of the various contingents of Jews deported from individual cities.
> I would be very grateful if you could send me an acknowledgement of your receipt of this and of the previous letters as soon as possible, also because I would like to know from you whether this work of mine, which is necessarily very fragmentary and incomplete, may be of any use to you.[52]

Obluda was rather sparing in his replies, and only in mid-December did he respond to the numerous letters that Ravenna had sent in the preceding weeks. He confirmed that he had received all the materials sent and, although his office had not yet been able to translate everything, he was nevertheless already in a position to inform her that they constituted material and information "of great importance," since they had brought to light "new facts for the investigation and therefore of particular importance."[53] He further added that the identity of the German guard units at Fossoli and Bolzano had been almost completely established: "The camp commander named Tito, Hans Haage, […] Else Lächert ('the tigress'), an assistant of Lächert ('the little tigress'), Günter Beermann, Sain (or a similar name), two Ukrainians of unknown name."
Obluda then wrote that he needed the exact dates of the transports departing from Fossoli and Bolzano "bound for Germany, Austria and Poland," as well as information on the identity of the SS personnel attached to the BdS in Verona.[54] In the meantime, he had been able to ascertain that the *Judenreferent* was SS-Sturmbannführer Friedrich Bosshammer and that he had held the position probably from February or April 1944 until the autumn. It is said that after this period, he became head of the detachment in Padua. His predecessor in his capacity as *Judenreferent* (Ref. IV B 4) was probably SS-Hauptsturmführer Theodor Dannecker.[55] His collaborators may have been: an SS-Hauptsturmführer Müller, an SS-Hauptscharführer Arendt[56] (or a similar name).[57]
At the end of 1964, everything was still in the conditional: dates uncertain, names yet to be verified. And yet, slowly, the picture was beginning to take shape; what was now needed was to find witnesses capable of confirming or refuting these first reconstructions.
Thus, in the first half of 1965, alongside archival research, Ravenna added direct fieldwork

[51] This number derives from the list compiled by Massimo Adolfo Vitale in 1947. See "Elenco dei deportati dall'Italia negli anni 1943 – 1944", bound typescript, Fondo CRDE, ACDEC.

[52] Eloisa Ravenna to Günther Obluda, December 10, 1964, originally in Italian.

[53] Eloisa Ravenna to Guido Obluda, December 21, 1964, originally in Italian.

[54] All of this information can be found in Picciotto, *Il libro della memoria*, 851-949; see also Gentile and Klinkhammer, "L'apparato centrale della Sicherheitspolizei in Italia."

[55] SS-Hauptsturmführer Theodor Dannecker (1913-1945) served as Judenreferent in Italy from September 1943 to January 1944. On 16 October 1943, he directed the operations for the roundup of the Jews of Rome (see Picciotto, *Il libro della memoria*, 881; Berger, "Il BdS").

[56] This is in fact Hans Arndt, a liaison officer between the Gestapo (Amt IV) office in Verona and the Fossoli camp, and one of the direct perpetrators of the deportation of Jews (see Picciotto, *Il libro della memoria*, 915).

[57] Günther Obluda to Eloisa Ravenna, February 22, 1965.

with witnesses. After Genoa,[58] between late June and early July (24 June-4 July), we find her gathering information in Padua and Verona. In a long letter dated 15 July 1965, she explained in detail everything she had been able to reconstruct by speaking with local people.

She reported that in Padua, she had found confirmation of the information according to which "Bosshammer" had been in charge of the SD command: the director of a clinic in Padua, Professor Giambattista Belloni, "vaguely" remembered the name, but was unable to say when Bosshammer had actually arrived in the city. Another witness, Professor Oselladore, told her that he might have arrived "approximately" in the "early months of 1944." The same Oselladore recounted that the clinic had been requisitioned by the German Security Police in order to establish their offices there, along with prisons and a torture chamber in the basement; he also still remembered the "large fire" [*grande falò*] that the Germans had lit in the courtyard before leaving.

Professor Giorgio Erminio Fantelli, a former partisan, had also provided her with some information about Bosshammer, and Ravenna reported his testimony directly in the letter, "as she had been able to transcribe it":

> Bosamer [*sic*][59] was certainly SS. He was also known as a big shot commander [*grosso comandante*]: they called him "the Major [*il Maggiore*]; I believe that he was in Padua only briefly, just passing through, between '44 and '45. Don Ugo Orso […] told me that it was this Bosamer [*sic*] who, in April '45, gave the order to shoot, in reprisal, the members of the Venetian [*veneto*] CLN who had been captured on 7 January '45. In October (or August) '44 he must have been in the Grappa area, between Bassano and Montebelluna, to direct a roundup. Don Ugo Orso was chaplain to the Italian SS (Banda Carità)[60]

Bosshammer, Ravenna went on to report, had also been mentioned by Professor Mario Mosconi, also from Padua, who in his memoir of his time as a detainee (*Mai più come allora. 100 giorni alla Polizia criminale nazista* [Venice, 1955]) referred to him together with a "Lieutenant Kofler, a Captain Danzer, and a Lieutenant Smith, all of the SD."

In Padua, Ravenna also stated that she had been given access to the diary of an inspector of the Italian Red Cross, Lucia De Marchi, who had been serving in the city since 1940.

[58] Ravenna travelled to Genoa in mid-December 1964, but reported the results of that visit to Obluda in two separate letters dated 14 and 15 April 1965 (see Eloisa Ravenna to Günther Obluda, April 14 and 15, 1965, originally in Italian).

[59] In the above-mentioned 1973 interview with the Swiss Italian Radio [Radio della Svizzera Italiana], referring to this testimony by Fantelli, Ravenna stated: "It was very difficult to find a witness capable of giving Bosshammer's name, even after a long stay—by which I mean as little as five or six days—spent in the places where he had operated, in Verona, in Padua…. Only one evening, very late, did I manage to get a partisan leader to tell me this name, distorted, in connection with events relating to the Resistance…described rather vaguely, but at least he was the first person in Italy to give me this name, because even in circles that might have been close to Verona, no one was able to name him" (Eloisa Ravenna, interview with Radio della Svizzera Italiana, February 1973, ACDEC).

[60] Eloisa Ravenna to Günther Obluda, July 15, 1965, originally in Italian. On Don Ugo Orso, see G.E. Fantelli, *La resistenza dei cattolici nel padovano* (Padua: Federazione italiana volontari della libertà, 1965), which also contains an interview conducted by Fantelli himself with Don Orso in 1964.

From that diary, she had copied the entry for 19 October 1943, which referred to "a train loaded with Roman Jews on its way to deportation, which stopped at the station and whose wagons were whose wagons were opened, contrary to normal procedure [*eccezionalmente aperti*]."[61]

With regard to the Jews of Padua, Ravenna explained that she had learned that those arrested—"around fifty"—from 3 December 1943 onward had been "detained in an old villa in Vò Vecchio, converted into a concentration camp, where—according to witnesses—they were treated fairly humanely by the Fascist guards [...] until 17 July 1944, the day on which they were brutally taken away by German SD soldiers." In support of this information, she then quoted a fragment of testimony collected by the parish priest of Vò Vecchio, Don Giuseppe Rasia, whom she had visited in search of information:

> On Monday, 17 July 1944, in the afternoon, they were all deported by German soldiers and taken first to Padua, then to Germany: they were not allowed to take anything with them. Mr. Gesses,[62] at the moment of the arrest, was in Padua to have his teeth treated [*governarsi i denti [sic!]*]. Having learned of what had happened, he returned here immediately, because the Germans had threatened that if he could not be found, the camp commissioner would be arrested in his place and deported. Once the camp had been dissolved, the commissioner was being sought by the Fascists—at least, so I was told—because he was accused of having treated the Jews too well.[63]

In both Padua and Verona, Ravenna had proceeded along several lines, speaking with individuals both from the Jewish community and from circles of former partisans. Others, however, she had decided from the outset not to approach, because, as she explained, "for reasons connected with their political past, they would not have spoken, and might even have avoided seeing me. Nevertheless, I attempted to approach some of these people as well, and in some cases not without result."

As for the BdS archives, which Obluda had inquired about, she reported that at least two people had confirmed to her that they had been destroyed by the Germans themselves:

> I was told that both in Padua and in Verona, before leaving the city, the respective commands set fire to large quantities of documents,(testimony of Professor Guido Oselladore [...] for Padua, and of Dr. Giulio Sancassani [...] for Verona[ ) ]. Professor Oselladore, then director of the clinic at Via Armando Diaz 9, which had in fact been requisitioned by the SD command in Padua in order to establish its

[61] This most likely refers to the transport that departed from Rome on 18 October 1943 following the roundup of 16 October.

[62] The correct name is Elia Gesess (1896-1945). Originally from Odessa and married to Ada Ancona of Trieste, Gesess was arrested in Tirano (province of Sondrio) in late December 1943, then transferred to the camp at Vò Vecchio, subsequently to the prison in Padua, and finally to the Risiera di San Sabba in Trieste. From Trieste, he was deported to Auschwitz on 31 July 1944. He was later transferred to Dachau, where he died in February 1945. Ada and their six-year-old daughter Sara were selected for the gas chambers immediately upon arrival at Auschwitz (see Picciotto, *Il libro della memoria*, 107 and 321).

[63] Eloisa Ravenna to Günther Obluda, July 15, 1965, originally in Italian.

> offices there and, in the basement, prisons and a torture chamber, still recalls the "large fire" that was lit in the courtyard of the clinic itself.[64]

After the summer of 1965, the exchange between Ravenna and Obluda continued steadily. The work focused in particular on the systematic collection of lists of deportees, requested from the various Italian Jewish communities and organized according to criteria relevant to the investigation: date of arrest, places of detention in Italy, and date and destination of deportation. At the same time, the search for both testimonies and documents continued, in particular at the Central State Archives.

At the end of November 1965, Ravenna had the opportunity to travel to Germany and to meet Günther Obluda and his family in person.[65] It was an experience charged with emotion ("stimulating and full of impressions"): Ravenna returned with "a sense of liberation and great ease." Until then, she had considered it impossible to have German friends with whom she could spend time together at ease; yet this is precisely what happened, thanks to the warm welcome from Obluda and his family and friends, and to the possibility of openly addressing even the most painful aspects of the past with them. And this despite (or perhaps thanks to) the use of a language—English—that was not native to any of them.

> I am very pleased with our meeting: perhaps some years ago I would have considered it impossible for me to make friends with a German, to look pictures together, to laugh with him and drink beer together. Then, our common work, my firm belief that Mr. Obluda makes his inquiries with an unbias [*sic*] mind trying hard to go to the bottom of the matter made me change some positions of mine. Though our possibilities of communicating, outside the Landgericht office were rather scanty I think that in the essential things we managed to understand one another pretty well: now, that we have spoken togethers [*sic*], now that I know we can use a common language, now that I have realized that also among you there is somebody who still feels burden of the past, somebody who tries hard to edify the present on entirely new bases, all that gave me a sense of liberation and of great ease. I must say that this was all due to you two, and mostly to the conversations with you, Mr. Obluda, who on every occasion showed a keen sensibility, a sincere intention not to drop certain subjects, not "to choose silence," not "to wish to forget." And all that was necessary so that we could speak freely about all things of life, […] Friday night when we parted at Bochum station I was really moved, and after so many fears and anxieties here in Italy, at last I experienced some peace within myself.[66]

[64] Ibid.

[65] Obluda had sent an invitation to meet in person as early as summer 1965 (see Günther Obluda to Eloisa Ravenna, July 22, 1965, originally in English). Ravenna welcomed it enthusiastically, expressing the hope of giving rise to "an understanding and […] a genuine friendship" (Eloisa Ravenna to Günther Obluda, October 4, 1965, originally in English).

[66] Eloisa Ravenna to Günther and Gisela Obluda, December 9, 1965, originally in English. That letter was first answered, in Italian, by a couple of Obluda's friends: "Abbiamo parlato francamente e senza reticenze e se Lei è ritornata in Italia con l'impressione che nel mio paese vivono uomini—e non sono pochi—di buona volontà,

Whether personal or work-related, Obluda's replies by letter remained sporadic: he responded to the personal letter from December only in March 1966, and to the many work-related letters that followed, Ravenna, as late as June 1966, was still prompting a reply: "Since I was in Dortmund, I haven't received any 'official' letters from you." She asked him to provide at least an acknowledgement of his receipt of the material sent "from time to time," but also requested an update on the progress of the investigation: "I should be glad if you could tell me how your work is getting on, and when you expect that the trial will begin, and who the accused will be."[67]

No reply came, but Ravenna continued to send lists, testimonies, and documents; she also continued to supplement, verify, and update the names and contact details of individuals who, through direct or indirect experience, might be called upon as witnesses. It was only in the spring of 1967 that all this preparatory work seemed to begin to take concrete shape. In a letter dated 5 May 1967,[68] Obluda announced the arrival in Milan of two officials from the German public prosecutor's office, Wilhelm Kaup and "Herr Schaffrath," tasked with "interviewing, for informational purposes, the witnesses you have identified in Milan and the surrounding area, in order to determine which of these witnesses will still need to be heard through judicial assistance from the Italian authorities."[69]

It was an official communication, but one that reached Ravenna with some delay, certainly after an initial informal contact—in English and undated—in which Obluda had already urgently requested her assistance in organizing the mission, asking her to verify the availability of the witnesses, to ensure the presence of an interpreter, and to receive the two officials at the CDEC.[70] In essence, he entrusted Ravenna with the entire practical

allora il suo viaggio è stato utile" ("We spoke frankly and without reticence, and if you returned to Italy with the impression that in my country there are men—and not a few—of good will, then your journey has been worthwhile") (Rudolf Jordan to Eloisa Ravenna, 28 December 1965, original in Italian). Obluda and his wife Gisela only replied in March 1966: "There is so little time to write a letter in quiet, because our office, our family und [*sic]* our child require more time than the day spends. […] It was very important for our work to speek [*sic*] with you and personally a great luck and great pleasure to live here with you. We are very gratefull [*sic*] to You for Your kindness and your appreciation for us young german [*sic]* people. We hope very much, that you have got an impression of a better Germany than You and Your fellow-believers must have had in account of the crimes till 1945. We are very glad, that you wrote in your letter from 9.XII.65, that after your visite [*sic*] to us you have got a sence [*sic*] of liberation and of great ease. Your words were for us, and specially for the prosecutors in these matters in Dortmund, a great encouragement to do our work further on too with all eagerness and thouroghness *[sic]*" (Günther and Gisela Obluda to Eloisa Ravenna, March 5, 1966, originally in English).

[67] Eloisa Ravenna to Günther Obluda, 8 June 1966, original in Italian. Between February and June 1966, Ravenna sent ten letters to Obluda, each accompanied by materials and information gathered in the course of her research. A further three were sent between July and November of the same year.

[68] In 1966, only two letters from Obluda are recorded, dated 21 and 23 November; in 1967, the first recorded letter is that of May 5, 1967.

[69] Günther Obluda to Eloisa Ravenna, May 5, 1967, originally in English.

[70] "Dear Mrs. Ravenna! I am sorry that our interpreter for the Italian language did not finish the translation of my letter to you from 4.4.1967 till today. Because the matter is urgent, I send now the letter in German language and hope, you will find an interpreter for the letter. Mr. Kaup will go to Milano—when possible at the 16 Mai 1967—accompanied bei [sic] Mr. Schaffrath (both persons belong to our criminal-police (better: detective force?) in Düsseldorf and are working in the matter BdS Italien against Bosshammer and others. The main-motive of their visit is to speak with that Italian person you see on the list added to this letter. The adresses and names of this [sic] persons you gave me in our correspondences. The persons had been in Fossoli, Bozen or German Lagers. Are you in Milano from 16. till 30. Mai 1967? Would you have the kindness to receive Mr. Kaup and Schaffrath in Milano at via Eupili in the CDEC? Is it possible for you to get an interpreter for them

organization of the investigation in Milan.
Ravenna set to work immediately. On 10 May 1967, she informed Obluda that she had personally verified the availability of numerous witnesses through an intensive series of telephone calls—"I spent some seven hours yesterday on the phone"[71]—and enclosed a list of those "ready to come, on appointment, to the C.D.E.C., to testify."[72] In the same letter, she outlined her availability, proposing 18 May as the most suitable date for the arrival of the two officials and confirming that she would assist them during their stay in Milan: "I'll take care of them and they will be provided with an interpreter."[73]
Two days later, Obluda confirmed that Kaup and Schaffrath would arrive in Milan on the 18 May—"Mr. Kaup and Mr. Schaffrath will arrive in Milano with their motor car at Thursday, the 18.5.1967 in the morning." They would go directly to the Via Eupili, where together, they could define "the program for the next days."[74]

## "He Had an Apple in His Mouth, He Was Eating…and Spitting It Out." The Hearings of May 1967

From one of the notebooks that Ravenna used to take notes, it is possible to reconstruct the schedule of the hearings held at the CDEC between 19 and 29 May 1967. It shows that in those days, around fifty people took turns in the offices on the via Eupili: both former Jews and anti-fascists deportees who had passed through San Vittore, Fossoli, Bolzano, Bergen-Belsen, Auschwitz, and Buchenwald, and indirect witnesses—former prison guards, medical officers. All were called upon to report what they had seen, heard, and experienced firsthand after 8 September 1943:

Friday 19 May: 9:30 Berta and Luisa Costi; 11:00 Alberto Fiorentino; 15:30

and to help them speak with the persons named on the list? Are you able to name more persons in Milano, who can give facts about the SS in Milano and Italy to the both detectives? Would you have the kindness to help Mr. Kaup and Schaffrath to get an hotel in Milano? If you are not in Milano during 16-30 Mai [sic] or you think it impossible to speak with the named Italian persons during that time, please let me know that. Than the both police-detectives Kaup and Schaffrath will go to Milano to another time (June? July?). Please excuse this bad English and the fact that our interpreter did not finish the translation of me letter to you from 4.4.1967 in time. May I beg you to answers as quick as possible, because mr. Kaup and Schaffrath must know, whether they can go to Milano at 16.5 or not" (Günther Obluda to Eloisa Ravenna, n.d., but late April/early May 1967, originally in English).

[71] The Italian original reads: "Senza che ne avessi realmente il tempo, ieri ho trascorso circa 7 ore al telefono"; Ravenna translated it into English as: "I really did not have time at my disposal, yet I spent some seven hours yesterday on the phone."

[72] Eloisa Ravenna to Günther Obluda, May 10, 1967 (draft of the text sent by express mail), originally in Italian. Among the witnesses available were Franco Schönheit; Beniamino Costi; Berta Costi; Emilia Coen; Floretta Coen; Mosè Dana; Salomone Dana; Samuele Dana; Alberto Fiorentino; Anna Fiorentino; Giacomo Fiorentino; Marco Fiorentino; Ivo Misul; Giuliana Cardosi; Renato Salmoni; Gilberto Salmoni; Cesare Gatti; and Esther Sabbadini-Hammer.

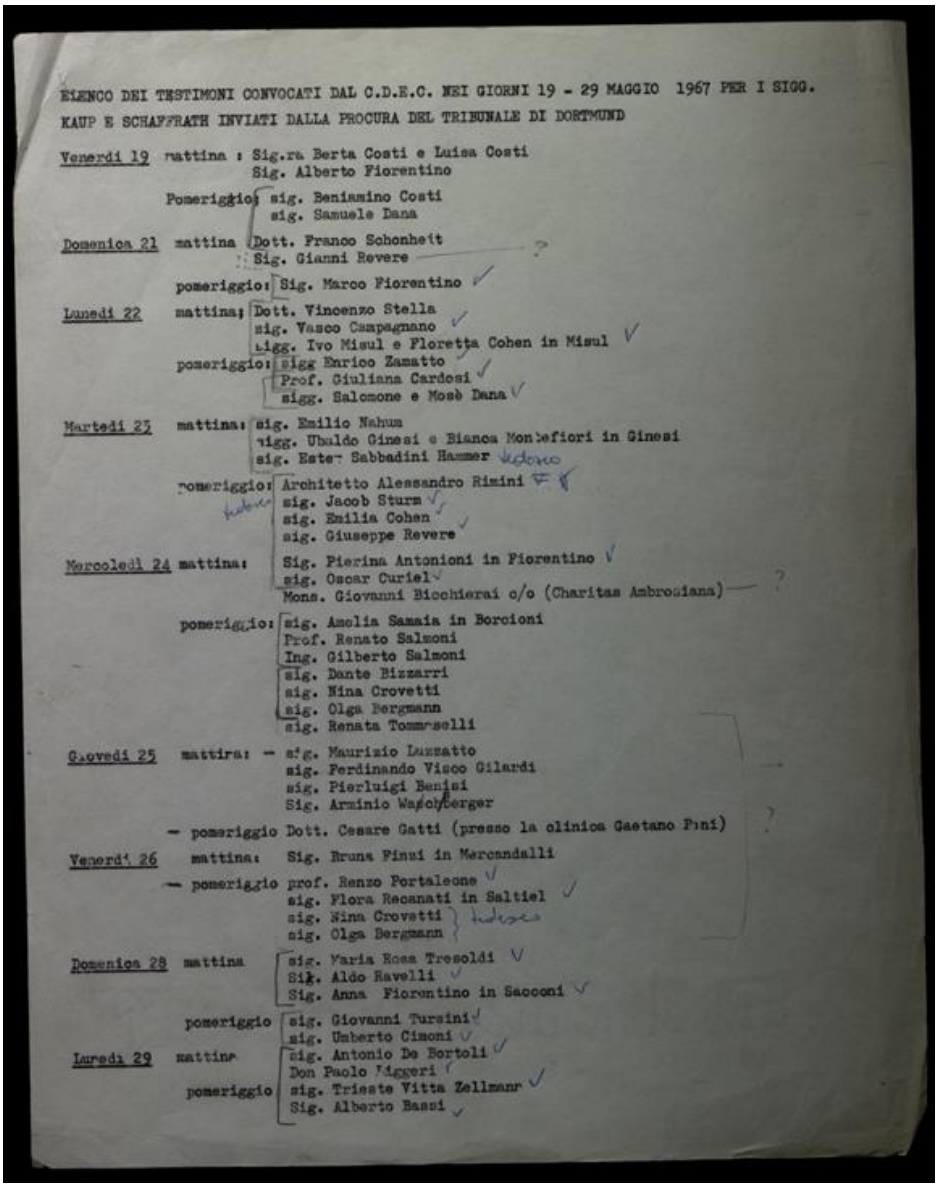
[73] Eloisa Ravenna to Günther Obluda, May 10, 1967, originally in English. In the closing lines of this communication, Ravenna adds: "On their arrival, I believe that it will be possible to draw up the program and also call other persons to testify. It is a pity that neither of them understands Italian."

[74] Günther Obluda to Eloisa Ravenna, May 12, 1967, originally in English, on plain paper).

> Beniamino Costi; 16:30 Samuele DanaSunday 21 May: 10:00 Franco Schönheit; 15:00 Marco Fiorentino.
> Monday 22 May: 8:00 Vincenzo Stella; 10:00 Vasco Campagnano; 11:00 Misul Flora née Cohen and Ivo Misul; 15:00 Enrico Zamatto; 16:30 Giuliana Cardosi; 17:00 Salomone Dana and Mosè Dana.
> Tuesday 23 May: 9:30 Emilio Nahum; [?] Bianca and Ubaldo Ginesi; [?] Ester Sabbadini-Hammer; 15:00 Alessandro Rimini; 17:00 Jacob Sturm; 18:00 Giuseppe Revere; [?] Emilia Costi, widow Cohen.
> Wednesday 24 May: 9:00 Pierina Antonini in Fiorentino; 10:00 Oscar Curiel; [?] Amelia Samaja and Alfredo Borcioni; 16:30 Gilberto and Renato Salmoni; 18:15 Dante Bizzarri; 19:00 Nina Crovetti née Neufeld, Olga Bergmann née Stahl, Renata Tomaselli née Einhorn.
> Thursday 25 May: 9:30 Maurizio Luzzatto; 10:30 Ferdinando Visco-Gilardi; 13:00 Arminio Wachsberger; [?] Pierluigi Benisi; [?] Cesare Gatti.
> Friday 26 May: 10:00 Bruna Mercandalli, widow Finzi; [?] Nina Crovetti née, Olga Bergmann née Stahl; 15:30 Renzo Portaleone; 16:30 Flora Recanati in Saltiel.
> Sunday 28 May: 9:30 Maria Rosa Tresoldi; 10:30 Aldo Ravelli; 11:30 Anna Fiorentino; 16:00 Giovanni Tursini.
> Monday 29 May: [?] Antonio De Bortoli; [?] Don Paolo Liggeri; 12:00 Maria Tresoldi; [?] Trieste Vitta Zelman; 17:00 Alberto Bassi[75].

Over the course of eight days, forty-nine people were summoned, and a total of fifty-two hearings were conducted, with two witnesses heard twice (Crovetti and Bergmann). The overall impression is one of intense work, carried out almost without interruption: witnesses were scheduled at intervals of one to one and a half hours; sometimes individually, sometimes in pairs in cases of spouses or siblings.

[75] The schedule of the hearings, including dates and times, is derived from Ravenna's notebook, which also contains the notes taken during each individual hearing (see Fondo Processi ai criminali nazisti. Procure di Dortmund e Berlino, box 5, file 61, ACDEC). A typewritten copy of the schedule, with handwritten annotations, is also available in box 5, file 52. The transcription or summary of each hearing can be found in the Fondo Processi ai criminali nazisti. Procure di Dortmund e Berlino, box 5, file 52, ACDEC. This is a schedule reconstructed ex post, as it includes the names of witnesses who were not part of Obluda's initial list and were added during the course of the hearings, also on the suggestion of the witnesses themselves.



ELENCO DEI TESTIMONI CONVOCATI DAL C.D.E.C. NEI GIORNI 19 - 29 MAGGIO 1967 PER I SIGG. KAUP E SCHAFRATH INVIATI DALLA PROCURA DEL TRIBUNALE DI DORTMUND

Venerdì 19 mattina : Sig.ra Berta Costi e Luisa Costi
Sig. Alberto Fiorentino

Pomeriggio: sig. Beniamino Costi
sig. Samuele Dana

Domenica 21 mattina Dott. Franco Schonheit
Sig. Gianni Revere

pomeriggio: Sig. Marco Fiorentino

Lunedì 22 mattina: Dott. Vincenzo Stella
sig. Vasco Campagnano
sigg. Ivo Misul e Floretta Cohen in Misul

pomeriggio: sigg Enrico Zamatto
Prof. Giuliana Cardosi
sigg. Salomone e Mosè Dana

Martedì 23 mattina: sig. Emilio Nahum
sigg. Ubaldo Ginesi e Bianca Montefiori in Ginesi
sig. Este- Sabbadini Hammer

pomeriggio: Architetto Alessandro Rimini
sig. Jacob Sturm
sig. Emilia Cohen
sig. Giuseppe Revere

Mercoledì 24 mattina: Sig. Pierina Antonioni in Fiorentino
sig. Oscar Curiel
Mons. Giovanni Bicchierai c/o (Charitas Ambrosiana)

pomeriggio: sig. Amelia Samaia in Borcioni
Prof. Renato Salmoni
Ing. Gilberto Salmoni
sig. Dante Bizzarri
sig. Nina Crovetti
sig. Olga Bergmann
sig. Renata Tommaselli

Giovedì 25 mattina: - sig. Maurizio Lanzatto
sig. Ferdinando Visco Gilardi
sig. Pierluigi Banisi
Sig. Arminio Wachberger

- pomeriggio Dott. Cesare Gatti (presso la clinica Gaetano Pini)

Venerdì 26 mattina: Sig. Bruna Finzi in Mercandalli

- pomeriggio prof. Renzo Portaleone
sig. Flora Recanati in Saltiel
sig. Nina Crovetti
sig. Olga Bergmann

Domenica 28 mattina sig. Maria Rosa Tresoldi
Sig. Aldo Ravelli
Sig. Anna Fiorentino in Sacconi

pomeriggio sig. Giovanni Tursini
sig. Umberto Cimoni

Lunedì 29 mattina sig. Antonio De Bortoli
Don Paolo Liggeri

pomeriggio sig. Trieste Vitta Zellmann
Sig. Alberto Bassi

*Fig. 6. Typewritten list of testimonies May 19-29, 1967, Fondo Processi ai criminali nazisti. Procure di Dortmund e Berlino, box 5, file 52, ACDEC.*

From the transcripts of the hearings prepared by Giuliana Donati in 1974, it is possible to reconstruct the type of questions put to the witnesses, which varied depending on the witnesses and their experiences. As a rule, however, the questioning followed a progression "from the general to the particular": first the arrests—where they had taken place and by whom; then the interrogations and the violence witnessed or suffered in prison; and then, in increasing detail, leading up to the identification of names and faces—commanders and officers of the San Vittore prison, the Fossoli camp, or Bolzano.

Some examples:

### Vasco Campagnano,[76] hearing May 22, 1967

> [Wilhem Kaup's Interpreter]: Who carried out the arrests? Italians or Germans?
> [Vasco Campagnano]: They were Germans and…they were led by someone who spoke Italian… […].
> [WK-I]: Was he in uniform?
> [VC]: No, no, no…in civilian clothes. In fact, he even advised me not to resist, because…
> [WK-I]: Were the Germans in uniform?
> [VC]: No, no. There were six of them: two came into the house, two stayed at the door, and two were outside the door.
> [WK-I]: Where were the others?
> [VC]: Outside the door…under the window…two were inside…two were outside the front door and two were under the window, because I lived on the ground floor.
> [WK-I]: Were you able to find out which unit these Germans belonged to?
> [VC]: Eh…who could ask that? No, because from there, they took me straight to San Vittore prison. Then there was the lieutenant there…the one who was in charge at the time…the lieutenant…then there was Hans…a certain Hans…
> [WK-I]: Were you taken to the Jewish section or the political section at San Vittore?
> [VC]: To the Jewish section.
> [WK-I]: Immediately?
> [VC]: Yes, immediately. There, the lieutenant called me in, whose name… I don't know now… at the time what his name was…he was a man of about thirty-five, I'd say…he interrogated me and told me: "You have been arrested for racial reasons." And he sent me up to the sixth [*sic*] wing, where all the other Jews were.[77]

### Emilia Cohen née Costi,[78] hearing May 23, 1967

> [Wilhem Kaup's Interpreter]: Were you arrested by the Germans?
> [Emilia Cohen]: By Marshal Koch himself. I only found out later, when they took me to San Vittore. Before that, I didn't know it was him.

[76] Vasco Campagnano (1909-1976), opera singer, was arrested in Milan in October 1944 and detained at San Vittore prison. Fifteen days later, he was transferred to the Bolzano transit camp, where he was released by the Italian Red Cross on 29 April 1945 (see Fondo Ricerca Deportazione 1972-1974, Cartoteca Giuliana Donati, file "Arrestati e liberati", ACDEC).

[77] Vasco Campagnano, May 22, 1967, Donati's transcript (1974), Fondo Processi ai criminali nazisti. Procure di Dortmund e Berlino, box 5, file 52, ACDEC.

[78] Emilia Cohen née Costi (1921- ?), was arrested in Milan in late January 1945. Detained to San Vittore prison, she was transferred to the Bolzano transit camp and released by the Italian Red Cross on 29 April 1945 ("Arrestati e liberati", Cartoteca Giuliana Donati, Fondo Ricerca Deportazione 1972-1974, ACDEC).

[WK-I]: When you were arrested, were there other people besides Marshal Koch?
[EC]: There was another one. Just one. There were two of them.
[WK-I]: Was he also a German or an Italian?
[EC]: I don't remember exactly; I think one was Italian and one was Marshal Koch.
[…]
[WK-I]: Apart from Marshal Koch, do you remember anyone else among the German personnel?
[EC]: The only one I remember, who took me down into the basement, was Franz […].

### Ubaldo and Bianca Ginesi,[79] hearing May 23, 1967

[Wilhem Kaup's Interpreter]: Did you know who was in charge of San Vittore prison?
[Ubaldo Ginesi]: It was said…there were two Germans, Franz and Klemm?
[WK-I]: Was Franz a first name or a surname?
[UG]: Well, nobody knows, everyone called him that…since in our section there were also partisans, in that fifth wing, downstairs there were the partisans…
[WK-I]: Just a moment—Franz and Klemm, did you personally know them? Could you say: This is Klemm and this is Franz?
[UG]: Yes, one was blond and the other…
[WK-I]: If someone came toward you, could you say: This is Franz…
[Bianca Ginesi]: Yeees, Klemm always walked around with a dog.
[…]
[*photographs are shown*]
[WK-I]: Try to see if you recognize anyone.
[UG?]: Klemm was tall, blond, he had blue eyes. They're also in civilian clothes. We saw them in uniform—how can one tell? There were many like that. This one with the dog could be Klemm. One of them had a dog, he always went around with a dog, a big wolf like this. Klemm was more effeminate. How can one tell? Klemm was a blond, elegant, like a film type. I wonder if Hage is here too. Well. The uniform changes everything [*fa tanto la divisa*].
[…]
[WK-I]: You were probably in the section at Bolzano where the women were?
[Bianca Ginesi]: Yes.
[WK-I]: Were there male guards or female guards?
[BG]: The guard was a woman they called "the Tigress," we didn't know anything

[79] Ubaldo Ginesi (1900-?) and his wife Bianca née Montefiore (1894-?), were arrested in Milan the 18 December 1944 (Ubaldo Ginesi) – 20 December 1944 (Bianca Ginesi). Detained at the San Vittore prison, in January 1945 they were both transferred in the Bolzano transit camp. They were released by the Italian Red Cross on 29 April 1945 ("Arrestati e liberati", Cartoteca Giuliana Donati, Fondo Ricerca Deportazione 1972-1974, ACDEC).

else, she was someone who came from the camps in Germany.
[WK-I]: Which camp?
[BG]: We didn't know.
[WK-I]: Why did you call her "the Tigress"?
[BG]: Because she was terribly cruel. She whipped everyone, took them into the cells, there were cells.
[WK-I]: What did she whip them with?
[BG]: With a riding crop.
[WK-I]: A riding crop for horses?
[BG]: Yes, they all had those. They all had them. Everyone had them, even the soldiers.
[WK-I]: What kind of crop was it?
[BG]: Who knows. I remember Panciolini's,[80] because it was a piece of tubing with at the end…
[WK-I]: A piece of tubing—what kind, rubber, metal?
[BG]: Tubing made of…it must not have been metal, because it was flexible…[81]

All were able to recount what they had personally experienced, but few were able to remember names or recognize the faces of their captors. Monsignor Bicchierai was the only one to recall Bosshammer's name, although he had never met or seen him. By contrast, Dante Bizzarri recounted the cold-blooded killing of a Roman Jew at Fossoli, while Franco Schönheit described the composition of the last convoy departing from Fossoli and suggested that Nina Crovetti[82] be called to testify, as—being the secretary to the commandant of the Fossoli camp—she had personally drawn up the transport lists of the departing convoys.
From the point of view of the proceedings against Bosshammer, the hearings proved less decisive than might have been expected. From the perspective of the historical reconstruction of the dynamics of the Nazi persecution of the Jews in Italy, however, they represented an important step forward: as Liliana Picciotto would later write, "during the investigations and the examination of witnesses, a considerable amount of information and new data had emerged that needed to be taken into account."[83]

[80] As Bianca Ginesi later explains, Panciolini was the nickname that the female prisoners had given to one of the German guards at the Bolzano camp. Ginesi was unable to identify the guard's real name.

[81] Umberto and Bianca Ginesi, May 23, 1967, Donati's transcript (1974), Fondo Processi ai criminali nazisti. Procure di Dortmund e Berlino, box 5, file 52, ACDEC.

[82] Nina Crovetti was mentioned by both Schönheit and Alessandro Rimini. Prior to their testimonies, she was unknown (at least to Eloisa Ravenna). Nina Crovetti née Neufeld (1904-1966), was arrested in Sondrio in December 1943 and transferred first to the San Vittore prison and then to the Fossoli camp. She was deported to Auschwitz on a transport that departed from Verona on 2 August 1944. After Auschwitz, she was transferred to the Ravensbrück camp and subsequently to the subcamp of Rechlin.

[83] For an overview of research and works published between the immediate postwar period and 1988, see the bibliography compiled by Michele Sarfatti in the special issue of La Rassegna mensile di Israel dedicated to the fiftieth anniversary of the 1938 anti-Jewish laws (Sarfatti, "Bibliografia per lo studio delle persecuzioni antiebraiche in Italia 1938–1945," La Rassegna mensile di Israel 54, no. 1-2 (1988), "1938: Le leggi contro gli ebrei: Numero speciale in occasione del cinquantennale della legislazione antiebraica fascista": 435-475). For a brief overview of subsequent studies: Amedeo Osti Guerrazzi, "Introduction", in *Tedeschi, Italiani ed Ebrei. Le polizie nazi-fasciste in Italia 1943–1945*, https://www.assemblea.emr.it/cittadinanza/archivio-

The "considerable amount of information and new data" collected by Kaup became accessible in a clear and organized form thanks to the transcription of the recordings. We know, in fact, that the May recordings, after being transcribed by the Dortmund prosecutor's office, were immediately sent back to the CDEC, and that only a few years later the CDEC entrusted Giuliana Donati with their "recovery." Donati transcribed both the recordings and the notes that Ravenna regularly took during the hearings. The result is what I have illustrated in the few examples above: transcripts with a linear structure—question and answer—in which the interviewer asks questions and the interviewee responds. Both questions and answers are rendered in Italian.

However, listening to the recordings rediscovered in 2022 reveals a far more complex picture. This does not alter the substance of the information provided by the witnesses, but it confronts us with a source that is very different from that represented by the transcripts.

The hearings followed a structure that was at once precise and fragmented: each exchange unfolded in four stages—the question in German, the translation of the question into Italian, the answer in Italian, and the translation of the answer into German. The result was an inevitably slowed-down form of communication, at times subject to shifts in meaning, but also marked by voices that not infrequently overlapped—this often occurred when witnesses understood, and sometimes even spoke, German, and therefore did not wait for Kaup's questions to be fully translated.[84]

The fragmentation—and, at the same time, richness—revealed by the recordings shows us very clearly what is absent from the transcripts: the entire portion of the hearing conducted in German is missing; often, there is no indication of who is speaking (the interpreter? the witness? Eloisa Ravenna, who occasionally intervenes?); the "timing" of the responses is missing, as are the difficulties of communication and comprehension that in some cases arose between those formulating the questions and those expected to answer them.

In light of this, we understand that Donati's work was not exactly the transcription of an oral source, but rather the construction of a working document.[85] From this perspective,

progetti/2016/percorsi-sulla-memoria%202016/AOSTI_G_TedeschiItalianiedEbrei.pdf, (accessed December 24, 2025).

[84] A particularly illustrative case in this respect is the hearing of Emilio Nahum, who alternates between Italian and German. In the final part of the recording, one can also hear a rather elaborate and at times light-hearted conversation with Kaup, of which there is no trace in Donati's transcription.

[85] As Liliana Picciotto explains, in 1972, the mayor of Carpi asked the CDEC to provide 2,000 names of Jewish deportees for the project of the Museum and Monument to Political and Racial Deportees to be established within the Castello dei Pio in Carpi. To this end, the CDEC began verifying the lists of deportees available at that time. Giuliana Donati was entrusted with this task and, on that occasion, created "a paper card index of deportees, transcribing onto each card the data that had been collected up to that point." Among the sources she used, in addition to the list compiled by Colonel Massimo Adolfo Vitale and the forms distributed among the various Jewish communities between 1965 and 1966 for the investigations of the Dortmund public prosecutor's office, there were also "the forty-nine testimonies collected by the Dortmund prosecutor's office in 1967" (see Picciotto, Il libro della memoria, 21). The paper card index of deportees now consists of a total of ninety-four archival boxes. The cards are divided into thirteen categories: "Deportees killed," "Deceased foreign nationals," "Jews seen in concentration camps," "Uncertain cases," "Foreign survivors – escaped/survived," "Deaths in Italy," "Arrested and escaped," "Surviving deportees," "Non-Jews or non-deportees," "Arrested and released," "Not captured – 'Interned, escaped' – 'Non-Jews' – 'Jewish partisans' – 'Non-Jews arrested for helping Jews' – 'Italians arrested abroad,'" "Lake Maggiore Massacres" (see Giuliana Donati card index [cartoteca], Fondo Ricerca Deportazione 1972–1974, ACDEC).

one can account for certain condensations of spoken language, the transcription of only the Italian portions, and also a certain disregard for the figures present in the hearing setting—namely, Ravenna and the interpreters.

Listening to the recordings shows that the interpreters played a key role. Not only did they make communication between Kaup and the witnesses possible, but they also acted as genuine mediators. The two female interpreters in particular seem to have established a relationship of trust and familiarity with the witnesses, which, one may assume, could also have facilitated their interaction with the two German officials. In this sense, the interpreter emerges as a point of reference not only linguistically, but also emotionally (a role that can be even more clearly inferred from the brief conversations that can be heard before or after the hearings).

A further aspect that emerges from the recordings is how memory is shaped in the act of recollection. In Donati's transcripts, one can perceive an attempt to reproduce the uncertainties and pauses of spoken language, but also a tendency to privilege the outcome of the response—that is, the information deemed relevant. Listening to the recordings, by contrast, reveals in every case a process of elaborating responses that is far more complex than what appears in the transcripts.

The recovery of the recordings thus makes it possible to shift our perspective beyond reading these testimonies as a mere "container" of information. They can, in fact, also be considered documents of emotional experience, and, precisely for this reason, they require—as David Boder[86] observed—a true *art of listening*,[87] capable of grasping not only the content, but also the manner and the context in which experiences are narrated—through hesitations, pauses, self-corrections, and inflections of the voice. These features are an integral part of the source and must be taken into account.

Let us take, for example, the testimony of Trieste Vitta Zelman.[88] The transcript records that at a certain point, she was shown a set of photographs and asked to indicate whether, among the portraits presented, there was also that of Otto Koch, who—according to her testimony—had interrogated her immediately after her arrest:

> Madam, please look carefully at the heads [ed.: *that is*, *faces*] between the two columns of the two upper rows.

[86] David Boder (1886-1961) was a Latvian-born American psychologist. He was among the first to record testimonies of survivors in the immediate aftermath of the war, and in 1946, he conducted a series of interviews with survivors of deportation in various displaced persons camps across Europe. On how he conducted these interviews, see Boder, *I Did Not Interview the Dead* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1949). Boder's collection of interviews is today preserved in several repositories, including the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University and the Boder collections at the Illinois Institute of Technology.

[87] Already in the immediate postwar period, Boder developed a sophisticated system for annotating recordings, designed to convey not only the content of the testimonies, but also the conditions in which they were recorded, as well as the emotional and vocal inflections of the interviewees (see Todd Presner, *Ethics of the Algorithm: Close and Distant Listening to Holocaust Testimonies* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2024], 104-105).

[88] Trieste Vitta Zelman was sixty-five years old at the time of her testimony. She had been arrested in Milan in October 1943, detained at San Vittore, and was subsequently transferred to the Fossoli camp. She was deported to Auschwitz on a transport departing from Verona on 2 August 1944. From Auschwitz, she was transferred to two subcamps of Dachau, first to Kaufering and subsequently to Landsberg, where she was liberated in April 1945. She returned to Italy in June 1945.

It looks like this one to me…I wouldn't swear to it. Koch, it seems to me it's this one. Is this Koch? Eh? 7 [*sic*] Koch.
He's the one who interrogated me. It's Koch, is that right? It's him, he interrogated me at…
Please also look carefully at the photographs on these two pages.
I recognized that other one.
Madam, on this page are you able to recognize Koch?
No, no.
I may have recognized that other one, perhaps these are earlier, earlier than the photograph you showed me. Because they seem to me…they are thinner…whereas that one there I recognized because he had a round face. Perhaps these are from three, four, five years earlier and the features change, at least in my view, earlier, you see…
Whereas when I saw him, he was not so young, here he is younger…he must have been about forty-five when I saw him, you can tell him that…
You have already recognized him, madam, it was indeed Koch. Was the man you recognized in this photograph the one who interrogated you?
Yes, he interrogated me through an interpreter.
What did he want to know about you, madam?
Ah, twenty-three years that I have been… .....
Did he perhaps tell you the reason for your arrest?
No, no, no…he was eating, he had an apple in his mouth, he was eating…
During the interrogation?
Yes, during the interrogation[89].

This transcript, in which there is no indication of who is speaking, appears to present a simple two-way dialogue. In the recording, however, the voices that alternate and overlap are at least three—four, when Ravenna intervenes. The interpreter's voice—a woman's—is understanding and caring, and the witness seems to seek reassurance from her (and perhaps also from Ravenna):
*Transcript of the Italian portion from the recording* [Italics indicate passages omitted from Donati's transcript/translation]

Interpreter: Madam, please look carefully at the heads [*sic*] in the two columns of the two upper rows.
Trieste Vitta Zelman: *It seems to me it's this one, but I wouldn't swear to it*.
Koch. It seems to me it's this one. Is this Koch? *Eh?* [ed.: *in a tone of satisfaction and self-assurance*]
Is it Koch? You see…? He's the one who interrogated me.
It's Koch, this one. Is that right? It's him. It's this one here, who interrogated me at…*at…oh God, sorry…*

[89] Trieste Vitta Zelman, May 29, 1967, Donati's transcript (1974), Fondo Processi ai criminali nazisti. Procure di Dortmund e Berlino, box 5, file 52, ACDEC.

I: Would you please look carefully at these photographs, madam, *here*,
[ed.: *silence*]
TVZ: *I recognized that other one*.
I: Madam, on this page are you able to recognize Koch?
TVZ: *NO*. [ed.: *pause*] No.
I may have recognized that other one because…
Perhaps these…are earlier [ed.: *here and in the following lines, Vitta Zelmann seems to be thinking things through with Ravenna, while the interpreter, in the background, translates for Kaup*]…earlier than the photograph you showed me…
*Eloisa Ravenna: One could ask…one could ask why, because also this morning…*
[ed: *inaudible*]
TVZ: Because they seem to me…these…they are thinner*!*… Whereas that one there I recognized because he had a round face.
Perhaps these are from three, four, five years earlier and then the features change, at least in my view…
earlier, you see…it's…
…whereas when I saw him, he was not so young…
*They are younger!*
Here he is younger…he must have been about forty-five when I saw him, you can tell him that…
I: You have already recognized him, madam, it was indeed Koch
I: The man you recognized in this photograph—was he the one who interrogated you?
TVZ: Yes. He interrogated me through an interpreter
I: What did he want to know about you, madam?
TVZ: *Ahhh*, I have been… for twenty-three years, eh… *that I have been……..so, what was it that he asked me…?*
I: Were you told the reason for your arrest?
TVZ: No *no… no no no no no no*.
He was eating…he had an apple in his mouth…he was eating…*and spitting it out* [ed.: *in a low voice and with embarrassment; she seems to want to say this only to the interpreter, almost as a confidence*]
I: During the interrogation?
TVZ: Y*ees!* During the interrogation*!*[90]

Another interesting case, in terms of both structure and complexity, is the testimony of Nina Crovetti[91] on 24 May. The hearing also took place in the presence of Olga Bergmann

[90] Hearing with Trieste Vitta Zelman, May 29, 1967, audio recording n. 3, ACDEC (unprocessed audio collection).

[91] From the two hearings of May 1967, Crovetti's key role within the Fossoli camp emerged: as the camp commander's secretary, she was responsible for drawing up both the lists of entry into the camp and the Transportlisten (see Picciotto, Il libro della memoria, 921, where Crovetti's second deposition with Kaup [May 26, 1967] is cited in support of the statement: "Haage [deputy commander of the Fossoli camp] would then extract the personal files from the card index and bring them to Mrs. Nina Neufeld Crovetti so that she could type the transport list").

and Renata Tomasselli, and was conducted entirely in German, without an interpreter,[92] as all three witnesses were native German speakers. In this case, the transcript is simultaneously a translation from German into Italian. Listening to the recording makes it clear that Donati condensed certain passages in her translation.
At one point in Donati's transcript/translation, we read:

> WK.: Did you travel from Fossoli directly to Auschwitz?
> NC.: No, from Fossoli we went by L.K.W. (= *Lastkraftwagen*, that is, a military truck) [*sic*] as far as Verona, and then by train to Auschwitz.
> WK.: Were you in cattle cars?
> NC.: Of course.
> WK.: How many people were there in each wagon?
> NC.: Twenty, twenty-five.
> Olga Bergman.: There were up to forty per wagon.
> NC.: There was no selection immediately on the ramp; instead, we were taken to Birkenau. The selection took place many hours later. The next day. Mengele was there, and two others. He saw me and said: "Die ist kräftig, die Sau-Jüdin" (*This dirty Jewess is strong—"Questa sporca ebrea è robusta"*), "Die kann noch arbeiten" (*she can still work*). I had grey hair, but he said to me: "Yes, you can still work." They put me in one group, and the children and the elderly in another. They were told: "You are going to a camp where people do not have to work."[93]

At this point in the recording, the exchange appears more articulated, both in the responses and in the ongoing interaction between Crovetti and Bergmann:[94]
*[Italics indicate passages omitted from Donati's transcript/translation]*

> Wilhem Kaup: How many people were there in each wagon?
> Nina Crovetti: *This is difficult to say, but I would think at least…how many could there have been?* About twenty, twenty-five.
> Olga Bergmann: There were up to forty per wagon.
> *NC: In ours? No, I don't think so…*
> *OB: Yes, there were also…*
> *NC: No, I don't think so…*
> *OB: When the convoys were full and left, there were forty people.*
> *NC: Yes, perhaps so.*
> *OB: There were usually 400 people in one transport…*

[92] At the moment the decision is made to conduct the hearing in German, Ravenna can be heard expressing some hesitation at being unable to follow the questioning directly, while the interpreter reassures her that the transcripts will be prepared for her.

[93] Nina Crovetti, May 24, 1967, Donati's transcript (1974), Fondo Processi ai criminali nazisti. Procure di Dortmund e Berlino, box 5, file 52, ACDEC.

[94] Nina Crovetti's two hearings, held on May 24 and 26, 1967, both conducted in German, were fully retranscribed and translated into Italian in 2024 by Riccardo Correggia to whom to whom I am sincerely grateful.

*K and C: Yes [ed: said together while Bergmann is speaking].*
*OB: …where we were loaded…*
*NC: In the wagons…*
*K: How many wagons did a transport have? Approximately?*
*NC: I have no idea!!*
*K: Yes…*
*NC: You know, I was thinking about something else, I didn't look! [ed.: raises her voice]*
*K: When you arrived in Auschwitz and were unloaded, on the ramp, was there a selection?*
NC: There was no selection immediately on the ramp, but we were taken to the camp in Birkenau, *I think, or Auschwitz, I cannot say. Then we waited several hours. And then the selection.*
*K: So you cannot say whether it was Auschwitz or Birkenau?*
*NC: I believe it was Birkenau…*
*K: And then?*
*NC: And then the selection. First the children*, then the elderly.
*K: Did it take place* the same day? *Or the following day?*
NC: *I think* the following day. *But I cannot say with certainty* [ed.: *tone of regret].*
*K: Where were you assigned, with which group?*
C: Mengele was there…
*K: Mengele was there…*
C: *There was* Mengele and two others. He saw me and said: "Die Sau-Judin, die ist kräftig genug, die kann arbeiten" [*That filthy Jewess—she is strong enough, she can work*— "*quella lurida ebrea—è abbastanza forte, può lavorare*]. *He even asked me how old I was.* I had grey hair *at the time*, *and I answered forty*, but he said to me: "Yes, you can still work." *He sent me to work.* They put me in a group *with the young people*, while the children and the elderly were placed in another group. They were told: "You are going to a camp where people do not have to work." *But people already knew…*[95]

In this case as well, as in the previous one concerning Trieste Vitta Zelman, what the recording brings out is not so much different information from what was already known, but rather the complexity of its elaboration. Whereas in Donati's transcript, the answers appear linear, coherent, and clear-cut, in the recording they emerge as the result of interactions, hesitations, second thoughts, and prompts from those asking the questions—or simply listening.
Listening thus confirms that the witnesses' answers are the outcome of a process of probing and working through their own memories, which Donati only partially conveyed in her transcript, privileging the information contained in the answer rather than the process through which that information takes shape.
Ultimately, these recordings very clearly show the difference between judicial testimony and testimony of a memorial nature. In these hearings, the witness is not a "protagonist,"

[95] Hearing with Nina Crovetti, May 24, 1967, audio recording n. 5, ACDEC (unprocessed audio collection).

and the account of their personal story is not the aim of the questions to which they are subjected. In this context, the witness is above all an "eyewitness":

> Oscar Curiel: [he] …was out of his mind and took off his clothes and I saw that…that they…shot him.
> Interpreter: You saw…you saw them shoot
> […]
> Intepreter: How was Lombroso killed?
> OC: Well, I think…with…a pistol…a shot to the back of the head…or something like that…
> I: In any case, he was shot?
> OC: Shot.
> I: Did you see the shot with your own eyes? That is, were you present at the moment of the shooting?
> OC: No, I was not present…I was not present…
> I: You were not present…?
> OC: No, I was not present at the shooting. I saw that they killed him.
> I saw, I saw… Now! after twenty-five years I cannot say…
> I saw the body! That is, if I want to be precise…
> […]
> OC: …there is no point in saying this…it does not matter now, and after twenty-five years, to say whether I saw them shoot…what is certain is that they killed him!
> […]
> I: For the gentlemen, this is important, because they want to know exactly who killed him.
> OC: Ah, that's the point, that's the point…. That is right, but I cannot say it…[96]

In the 1967 recordings, alongside the re-emergence of memory, we also encounter ambient sounds and background conversations: the phone calls that Ravenna receives during the hearings of Alessandro Rimini and Oscar Curiel; the offer of a lift home by car that Don Liggeri[97] is heard receiving from Antonio De Bortoli,[98] and the flask of wine that the latter—"had he known"—would have brought. And then: the words of appreciation, gratitude, and "solidarity" expressed by the vice-president of the Jewish Community of Milan, who was visiting at the time, to Kaup, the Dortmund prosecutor's office, and Ravenna for the work they were carrying out together, because, as he says, "every act of

[96] Hearing with Oscar Curiel, May 24, 1967, audio recording n. 4, ACDEC (unprocessed audio collection).

[97] On 24 March 1944, Don Paolo Liggeri was arrested in Milan for antifascist activities and for assisting Jews and other victims of racial and political persecution. Imprisoned in San Vittore, he was then transferred to Fossoli and subsequently to the Bolzano-Gries camp, to Mauthausen, and finally to Dachau, where he arrived in December 1944. He was liberated in April 1945.

[98] An antifascist and partisan, Antonio De Bortoli, known as "il Barba," was arrested and detained in the San Vittore prison, where he was subjected to violence and torture. Transferred to Fossoli, he was subsequently deported to Dachau. He later published a memoir entitled *Il Barba. Autobiografia di una lotta* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1977).

justice serves not only you and us, but everyone";[99] and again, the informal exchanges between Ravenna and Pnina Schotten regarding the most appropriate form of address to use when speaking to a monsignor[100] (and the suggestion offered by Kaup, "Excellence").
These elements, although external to the investigation, help to convey the climate, the atmosphere in which the source was produced, including the relationships among the various people involved. For example, in none of the witnesses heard in these recordings—except perhaps Oscar Curiel[101]—does one perceive those tones or feelings of distrust toward the German interrogator that one might have expected—and that Kaup himself, in fact, expected: "For me, it was a hugely meaningful experience to observe the cooperation of people who in truth would have every reason to be ill-disposed and distant."[102]
What only listening to the recordings, and no transcript—neither that of 1974, nor any produced today—I would argue, can ultimately convey is the tone of the voices, the sighs, the inflections: the strong, assured voice of Crovetti and the irony mixed with sarcasm that permeates some of her answers; the lightness with which Antonio De Bortoli recounts even the tortures he endured; the gravity of Don Liggeri's responses; the shyness of Alessandro Rimini; a certain boldness on the part of Emilio Nahum.
Beyond the results that those hearings produced for the purposes of the proceedings against Bosshammer, and more than any subsequent analysis, what ultimately conveys the deeper meaning of that "encounter" between Kaup, Schaffrat, and the witnesses is a letter that Ravenna addressed to Kaup a few months after the conclusion of the Milan hearings:

> For me too, as I already told you, the most positive aspect of this work of ours and yours is its human dimension, the possibility of an encounter: for us, having felt in you a deep and conscious commitment and—beyond the search for data and information useful for the purposes of the criminal proceedings—the effort to understand those who were sitting before you, burdened by a past that cannot but weigh upon you; for you, having felt that it was possible—even if at times with difficulty—to overcome that natural distrust toward "a German" and to reopen a dialogue, even if, for the time being, this dialogue does not seem to be directed toward anything other than that past [*anche se questo discorso, per ora, non sembra possa essere rivolto altro che a quel passato*]. A past that yesterday bound us sadly

[99] This visit is recorded at the end of Don Liggeri's hearing on May 29, 1967.

[100] This was Monsignor Giovanni Bicchierai, Cardinal Schuster's representative in Milan and Lombardy during the war. His hearing is not included among the recordings that have been recovered. According to Donati's transcript, Mons. Bicchierai was one of the few to recognize both Klemm and Klimsa in the photographs, as well as Franz [Staltmayer] (see the transcript of the hearing Monsignor Giovanni Bicchierai, May 24, 1967, Fondo Processi ai criminali nazisti. Procure di Dortmund e Berlino, box 5, file 52, ACDEC).

[101] Oscar Curiel, arrested in Milan in November 1944, was detained in San Vittore and subsequently deported to the Bolzano camp, where he remained until liberation in April 1945. His daughter, Livia Curiel Uggeri, and his four-year-old granddaughter were arrested in Milan during the roundup at the synagogue in November 1943. Both were deported to Fossoli and then to Auschwitz, where they were selected and killed upon arrival (August 1944) (see Picciotto, *Il libro della memoria*, 207 and 632).

[102] Wilhelm Kaup to Eloisa Ravenna, July 30, 1967, Italian translation prepared by CDEC in 1967 from the German original. The letter continues as follows: "It struck me to observe how men can take pride even though they had to endure unspeakable suffering during the darkest period of German history" ("Mi ha colpito constatare come degli uomini possano essere fieri pur avendo essi dovuto sopportare dolori indicibili nel più buio periodo della storia tedesca").

> in wrongdoing and that today should unite us in the search for what is just and good. None of the witnesses who had expressed doubts and distrust at the time when they were summoned rose and left without greeting you once you had finished asking your questions; Mr. Curiel, addressing me, even said: "Poor people, them too: how much harm all this has done them." These, for me, are the most beautiful moments, the moments in which I feel that something melts within us and that it is still possible to smile. But a "healing" in this sense is possible only—as you write[103]—in conscious remembrance, in the struggle against those who persist in remaining silent, and in the teaching—without any attenuation—of this dark period of German history and of the extermination of the Jews of Europe to the younger generations.[104]

The proceedings initiated by the Dortmund prosecutor's office in 1964 and culminating in the 1967 hearings did not continue in that venue due to insufficient evidence to bring the case to trial: neither the documentation nor the testimonies collected up to that point provided sufficient grounds to establish that Bosshammer had been responsible for the deportation of the Jews from Italy.[105] In 1968, the Bosshammer case was taken up by the Berlin court, with a new legal classification of the charges: complicity in murder with Hitler, Göring, Goebbels, Himmler, the heads of the Reich Main Security Office (Reichssicherheitshauptamt; RSHA), and Department IVB4—Ernst Kaltenbrunner, Heinrich Müller, Adolf Eichmann, and Rolf Günther.

The trial took place between the end of 1971 and the beginning of 1972, and also at that stage, the work of the CDEC and of Eloisa Ravenna proved decisive. This further phase of the investigation will be addressed in a subsequent article.

[103] Kaup wrote: "My professional task, for the past nine years, has been to bring to light the crimes of the Hitler era, but it is also because I feel it as a duty from which I cannot withdraw, the fact of belonging to those forces within my people that provide the conditions to ensure that never again will the spirit of our nation become brutalized and, at the same time, to drag millions of people from other countries along this path. The crimes committed against the Jews of Europe constitute a historical fact, and all future generations of Germans will not be able to escape this reality. My children must know the point to which political and racial fanaticism can lead: only through the bridge of knowledge of this genocide will future generations be able to prevent its recurrence in history, as Jaspers very rightly said" (Wilhelm Kaup to Eloisa Ravenna, July 30, 1967, Italian translation from the German original prepared by the CDEC [1967]).

[104] Eloisa Ravenna to Wilhelm Kaup, October 4, 1967

[105] Addressing Holzner, the public prosecutor of the Berlin court, Ravenna asked, somewhat polemically and with a certain bitterness: "But why is Bosshammer being prosecuted? Because he was in charge of the deportation of the Jews from Italy, and because in fact thousands of Jews were deported from Italy and did not return. This, it would seem, emerges from your findings, and we do not understand how the fact that his name is not known in Italy can in any way alter his position before the law (or will the lack of Italian testimonies serve someone to prove the innocence of a man who—judging by the events—did in fact carry out his task?). Unless Bosshammer can prove that someone else took care of it in his place, and can indicate the real persons responsible" (Eloisa Ravenna to Dietrich Holzner, August 13, 1970, Fondo Processi per procure di Dortmund e Berlino, box. 2, file 42, ACDEC).

**Patrizia Baldi**
Fondazione Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea, CDEC
edu@cdec.it

# "Better Than Schools Teach It, More Accurately Than Our Fathers Tell It"

## The Educational Commitment of the CDEC, 1955-2005

ABSTRACT

This article describes the dynamics that led the CDEC to engage with schools and to define its educational program during its first 50 years of activity. In its early phase, this took the form of self-education among young members of the Federazione Giovani Ebrei Italiani (FGEI; Jewish Youth Federation of Italy) within the Resistance and an antifascist paradigm. From the 1970s onward, its contribution to education on the memory of deportation and the Resistance developed from a perspective that diverged from that of the Istituti storici per la Resistenza (Institutes for the History of the Resistance). With the publication of deportees' testimonies and survivors' visits to schools, however, a unified view of the struggle for Liberation and of the victims of Nazism-Fascism persisted. In the late 1980s, historical research began to challenge these approaches. In the 1990s, amid renewed scholarly work on deportation and in response to a new wave of antisemitism and denialism, the CDEC began to devote itself to educational work in a more structured way. With the transition from the First to the Second Republic, attention to the Resistance declined. The paradigm shift was marked by the establishment of Holocaust Remembrance Day. Pedagogical reflection identified Auschwitz as an anthropological watershed. Subsequently, two developments defined new educational challenges: the establishment of museums and memorials in Italy and widespread access to the internet.

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## Introduction

This article is the result of a preliminary survey of educational initiatives at the CDEC, conducted on the basis of documents from the institution's historical archive covering its first 50 years of activity, from its founding to 2005. As the author has headed the CDEC's Education Department since 2017, the choice of this timeframe reflects the intention to provide a historicized account of the transformations that have shaped the CDEC's educational commitment, with sufficient critical distance and without reference to her own work.

## The Early Years—Educating Oneself

Founded in 1955, the CDEC was established with the explicit aim of "providing tomorrow's scholars and historians" with documentation on the Jewish tragedy and of disseminating the history of Jews in Italy and their contribution to the cause of freedom to a broad audience.[1] This defined a process that would concern the institution for decades to come: collection and preservation, research, and dissemination, within a national context of growing attention to the memory of political and racial deportation and to its inclusion within the antifascist experience and the Resistance.[2]

The CDEC's commitment to research, explicitly stated and ideologically motivated, was primarily directed at young Jews, so that they might learn from the errors and horrors of the past how to discern the right path to follow,[3] while preserving the memory of the "Martyrs"—a term borrowed from the antifascist paradigm and used indiscriminately to refer to both members of the Resistance and deportees.[4]

An article published in early 1960 in *Hatikwà*, the periodical of the Federazione Giovani Ebrei Italiani (also known as FGEI, Jewish Youth Federation of Italy),[5] inaugurated a season of reflections and initiatives aimed at responding to the "anti-Jewish wave," to the period marked by swastikas, at both the local and international levels.

Statements contained in a letter in the readers' column of a national daily newspaper published on 29 November 1959, written by a student who, after visiting the first exhibition on deportation from Italy,[6] incredulously sought confirmation of what had

[1] Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea, Sezione Italiana, April 1956 (Venice, 1956), 3, Fondo Attività del CDEC 1955-1995 (unprocessed collection), CDEC Foundation Archives (hereafter ACDEC), Milan.

[2] Filippo Focardi, *Nel cantiere della memoria. Fascismo, Resistenza, Shoah, Foibe* (Rome: Viella, 2020), 170; Robert Gordon, *Scolpitelo nei cuori. L'Olocausto nella cultura italiana (1944-2010)* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2013), 87.

[3] Relazione introduttiva tenuta dal Responsabile Dr. Roberto Bassi al 2° Convegno dei Collaboratori del C.D.E.C, Turin, December 25, 1956, 4, Fondo Attività del CDEC 1955-1995 (unprocessed collection), ACDEC. Bassi was among the founders and first head of the CDEC.

[4] Focardi, *Nel cantiere della memoria*, 167.

[5] Bruno Di Porto, "'Ieri' nella scuola di oggi," *Hatikwà* 4, January, 1960, 2.

[6] Inaugurated in Carpi on 8 December 1955, as part of the initiatives for the tenth anniversary of Liberation, the "Mostra Nazionale dei Lager nazisti" (National Exhibition of Nazi Concentration Camps) was later reassembled and displayed in numerous cities until 1960.

occurred in the extermination camps,[7] challenged institutions and prompted survivors to testify to the horrors they had endured. This was only the first in a series of articles.[8] Present-day awareness of the Fascist past became the starting point for political engagement in antifascism. The young members of the FGEI carried forward the debate on education in the service of antifascism, personally committing themselves to promoting historical education on Fascism and civic engagement by questioning their parents' generation about their adherence—or lack thereof—to the regime. These choices were motivated by the desire for integration into the national antifascist myth and by the affirmation of an indissoluble link between Judaism and antifascism.[9] Drawing on the CDEC Foundation Archives, at the end of July 1960 the FGEI organized the first exhibition on Fascist anti-Jewish persecution,[10] which was set up during the customary summer camps.

## Before 1967—Within the Resistance Paradigm

In an article published in Israel in January 1960,[11] dedicated to the publication of the first catalogue of the CDEC Foundation Archives, Roberto Bassi[12] highlights the archive's usefulness as an "agent in the construction of history," especially for young people, who "naturally shy away from vague and imprecise rhetorical celebrations" and wish to gain an in-depth understanding of the recent past—better than that taught in schools, more accurately than that narrated by fathers.[13]

Between 1961 and 1963, three booklets devoted to the experiences of Jews in Italy during Fascism, edited by Guido Valabrega, were published. These attracted interest among

[7] The letter, sent to La Stampa by a student who signed herself as "the daughter of a Fascist who would like to know the truth," was picked up by other newspapers. The article mentions *Paese Sera*.

[8] With reference to the problem of the continuity of the state apparatus in the transition from Fascism to the Republic: Claudio Pavone, *Alle origini della Repubblica. Scritti sul fascismo, sull'antifascismo e sulla continuità dello Stato*, new ed. (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2025), 95-99. On the lack of purging of school personnel, see the case study of Padua in Fabio Targhetta, "Tra selva normativa e schedatura di massa: I procedimenti di epurazione degli insegnanti di scuola secondaria," Rivista di storia dell'educazione 1 (2018): 209-225.

[9] Guri Schwarz, "Nota introduttiva," in *Diario di un partigiano ebreo gennaio 1940-febbraio 1944*, *Emanuele Artom*, ed. Guri Schwarz, new ed. (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2022), xiv.

[10] "Il CDEC al campeggio," Hatikwà 4, nos. 7-8, July-August, 1960, 2.

[11] A Jewish political and cultural periodical, published in Florence (1916-1938; 1944-1974) and edited, at that time, by Carlo Alberto Viterbo.

[12] Roberto Bassi served as CDEC's general secretary from 1955 to 1960.

[13] L'archivio del C.D.E.C. e le vicende degli ebrei italiani nel periodo fascista (s.d.), 3, Fondo Attività del CDEC 1955-1995 (unprocessed collection), ACDEC. It should be noted that only in 1956 did the ANED amend its statute to admit former racial deportees, while the National Association of Italian Anti-Fascist Political Persecutees (ANPPIA) had already taken up the cause of compensation for the victims of antisemitic persecution, who had long been excluded from indemnities, a few years earlier. For further discussion: Paola Bertilotti, "Contrasti e trasformazioni della memoria dello sterminio in Italia," in *Storia della Shoah in Italia: Vicende, memorie, rappresentazioni. 2: Memorie, rappresentazioni, eredità*, eds. Marcello Flores et al. (Turin: UTET, 2010), 58-114.

scholars as well as a broader readership[14] in the wake of the Eichmann trial,[15] but also encountered resistance due to their critical stance toward the communal leadership.
Toward the end of the 1960s, Eloisa Ravenna[16] edited an excerpt devoted to the CDEC for the Associazione Nazionale ex deportati nei campi nazisti (also known as ANED, National Association of Former Deportees in Nazi Camps),[17] in which she stated that the institution had received its first grant from the Ministry of Public Education. The CDEC recorded an increase in requests for consultations from secondary school students and teachers and collaborated in initiatives promoted by other organizations, focused primarily on the Resistance and secondarily on deportation, such as the exhibition organized for Deportees' Day in September 1964.

## The 1970s—Education for Memory and the Fight against Antisemitism

In 1967, the link between the memory of antifascism and the memory of the Shoah began to fracture following the positions taken by the Italian Communist Party regarding the Six-Day War. The Italian Jewish community, internally divided, registered a rise in antisemitism that went beyond judgments of Israel's political and military strategy. The antifascist paradigm gradually lost ground in the reconstruction of postwar Jewish identity. In an essay devoted to schools and the Resistance published in the early 1970s, Ravenna drew the attention of those concerned with transmitting the spirit of the Resistance to younger generations to the connection between the struggle against fascism and the struggle against antisemitism,[18] as well as to the shortcomings of educational approaches that excluded Jewish resistance in Europe from the narrative, thereby depriving the fate of Jewish deportees of dignity by categorizing them as passive victims.[19]
In the following years, the CDEC's commitment would be characterized by the convergence of education regarding he memory of deportation and the Resistance with the fight against contemporary antisemitism. Research projects guided by teachers at the CDEC's headquarters, as well as initiatives undertaken by many young people—some of

[14] Gli ebrei in Italia durante il fascismo, October 30, 1963, mimeographed pamphlet accompanying the publication of *Gli ebrei in Italia durante il fascismo* 3 (1963), following the publication of volumes 1 (1961) and 2 (1962), Fondo Attività del CDEC 1955-1995 (unprocessed collection), ACDEC.

[15] Despite these publications, Italy's role, reinforced by the trial, remained anchored to the image of a country that devoted itself to the rescue of the Jews, while the role of Fascism remained largely unacknowledged. See Valeria Galimi, Sotto gli occhi di tutti. La società italiana e le persecuzioni contro gli ebrei (Milan: Le Monnier, 2018), 89-112.

[16] Eloisa Ravenna was CDEC's general secretary from 1963 to 1973.

[17] Eloisa Ravenna, "Il centro di documentazione ebraica contemporanea," *Quaderni del Centro di Studi sulla Deportazione e l'Internamento* 4 (1968): 38-46.

[18] Eloisa Ravenna, "Resistenza e antisemitismo ieri e oggi," in *La Resistenza e la scuola*, ed. Istituto Storico della Resistenza Bresciana (Brescia: Editrice La scuola, 1970).

[19] Discorso della Dr. Eloisa Ravenna al IV Convegno dell'Ebraismo Progressista, Paris, March 24-25, 1973, Fondo Attività del CDEC 1955-1995 (unprocessed collection), ACDEC. In that context, the same themes are addressed and expanded upon, with reference to the relentless pace of antisemitic attacks from various origins: from the left, from the right, from the extraparliamentary factions of both sides, and from the most reactionary Catholics.

whom also came from the Jewish school system—became opportunities to establish contact with the broader world. For many participants, research proved to be a means of questioning preconceived or distorted ideas about Jews, or of filling gaps in knowledge.

After Ravenna's death in 1973, the CDEC continued, despite its limited resources, to provide tools to a wide audience, above all through exhibitions. In 1975, two initiatives stood out: collaboration in the organization of an exhibition on the Resistance promoted by the Municipality of Milan at Palazzo Reale[20] for the thirtieth anniversary of Liberation, and the preparation of a volume intended for schools regarding the deportation and resistance of Jews in Italy, with a focus on local experiences, for the thirtieth anniversary of the Resistance and deportation from Tuscany.[21] The exhibition had an explicitly educational purpose. It presented the ideological components and social motivations of the struggle against Fascism and gave prominence to Jewish antifascists and members of the Resistance. Its success led to it being converted into a traveling exhibition.

Two years later, the CDEC initiated a project to read and review lower secondary school textbooks, identifying inaccurate information about Judaism and Zionism alongside antisemitic elements,[22] drawing on the expertise of the newly established sector devoted to the study and documentation of antisemitism.[23] That same year, it was invited to collaborate in the Polish government's initiative to establish an "international museum with a section dedicated to the Jewish Holocaust" at Auschwitz. For the Jewish world, this project carried particular significance at a time marked by a resurgence of neo-Nazi denialist pamphlets.[24] Also in 1975, the CDEC established an academic committee in order to strengthen the advisory and disseminatory functions—through exhibitions and audiovisual materials—within which its engagement with schools was situated.

The 1970s concluded with the co-curation of an exhibition[25] on another aspect of the Resistance, on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the promulgation of the Nuremberg Laws: spiritual resistance, illustrated through drawings and biographies of authors selected by Miriam Novitch, curator of the Lohamei Haghetaot Kibbutz Museum.[26] The exhibition opened in the context of the public outcry triggered by the denialist statements of Robert Faurisson. The response from both lower and upper secondary schools in Milan and Lombardy was significant: more than one hundred classes visited the exhibition in the space of two weeks.

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[20] "Mostra della Resistenza," celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of Liberation, Palazzo Reale, Milan, April-June 1975.

[21] Giuliana Donati, *Ebrei in Italia: Deportazione, resistenza* (Florence: Giuntina, 1975).

[22] "Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea C.D.E.C.," *Bollettino della Comunità Israelitica di Milano* 9, 1977.

[23] A sector also called "Documentazione e studi sulla situazione degli ebrei in Italia" (Documentation and Studies on the Situation of the Jews in Italy) in *Breve Relazione del C.D.E.C. al 30° Congresso della F.G.E.I.* (Firenze 1977) (October 27, 1977), 2.

[24] The project for the Italian Memorial to the Deportees in Nazi Extermination Camps in Block 21 of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum was formally entrusted to the ANED and inaugurated in 1980. In agreement with the UCII and the CDEC, it was clarified that the memorial is dedicated to Italian deportees, both political and Jewish.

[25] "Aspetti di una resistenza ebraica al nazismo. Comunicazioni visive dai campi di concentramento," exhibition at the Biblioteca Trivulziana in Milan, 17 January-7 February 1979.

[26] The Ghetto Fighters' House was the first museum in the world dedicated to the Holocaust and Jewish resistance, founded by Holocaust survivors in Israel in 1949.

## After 1982—The Years of Experimentation

During the 1980s, CDEC researchers began working directly in schools. Thanks to a proposal and funding from the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, the Center organized its first seminar on the history of Nazism and Fascism, deportation, and Jewish resistance in Europe, aimed at Italian Jewish schools. The methodological approach focused on engaging students through the "didactics of objects in the learning of history."[27] The initiative began with third-year lower secondary classes at the Jewish school in Rome. The seminar was followed by a visit to the exhibition on the Resistance that was first displayed at the Palazzo Reale in 1975. The traveling version of this exhibition subsequently toured Italy and was also displayed in non-Jewish venues.

As the CDEC monitored the growth of antisemitism, which had been steadily increasing since the 1970s, in 1982—against the backdrop of the First Lebanon War—the Jewish minority was directly targeted by various sectors of public opinion. This had repercussions for the image of Jews, for Jewish self-awareness, and for relations between minority and majority groups. Initiatives for schools multiplied. The CDEC opened its doors to students and teachers for research in its library, including its audiovisual materials, the documentary archive, and the section containing studies and documentation on antisemitism. For lower secondary schools, both Jewish and public, study days on deportation and Jewish participation in the Resistance alternated with those devoted to antisemitism. During seminars, classes could visit the CDEC and learn about the institution and its research activities.

The link between the prevention of antisemitism and youth education is clearly illustrated by an initiative of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities (UCEI) and the Jewish Community of Milan, which involved the CDEC and was made possible by compensation awarded following an antisemitic demonstration in Varese in 1979: a memorial visit to Dachau for 34 upper secondary students from Milan in the spring of 1986, with the aim of deepening knowledge of recent European history and promoting a culture of respect. The students' work prior to their departure for the camp—with the section on the Nazi system of oppression and on racist prejudice being entrusted to the CDEC[28]—included the study of the ruling of the Court of Cassation and the reasoning behind the conviction of supporters of the Emerson Varese basketball team, linked to the far-right *Fronte della Gioventù* political movement, for apology for genocide.[29]

Toward the end of the 1980s, between 1987 and 1989, traces of the institution's educational commitment, coordinated by Michele Sarfatti,[30] can be found in its biennial

[27] "La storia dal vero," *Shalom* 10, November 1980, 29.

[28] "Comunicato stampa della Comunità Ebraica di Milano," 3 April 1986, Fondo Attività del CDEC 1955-1995 (unprocessed collection), ACDEC.

[29] Offense provided for under Italian law of 9 October 1967.

[30] A contemporary historian. Coordinator of the CDEC from 1982 to 2002, and director from 2002 to 2016.

and annual reports.[31] This commitment was primarily directed at Jewish schools in Milan and Turin and secondarily at public schools in Lombardy, through seminars devoted to persecution, the Shoah, and anti-Jewish prejudice. This period also saw the revision of educational materials such as the "Worksheets on Nazi Oppression,"[32] produced ten years earlier on behalf of the Union of Italian Israelite Communities (UCII) during the presidency of Raffaele Jona, a former *Giustizia e Libertà* partisan and entrepreneur.

The 1979 worksheets and their revision in 1987, the result of the work of various CDEC collaborators (including Guido Valabrega and Giuliana Donati) and of the relevant scholarly literature, offer a highly revealing snapshot of research conducted at the Center, of the relationship between teaching about the deportations and the Shoah and its evolution, and of the debate on denialism as it was taking shape in the 1980s. The structure and variety of the contents highlight the project's pedagogical maturity. From a historiographical perspective, one can observe the gradual consolidation of the extermination of the Jews as a distinct field of research and study.

Seminar-based training for lower secondary schools remained firmly anchored in the study of the Jewish resistance during the Second World War,[33] with particular emphasis on the European dimension of the Shoah and on Nazism. Feature films and documentaries played a key role in enlivening the seminars.

## Around 1988—A Shift in Perspective

In 1988, a shift in perspective took place: while remaining anchored in the European dimension of the Shoah, deportation from Italy assumed greater prominence, and for the first time, a seminar addressed to schools also included the direct testimony of a survivor, Goti Bauer.[34] "1938: Le leggi contro gli ebrei," a special issue of *La Rassegna mensile di Israel*[35] published in collaboration with the CDEC and edited by Michele Sarfatti, which was issued on the fiftieth anniversary of the promulgation of Fascist anti-Jewish legislation, attracted the interest of institutions engaged in human rights education. The original texts of the anti-Jewish legislation were published, together with a study of the treatment of the racial laws in history textbooks. Amnesty International Italy devoted an article to the CDEC,

[31] *Relazione sull'attività svolta nel 1987-1988* (Milan: CDEC, 1989), 4, Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea, ACDEC; Relazione sull'attività svolta nel 1989 (Milan: CDEC, 1990), 5, Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea, ACDEC.

[32] *L'Olocausto. Schede su alcuni aspetti particolari del sistema dell'oppressione nazista: Note, dati, elaborazioni realizzate a cura del Centro di documentazione ebraica contemporanea di Milano per conto dell'Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane* (Milan: CDEC, 1979); later reviewed and reissued under the title Lo sterminio degli ebrei. Schede su alcuni aspetti del sistema dell'oppressione nazista: Note, dati, elaborazioni realizzate a cura del Centro di documentazione ebraica contemporanea di Milano nel 1979 e aggiornate nel 1987 (Milan: CDEC, 1979).

[33] "Seminario per le III medie," 7 and 8 April 1987, Fondo Attività del CDEC 1955-1995 (unprocessed collection), ACDEC. The program and the resources made available, such as the list of documents and literary texts on Jewish resistance, are preserved in the archives.

[34] Goti Bauer, born Agata Herskovits in Fiume on 29 July 1924. Deported from Italy to Auschwitz, she survived the Holocaust and became a witness.

[35] "1938: Le leggi contro gli ebrei. Numero speciale in occasione del cinquantennale della legislazione antiebraica fascista," *La Rassegna mensile di Israel* 1-2 (January-August 1988).

announcing the beginning of a collaboration with the Centre for Human Rights Education in order to disseminate documents and articles on the curtailment of Jewish rights under Fascism[36] from a perspective detached from references to the Resistance.

This evolution between 1988 and 1989 was linked not only to advances in research on anti-Jewish legislation and deportation from Italy, but also to the CDEC's intention to investigate the role of Fascism in the exclusion and persecution of Jews.[37] Educational activity once again became centered on the Shoah, despite the Observatory on Antisemitism calling for educational responses to the rise in anti-Jewish prejudice,[38] within an increasingly intolerant and racist climate. The spread of antisemitic narratives was also noted, accusing Jews of exploiting the compassion of others, resulting in a weakening—and at times a rejection—of the memory of the Shoah, not only within radical right-wing circles. Between the late 1980s and the early 1990s, Europe entered a prolonged phase of political and social transition, marked by the crisis of ideological reference points following the end of the Cold War and, among other factors, by discrimination linked to immigration.[39] In these years, new shared value frameworks emerged at the European level, which were no longer tied to political systems legitimized through the Resistance. The victim paradigm and the memory of the Shoah—understood as foundational to postwar European identity—were identified as powerful cohesive forces both by Western European societies grappling with the challenge of multiculturalism and by societies in the former Soviet bloc aspiring to be admitted into Europe.[40]

With the CDEC's transformation from an association into a foundation in 1990,[41] educational work, on paper, did not constitute a priority, although it remained one of its activities. The institution was engaged in projects of national relevance, such as producing the aforementioned educational worksheets, as well as in consultancy work and interventions from its collaborators, and it was frequented by teachers and textbook editors, who made use of its library.[42] In this phase, schools appeared interested in the

[36] *Educare ai diritti. Newsletter quadrimestrale di Amnesty International* 1 no. 2 (1991/92): 7-8.

[37] The "La legislazione antiebraica in Italia e in Europa" (Anti-Jewish Legislation in Italy and Europe) conference, held on October 17 and 18, 1988 and promoted by the Chamber of Deputies in collaboration with the UCII and entrusted to the CDEC, should also be mentioned. The proceedings allowed for the publication of the texts of the anti-Jewish legislation enacted in Italy, France, Germany, and Austria, thus enabling comparative study, including for educational purposes.

[38] Adriana Goldstaub, "Il razzismo e l'antisemitismo in Italia," *Bollettino della Comunità Israelitica di Milano* 44, no. 2, supplemento, February 1988, 4-5.

[39] On the increase in public and private discrimination against minorities, also supported at the institutional level, see, for example, an article by Marina Morpurgo preserved in the CDEC Foundation Archives, "Negri, terroni, creperete tutti," *L'Unità*, March 29, 1989, 3, Milan section.

[40] For an analysis of memory policies from the 1990s to the 2020s, see Valentina Pisanty, "Che cosa è andato storto? Le politiche della memoria nell'epoca del post-testimone," *Novecento.org. Didattica della storia in rete* 13 (February 2020, https://www.novecento.org/la-didattica-della-shoah/che-cosa-e-andato-storto-le-politiche-della-memoria-nellepoca-del-post-testimone-6297/ accessed April 13, 2026.

[41] On 17 April 1990, by decree of the President of the Republic. The Foundation became fully operational on 1 January 1991. See *Relazione sull'attività svolta nel 1990* (Milan: CDEC, 1991), 2, Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea, ACDEC.

[42] Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea, *Relazione sull'attività svolta nel 1991* (Milan: CDEC, 1992), 8.

CDEC, while the CDEC primarily regarded schools as a field of investigation.[43] These inquiries would, a few years later, provide the basis for the development of structured educational training attentive to the shortcomings or distortions identified, for example, in school textbooks.[44]

In the spring of 1991, a volume edited by Liliana Picciotto entitled *Il libro della memoria. Gli ebrei deportati dall'Italia (1943-1945)*,[45] which was published by Mursia, was released. This work was the result of decades-long research conducted by the CDEC. The publication of research on deportation from Italy sparked significant interest within the school system. Meetings and public discussions on the Shoah were organized, as well as on denialism and antisemitism, phenomena whose marked increase—alongside racism—was recorded by the Archive on Antisemitism in the second half of 1992,[46] to such an extent that it disrupted the CDEC's routine work.

At the same time, civil and religious authorities—particularly in Milan—expressed solidarity with the Jewish community and with non-EU immigrants, who were targets of neo-Nazi and neo-Fascist violence,[47] through intercultural and interreligious initiatives. Growing public attention to episodes of antisemitism and racism led to numerous educational interventions on these issues. Using CDEC materials, an exhibition on antisemitism was organized in Trieste and Gorizia by the Association of Young Jews and the Regional Institute for the History of the Liberation Movement in Friuli-Venezia Giulia. The same period also saw the presentation of a legislative proposal on hate crimes, later known as the Mancino Law.

In the absence of a structured educational offering, CDEC interventions in schools were carried out upon request; nevertheless, reports by librarians and the Observatory highlight the Center's role as a mediator between resources, research, and educational needs. The Ministry of Public Education and its advisory bodies recognized, and acted upon, the need for a structured response from schools to the increase in intolerance. In 1993, a ministerial circular identified racism and antisemitism as educational issues and provided operational guidelines for addressing them in schools;[48] in 1994, another circular addressed the prevention of antisemitism through "Intercultural Dialogue and Democratic Coexistence:

[43] See Adriana Goldstaub, Laura Wolfsi Rocca, and Giovanni Battista Novello Paglianti, "L'immagine dell'ebreo in un gruppo di studenti veneti. Un'indagine antropologica con la tecnica del differenziale semantico," *La Rassegna mensile di Israel* 56, no. 3 (1990): 489-516.

[44] Laura Wolfsi Rocca and Giovanni Battista Novello Paglianti, "L'immagine degli ebrei e dell'ebraismo nei libri di storia della scuola media dell'obbligo," *La Rassegna mensile di Israel* 56, no. 3 (1990): 441-487, in collaboration with the CDEC.

[45] About Liliana Picciotto's research on the deportation of Jews from Italy, see her article in this issue of *Quest*: "From 'Il Libro della memoria' to 'Resistenti ebrei d'Italia'. A Personal Journey".

[46] That year saw tomb desecrations in Jewish cemeteries and the rise of anti-Jewish and Holocaust-denying propaganda by neo-Fascist factions in Italy, which had already occurred in France and Germany, while in Germany xenophobic violence against asylum seekers was widespread. See also "Anche l'antisemitismo cambia," *Bollettino Comunità Ebraica di Milano*, December 4, 1992.

[47] Province of Milan, "Milano contro l'antisemitismo per la solidarietà," December 14, 1992, Congress Hall, Via Corridoni. Speakers included Arrigo Levi, Carlo Maria Martini, Giorgio Napolitano, Paolo Mieli, Luisella Mortara Ottolenghi, Micha Guttmann, Giuseppe Laras, Giampiero Borghini, and Tullia Zevi.

[48] *Razzismo e antisemitismo il ruolo della scuola* (Racism and Antisemitism: The Role of Schools), Pronouncement of the National Council of Public Education, March 24, 1993, transmitted by Ministerial Circular no. 138, April 27, 1993.

The Schools Project-Based Commitment."[49]

The spread of the intercultural approach in schools also involved historical minorities such as the Jewish community. With the aim of fostering a culture of coexistence, an agreement was signed between the Ministry of Public Education and the UCEI. The following year, a further circular identified this approach as a tool for addressing antisemitism, racism, and xenophobia.[50]

Ministerial support enabled the CDEC to launch a project entitled "Chi sono gli ebrei" (Who Are the Jews), an audiovisual resource accompanied by a booklet on Shoah-related filmography, which was distributed to schools. Moreover, in 1993, thanks to a group of volunteers and supporters, the CDEC inaugurated its video library containing Italian and international materials on Jewish topics and contemporary history, in response to growing requests for visual documentation from schools and the media. Teachers from across Italy—also interested in guidance on the didactic use of audiovisual materials—constituted the bulk of its users. In a special issue of the educational research journal *Sisifo*, published by the Piedmontese Gramsci Institute, an article by Marcello Pezzetti[51] appeared on the didactic use of audiovisual materials in the "teaching of the Shoah." This article reported on research conducted by the CDEC concerning the necessary preparation for students to understand educational interventions on the subject, as well as the equally necessary pedagogical preparation of teachers, alongside historical knowledge of antisemitism and anti-Jewish persecution.[52] The CDEC's educational proposals—especially at the local level—included screenings, lectures, and survivor testimonies. From the late 1980s onward, on the initiative of the Association of Italian Jewish Women (ADEI-WIZO), survivors had begun speaking in the protected setting of private homes before deciding to enter schools. In 1995, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War—and in particular of the liberation of Auschwitz and the Liberation of Italy—a project was launched to collect video interviews with Jews who had survived deportation from Italy, conducted by Liliana Picciotto and Marcello Pezzetti. These interviews would form the Archive of Memory and later gave rise to the documentary film *Memoria*.

Situated between dissemination and education was the CDEC's consultancy work for films such as *Life Is Beautiful* by Roberto Benigni, *Jonah Who Lived in the Whale* by Roberto Faenza, and *Schindler's List* by Steven Spielberg. From the second half of the 1990s, these films contributed significantly to shaping the imagery of the Shoah and the forms of its representation within the school audience.

## Between 1998 and 2000—Memory Politics and Education

[49] Ministry of Public Education, Ministerial Circular no. 73, March 2, 1994.

[50] Ministry of Public Education, "Campagna europea dei giovani contro il razzismo, la xenofobia, l'antisemitismo e l'intolleranza" (European Youth Campaign against Racism, Xenophobia, Antisemitism, and Intolerance), Ministerial Circular no. 56, February 16, 1995.

[51] On Marcello Pezzetti's work at CDEC, see the article co-authored with Ruggero Gabbai in this issue of *Quest*: "Building Memory: The Creation of the CDEC's "Archivio della Memoria" and the Film *Memoria*".

[52] Marcello Pezzetti, "Le immagini della Shoà. Documentari storici per le scuole," *Sisifo* (October 1993): 59-61.

In this period, attention to new technologies and multimedia languages emerged through the "Destination Auschwitz" project,[53] which ran from 1998 to 2000. This CD-ROM brought together historical texts, archival and contemporary images, a historical atlas of twentieth-century Europe, maps, and virtual reconstructions of Auschwitz-Birkenau, developed in consultation with survivors. These reconstructions aimed to visually represent not only the mechanisms of exterminating Jews, Roma, and Sinti, but also the physical layout of the camp. Research conducted in public and private archives and in Italian and foreign libraries made it possible to acquire previously unpublished documentary material.[54] The European Commission rewarded the project for its innovative character and supported the distribution of 10,000 copies to upper secondary schools.

On the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the anti-Jewish laws, the CDEC participated in joint initiatives or projects promoted by other institutions and schools, including a volume for upper secondary students,[55] prepared by the Chamber of Deputies. More frequently, these took the form of public events addressed to large numbers of student groups, sometimes rhetorical in nature, such as the reading of reflections by prominent cultural figures. The anniversary marked a turning point in reflections on the complex relationship between Jews and Italian institutions under Fascism, with the state assuming a leading role in promoting initiatives to raise public awareness of the persecution of Jews in Italy.[56]

In 1998, the volunteers working in the video library, coordinated first by Liliana Picciotto and later by Marcello Pezzetti, formed the first core of educators specifically dedicated to schools.[57] A project on the history of the Shoah, general Jewish history, and Jewish identity designed by the video library supported these educational interventions. Their teaching methodology was developed through observation and analysis, particularly for lower secondary schools, and the educators documented each intervention in a written report.[58] In lower secondary schools, educators introduced the reality and long-term history of the Jews before addressing prejudice and the Shoah; in upper secondary schools, researchers offered lectures combined with survivor testimonies. Alongside Goti Bauer, Nedo Fiano and Liliana Segre participated in these initiatives. Auschwitz constituted the central focus, although antisemitism and other related topics were also addressed.

Four elements characterized the CDEC's independent educational program, shaped by its research and classroom experience: the structuring of a recognizable and recurring educational program; access to the Center's research and documentary resources; the production and didactic use of audiovisual and multimedia materials; and the combination of place-based education with the pedagogical use of testimony.

The year 1998 also marked the CDEC's engagement in educational trips and residential professional development courses for teachers at Auschwitz, which were curated by

[53] Project in collaboration with the Proedi Editore publishing house (2002).

[54] *Destinazione Auschwitz*, Rome, July 10, 2000, Archivio didattica 2000, ACDEC.

[55] *La persecuzione degli ebrei durante il fascismo. Le leggi del 1938* (Rome: Camera dei deputati, 1998).

[56] Valeria Galimi, "La persecuzione degli ebrei in Italia (1938-1943). Note sulla storiografia recente," *Contemporanea* 5 (2002): 587.

[57] Maurina Schinasi, interview by the author, June 18, 2025. Pia Masnini and Nicoletta Salom were regular members of the group.

[58] Corrispondenza scuole, 1998, Interventi nelle scuole 1997-1998, intermediate archives of the CDEC, ACDEC.

Marcello Pezzetti on the CDEC's behalf until 2006. That same year, the Ministry of Public Education launched a project entitled "The Twentieth Century: Youth and Memory," involving more than 400 schools, which it continued for the following three years. Many participated and undertook memory trips, particularly to Auschwitz or Mauthausen.[59]

Since 1989,[60] Auschwitz had been at the center of intellectual debate in France, promoted by *Pardés* and the Alliance Israélite Universelle, intertwining religious, philosophical, historical, literary, and educational elements within Jewish thought. In 1995, this reflection reached Italy via a translated monograph.[61] Ethical questions were posed primarily within philosophical and educational contexts and were particularly taken up by the Catholic world, which, at a paradigmatic level, identified Auschwitz as the focal point of reflection on the genocide of the Jews, transforming it into a concept endowed with meaning for the present.[62] Within this framework, the CDEC assumed the role of a historiographical interlocutor in teacher training.[63]

On the invitation of the Ministry of Public Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the CDEC participated in the Forum on the Holocaust, which was held in Stockholm in early 2000. This led to the Foundation's official inclusion in the Italian delegation and in the Italian "task force" of the intergovernmental organization later known as the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.[64]

Following discussion with the Ministry, the Foundation submitted a funding request for research on the teaching of the Shoah in Europe and in Italy. Starting from a mapping of educational activities within the Jewish sphere and at sites related to the Shoah across the country, the project aimed to develop an effective educational strategy to be offered to schools. The project text outlined the reasons why, according to its proponents, the study of the Shoah should be prioritized within the history of the twentieth century.[65] At the same time, the proposal anticipated several educational issues linked to the spread of new technologies: young people's perception of living outside of history, the acceleration of change creating a generational gap, and the resulting loss of relevance attributed to

[59] Alessandra Chiappano, "Educare ai luoghi della memoria" (s.d.), https://www.italia-liberazione.it/ita/doc/Chiappano_06RE.pdf, accessed May 19, 2026.

[60] The year the proceedings of the "Penser Auschwitz" conference, held in Senato from 5 to 7 November 1988 for the fiftieth anniversary of Kristallnacht, were published.

[61] Shmuel Trigano, ed., *Pardés: Pensare Auschwitz* (Milan: Edizioni Thàlassa De Paz, 1995).

See, for example, Enzo Traverso, ed., *Insegnare Auschwitz. Questioni etiche, storiografiche, educative della deportazione e dello sterminio* (Turin: IRRSAE Piemonte - Bollati Boringhieri, 1995); Giuseppe Vico and Milena Santerini, eds., *Educare dopo Auschwitz* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1995); Gadi Luzzatto Voghera and Ernesto Perillo, eds., *Pensare e insegnare Auschwitz* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2004). These were the years in which the Holocaust began to be publicly commemorated by the Catholic Church, following the initiation of dialogue between Jews and Catholics. The issue of the Church's responsibilities was addressed in the document We Remember: A Reflection on the Holocaust, published in March 1998 by the Commission for Religious Relations with Judaism, chaired by Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy.

[63] See, for example, "Antisemitismo e Shoah," no. 7 (24 October 1996), organized by the Società Umanitaria.

[64] *Relazione sull'attività svolta nel 1999* (Milan: CDEC, 2000), 5, Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea, ACDEC.

[65] It should be noted that between 1996 and 2004, the chronological limits of the three school cycles—elementary, middle, and upper—were modified: the final year included the teaching of twentieth-century history by Ministerial Decree 682/96 from the Ministry of Public Education, better known as the "Berlinguer Reform."

knowledge of the past. The history of the Shoah, it argued, could become a tragic yet decisive lesson for younger generations, educating them in democracy without slipping into ideological rigidity or the banality of politics.

At the turn of the millennium, the Shoah was interpreted as the central event of the twentieth century, in a "post-ideological" phase of the role and values attributed to historical events within Italian culture.[66] In the same years, Western culture placed the Shoah at the center of public memory as an ethical point of reference for democratic systems founded on the protection of human rights.[67] In 2001, for the first time, the CDEC's annual report dedicated a specific section to highlighting its educational and didactic commitment, which from the following year would designate a distinct area of activity.

In preparation for the first Holocaust Remembrance Day, in the final months of 2000 the Foundation developed and published a *Workbook (Quaderno di Lavoro)*,[68] a dossier of documents, testimonies, and historical analyses, released on its newly established website. The publication of these workbooks continued for two more years, while in 2004 a chronology of the Auschwitz camp was published. It is worth noting that the first workbook—dedicated precisely to Holocaust Remembrance Day—offered a Shoah-centered interpretation of the meaning of this civic commemoration. Unlike the wording of the law, it explicitly mentioned the collaboration of Fascist Italian governments in the arrest and deportation of Jews.

With the establishment of Holocaust Remembrance Day, a new phase began in the conception and planning of Shoah museums and memorials. The CDEC participated in the work of the committees promoting the Shoah Memorial in Milan and followed the debate surrounding the creation of the National Museum of Italian Judaism and the Shoah (MEIS) in Ferrara. Shortly thereafter, it also became involved in planning the Shoah Museum in Rome.

In the early 2000s, the expression "Shoah education" entered common usage and became the object of reflection and study. The CDEC organized a national conference entitled "La didattica della Shoah. Il contributo del mondo ebraico all'insegnamento della Shoah nella scuola italiana: esperienze, metodologie prospettive" (Shoah Education: The Contribution of the Jewish World to Teaching the Shoah in Italian Schools—Experiences, Methodologies, Perspectives).

The decade inaugurated by Holocaust Remembrance Day marked a significant evolution in the CDEC's educational production in comparison to the previous decade. The focus shifted from reflection on the representation of the Shoah[69] to reflection on the relationship between history and memory—two moments within the process of cultural elaboration of the Shoah—at whose center remained the complex relationship between knowledge and education.

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[66] See Gordon, *Scolpitelo nei cuori*, 271.

[67] Focardi, *Nel cantiere della memoria*, 182. For a reflection on the need to be prepared to effectively and decisively combat discrimination, see Pisanty, "Che cosa è andato storto?"

[68] *Fondazione CDEC onlus, 27 gennaio 2001. Quaderno di lavoro per il "Giorno della memoria" ad uso delle scuole* (Milan: December 2000).

[69] Marcello Pezzetti, "Rappresentare la Shoah, trasmettere la memoria," in *Educare dopo Auschwitz*, eds. Giuseppe Vico and Milena Santerini (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1995).

During this period, the CDEC began developing the historical and architectural groundwork for a major national documentary exhibition, "Dalle leggi antiebraiche alla shoah. Sette anni di storia italiana 1938-1945" (From the Anti-Jewish Laws to the Shoah: Seven Years of Italian History, 1938-1945), displayed at the Vittoriano in Rome from 15 October 2004 to 30 January 2005. Of particular interest was the display of the autograph texts of the anti-Jewish laws and the files of the Committee for Research on Jewish Deportees. The documentation was complemented by archival film footage and by video interviews with survivors produced by the CDEC.[70] In 2007, the first digital exhibition on anti-Jewish persecution in Italy was completed and made available online, presenting three hundred documents accompanied by explanatory texts.[71] At the same time, a printed exhibition entitled "1938-1945 La persecuzione degli ebrei in Italia" (1938-1945: The Persecution of Jews in Italy) was produced for students, in two formats: one for institutional venues and one for schools and municipalities.

The curatorial approach of exhibitions in this phase reflects the institution's intention to disseminate its work to the public while continuing to rely on historical critique, without yielding to the subjective narrative of the witness—a figure increasingly shaping public discourse on memory and onto whose disappearance anxieties about Shoah's loss of relevance for younger generations were projected.

This educational framework remained unchanged until 2004, when the department was left without leadership. Some activities continued, while others came to an end. A few months earlier, a secretariat had been established in Rome, operating in collaboration with the Center of Jewish Culture of the Jewish Community of Rome, to support and organize school visits from survivors and witnesses of the Shoah in central and southern Italy.[72] This office took the name Progetto Memoria. Several years would pass before a new Education Department would be established in a new phase of the institution's history.

## Conclusion

Over its first 50 years of activity, the CDEC's educational commitment developed through both continuity and discontinuity, gradually becoming structured in relation to scholarly advances and to the demands and transformations of the political, cultural, and institutional context. Its educational experience thus emerges as the result of a non-linear process, marked by experimentation, interruptions, and renewals, as well as by the tension between historical research and educational responsibility. This legacy constitutes an indispensable prerequisite for understanding subsequent developments and represents a heritage to be reactivated and put back into circulation.

[70] *Relazione sull'attività svolta nel 2004* (Milan: CDEC, 2005), 3, Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea, ACDEC.

[71] Michele Sarfatti and Alessandra Minerbi, eds., "La persecuzione degli ebrei in Italia 1938–1945," digital exhibition published online in 2006 at www.museoshoah.it, accessed May 19, 2026. The website was redesigned in 2022 and is now available at https://shoahmuseum.cdec.it/, accessed May 19, 2026.

[72] Sandra Terracina, interview by the author, June 11, 2025.

Guri Schwarz
University of Genoa
guri.schwarz@unige.it

# Between Scholarship and Cultural Activism

## The CDEC and the Changing Nature of the Italian Memoryscape. Interviews with the Former and Current Directors: Michele Sarfatti and Gadi Luzzatto Voghera

## ABSTRACT

This contribution aims at presenting and contextualizing the interviews made to the recent and former directors of the Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea (CDEC), offering basic elements to introduce the readers to the history of the institution and the context in which it operates, while at the same time raising some questions regarding current challenges.

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## Introduction

The history of the Fondazione Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea (Contemporary Jewish Documentation Center, CDEC), founded in Milan in 1955, is inseparable from the broader evolution of the modern Italian Jewish condition, the perceptions of contemporary antisemitism, the memory of the Fascist persecutions, and the ways in which the Shoah has been represented within the Italian public sphere. From its origins as a volunteer-driven initiative promoted by the Federation of Italian Jewish Youth (FGEI), originally dedicated to collecting dispersed documentation on the Jewish contribution to the Resistance as well as on Mussolini's racist policies,[1] the CDEC has grown into a national research center whose activity spans archival preservation, digital humanities, Holocaust education, and the monitoring of present-day antisemitism. In these pages, I will offer a brief introduction to two interviews, one with Michele Sarfatti, scientific Director of the CDEC from 2002 to 2015, and the other with Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, who took on the same role in 2016. Both are historians by training, of two distinct generations. The first is a specialist in Fascist antisemitism[2] who grew into the directorship from within the ranks of the institute, while the latter came to the role having previously worked as a scholar in other institutions and has major publications in the history of Jewish emancipation as well as antisemitism in its most recent forms.[3] Both have had to tackle the responsibility of managing a small but important cultural institution, which, since the 1990s, has had to manage growing requests and expectations. These dialogues have been conceived for publication in this special issue dedicated to the history of the CDEC in the belief that they might offer a privileged vantage point from which to examine the transformations of the institution and, through it, the shifting terrain of Italian Jewish history and memory.

As Sarfatti recounts, when he entered the institution in the early 1980s, the documentary landscape was marked by a "repressed knowledge." Astonishingly, there was no systematic, critical corpus of the 1938 racial legislation and the administrative guidelines that accompanied it. This absence was not merely technical; it was symptomatic of a refusal to confront the indigenous nature of Italian racism. There is a stark contrast between the climate in which Sarfatti began working at the Center and the context in which he retired at the end of his mandate as Director, which essentially progressed from silence and inattentiveness to the monumentalization of the Holocaust in public memory and the reassessment of Fascist antisemitism within and without the field of historical scholarship. Liliana Picciotto's systematic reconstruction of the list of names of those deported from

[1] On the Federation, its political orientation, and the birth of the CDEC, see Guri Schwarz, *After Mussolini: Jewish Life and Jewish Memories in Post-Fascist Italy* (London-Portland: Vallentine Mitchell, 2013), 88-92. For more on the CDEC, its origins, and its activities, see, beyond the other contributions pubblished inissue: Liliana Picciotto, "Eloisa e il CDEC," *La Rassegna mensile di Israel* 47, no. 1-3 (1983): 9-44; Michele Sarfatti, "La Fondazione Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea," *in Funzioni dei centri di storia e cultura ebraica nella societa cantemporanea*, ed. Michele Sarfatti (Milan: Proedi, 1998), 45-50.

[2] Michele Sarfatti, *Mussolini contro gli ebrei. Cronaca dell'elaborazione delle leggi del 1938*, new ed. (Turin: Zamorani, 2017) (originally published 1994); Sarfatti, *The Jews in Mussolini's Italy: From Equality to Persecution* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

[3] Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, *Il prezzo dell'eguaglianza. Il dibattito sull'emancipazione degli ebrei in Italia (1781–1848)* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1998); Luzzatto Voghera, *L'antisemitismo: Domande e risposte* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1994); Luzzatto Voghera, *Antisemitismo* (Milan: Editrice Bibliografica, 1997); Luzzatto Voghera, *Antisemitismo a sinistra* (Turin: Einaudi, 2021).

Italy and Italian-controlled territories[4] and Sarfatti's own studies on the implementation of Fascist antisemitism and the history of Jews under the regime[5] filled a vacuum, becoming an essential reference point for further studies and contributing significantly to a new reckoning with the country's past. These contributions from scholars who operated within the CDEC started to be developed before the so-called myth of the good Italian came to be discussed and challenged in Italian public discourse and international historiography,[6] paving the way for the consolidation of a different, less apologetic and more documented narrative.

Such developments matured as the country's political and cultural landscape was rapidly shifting, and with it, its relationship to the recent past.[7] As Robert Gordon has shown, public discourse on the Shoah underwent a major shift between the immediate postwar decades—when selective remembering and Resistance-centered narratives prevailed—and the period beginning in the late eighties, when literary, cinematic, and civic forms of Holocaust remembrance expanded dramatically. The "memory boom" of the 1990s and early 2000s, which was consolidated with the institution of Holocaust Memorial Day in the year 2000, created unprecedented expectations for public engagement with the Shoah and placed institutions such as the CDEC at the center of a newly intensified memorial culture.[8]

Within that shifting memoryscape, as Holocaust memory gained unprecedented prominence at a national and international level, the CDEC's transformation from a modest documentation center into an authoritative national institution was both reactive and creative. Under Sarfatti's tenure as Director, the CDEC started professionalizing the management of its archival holdings, with the development of a rich online open access repository, the Digital Library. The early adoption of Linked Open Data standards situated the institution at the forefront of current experimentation with modern technology for the preservation and fruition of archival sources. The CDEC's archives have continued to grow through the decades and today constitute one of the most important repositories for the study of modern and contemporary Italian Jewish history. Being first and foremost a

[4] Liliana Picciotto, *Il libro della memoria. Gli ebrei deportati dall'Italia*, new ed. (Milan: Mursia, 2002) (originally published 1991). On the genesis of that research, see Liliana Picciotto Fargion, "La ricerca del Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea sugli ebrei deportati dall'Italia," in *Storia e memoria della deportazione. Modelli di ricerca e di comunicazione in Italia e in Francia*, ed. P. Momigliano Levi (Florence: Giuntina, 1996), 60-72.

[5] See note 2 above.

[6] David Bidussa, *Il mito del bravo italiano* (Milan: Il saggiatore, 1993). On the genesis and function of this myth, see Filippo Focardi, *Il cattivo tedesco e il bravo italiano. La rimozione delle colpe della seconda guerra mondiale* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2013); Guri Schwarz, "On Myth Making and Nation Building: The Genesis of the 'Myth of the Good Italian,' 1943–1947," *Yad Vashem Studies* 1 (2008): 111-143.

[7] To be fully understood, this evolution must be interpreted in connection with the crisis of the political system and of the antifascist narrative that lay at its foundations. Marco Bresciani, "Fascism, Anti-Fascism and the Idea of the Nation: Italian Historiography and Public Debate since the 1980s," *Contemporary European History* 30 (2021): 111-123; Guri Schwarz, "La memoria prima del giorno. La crisi del 1992-1993 e la genesi di un nuovo paradigma commemorativo", in *Calendario civile e politiche della memoria in Italia. Dinamiche nazionali e transnazionali*, eds. Filippo Focardi and Guri Schwarz (Rome: Viella, 2026), pp. 73-102. Filippo Focardi, *La guerra della memoria* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2005); Philip Cooke, *The Legacy of the Italian Resistance* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011).

[8] On the seasons of Italian Holocaust memory: Robert S. C. Gordon, *The Holocaust in Italian Culture, 1944–2010* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012); Filippo Focardi, *Nel cantiere della memoria. Fascismo, Resistenza, Shoah, Foibe* (Rome: Viella, 2020); Rebecca Clifford, *Commemorating the Holocaust: The Dilemmas of Remembrance in France and Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). On Holocaust Memorial day, see Guri Schwarz, "Il 27 gennaio e le aporie della memoria," *Italia Contemporanea* 296 (2021): 100-123.

documentation center, the archives and the library are two core components of the institute. Their holdings include Jewish community archives, papers documenting the activities of various Jewish groups and organizations during and after the fascist period, personal archives, documentation on internment and deportation, an extensive photographic collection, and video testimonies by Holocaust survivors recorded in the 1990s by Liliana Picciotto and Marcello Pezzetti. The gathering of testimonies went hand in hand with the elaboration of new forms of dissemination. As Luzzatto Voghera points out, the documentary film *Memoria*, directed by Ruggero Gabbai (1997), which was largely influenced by Lanzmann's *Shoah* in terms of its modes and style of narration and framing, was a major accomplishment for the CDEC and a cornerstone of a renewed Italian public memory of the Holocaust. Parallel and complementary to the archives is the library, its large collection of rare Italian Jewish periodicals, a portion of which were recently digitized and made accessible online, together with its collection that blends Judaica and antisemitic pamphlets and sources, possibly the richest single collection in the country, make it an invaluable point of reference not only for historians, but also for literary scholars, sociologists, and researchers in various fields.

In 2022, the institute moved to the site of the Memoriale della Shoah (Shoah Memorial) just beneath Milan's Central Station, where the trains carrying political and racial deportees left the city, awarding it renewed visibility, while at the same time raising new issues connected with its cohabitation with a separate institution, the Memoriale itself, devoted to memory and education and not to scholarship or documentary preservation. This complicated move, completed under Luzzatto Voghera's directorship, signaled both symbolic and practical changes. Symbolically, it embedded the CDEC within the very site from which many Jews (and non-Jews) were deported. Practically, it expanded public access to the archives, library, and educational services, and placed the institution in dialogue with the broader ecosystem of Italian Holocaust education. Since the establishment of the *Giorno della Memoria* (Holocaust Memorial Day) in 2000, demand for pedagogical resources has grown exponentially. The CDEC has responded by producing teaching materials grounded in archival evidence, training educators, participating in national educational programs, and collaborating with museums and memorials.

Another of the Center's traditional fields of activity has been its monitoring of antisemitism. In this respect, we see a similar trend, with a gradual transition from volunteer work to professionalization that began under Sarfatti's tenure and was further developed and enhanced by Luzzatto Voghera in a new political and cultural context. Today, the gathering of data on antisemitism is a central part of the CDEC's mission, having undergone a significant transformation over the last twenty-five years. The CDEC's Osservatorio Antisemitismo (Observatory on Antisemitism), created before most European countries had systematic monitoring mechanisms in place, has become the primary national body for collecting data on antisemitic incidents, and currently produces annual reports aimed at informing the country's institutions, largely based on the highly controversial IHRA working definition of antisemitism,

These developments intersect with evolving national and international policies. In 2020, the Italian government chose to adopt the aforementioned IHRA working definition of antisemitism and appointed its first national coordinator for the fight against antisemitism, the pedagogist Milena Santerini, confirming a sustained collaboration between state institutions and research centers like the CDEC with an increased level of engagement. Italy's government policies—as confirmed by the recent National Strategy against

Antisemitism in 2024-25—reflect a broader European trend toward integrating civil society data (notably that produced by the CDEC) into national frameworks. In this respect, the CDEC is today poised not merely as a national actor, but as an institution integrated in international networks involved in education about xenophobia and in analyzing current antisemitism. These are key aspects of the institute's activity today, as Luzzato Voghera emphasized in his interview, remarking on the relevance of the Center's integration into European international networks such as Facing Facts and the European Network for Countering Antisemitism through Education, as well as CDEC inclusion, since a decade, with its own representative, in the Italian national delegation of the International National Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). In a comparative perspective, the CDEC's hybrid role—combining archival research, education, community engagement, and the monitoring of anti-Jewish sentiment—places it between the functions of the UK's Community Security Trust (CST) and France's Service de Protection de la Communauté Juive (SPCJ), but with a stronger research and historical-analytical mandate.

In between the lines of these interviews, we may gather insight not only regarding the evolution and activities of the Center, but more broadly regarding how different and yet intertwined fields, ranging from historical research on Jewish history and antisemitism to the present-day analysis of antisemitic trends and educational activities, have shifted and changed over the decades. For a long period, although it was not the sole proponent of initiatives and research, the CDEC was an essential actor in this field, since the Italian academic and cultural system proved to be largely uninterested. Since the early years of the twenty-first century, the situation has undergone a profound mutation. A new generation of scholars has gained a foothold in universities and research institutes, in Italy and abroad, providing new input and energy in the study of the history of the Jews in Italy and of the forms assumed by antisemitic cultures and practices in the country. This generational transition indirectly reshapes the CDEC's role by transforming the ecosystem in which it operates: from being the *de facto* center of scholarly expertise on the Shoah in Italy, it is now increasingly a collaborator, facilitator, and infrastructure provider within a more plural research environment that crosses national boundaries. Following the Board's advice to the current Director when he took office, as Luzzato Voghera reports in his interview, it reacted by investing in international and national collaborations, and also in new areas such as interreligious dialogue. It has become further integrated into transnational networks, such as the European Holocaust Research Infrastructure (EHRI), maintaining and developing venues that allow for the sharing of knowledge—ranging from the Digital Library to this scholarly journal, conceived as a site of free and open discussion as well as an instrument to stimulate cross-border interaction and exchanges—but also to some degree progressively shifting its focus from historical research to Holocaust education and the examination of present-day antisemitism.

Ultimately, Sarfatti and Luzzatto Voghera's reflections reveal a dynamic institution whose hybrid mission is at once historical and civic. In the past, its research work contributed to shape the historiography on Fascist antisemitism; its archival and bibliographical resources continue to constitute a key resource; its educational programs have accompanied the national institutionalization of Holocaust memory; its *Osservatorio Antisemitismo* (Antisemitism Observatory) has become a reference point for institutions as well as media discourse. As new challenges emerge and Italy confronts new forms of prejudice, intensified political polarization, and the gradual transition to a post-survivor memory culture, the CDEC stands as both a custodian of the past and an active participant, directly and sometimes militantly engaged, in present-day cultural struggles. Its recent stance in support of the IHRA working definition on antisemitism, as the Italian Parliament discusses

introducing new laws on the subject, place it squarely at the center of a heated debate that intersects politics, media discourse and scholarship.
In this respect, in closing these introductory remarks to the two interviews, I wonder how the current crisis, a crisis of politics and of memory, which took shape following the October 7 2023 massacres as well as the ensuing devastating and protracted Israeli military reaction, has altered the landscape in which institutions such as this operate. We may be facing a seismic shift in international relations that directly and dramatically implies the end of the long postwar era, a protracted season in which—despite several transformations—historic and symbolic references to the legacy of World War II and the Holocaust constituted an essential linchpin and key reference point. As this new horizon unfolds, traditional frameworks of meaning are eroded and new cultural wars are taking shape. Holocaust memory and varying uses of antisemitism are thus manipulated and have become more instrumental than ever to factionalism and political exploitation, both at a national and at an international level. It therefore seems urgent and essential to critically re-examine the current memory culture, its limits and blind spots, as well as to rediscuss definitions of antisemitism and their uses. It seems to me that a Jewish cultural institution such as the CDEC and, more broadly, scholars involved in these fields in various ways, need to publicly and decisively confront these problems in their full complexity. Business cannot continue as usual. For a cultural institution, having a clear cultural line, based on sound scientific principles is, obviously, paramount, and in the current context it is essential to reflect on the risks of being dragged into partisan politics.
Potentially, the CDEC's roots as a historical institute may allow it to identify instruments to tackle the current challenges, perhaps starting by historically framing the current crisis with its unique characteristics vis-à-vis previous moments of comparable tension that induced violent memory crises, such as the first Lebanon War (1982) and the first Intifada. It was also in connection to those tense seasons that a renewed effort to fight antisemitism and to educate, with a growing emphasis on the centrality of Holocaust memory, has developed. Clear connections exist between Middle Eastern conflicts, evolving public memory, and the representation of Jewish identity in the public sphere. Historicizing these phenomena may not provide immediate solutions or obvious escape routes, but it could offer a clearer grasp of the intricacies which characterize the contemporary scenario and of the multi-decade trajectory that has lead us to this point.

## Interview with Michele Sarfatti, former Director of the Cdec (June 15, 2025)

GURI SCHWARZ: *When did you start working at the CDEC? Can you please describe the nature and organizational structure of the institution at the time of your arrival? You worked there for many years: How did the institution—and your role in it—evolve through time?*

MICHELE SARFATTI: I began working at the CDEC in Milan in 1981. At the time, I was living in Florence and making trips to Switzerland (Geneva and Lausanne) to conduct research on the Association internationale des femmes—which was founded by Marie Goegg Pouchoulin shortly before the Franco-Prussian War—on behalf of Franca Pieroni Bortolotti, and also to gather information on Italian Jews who had sought refuge in Switzerland between 1943 and 1945 for a study I was doing on Gianfranco Sarfatti (my father's

brother, who accompanied his parents to Switzerland and later returned to Italy to join the Resistance in Valle d'Aosta). During these trips, I would often stop by the CDEC's archives and library to conduct research on Jews in the Resistance and during the Fascist period more broadly. At that time, I had neither a stable job nor a clear career prospect. I had a very strong interest in history, which perhaps first revealed itself in the enthusiasm with which I had read C. W. Ceram's *Gods, Graves, and Scholars: The Story of Archaeology* when I was a boy.[9]

Over the years, this interest shifted toward recent history, also driven by a desire to understand what it means to be Jewish in contemporary times. During the usual coffee break at one of these stops at the CDEC (which involved a collective pause of all activities, including for users), I was offered a position in the archives. The hours were short and the pay was low, as for everyone. I accepted and started a few weeks later.

At that time, fewer than ten people were working at the CDEC, motivated by a strong commitment to documenting and understanding the historical and present condition of Jews in Italy. The organizational structure was very light; Gigliola Colombo Lopez had recently been elected coordinator of activities (there was a bit of a kibbutz-like spirit at the CDEC, and that position was indeed elected). There was also a board of directors, chaired by Luisella Mortara Ottolenghi, who devoted considerable time and energy to managing the institute.

The CDEC was organized into activity sectors, which initially included the library, the archives (which also encompassed historical research), and antisemitism (in the sense of monitoring the phenomenon). I later understood that this structure made the CDEC different from the main institutes with which we compared ourselves (Yad Vashem, but especially the nearby—and namesake—Centre de documentation Juive Contemporaine in Paris). The coexistence of historical documentation, conte.porary records, books and journals on both the past and present vitality of Italian Jewry, and the study of contemporary prejudice meant (and still means) that the CDEC brings together topics and knowledge that in many other countries are developed in separate institutes. Moreover, this intertwining of different fields always has a positive effect on the work carried out in each area (of course, with care taken to avoid overlaps and confusion).

The following year, I applied (or perhaps was nominated) to become coordinator of activities, and the assembly of collaborators entrusted me with the role. In undertaking it, I always tried to respect the autonomy and, at times, the strong independence of the activity sectors as much as possible, insisting above all on the continuous qualitative improvement of the work carried out.

Two decades later, the entire institute had grown considerably, the collaborators had mostly transitioned from volunteers to employees, and relations with the wider society (including the organizations and companies supporting the CDEC) required greater bureaucracy and decision-making structures. All of this created the conditions for introducing the role of Director. I was the natural candidate for the new role, and my position was formally changed in 2002. This decision was also submitted to the assembly of collaborators, some of whom voted against the transformation. Upon becoming Director, I realized that my formal education had not provided me with any specific preparation for "leading" and that I would therefore have to learn, compare, and engage in

[9] Ceram was the pseudonym used by the German journalist Kurt Willhelm Marek. The book was orignally pubblished in German in 1949 by Rowohlt pubblishing house as *Götter, Gräber und Gelehrte*, and had an astounding international success, with subsequent translations in numerous languages. The Italian translation came out as *Civiltà sepolte: il romanzo dell'archeologia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1952).

dialogue. Assuming the new responsibilities was thus a progressive learning process. Nonetheless, the overarching goal remained quality: the strength of the CDEC resided (and still resides) solely in the expertise of its collaborators and the value of their work.

G.S. : *Through your work, you have become the foremost scholar on Fascist antisemitism. Could you tell us how you developed your interest in this field, and to what extent your research endeavors were connected to the Center's activities?*

M. S. : I joined the CDEC as an archivist, but my passion was historical research. For many years, my desk was opposite that of Liliana Picciotto, and I quickly became aware of her intensive work on identifying Jews deported from Italy and reconstructing their fates (work that later culminated in the volume *Il libro della memoria* [1991]).[10] Thus, that thematic field was already being diligently and expertly cultivated.
After some time, reflecting also on requests from archive users, I realized that there was no comprehensive list of the Fascist anti-Jewish laws. Investigating why, I was struck by the fact that these laws had been studied in depth by only one historian, Renzo De Felice. On examining his book (*Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo* [1961]),[11] I noticed that I was not convinced by some of his interpretations. Finally, I considered that the topic fell squarely within the CDEC's mission. The process of reflection is always more complex and intertwined than can be fully described, and naturally I was influenced by external stimuli; yet these were the key points.
From this arose, first, the publication of the complete corpus of anti-Jewish laws in the journal *La Rassegna mensile di Israel* in 1988 (on the fiftieth anniversary of their enactment); then the book Mussolini contro gli ebrei. Cronaca dell'elaborazione delle leggi del 1938, published by Zamorani in 1994; finally, a short essay on the history of Jews in Italy during the Fascist era for the work Gli ebrei in Italia, edited by Corrado Vivanti and published by Einaudi in 1997 in the Storia d'Italia. Annali series. This essay subsequently led to my book Gli ebrei nell'Italia fascista. Vicende, identità, persecuzione, published by Einaudi in 2000 and updated and translated multiple times.
I would like to highlight, in this trajectory, the inclusion of the word *contro* (against) in the title of the 1994 book: it was a small act positioning the work "against" a then-widespread narrative that attributed almost all responsibility for the persecution of Jews in Italy to Hitler. My research, on the other hand, demonstrated—through documentary evidence—that Mussolini himself devoted considerable effort and creativity to "thinking through" the Italian anti-Jewish laws. This was therefore not an a priori ideological judgment, or a "prejudice," but rather a reconstruction of the actions of a historical actor.

G. S. : *What do you feel were the CDEC's most relevant achievements during your tenure as director?*

M. S. : I cannot offer a detached assessment of my own commitment to the CDEC, which

[10] See above, footnote n. 4.

[11] De Felice's book was first pubblished in 1961, and later reprinted in various revised versions (1962; 1973; 1988; 1993). An Enghlish translation of the final version has appeared with the title *The Jews in Fascist Italy: A History* (New York: Enigma Books, 2001).

lasted until 2015. After all, it was a commitment of over thirty years—an important part of my active life. What I can do, however, is point out what I consider to be two significant achievements of the research carried out by the CDEC during that period, which had an important impact on Italian society. I wish to emphasize that these achievements were accomplished by a small private Jewish institute—the CDEC itself—and not by the official research system in Italy, which is centered on the universities and the National Research Council (CNR). For the sake of accuracy, I should also clarify that the merit for the first achievement obviously belongs entirely to those who conducted the research, without my direct involvement.

The first of these achievements is a brief table in Liliana Picciotto's book Il libro della memoria[12]. The table condenses decades of research and indicates how many victims were arrested by Germans, Italians, or both between 1943 and 1945; in quantitative terms, it shows that Italians made a significant contribution to the arrests, and therefore to the deportation of people whom the Fascist government had classified as being "of Jewish race." In short, that small sequence of numbers attests to the existence of participation and shared responsibility.

The second achievement is the reconstruction of Mussolini's personal involvement in drafting the 1938 anti-Jewish laws, as I have already mentioned.

In both cases, the CDEC demonstrated that in Italy, there was genuine "Italian" engagement in conceiving and implementing antisemitic persecution. It thus made a significant contribution to fostering a knowledge of the national past that is closer to historical reality and less self-exonerating.

G. S. : *What, in your view, is the future of studies on the Shoah in Italy?*

M. S. : Observing what has happened in past decades, I believe that Holocaust studies in Italy do not have a very positive future. By this, I am not referring to research on individual victims or specific episodes of persecution, which will surely continue and yield new and useful knowledge. What I am pessimistic about is the research commitment to the general characteristics of the Holocaust in Italy, and to the place that the Holocaust occupies in Italian history. Such studies require substantial resources and large research infrastructures—that is, the direct engagement of universities or the National Research Council (CNR). Yet these are precisely the institutions that have never personally undertaken the reconstruction of the list of Jews killed or of the anti-Jewish laws enacted by the Fascist government. On the occasion of the eightieth anniversary of 1938 in 2018, some universities installed plaques bearing the names of expelled professors and students, and the rectors of all universities issued a collective letter of apology for those expulsions. However, they did not organize a dedicated research program.

After October 7, 2023, the situation became even more difficult: it seems to me that interest in the persecution of the Jews has, on average, declined, due to the controversies surrounding the events in Gaza, which have affected the very perception of the Holocaust. I write "seems" because this is a personal impression for which I cannot yet provide evidence, and which I hope will ultimately be contradicted by the facts.

The research I consider lacking concerns various aspects. First, a demographic and social analysis of the deportation victims, including their relation to the wider population of

[12] See above, footnote 4.

persecuted individuals. How did the presence of very young children or very elderly family members impact outcomes? How significant were the victims' educational level and social class? Were there differences between Italian and foreign victims? We also know very little about the relationship between economic impoverishment caused by the 1938 laws and the arrests of 1943 to 1944. It would also be necessary to investigate the link between survival and the existence of "Aryan" relatives. Numerous other topics could also be mentioned.
But even the last topic I listed highlights that Holocaust studies tend to be studies of Italian society as a whole. And here, in my view, lies the core issue. The fact is that a true commitment to studying the life and persecution of a minority within the national society requires, on the one hand, the preliminary abandonment of all majority biases, and on the other, the conviction that such a study allows for a deeper understanding of the majority itself. And yet this is precisely one of the obstacles facing Holocaust studies: the majority's limited interest in knowing itself and acknowledging its own dominance.
Still, I am a historian, not a futurologist, and these reflections are only suppositions. It is better to conclude that in Italy, the scientific activity of the CDEC continues to be necessary, regardless of whether the majority oft he country's pubblic opinion is aware of it.

## Interview with Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, current Director of the Cdec (June 4, 2025)

G. S. : *You were appointed to the role of scientific Director of the Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea in 2016. Can you please describe the nature and organizational structure of the institution at the time of your arrival?*

GADI LUZZATTO VOGHERA: By the mid-2010s, the CDEC had entered a transitional phase. The Center had been established in 1955 on the initiative of the Jewish Youth Federation (FGEI), and over the decades, it had undergone successive stages of development, evolving from a volunteer-based organization into one increasingly characterized by professionalization. In the mid-1980s, this evolution prompted the board—which is always representative of the Italian Jewish communities—to create a foundation, thereby placing the institution among the most prominent Italian cultural centers, alongside the Gramsci, Einaudi, and Sturzo Foundations, among others.
Upon Michele Sarfatti's retirement, the board opted to launch a public selection process for the new scientific Director, rather than appointing someone from within the institution. This decision represented a significant act of institutional courage, recognizing generational renewal as one of the most pressing challenges facing the Foundation. The new Director was entrusted with a mission of clear discontinuity, focused on rationalizing resources, strengthening national and international collaborations, forging ties with research institutions and universities, and developing initiatives in the field of interreligious dialogue. Given the persistent uncertainty around reliable sources of funding that might allow for medium-term planning, the overarching idea was to enhance the Center's public visibility by actively communicating and disseminating the range of its research and archival work.
When I accepted the role—created in the early 2000s to replace the former title of "secretary general"—the CDEC was housed on two floors of a building owned by the Jewish Community of Milan, located at Via Eupili 8, formerly home to the Jewish school. It

was subdivided into distinct departments: the archives and historical research formed a single unit; the library operated independently; the Observatory on Antisemitism worked from a separate room. There was also a photographic documentation department and a video archive. Around fifteen individuals worked in various capacities, in addition to several volunteers. Women made up most of the staff—a longstanding characteristic of the CDEC since the 1960s—and the average age of the workforce was relatively advanced.

G. S. : *The CDEC is in many ways a hybrid institution, partly a documentation center dedicated to the conservation of archival materials and other resources, partly a place that promotes and actively engages in historical research, partly oriented toward educational activities, and finally also an institution dedicated to monitoring present-day antisemitism. How do these very diverse sectors of activity fit together, and what is or are—in your view—the area or areas on which the CDEC should invest the most in the future?*

G. L. V. : I find the term "hybrid" quite fitting; it aptly captures the nature of the institution. Indeed, the CDEC performs multiple functions, each with considerable competence and professionalism. Today, and in fact throughout its history, the CDEC has never been an academic research center in a strict sense. In my view, its fundamental identity must be anchored in its name: first and foremost, we preserve archival documentation, books, journals, oral testimonies and video interviews, photographs and films, and music scores. We are a constantly expanding repository that chooses diverse avenues for making this material thoughtfully and effectively accessible to the public.

Before delving into our methods, I would emphasize how this hybrid character allows us to maintain continuous relationships with a variety of research centers and cultural institutions, often more specialized. We can, for instance, establish formal collaborations with many universities, cooperating in fields ranging from historical research to education and dissemination. We maintain structural partnerships with our sister institutions ("older sisters," I would say) such as Yad Vashem in Jerusalem or the Mémorial de la Shoah in Paris. We work with a music conservatory that has established doctoral fellowships based on documentation we preserve. We have agreements with the Italian President of the Council of Minister'soffice and with law enforcement apparatus monitoring antisemitism. We offer consultancy services to writers, filmmakers, and journalists. All this is made possible by the hybrid nature of our institution, and of course, by the extensive expertise gained over 70 years of work.

Let me now turn to our operational approach. I would highlight the visionary quality of certain key decisions made in the recent past. Two moments come to mind. In the mid-1990s, the CDEC secured funding to collect video testimonies from Italian Jewish survivors of Nazi extermination camps. The project was led by Liliana Picciotto and Marcello Pezzetti and involved the collaboration of a young filmmaker, Ruggero Gabbai, who took up this unprecedented challenge. This resulted in an invaluable trove of images and high-quality footage, which was initially condensed into the documentary movie Memoria (1997).

The second decision was to make a decisive commitment to digitization and to embrace the challenges posed by emerging technologies. The creation of a modern data management system—the Digital Library—was accomplished innovative for its time. This was a unifying project, intended to structurally link the Center's archival and bibliographical holdings through a single digital platform.

The CDEC's forward-looking spirit is, in a sense, "genetic." The institute was founded by a generation traumatized by the antisemitic persecutions of the 1930s and the devastation

of World War II. Their orientation was toward the future, and it is this imperative that we continue to honor today. We actively recruit young scholars and researchers, as well as civil service volunteers (through agreements with both the Italian and Austrian governments). We have established a department dedicated to education and training, convinced as we are that working with teachers and younger generations is essential to making our work meaningful. We constantly adapt our research methodologies on antisemitism to the evolving languages of the web and social media. Moreover, we pay close attention to communication, promoting a coherent and recognizable graphic identity for our public initiatives (conferences, digital exhibitions, newsletters, etc.).
Lastly, the relocation of the CDEC's headquarters from Via Eupili to Milan's Central Station, within the Shoah Memorial complex, has allowed us to open our library and archives to broader and more convenient public access. We now offer forty-nine workstations, computers for visitors, and extended opening hours—including Sundays. This move has significantly increased the use of our collections and has enhanced the Foundation's visibility beyond the traditional framework of the Jewish community.

G. S. : *What do you believe are the peculiarities of this institution? How does it compare to others operating within or outside of the country? What are its operating relationships with other academic and non-academic institutions inside and outside Italy?*

G. L. V. : Shortly after I assumed my role at the CDEC, the institution entered an intense phase of international project development. We had just completed the demanding yet unique experience of the EHRI project (European Holocaust Research Infrastructure), developed under the Horizon program, in which the CDEC had participated since 2015. Collaborating with international partners is undoubtedly challenging, yet the CDEC has demonstrated its ability to position itself as a competent and credible institution. This international orientation had already emerged in 2010 with the launch of an English-language historical journal. The scientific committee, responding to the initiative of a new generation of Jewish studies scholars, supported the creation of this academic platform: as noted on the journal's website, "CDEC's Scientific Board supported the creation of a new historical journal, based in Italy but written in English, as a venue for intellectual discussion in the field of Jewish studies," as noted on the journal's website. Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History is now approaching its thirtieth issue and has become a recognized platform in the field.
Joining European projects meant—and continues to mean—pursuing a necessary dynamic: taking advantage of international funding to support ongoing initiatives; exposing our researchers to an international academic environment, which continuously enriches our work with new perspectives and approaches, while also reaffirming the CDEC's central role as a key reference point in Italy. These collaborations extend our network, creating initiatives with significant social and cultural impact. Consider our training seminars for teachers, often developed with European, American, and Israeli partners—initiatives that allow for methodological exchange and foster innovative teaching. Consider also our work in monitoring antisemitic hatred and in educational efforts to counter it—fields in which the CDEC has long been a part of consolidated networks, such as Facing Facts and ENCATE, and it has represented Italy at the IHRA for over a decade. Finally, the EHRI project helped to establish a permanent European research infrastructure dedicated to Holocaust-related

archival documentation.

G. S. : *For a long time, the CDEC has invested in digital resources. Its Digital Library is a prime example of how to operate in terms of archival conservation, making documents and various resources easily available for scholars. What do you envisage as the key drivers of digital investment from the CDEC in the near future?*

G. L. V. : As previously mentioned, technological development is a central concern at the CDEC. The painstaking construction of the Digital Library has enabled us to transform what was once a largely two-dimensional paper archive into a complex, three-dimensional web of data connected to the individuals whose memory we preserve. The use of Linked Open Data (LOD) technology now allows searches performed through our online platform to connect the tens of thousands of individuals in our archives with a potentially expandable network of associations. This dynamic, constantly updated system enhances our work in the field of Digital Humanities.
We have, for instance, fundamentally changed how we conceptualize and present exhibitions. In recent years, we created an installation for the Triennale di Milano illustrating the 1938 Fascist "Census of Race," using data from our Digital Library in a visually intuitive format that broke from traditional exhibition models. A similar approach was adopted in an installation on the deportation of Jews from the island of Rhodes displayed at Milan's Shoah Memorial. Currently, our ever-expanding databases are enabling a new dissemination project using maps, documents, and narratives to trace the emigration (more accurately, expulsion) of Jews from Arab countries. The website for this project, TRAME, has been recently launched.

G. S. : *What do you believe to be the CDEC's major accomplishments during your years as its director?*

G. L. V. : Each leadership transition at the CDEC has ushered in periods of change and innovation, often in response to broader social and cultural transformations in Italy, Europe, and globally. The various scholars and administrators who served at the helm left their distinct marks and proposed different research and organizational strategies, always in keeping with the foundational mission of 1955. Roberto Bassi, Guido Valabrega, Eloisa Ravenna, and then Raffaele Jona, Luisella Ottolenghi with Liliana Picciotto, Michele Sarfatti and Marcello Pezzetti, and then Giorgio Sacerdoti with Raffaella Mortara and many of the institute's advisors and collaborators decided on and subsequently oversaw these transformations.
The nine years of my directorship were shaped by several strategic priorities. First among them was the relocation of our headquarters to Milan's Central Station, within the Shoah Memorial, and the opening—mentioned earlier—of a large public library. This move brought major operational changes, partly due to the Center's new public visibility and central location. Today, it is easy to come and study in the archives and library from practically all over Italy in just a few hours, and this has led to a notable increase in the presence of researchers, and consequently a multiplication of publications created thanks to the consultation of our material. A second major development was the decision to provide open access to key periodicals and newspapers published by Italian Jewry from the mid-nineteenth century through the post-World War II period. These primary sources are

indispensable for the study of modern Jewish history and are now regularly consulted by a growing community of scholars.
The third innovation involved the still ongoing establishment of a structured department dedicated to education and training. Previously, CDEC staff occasionally offered school consultations and organized public lectures, but education was not a core priority. Over time, we realized that the demand for professional training and education services on topics such as the history of the Holocaust, antisemitism, interreligious dialogue, and issues related to discrimination and human rights was growing from the world of schools and associations. Collaborations at national and international levels have therefore developed, leading the CDEC to become one of the most recognized points of reference in this field today.

G. S. : *In your view, how has the Middle Eastern conflict post-October 7 affected the CDEC?*

G. L. V. : It is generally inadvisable to analyze the consequences of a crisis while it is still unfolding. Nevertheless, certain emerging dynamics are already evident. The department most directly affected has been the Observatory on Antisemitism, whose scientific rigor has made it a critical reference point for media, politics, and institutions alike. The increased psychological pressure and workload has paralleled the surge in antisemitic incidents, prompting changes—which are still underway—in our working practices.
This rise in antisemitic acts has also intensified concerns around the safety of our staff and our premises, which—like many Jewish sites—are now under constant police surveillance. At the same time, we are witnessing a significant shift in civil society, with some sectors demanding (and at times expecting) unequivocal political condemnation of Israeli government and military actions from institutions like ours. Such expectations often blur into the problematic conflation of Jewish identity with Israeli policy.
We have also observed similarly troubling trends in the educational sphere, where there is an obsessive and scandalous tendency to draw false equivalence between the events of the Middle East conflict and the memory of the Shoah. These dynamics inevitably affect our institutional work, though it is too soon to determine whether the events of October 7 and the ensuing conflict will have lasting impacts—and if so, of what nature—once the current crisis reaches its conclusion.

**Liliana Picciotto**
Fondazione Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea, CDEC
liliana.picciotto@cdec.it

# 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.[1]

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.resistentiebreditalia.it (2023)—all works that I myself edited.[2] I would also include in this list the making of the film *Memoria* together with Marcello Pezzetti, which was directed by Ruggero Gabbai.[3]

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

[1] Marcello Morpurgo, *Valdirose. Memorie della comunità ebraica di Gorizia* (Udine: Del Bianco, 1986), 105.

[2] 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 Decembre 20, 2025.

[3] 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,[4] that the number of deportees had been far greater.[5] 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,[6] 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.[7]

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

[4] 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 pioneristico (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).

[5] 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).

[6] 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.

[7] 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.[8]

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,[9] 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.[10] 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[11] 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

[8] 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).

[9] 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.

[10] Investigation of the trial against Friedrich Bosshammer and judgment, Processo ai criminali nazisti. Procure di Dortmund e Berlino, ACDEC.

[11] 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[12] 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.[13] 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.

[12] 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.

[13] 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*.[14]
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.[15]
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.[16] I thus began the research for a project that I called "Memoria della salvezza,"[17] 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

[14] "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.

[15] Picciotto, "L'alba," 274-275.

[16] 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.

[17] 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.[18] Even Claudio Pavone, in his important work on the Resistance, had not taken them into account.[19] 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[20] 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,[21] Aharon Adolfo Croccolo,[22] Vittorio Finzi,[23] Beppe Sajeva,[24] Alberto Terracina,[25] and also Anna

[18] 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).

[19] Claudio Pavone, *Una guerra civile. Saggio sulla moralità nella Resistenza* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1991).

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

[21] Adelina Provenziali 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.

[22] 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.

[23] Vittorio Finzi was a partisan inspector for the Garibaldian Pinan Cichero brigade. Vittorio Finzi, interview by Liliana Picciotto, Genoa, 18 February 2010, MdS, ACDEC.

[24] At just fifteen years of age, Beppe Sajeva joined the Resistance in Val Sangone out of a spirit of adventure. Beppe Sajeva, interview by Liliana Picciotto, Boves, March 25, 2008, MdS, ACDEC.

[25] 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,[26] Guido Weiller,[27] 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,[28] a Garibaldian partisan from the anti-Fascist Montagnana family in Turin; Gustavo Ottolenghi,[29] a twelve-year-old courier in a unit of the 5th Autonomous Division under Commander Enrico Martini, known as "Mauri"; Luciano Segre,[30] 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,[31] a partisan of the Partito d'Azione (Action Party) who later became the commander of a band in the Aosta Valley; Bruno Segre himself,[32] a GL partisan in the Valle Grana; and Davide Schiffer,[33] 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[34] project which planned to create a web portal on Italian partisans based on sources from the RICOMPART archival material.[35] 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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[26] 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.

[27] 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.

[28] 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).

[29] Gustavo Ottolenghi, interview by Liliana Picciotto and Sara Buda, Genoa, August 10, 2018, RREB, ACDEC.

[30] Luciano Segre, interview by Liliana Picciotto and Sara Buda, Milan, April 15, 2018 and October 18, 2018, RREB, ACDEC.

[31] 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.

[32] Bruno Segre, interview by Liliana Picciotto and Sara Buda, Turin, July 19, 2018, RREB, ACDEC.

[33] 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.

[34] 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.

[35] 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,[36] 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[37] 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,[38] 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,[39] 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,[40] as well as Anna Pizzuti's valuable research on foreign Jews interned in Italy between 1940 and 1943.[41]

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,[42] Gilberto Terracina, Mario Graziano Terracina, Osvaldo 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,[43] a partisan leader in the province of Arezzo who was killed, and two others who fell—Bruno Fiorentini and

[36] In fact, the portal is constantly being supplemented with new records as they are gradually discovered and processed.

[37] 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).

[38] Fondo antifascisti e partigiani ebrei, 1922-1945, ACDEC.

[39] Fondo Censimenti, 1938-1942, ACDEC.

[40] 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, accessed December 20, 2025.

[41] Anna Pizzuti, Ebrei stranieri internati in Italia durante il periodo bellico, 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.

[42] 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).

[43] See the podcast dedicated to him at https://resistentiebrei.cdec.it/storie/eugenio-calo/, accessed May 6, 2.

Alessandro Sinigaglia[44]—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.[45] 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.[46] 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;[47] 5-6 October 1943 at Lanciano, in the province of Chieti;[48] and 13-15 November that same year in the fortress of San Martino, above Varese.[49]
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.

[44] 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.

[45] 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.

[46] 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.

[47] 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.

[48] Carlo Schoenheim, a partisan, doctor was one of the leaders of the battle of Lanciano.

[49] 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.

Marcello Pezzetti
Historian, former Director of the Shoah Museum in Rome
marcellochaim@yahoo.it

Ruggero Gabbai
Film director, Head of Forma International
ruggero.gabbai@formainternational.it

# Building Memory

## The Creation of the CDEC's Archivio della Memoria and the Film *Memoria*

**ABSTRACT**

This article, conceived as an institutional memoir written in two voices, retraces the creation of the CDEC's Archivio della Memoria and the making of the documentary film *Memoria* (1997). Drawing on the perspectives of a historian and a filmmaker, it highlights the emergence of a new approach centered on filmed testimony and the central role of place in reconstructing the experience of persecution. The article also reflects on the challenges of translating testimony into film, balancing historical rigor and narrative form. It thus traces the development of the project leading to the production of *Memoria*.

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## The Creation of the Archivio della Memoria at the CDEC[1]

Until the end of the 1970s, the tragedy of the Shoah, or the Nazis' attempt to exterminate the European Jewish population, was not public knowledge in Italy. Political persecution was better known, and consequently the places considered to symbolize the Nazi oppression were Mauthausen, followed by Dachau, then Buchenwald; that is, the so-called concentration camps (KL), almost always referred to as "extermination" camps.

Immediately after the liberation, Jews struggled to reconstruct a "Jewish" memory of the tragedy, but only a few survivors made their testimonies public. This was followed by a decline in discourse, justified by the belief that no one wanted to listen to them. Feeling that this immense black hole in European history was of little interest to anyone, the few survivors took refuge in silence, almost unconsciously entrusting Primo Levi with the task of speaking for them all. The construction of the memory of the Shoah was thus interrupted at its inception, partly because civil society remained deaf to it.

More than any other European nation, Italy remained chained to the confrontation between two dominant ideologies, Catholicism and communism: the former stood out for its guilty silence, if not for a conscious attempt at repression, while the latter had as its leitmotif the Soviet dictate that the tragedy of the Shoah should necessarily be included in the all-encompassing tragedy of the great "political" deportation. Therefore, the issue of "racial" deportation was addressed with deep embarrassment, precisely because it could not be included in a resistance narrative. For the Jews, there was never any talk of "resistance," but rather of the fact that they had allowed themselves to be "led to the slaughter like sheep." After all, what resistance could elderly people and women with children have offered?

In Italy, the media pointed to the Nazi regime as the sole culprit of the Jewish tragedy, concealing its own ignoble complicity, from the enactment of anti-Jewish legislation in 1938 to Police Ordinance No. 5 of 30 November 1943. However, there was one institution that stubbornly stood out from the crowd: the Centre for Contemporary Jewish Documentation (CDEC) in Milan, which, thanks to the tireless work of Eloisa Ravenna, had systematically identified some of the victims of the Nazi persecution in Italy for the trial of Friedrich Boßhammer, the person most responsible for the deportation of Jews from Italy. Some of these victims were interviewed in Italy and Germany.

Subsequently, in 1972, the institute began a complex historical research project, later entrusted to the historian Liliana Picciotto, to determine the number of Jewish victims of the Nazi persecution in Italy and the Dodecanese. The CDEC's task was extremely difficult, because even at the end of the 1970s, Italy lacked independent historical research on the subject and, moreover, the most important foreign works had not been translated. The only significant publications in Italian that could be referred to were Gerald Reitlinger's *The Final Solution* and Léon Poliakov's *Nazism and the Extermination of the Jews*.

During the 1980s, a very slow reversal of this trend began, primarily triggered by the appearance of the *Holocaust* television series (broadcast April 1978 in the USA, January 1979 in Germany, and May 1979 in Italy), which, despite strong criticism from historians and Holocaust survivors, was seen in fifty countries by 220 million viewers (in Germany by at least 20 million viewers, or 59% of Germans over the age of fourteen), who were overwhelmed by a shocking "collective moral awakening." This made an obvious contribution to the historical reconstruction of the Shoah, and therefore to its understanding, but two projects had a more profound impact on historical research: the

[1] This section is authored by Marcello Pezzetti.

collection of filmed testimonies by Yale University's Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies (4,400 testimonies) and Claude Lanzmann's gigantic documentary *Shoah* (1985) As a scholar of the history of the concentration camp system and Shoah cinematography, and as a new collaborator of the historian Liliana Picciotto, I was tasked with undertaking the first investigations into the new projects that were emerging in the 1980s. Until then, the CDEC had conducted interviews with some survivors, but only in audio format. We immediately realized that in order to arrive at a more historically accurate account of the events under examination, it would be necessary to first obtain the perspectives of as many people as possible who had suffered persecution. The material that was commonly used by researchers, consisting mainly of documents and statements by the persecutors, only allowed us to arrive at partial results. Many important aspects of the tragedy remained completely obscure. We therefore began by studying the Fortunoff Archive project, consulting with its founder, Professor Geoffrey H. Hartman.

With regard to the use of images, an analysis of this material revealed the shortcomings of documentary representation (from Nazi sources, which were scarce, or from those produced by the Allies during the liberation of the camps): we understood that what the documentaries on the Shoah showed was incomplete (for example, death by gas was missing, but so too and above all was the behavior of the victims), yet it was passed off as "the whole" and was therefore being mistaken for the entire reality, creating the illusion that there was nothing beyond the image, that the image explained itself. Thanks to the Fortunoff archive, it became clear to us that we should turn to the deportees themselves, not only to their accounts of their experiences, but also to their hesitations, their pauses, and therefore also to the unsaid, the suggested, if not the imagined. We believed that this would also encourage emotional identification on the part of those who listened to them, especially school audiences. However, the work that was to have the greatest impact on the CDEC's choices regarding projects on this theme and in this field was undoubtedly Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*. This absolute masterpiece represented a break with all previous representations of the extermination of European Jews and made us definitively aware that the time had come to focus on the oral testimony of survivors, or those who represented the "scandal of survival," to use Lanzmann's own terminology, excluding archive footage.

In the early 1990s, work began on preparing the "Italian" project on the subject, and at the same time, contact intensified with specialists and organizations at the European level who were pursuing the same goal. This was proving possible because after fifty years, witnesses throughout Europe were beginning to respond positively to requests from the societies in which they lived. Three countries were particularly active in this regard: Germany, France, and Belgium. In Germany, most of the *Gedenkstätten* were launching projects related to the oral history of the various camps, which were being systematically collected by the Fritz Bauer Institute in Frankfurt. In France, the "Témoignages pour Mémoire" project was launched by two specialists, Claudine Drame and Annette Wiewiorka, with whom I would work closely for several years. In Belgium, the Fondation Auschwitz was responsible for these projects, at the instigation of its director, Yannis Thanassekos, whom I had known for a long time. The relationship I established from the very beginning with Claude Lanzmann, who would give us valuable suggestions, was also significant. For us at the CDEC, it was particularly difficult to carry out this ambitious project because there was an international stereotype that was complicating our efforts: the fact that people thought that the Shoah in Italy had been almost insignificant in comparison with other countries. At an important conference on the theme of Holocaust remembrance held in Paris, attended by the director Steven Spielberg, who was already planning to create the Shoah Foundation, representatives from all the countries affected by the Nazi persecution were given the floor. In the end, the only one who was not heard was me, representing Italy, for the

following reason: "But was there a Shoah in Italy?" I was only able to speak at the explicit request of the representative from Poland. At that point, I finally understood that recounting the experience of persecuted Jews in Italy was above all a duty.

Liliana Picciotto and I immediately began to develop an accurate project that took into account the reflections of those in Europe who were about to embark on the same work. Our commitment was reinvigorated by the fact that a significant number of veterans informed us of their intention to break the silence in which they had been living up until that point, especially since, starting in 1992, everyone was about to be overwhelmed by a wave of extremely serious public manifestations of antisemitism, such as antisemitic graffiti on the walls and shop windows of Jewish businesses in the former ghetto of Rome.

We decided on a few conditions to which we would have to adhere: first of all, that the interviews would be prepared and conducted not by a team of occasional interviewers, even if they had been specially trained for the task—as Spielberg's Shoah Foundation would later decide to do—but only by the two of us, who had been studying the subject for years; secondly, that the interviews would be conducted, whenever possible, in the places where the tragic events had taken place, including the concentration camps; furthermore, that we would not set a standard time for the interviews, which in some cases could last for days (as would eventually happen); finally, that we would not set a series of pre-established questions. We also decided not to exclude the possibility of hearing the voices of those, Jews and non-Jews alike, who had "stood by and watched" that tragedy unfold. We named the result of this effort—which had initially seemed almost impossible—the Archivio della Memoria (Archive of Memory).

The preparation took about three years, during which time we also managed to conduct "pilot" interviews, such as our three-day interview with Shlomo Venezia in Rome, thanks to the generosity of the Canale 5 journalist Marina Ricci. During this period, driven by the desire to "question" the sites of persecution in Italy and thanks to the help of Mr. Salvatore Vitiello, an employee of the State Railways in the 1940s, we managed to discover where the deportation trains carrying Jews and political opponents departed from Milan, as well as the technique used by the persecutors. The victims were loaded onto the trains at the Central Station, but in order to hide this shameful reality from "normal" travelers, this occurred on an underground platform, "platform 21." We returned there with Liliana Segre, who gave us a most effective description of how the system worked. In the early 2000s, this place became the site of one of the most important Italian *Gedenkstätten*. It became clear that there was still one fundamental problem to be solved: financial support. Fortunately, in 1995, we managed to obtain funding from the presidency of the council in charge of the celebrations for the fiftieth anniversary of the Resistance and the War of Liberation. However, a further phase of the project proved to be extremely complicated; namely, that of identifying all the survivors. We already knew some of them, but our initial list proved to be incomplete: there was no trace of many people we knew to have been liberated in 1945; we did not know if they were still alive or if they were still living in Italy. We contacted all the Italian Jewish communities again to ask for their help with this search and for their support on the ground, a role they were eager to perform, but all those who were not registered with the various communities or who had deliberately tried not to publicize their tragic pasts (some had even hidden it from their own families) were missing. This research, which was almost like a detective story, would last several years, and in a few cases, it is still ongoing.

We began conducting the first interviews in early summer 1995 with a small team even before the state funding arrived, thanks to the decisive support of friends and acquaintances who backed us. The first interviews were conducted in Milan with Rachele

Levi, who had been arrested in Rhodes, and Teo Ducci, who was filmed at the Lambrate freight station, where cattle cars from that period could still be found.
Always inspired by Lanzmann's teaching on the importance of witnesses returning to the places of persecution, we devoted a great deal of energy to requesting permission to enter certain prisons with the film crew from the Ministry of Justice, as well as from the municipality of Carpi in the case of the Fossoli camp and the management of the Civic Museums of Trieste in that of the Risiera di San Sabba. Almost immediately, we were able to interview Franco Schönheit and Gilberto Salmoni in Fossoli.
During the summer, it was time for our first trip to Rome, where the local community welcomed us with great warmth and interest. Here, some survivors expressed their desire not to be filmed, a wish we respected. Among them was Davide Di Veroli, who in 1944 was assigned to work in *Effektenlager Kanada I* and *II* in Birkenau. He nevertheless provided us with valuable information about the theft of goods looted from Jews upon their arrival, introduced us to some survivors previously unknown to us, and allowed us to establish our operational base in his shop, Picchio, located in the heart of the former ghetto in the capital.
In the following months, we alternated filming in Rome with frequent trips back to Milan, where we interviewed other witnesses living in the city, such as Arminio Wachsberger, the famous "interpreter" of the 16 October roundup in Rome, and Agata (Goti) Herskovits, originally from Fiume. We also managed to return to Fossoli with Luciana Nissim, a famous psychiatrist and a fellow activist of Primo Levi, with whom she had been arrested. At the end of July, thanks above all to the enthusiastic help of the writer Livio Itzaak Sirovich and Rabbi Ariel Haddad, the first Jews from Trieste made themselves available, including Enrico Breiner, who returned with us to the Risiera di San Sabba as the only witness who could describe the liberation of the camp. We spent September and October in Rome, where a former deportee, Raimondo Di Neris, convinced other survivors to participate in our project.
After mid-October, the Ministry of Justice granted us permission to enter prisons, so we began with Nedo Fiano at the Murate prison in Florence, which was in the process of being dismantled at the time. In these places of sad memory, which today have changed profoundly, if not been dismantled altogether, we encouraged witnesses to recall events that were no longer present in their consciousness or that they had refused to remember. This allowed us to reconstruct the reality of persecution in those places, an operation that would have been impossible without their painful "gift."
The careful viewing of the "filmed" material, which was a pleasant surprise and filled us with further enthusiasm each time, led us to conceive the possibility of making documentaries, or even a film, on the subject. We then entrusted this new dimension of the project to the director Ruggero Gabbai, who, having become head of the new technical staff at the CDEC, strongly advised us to embark on this new adventure. We wanted to "stage" that tragic past, an extremely challenging task, but we were aware that we would be offering the public, especially young people, a new perspective on that past, because we would be "representing" it, which would allow us to situate that historical period in space. We became convinced that language, on which we had always relied, was less effective for describing space, that it was structurally limited in doing so. We thought that by creating "cinematic" stories, we would get closer to the geographical setting and, even more so, to the atmosphere of the time. For many, our project seemed an "impossible representation," as Elie Wiesel and Vladimir Jankélévitch had stated, but if the attempt were successful, it would significantly promote the transmission of the memory of that black hole in history. From that moment on, we continued to collect testimonies to complete the Archivio della Memoria, but with a particular focus on filming the "places" in order to create documentary works.
Gabbai and I then decided to make a further effort: to bring back and film as many survivors

as possible at the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp itself. This seemed almost impossible, due to the usual lack of funds (and also because some witnesses rightly requested to be accompanied by family members), but the generosity of the Jarach and Shapira families, in particular Andrea and Pia Jarach, allowed us to make this important and decisive trip, which was characterized by the extraordinary nature of their stories and, in particular, by the unprecedented onsite testimony of Shlomo Venezia, one of the few survivors of the Birkenau Sonderkommando. At the beginning of 1996, after conducting numerous other interviews, including those with some Rhodians in Milan, we moved to Israel to meet those who had made the decision to go to live in the Jewish state immediately after the end of the conflict. Among our appointments, we met a group of Rhodians in Ashdod, Elena Kugler, originally from Fiume, in Nazareth Illit, and Martino Godelli, assigned to work on the "Ramps" of Birkenau, the "memory" of the initial selection process among Jewish deportees in the camp, with his wife Gisella Kugler, Elena's sister, in Kibbutz Netzer Sereni. After Auschwitz, Agata Herskowitz agreed to return for the first time to the Italian-Swiss border, where she and her loved ones, together with the Kugler family, had been betrayed and arrested by Italians. A few days later, Liliana Segre gave us a particularly effective and moving testimony in the San Vittore prison in Milan. Then, after travelling to interview witnesses in Tuscany and Liguria, we moved to Venice, where, in the old ghetto, the place of their arrest, we listened to the stories of the sisters Lina and Amalia Navarro and Virginia Gattegno, who had been deported from Rhodes.

Subsequently, after interviewing Arianna Szörényi in Milan, who was arrested as a child in San Daniele del Friuli, we returned to Rome. At the end of that spring, we travelled to Udine to hear the story of Dora Klein, a Polish Jew who had moved to Bologna in the 1930s to study medicine. We then returned to Trieste, where we met the sisters Andra and Tatiana Bucci, who had been deported from Fiume as children and placed in a Kinderblock in Birkenau to be experimented on by Josef Mengele. The sisters also agreed, albeit with great difficulty, to return for the first time to the Risiera di San Sabba, where they had been imprisoned with their family before being deported to Auschwitz.

After conducting further interviews in Milan, we traveled to Turin, where, among other things, we took Natalia Tedeschi back to the city's Le Nuove prison, and then on to Genoa, where Dora Venezia agreed, albeit with great pain, to enter the Marassi prison. Dora was able to testify in the presence of the women imprisoned there at the time.

With the help of other supporters and a further effort on the part of the Institute, we returned to Auschwitz, this time with the Bucci sisters, Luigi Sagi from Fiume, the son of a member of the Sonderkommando killed during the heroic revolt of the "crematorium slaves," and Sabatino Finzi, who was arrested in Rome on 16 October 1943. In the following months, we were also granted permission to enter Regina Cœli, where we interviewed six witnesses: Mario Limentani, Alberto Mieli, Giacomo Moscato, Romeo Salmoni, Raimondo Di Neris, and Donato Di Veroli. From the Roman prisons, we then moved on to those in Trieste, taking Diamantina Vivante and Lucia Eliezer back to the cell in which they were imprisoned in the Coroneo prison between 1944 and 1945 (they were the last to be deported from Italy to the concentration camps, on 24 February 1945, when the war was almost over).

Over the next two years, thanks to the generous support of Eliott Malki and Maurizio Gabbai, the director's father, we managed to make our first film, *Memoria*, which, incredibly, was broadcast at prime time by RAI in 1997 and was an extraordinary success in terms of audience ratings, but above all in terms of critical acclaim: the work of the CDEC ended up

on the front pages of the most important Italian newspapers[2].

*Fig. 1. Filming Memoria in Auschwitz: interview with Alessandro Kroo, photo. CDEC Foundation Archives.*

[2] The collection of testimonies did not end with the release of Memoria: it resumed in 2002 thanks to a contribution from the Union of Italian Jewish Communities (UCEI). In the following years, further interviews were conducted in Italy and abroad, notably in Brussels, Israel, and New York, including with survivors of the deportation of Jews from the Dodecanese islands of Rhodes and Kos. This phase also led to new documentary productions, beginning with *Gli ebrei di Fossoli* (The Jews of Fossoli, 2003). The testimonies collected in the Archivio della Memoria were later analyzed and published in *Il libro della Shoah italiana* (Turin: Einaudi, 2009), a choral account of the lives of 105 witnesses. They also formed the basis for a series of documentary films, all directed by Ruggero Gabbai, including *Il viaggio più lungo* (The Longest Journey, 2013), *La razzia* (The Raid, 2018), *Kinderblock* (2020), *Il respiro di Shlomo* (Shlomo's Breath, 2023), and *Gli ebrei di Rodi* (The Jews of Rhodes, 2024).

*Fig. 2. Marcello Pezzetti, Liliana Picciotto and Ruggero Gabbai in the recording studio, photo. Courtesy of M. Pezzetti.*

## The movie[3]

Every Shoah has its uniqueness, and we were strongly convinced that ours had distinctive connotations and should be treated with an "all-Italian" sensitivity, starting with our cities, our Mediterranean light and our colors, our faces and accents from Milan, Venice, Turin, and Rome; this was our territory. It was important to create a film that in an hour and a half would take the observers on a narrative journey that could move them and make them understand the human story of the survivors. As previously mentioned, we focused on convincing the witnesses that it was necessary to return to the extermination sites. Many of them complied; they understood that after Primo Levi's sudden death, they had inherited that heavy legacy. Not all of them wanted to return to the largest Jewish cemetery in the world, where the ashes of their loved ones lay. The task of convincing the witnesses was difficult and very specific, and each one reacted differently. However, in most cases, Marcello Pezzetti, with his tremendous empathy, succeeded in making them feel protected and safe.

After so many years of silence, it was difficult to talk: the whole world wanted to move on. Everyone who returned from the camps did so bearing insurmountable trauma. The guilt of having survived was immense; what they had seen and experienced, they feared, could not be believed. One of the few who managed to narrate concentration camp life was Primo Levi, whose books became a milestone for Italian culture and are still fundamental texts for understanding *If This Is a Man*. Our intention was to humanize the witnesses as much as possible and to bring them out of the written words of a book, giving them faces, accents, and physical movements within a story that had to be historically rigorous, yet narratively emotional. The dignity of their recounting was such that it blended with the naturalness and strength of the stories and events told.

Many of the witnesses returned in 1995, 1996, and 1997, the years when we filmed *Memoria* and when they realized how important it was to tell the story. Many of them also travelled to Poland to the extermination sites with their children and grandchildren. This was a choice made by numerous Roman Jews, along with Nedo Fiano, who went to Auschwitz with Emanuele Fiano and his grandson Uri Fiano.

In the camp, we built a kind of community, a family in the most terrible place that could exist: Auschwitz, which for so many families represent a place of death and has never been a place where art could be created or where the seventh art could find its own location, script, or cinematography. These elements were very much present, but were treated as if the commitment to witnessing was above all cinematic considerations. The film is a consequence of this: testimony came first and only afterward did we give space to other factors. This is why we believe *Memoria* aroused so much emotion on prime-time TV on Rai Due with a 16% share of the viewership (in 1997, this was equivalent to almost seven million viewers: more than one in six Italians were glued to their television sets on 26 March).

Another relevant element of that experience was the cold: Varon said that he would never feel that cold and hunger again in such a specific and pungent way. We visited Auschwitz in November and everyone in the crew was very cold, but the witnesses were not: Alessandro Kroo kept talking, and Nedo Fiano, who testified during a snowstorm, managed to keep his voice warm and vibrant as he spoke. It was they who urged us to go on and tell every last detail that needed to be told to better understand the concentration camp universe.

[3] The next two sections are authored by Ruggero Gabbai.


*Video 1. Nedo Fiano and Marcello Pezzetti at Auschwitz during the filming of Memoria (1997). Frame from the film footage. CDEC Foundation Archives.*

We can only say thank you to the ninety-seven protagonists of *Memoria*, because without them and their determination, these filmed documents, these cinematographic works, would not exist today. Thanks to their crucial collaboration, we managed to achieve a result we are proud of, both historically and artistically. It was hard, because "art" and "Auschwitz" are two words that I believe should never be juxtaposed. Art is esthetic communication; Auschwitz, on the other hand, is the communication of the witnesses' memories, their pain, their relationship with death and the dehumanization of the individual. There is no possible relationship between these two communicative entities.

## The Reasons behind the Film

At the beginning, the idea was to create a historical archive, like the one that Steven Spielberg was putting together in Los Angeles. Liliana Picciotto and Marcello Pezzetti were very focused on producing an archive of filmed witnesses, whereas I strongly believed that the expression of the archive could be summarized by a full-length documentary in terms of communication, in order to broaden the audience, reaching general viewers, not only academics and historians. From that moment on, I was faced with the difficult task of combining art and the Shoah within the cinematic discourse of the film, in order to build a narrative that was both rigorous and emotional.
We sometimes see artistic representations—for example, the typical image of the barbed wire with the rose—that leave one wondering: we think of Auschwitz as we know it, and there is no room for any esthetic representation that could undermine the historical and

civil value of the testimony. Of course, every camera position, shot, and location represents a point of view, which, however, must be functional to the effectiveness of the story and not necessarily an esthetic/artistic choice.

However, art has always dealt with death. Let us think of the depiction of the crucified Jesus, perhaps the most narrated artistic representation in the history of art. Death and art have always coexisted; it is only in modernity that there has been a great removal where art has been relegated to something that is not seen and not talked about. Christian art carries with it the idea of a resurrection, or at any rate of a realm of the dead where true life continues. And it was precisely from Christianity that a universally recognized symbol was introduced that simultaneously shows the terrible side of death, with a suffering man nailed to a cross and dripping with blood from his tortured body on the one hand, and hope in a future life free of pain and suffering on the other. It represents the incomprehensible sense of the loss of life, simultaneously linked to the sense of hope and resurrection.

In the films we made with witnesses to the Shoah, we never thought of talking about God in relation to death. We made sure that references to God were removed from the script and testimony, which was then mediated by editing. Death had to be portrayed for what it was: the absence of life, with no transcendent or spiritual considerations; after all, hardly anyone uttered the word "God" during the interviews in Auschwitz. Perhaps they had experienced that place like Elie Wiesel, who in his book *The Night* wonders where God had ended up in Auschwitz: "Behind me I heard the usual man ask: Where then is God? And I heard a voice in me answer: He is hanging there, on that gallows."

This consideration that called mankind to its responsibility was a narrative that had always struck me, but which urged me not to show even a single image of the piled-up human corpses and skeletons in our films. This choice was deliberate. Death had to be mentioned but—perhaps motivated by an all-Jewish modesty—it could not be manifested visually. Death could not be relegated to photographic or filmic images; it had to retain its profound meaning, which for us always had to be linked to life. We could not allow ourselves to turn the essence of life and the injustice of millions of murdered innocents into a mere icon. Death had to be recounted with words and not with vivid images of corpses that often succeed in anesthetizing us with respect to evil, a concept that is difficult, if not impossible, to explain at Auschwitz.

We believe that when one speaks of Auschwitz, the Shoah, or other tragedies, one must perform a work of subtraction. In this regard, the crew working with us on set almost has to disappear. With *Memoria*, we succeeded not only because we had a small budget and could not afford many people in the crew or more than one camera, but also because we were working in the essential, and this helped us to be lucid and to focus intensely on what really mattered within a collective story that should not, however, lose the uniqueness of each individual. We urged all of the crew members to be as respectful, discrete, and sensitive as possible.

When we film a testimony or make a documentary, we have the advantage that we can use music, images, sounds, and words. Of course, everything always starts with the word. For me, as a young student in New York, Lanzmann's documentary *Shoah* was a revelation as to how to recount the Shoah, as to how you can relate something that is not fiction, but that engages you emotionally and succeeds in giving you fundamental notions of history. For me, it was and is important because filmmakers should also entertain the audience and be able to bring them into the story they are watching. The viewer should be taken and accompanied emotionally and intellectually on a narrative journey that involves all the senses.

To do this, places, topoi, become very important. It is almost as if a place becomes a character and a witness in the film. Places and witnesses must become one, a unicum that gives the viewer a natural veracity that makes the testimony absolute, unquestionable in

its strength and authenticity. The place becomes testimony and the testimony becomes place. In my film on the Mafia, *Io ricordo*, the Sicilian landscape clashes with the harshness of the family members recalling the dead who have fallen at the Mafia's hands. In *Memoria*, the place and the light are so in tune with the stories that words and places never clash; rather, one enhances the other. The places thus become narration itself, testimony.
We think there is a problem with the representation of the image because the image does not belong to Jewish culture and thought from a theological point of view. Yet look how many Jewish filmmakers there are, and how much Jewish culture in the modern era has liberated itself by producing great artists, storytellers, filmmakers, photographers, writers, and musicians. Communication and transmission remain the common denominator of a people who found an identity from the biblical narrative and who managed to reinvent art in an iconoclastic way.
We believe that *Memoria* remains a film, a document, a fundamental testimony for Italian culture; it gives us the story of the Shoah without filters or rhetoric, a real punch in the stomach. The credit goes to the survivors, who generously testified in a dry, sincere, and rigorous manner. There is a remarkable section in which Elisa Springer is standing in front of the window of the *Zauna* barracks (the place where they were stripped and matriculated). Unable to remember anything, she is confused and emotional and does not answer Liliana Picciotto's questions. Ruggero, as a director's note, suggests that she focus, stay in front of the window, and forget that we are shooting a film; he also tells her that she can be silent if she wants. After a few minutes, she comes to her senses and her memory flows like a river bursting its banks, and the moment of panic is replaced by one of the most touching scenes in the whole film:

It's a strange effect. I wanted to come here, I wanted to see those places again… I've been holding it in my mind for fifty years, day and night. At least I've come back, while all those poor companions and others never came back. Right now, it's difficult for me to speak, I'm trying to be strong [her voice breaks with emotion]. I see myself here naked, deprived of everything, of my dignity, of my personality, of all my human semblance… I still remember[4]
The image can be adopted in different ways: for me, as a director, the image must never overpower the story. In a film of testimony, where words carry a lot of weight, one more adjective or conjunction is enough to distort the meaning of the story itself. This is why in the editing phase, the director must be certain of the true meaning that the words take on at that precise moment and in that precise space.

[4] Elisa Springer, *Memoria* (1997), dir. by Ruggero Gabbai.


*Video 2. Elisa Springer in front of the window of the Zauna barracks at Auschwitz during the filming of Memoria (1997). Video still. CDEC Foundation Archives.*

Documentary films are constructed above all in the editing phase, because editing is what gives you the pace; otherwise, the scaffolding of the narrative system changes. In editing, you need sensitivity and rigor, and everything has to be regulated. The essentiality lies in finding the juxtaposition between the various film sequences, like taking the various pieces of a mosaic in which each part must contribute to the final image in a precise and harmonious manner.

The director's sensitivity is precisely this, that of interpreting individual testimony and its true meaning and then managing to insert it into a collective narrative in such a way that that individual testimony contributes to the narrative sense of the film. The editor's skill therefore lies in selecting and composing various sequences so that one can move from one subject in one place to another in a different place without interrupting the logical thread of the narration, but on the contrary, completing it in a logical manner and with an editing rhythm consistent with the film's story. As Godard said, "If the camera is an eye, editing is a blink of an eye."

We often use metaphors to explain what an assembly is. That of tailoring and the made-to-measure suit that starts with the fabric, or that of the jigsaw puzzle where each piece is part of the complete picture. This need to use metaphors arises because the editing phase is probably the least known of the various aspects that make up a production. A good montage, as I said before, is a work of subtraction dedicated to making it invisible to the viewer. This work allows the viewer to better enter into the narrated facts. Historically, editing has as its milestones the European avant-gardes of the 1920s, who used editing as the main lever to create artistic-figurative symbolism, often resulting in conceptual work that for the first time highlighted the great potential of montage in cinema as a modern work of art and an alternative to what would later become the language of montage in

1930s Hollywood.
We have to wait for genius directors such as Alfred Hitchcock and Orson Welles to understand how the ungrammaticality of editing could be incorporated into the narrative of the plot of a major motion picture. Their ingenious editing also successfully gave a psychological dimension to the characters and increased our emotional and sensory response to the sequence of images. Interestingly, Hitchcock was one of the first filmmakers to be allowed to bring a camera into the Auschwitz/Birkenau death camp. To this day, his black-and-white footage of the piles of corpses and the havoc wrought by the gas chambers remains a vital document that provided visual proof of the crimes of the Third Reich during the Nuremberg Trials. His purely documentary work had no artistic ambitions in its rawness and truthfulness and is still used as archival material in various films today.
The same cannot be said of the film *Night and Fog* by the French director Alain Resnais, where the black-and-white images of the corpses and especially the clothing of the children and adults killed on arrival have an artistic ambition in the poetic sense of the term. Resnais, who was filming eleven years after the end of the war, tackled a historical subject that was still little dealt with at the time in an unconventional way, and with great sensitivity managed to elevate the readymades (glasses, shoes, hair, etc.) of the concentration camp universe to objects that have a soul; the editing, voiceover, and music present us with a unique document. *Night and Fog* is the first real attempt at an artistic operation with respect to the horror of the Shoah. Resnais gives us his idea of Auschwitz, suggesting that the subject needed intellectualistic attention to make the film and the subject palatable to the European intelligentsia of the time. In fact, the text is written in literary French and the voiceover is soft and warm. This soft voice, together with the music, is meant to contrast with the death symbolism of the images in an attempt that even today remains an example of how archive images can be used in an artistic and emotional way. I consider *Night and Fog* to possess an extraordinary expressive power.

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**Bianca Ambrosio**
Fondazione Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea, CDEC
bianca.ambrosio@cdec.it

# New Horizons for Archival Sources

## San Vittore Prison Detainees Encounter World War II Testimonies

### ABSTRACT

This article presents one of the core projects launched by the CDEC Foundation in its seventieth anniversary year: a workshop for San Vittore's inmates focusing on testimonies from World War II. Its aim is to illustrate the framework within which the idea was conceived and structured, how the project unfolded, the challenges that were encountered, and the results that were achieved. As the project is still underway, there are no final conclusions to be outlined, yet it is already possible to observe the mold-breaking character of the workshop, in that it allowed CDEC to go beyond its traditional scope of action and generate a new type of social impact through its archive.

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**Keywords:** San Vittore, Prison, Detention Center, Testimonies, Workshop

## Introduction

Growing up in Milan, I passed by the San Vittore detention center countless times: driving through the circonvallazione, shopping at Papiniano weekly market, or going to my friend's house in the nearby area of Sant'Agostino, I skirted the massive structure of the prison, often wondering what stood beyond the wall. My curiosity and the very fact that the building was inaccessible, yet so close and central to my native city, led to a strong desire to discover its inside world, to know more about its inhabitants, their stories, and their conditions and to find out what was happening just a few meters from me. To some extent, I imagined the detainees as neighbors whom I was not allowed to meet, which was a weird feeling.

I had previously visited detention centers, but never San Vittore. During my master's degree in social work at Tel Aviv University, I completed a yearlong internship at Ofek juvenile prison, meeting regularly with the young people there and offering them one-on-one mentorship as well as group dynamics. It was a difficult, yet meaningful path, that exposed me to the reality of detention centers and one where I experienced, even if only at a preliminary level, the essential importance of engaging prison populations in all sorts of educational, interpersonal, and therapeutic activities.

This article aims at presenting and reflecting on an ongoing project entitled *San Vittore: Esperienze di ieri, voci di oggi*[1] (San Vittore: Yesterday's Experiences, Today's Voices) promoted by the CDEC Foundation and the Memoriale della Shoah as a special initiative for the detainees of San Vittore prison. This initiative represents a groundbreaking experience for the CDEC Foundation: in fact, while in the last two decades the institute has been deeply involved in educational activities and encounters with the general public, it has never engaged in activities in marginal contexts with populations who are less exposed to its work and mission. In this sense, the project has the potential to open new horizons for the use of archival material and to expand the scope of the work on testimonies toward a social impact, beyond our usual range of activity.

Analyzing a project that is still active is a sensitive endeavor, since we cannot have a comprehensive overview of its scope, achievements, and problematic aspects. We consider the workshop a pilot project, and we are fine-tuning along the way according to feedback we receive from both detainees and experienced volunteers, as well as our own perceptions of how things are unfolding. For this very reason and because of my personal involvement in the workshop as a facilitator, I have chosen to write in the first person, to convey the experience as it develops rather than providing a retrospective, more detached analysis.

## The Project: Yesterday's Experiences, Today's Voices

The idea to organize a special workshop on San Vittore and for San Vittore's population came during a meeting with our colleagues from the Memoriale della Shoah, who have been engaging with prison populations for several years. Specifically, they have been involved in activities with prisoners from the Bollate detention center in Milan and have been actively supporting the rights of detainees. From the CDEC's standpoint, we were

[1] Milan's Shoah Memorial is located deep within the city's central station on a sublevel below the main tracks. It was here that deportees arriving from San Vittore prison were loaded onto livestock cars. Since 2022, the CDEC Foundation's headquarters have been located within the Shoah Memorial, further fostering the collaboration between the two institutions.

planning a program of special events to celebrate the Foundation's seventieth anniversary, as well as the eightieth anniversary of the Liberation of Italy from the Fascist regime and the Nazi occupation. Moreover, in recent years, CDEC has been progressively opening not only to new areas of research, but also to new projects engaging with different publics that will enable us to expand our impact as well as to establish the groundwork for future horizons.

We came up with the idea of using documents preserved in the CDEC Foundation Archives—testimonies from Jews and antifascists who were incarcerated in San Vittore during World War II—in order to encourage a deeper understanding of the prison's role during the Fascist regime and the Nazi occupation, as well as to foster the expression and transmission of today's detainees' experiences by promoting new ways of reading and describing their conditions.

We had a general framework in mind, though we did not know what precisely to expect, nor how the detainees would react to the documents and stories we would bring with us. For this reason, we approached the project as a pilot, keeping in mind that we would need adjustments along the way. The working group that structured and is leading the workshop is composed of Talia Bidussa and Matteo Lenuzza from the Memoriale della Shoah and Jasmine Ferrario Sardi and myself from the CDEC Foundation. Moreover, Marco Vigevani, head of the Memoriale's cultural programs, and Laura Brazzo, deputy director and head archivist at the CDEC Foundation Archives, offered their supervision and mentorship. Laura Brazzo's assistance was fundamental for retrieving the relevant archival material.

## La Nave, an Island among Storms

Luckily, our proposal was welcomed with enthusiasm by the Amici della Nave,[2] an organization of volunteers involved in the activities of San Vittore's La Nave. Located on the top floor of the prison's third wing, La Nave is a special department that offers advanced treatment for drug addiction in collaboration with the healthcare system through activities that keep patients occupied all day long. Rather than being locked in cells, the detainees are free to move around, from morning until evening: they start with a daily assembly and proceed with various initiatives such as reading groups, a choir, psychotherapy, and more. The name La Nave, "the boat," is intended to symbolize a sort of ferrying toward the outside world, beyond the prison's walls. And indeed, all the activities offered to the detainees are intended to help them undergo a personal process of change. This is to increase the feasibility of providing them with a range of tools to cope with their previous addiction at the moment of their release, as well as to challenge the high probability of relapse in the criminal world; in fact, in Italy, the recidivism rate is almost 70%.[3] The physical structure of the department also resembles that of a boat: the walls are blue, there is a bow and a stern, and there are numerous references to the maritime world. Thus, La Nave is like a special island in the Italian prison system, which is generally characterized by harsh conditions and lacks rehabilitation activities.

Amici della Nave operates with two main objectives: the first is to continue to support the "outside" path of care and treatment that the prisoner-patients of La Nave undertake

[2] La Nave website, accessed December 20, 2025, https://amicidellanave.it.

[3] Data published in a report by the Antigone Association, an independent Italian organization that deals with justice and human rights and monitors the Italian prison system, accessed December 20, 2025, https://www.antigone.it/upload2/uploads/docs/DOSSIER%20ANTIGONE.docx.pdf.

"inside," especially from the point of view of culture as a rediscovery of oneself. The second is to promote an increasingly widespread sensitivity toward this type of approach by offering it as an opportunity for all citizens, in the belief that integration, participation, comparison, and exchange can foster mutual enrichment. With these goals in mind, Amici della Nave, and specifically its president, Eliana Onofrio, and vice president, Paolo Foschini, welcomed our workshop and assisted us in presenting it to the prison's director Elisabetta Palù.
Together with them, we decided to offer the workshop not only to the participants of La Nave, but also, separately, to detainees in the women's wing. However, the situation there was much more complex: there was no existing framework that could host us and the general conditions of the daily life of female detainees were not in any way comparable to those at La Nave. In any case, we decided to offer the workshop to any interested female detainees and to hold it within the department's library. The framework was set so that we would visit both La Nave and the female wing once a fortnight and hold a workshop lasting around an hour and a half.

## Choosing Material

After designing the framework of the workshop, we began analyzing and selecting material from our archive. Our aim was to gather material on Jews and antifascists who were imprisoned in San Vittore during the Nazi occupation of Milan from autumn 1943 until the Liberation in April 1945. Among our collections, there is some material dedicated to camps and prisons with documents dating from 1940 to 2005 that includes a specific file focused on San Vittore with documents dating between 1945 and 1994. The file is mainly composed of wartime prison registers, from which it is possible to see how the Jewish population was listed in the prison documents. It also contains a document written by Eloisa Ravenna, the CDEC director from 1963 to 1973,[4] with the testimony of Don Franco Rimoldi, a priest who helped Jews and partisans by providing information and falsifying documents and who was incarcerated in San Vittore during the spring of 1944. From that document, another testimony from Dr. Cesare Gatti, who at the time was a doctor at the Prison, and a report sent to the prefect of Milan by the Bianchi company—contractors responsible for the maintenance of Milan's prisons—we learned about the general conditions of detained Jews during World War II. They were all housed in the fifth wing of the detention facility and were given less food than other inmates (soup once a day rather than three meals a day), and from the moment of their arrest until deportation, they were generally ignored by the SS. From the same documents, we also learned that the SS operatives in charge of San Vittore were named Klims and Franz. Finally, the San Vittore files also include drawings representing an internal and external map of the prison drawn by Dr. Maini. It is unclear in what circumstances and for what purposes the drawings were made, but it may be assumed that they were drafted during the times of trials against nazi criminals to present an idea of how the prison was structured and organized.[5]

[4] To discover more about Eloisa Ravenna: Laura Brazzo's article " 'If not us, who?' - The CDEC and the German Investigations into the Deportation of Jews from Italy: The Bosshammer Case (1963-1967)", published in this issue.

[5] Up until this date, documentation regarding the experiences of Jews in San Vittore preserved in the CDEC Archives had been used for research by historians such as Michele Sarfatti and Liliana Picciotto, but never with the aim of working on the present-day detention center.

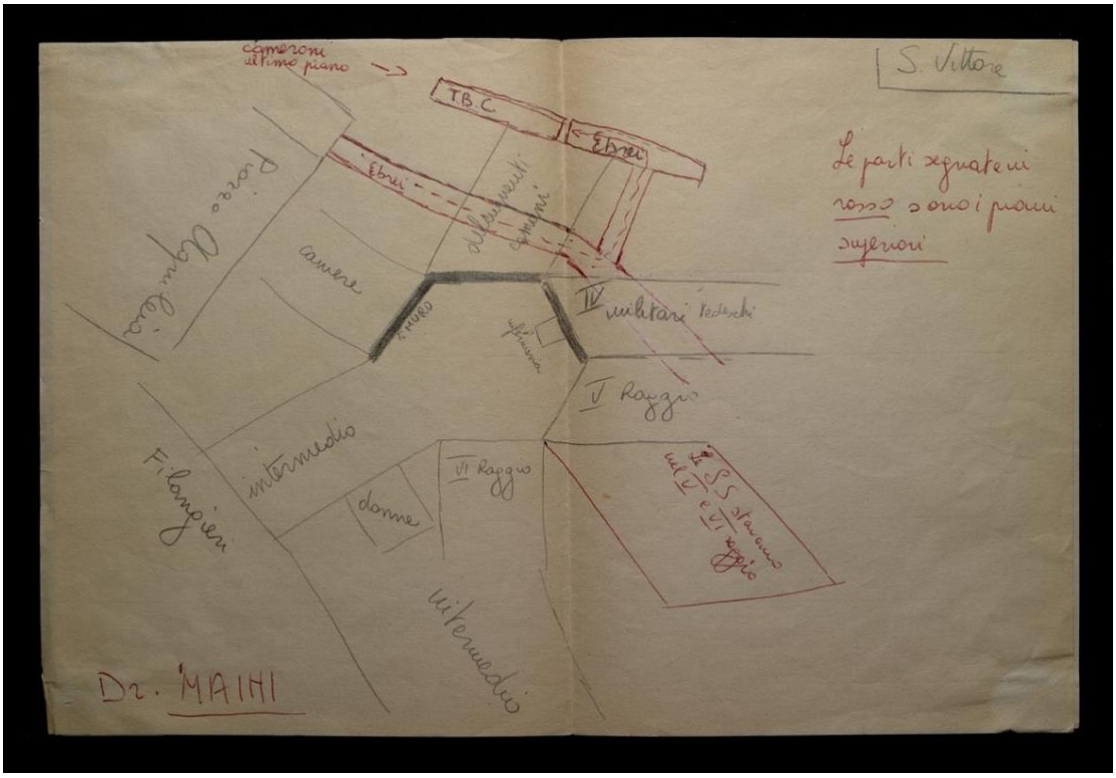


*Fig. 1. Dr. Maini, A map of San Vittore, draw, CDEC Foundation Archives.*

All these documents served us as background material for obtaining knowledge and information on the functioning of San Vittore during our period of interest. However, beyond this data, we wanted to have first-hand testimonies and narratives from detainees. For this objective, we worked with Laura Brazzo to collect a selection of documents to use during the workshop. Our goal was to be able to tell the testifiers' stories both during and beyond their incarceration to convey the wholeness of each person's life, rather than reducing their identity to the mere moment of imprisonment. We managed to gather several collections and while we researched, we realized that the more we searched, the more we would find. Indeed, the CDEC Foundation Archives continue to surprise us, leaving us with the feeling that there is still a large quantity of documents that have yet been thoroughly studied. Eventually, we decided to start with four stories:

Fausto Levi, a Venetian antiquarian who was arrested in Milan, imprisoned in San Vittore, and deported to Auschwitz with the first convoy that left the city on 6 December 1944. The CDEC Foundation Archives have conserved a few letters that he sent to his girlfriend Gina Polli from San Vittore and from the convoy, several photographs, and some identification documents.

Antonio De Bortoli, a partisan and Catholic patriot who was arrested in 1943, imprisoned first in Como and later in San Vittore, and eventually deported to Fossoli. In the Archives there are transcriptions from a deposition that he left to CDEC in 1967 as part of a collection of testimonies from the Dortmund prosecution.

Renata Caminada, who was arrested and detained in San Vittore until April 26 1945. In the CDEC Foundation Archives, there is a recording of an oral testimony where she speaks about San Vittore and the Liberation.

Gaetano De Martino, an antifascist who in 1945 published a book recounting of his life first in San Vittore and later in detention camps. His writings offer very detailed

descriptions of life within the prison and interactions with other inmates.

Beyond this first selection, there are other testimonies that we may consider using in the future: for example, that of Franco Momigliano, who managed to escape from San Vittore. His is an incredible story, though it may be a little too delicate to present at the workshop (although in the past months, we have observed that we can bring any kind of material if it is well introduced and if we are open to an honest and open discussion). Therefore, the testimonies mentioned above are not exhaustive, and more stories may be used for the workshop in the future.

*Fig. 2. Fausto Levi at Gavirate (Varese) in the 1920s, CDEC Foundation Archives.*

## The Porthole, Our Harbor

One of La Nave's main projects is *L'Oblò* (The Porthole),[6] a periodical that collects articles and reflections by the inmates that is published and distributed free of charge thanks to the support of the Feltrinelli publishing house. The project was born in 2002, a few months after the opening of La Nave, and its activities are promoted and facilitated by a group of dedicated retired journalists. It is an initiative with a well-functioning working model, and it is greatly appreciated by the inmates, who participate with enthusiasm and engagement.
It was from *L'Oblò*'s weekly editorial meeting that we began our encounter with the detainees: we were first invited as listeners and gradually as active participants in the discussion. There, we had the opportunity to introduce ourselves—and our project—to the group and to gain their trust. Starting with experienced volunteers and an existing

[6] "I racconti dell'Oblòg", accessed December 20, 2025, https://amicidellanave.it/oblog/.

framework enabled us to feel accompanied in our first steps within the prison and to learn how to properly and more confidently interact with the group. Moreover, from my perspective, participating in *L'Oblò* was an enriching human experience. At the first editorial meeting we joined, I was surprised and touched by the depth of the discussion: the framework enabled philosophical reflections on personal stories as well as existential themes that we rarely touch upon in our ordinary lives.
The discussion revolved around a range of themes such as the nature of human interactions, distinguishing between true relationships and those motivated by outside interests, the hardships and beauties of ordinary life and the risks of monotony (especially without drugs), time and its value, and more. The tone of the debate was frank, open, and respectful, and for the most part free of clichés and moralism. This was largely thanks to the discussion's facilitators, Paolo Foschini, Renato Pezzini, and Fabrizio Ravelli, who managed to lead the debate in a very open and engaging manner. The level of human interaction gave me a wider sense of purpose, one I found to be shared by my peers.

## Criticalities and Doubts before Beginning

After being introduced to the detainees at *L'Oblò* meeting and before starting our workshop, we reflected upon the criticalities and possible challenges of our project among ourselves, together with volunteers from the Amici della Nave as well as the department's psychologists and the prison director Elisabetta Palù. We agreed that there were several issues that we would have to keep in mind and that we would have to remain flexible as to how our ideas would translate into practice. In fact, we were aware from the beginning that the reality on the ground would confront us with the fragility of bridging between past documents and the current situation of the prison.
First, we knew that many detainees would be of foreign origin, which would possibly constitute a challenge for two main reasons: their understanding and ability to express themselves in the Italian language and their limited general knowledge of Italian history. Secondly, but no less importantly, we were aware that their cultural background could represent a challenge. Indeed, amid the war in Gaza, we foresaw the possibility that we would encounter opposition and objection to discussing testimonies from the Holocaust and World War II. This is a challenge that the CDEC Foundation has faced in different contexts since October 7, though we had thought that due to the high number of detainees in San Vittore coming from the Middle East and North Africa, we would encounter a stronger sense of aversion. In any case, we followed the advice and encouragement of Paolo Foschini, who assured us that at La Nave, they often discuss topics that appear intractable in the outside world. Eventually, we agreed to be ready and open to welcoming the discussion if it would arise.
Another potential problem that we foresaw was the difficulty of conveying the historical context: even though we put past and present testimonies side by side, we did not want to convey any confusion or equalization as to the motives for incarceration. For this reason, we decided to emphasize that the authors of the testimonies from our archive were imprisoned by authoritarian regimes due to their ethnicity or political affiliation, having committed no actual crime.
Keeping in mind and in an awareness of all those factors, we decided to face these issues and potential weaknesses not only as challenges, but rather as opportunities for unexpected discussions, human encounters, and raising questions about the nature of our

work.

## So, It starts

After our first experience at L'Oblò's editorial meetings and some brainstorming as to the criticalities we would possibly face, we began the workshop. This time, we would be the ones leading the conversation; volunteers from Amici della Nave would still be present, but in a more marginal role. The first workshop that we planned revolved around explaining and showing what an archive is, how it is formed, what it means to preserve, and for what purpose. We brought with us different materials (photographs, letters, minutes, etc.) with the goal of using physical elements to explain how an archive is formed. We attempted to convey that documents that may initially seem trivial and unimportant can acquire value. Hence, a letter, but also a certificate, a legal request, or other documents may reveal something about a specific place, the life of an individual, or the circumstances of the time. When discussing the role of an archive, we also mentioned that we had left a folder at La Nave and suggested that the participants use it to collect the texts and documents that they would produce in the context of our workshop.
To stress the intrinsic narrative value of objects and to help us get to know each other, we proposed an activity that focused on the presentation of oneself through a personal object, making the object speak. For instance, a tattoo could explain why its owner had it done, in which period of his life, and what it represents, or a pair of shoes could inform us about their owner's journeys outside the prison and what they see within the detention facility. This exercise helped us to reflect on the value that an object can have when telling a story and gave participants the opportunity to choose what to present about themselves and how to go about doing so. It was a moment of generous and at times intimate sharing: some choose to speak about their tattoos, others about their glasses, and still others about the phonecard that they use to call their loved ones outside the prison.
Following this introduction and after a lecture from historian David Bidussa about the historical and sociological context of the advent of Fascism in Italy, we started to bring in testimonies from our archive. We began with the story of Fausto Levi: we showed the personal letters he sent to his girlfriend, as well as photographs from his life before the advent of racial laws, identity documents, and more. We aimed to reconstruct a story that went beyond the moment of imprisonment and deportation and did not reduce human beings to that life experience alone. Equally, our approach was to meet detainees and listen to their stories, beyond their crime, regardless of their crime. We were pleasantly surprised to see that as with L'Oblò, within our workshop, participants shared private details of their lives and openly discussed the themes that emerged. Over time we read different documents with them and noticed that the encounter with direct testimonies of various types enabled us to explore the depth of life in prison, to speak of concrete experiences as well as more abstract concepts such as indifference or solidarity. In this sense, for example, De Martino's testimony about the condition of his cell sparked a conversation about La Nave's spaces, how the detainees feel about them and whether they can consider them as "theirs." On a different occasion, a gesture of solidarity toward a fellow prisoner recounted by Gaetano De Martino in his book From San Vittore Prison *to the German "Lagers"* opened a space for reflection on the deeper meaning of solidarity: What is it, really? How does it differ from esteem or respect? What conditions hinder or encourage it? What form does solidarity take in prison? These were some of the questions that we debated with the inmates, which confirmed to us that the testimonies offered an optimal starting point for delving into personal stories and favoring individual narration in the present time.

## Meeting the Detainess: On Spiders, Gaza, and Humanty

"Have you ever seen two spiders on the same spiderweb?" a new detainee asked us, showing a spider tattoo on his elbow at the last meeting we held before the summer break. I was not entirely sure what he meant by that question/metaphor, yet I was struck by its straightforwardness. We assumed that this was a Russian saying used to express the idea that he is a solitary character who does not want people to enter his personal space. This to some extent exemplifies the type of dialogue and encounters we held with detainees: honest and straightforward conversations that enabled us to reach a deep level of interaction within a relatively short time.

From April until the beginning of July, we held around ten meetings for male detainees at La Nave, some at *L'Oblò's* weekly meetings and some independently. Toward the end, we decided to hold all our meetings separately, in order not to interfere with the newspaper's work and to draw a clearer distinction between the two projects, which had perhaps begun to overlap slightly. Throughout the months, we received a positive response, with between ten and twenty-five people joining our workshop each time. From meeting to meeting, we were happy to see many detainees coming back to our sessions and gradually becoming more and more confident and friendly. Some detainees left the detention center because they were transferred to other facilities or freed. Most participants contributed to the project by producing their own texts, whether in the form of copies of letters sent to loved ones outside, general reflections on themes such as friendship and the passing of time, lyrics from rap songs, and more.

There is a paragraph from an article by the Bulgarian author Georgi Gospodinov that was published in *Robinson*, the weekly magazine of the newspaper *La Repubblica*, which in my opinion exemplifies very well the meaning of what we managed to do with our workshop in San Vittore. This paragraph reads:

> Narrating creates empathy. You can't – if you're a normal person – scream, insult, or chase away someone you're facing if you've just heard or read their story. Simply put, propaganda seeks to strip people of their humanity, to strip them of their face and history to more easily settle scores with them. But literature does just the opposite – it restores humanity. Literature and storytelling are the natural antidote to propaganda and the desire to consciously pit people against each other. And this is an important political quality.[7]

Gospodinov refers to the role of literature, yet his insight can also apply to storytelling that is not literature in and of itself. Indeed, I believe that his description may be highly applicable to our workshop in San Vittore: reading firsthand testimonies produced interest and curiosity regarding the stories of the past and encouraged the narration of personal episodes from the lives of today's detainees. Knowing the details, listening to other people's stories as they shared their emotions paved the ground for a sincere participation in each other's difficulties and standpoints. Under these conditions, the general atmosphere was empathetic and open to any kind of debate, and in mid-June, the topic of the situation in Gaza was also raised. We had expected it to be brought up before, and we knew that there were "rumors in the corridors" about it. From our side, we did not want it to become a taboo, and we had no resistance to speaking about it. So, when a young man originally from North Africa shared his discomfort vis-à-vis the unfolding war in Gaza and asked us what our thoughts were, we welcomed his question and did our best to foster an

[7] Georgi Gospondinov, "Racconta una storia e il mondo non finirà," *Robinson* (June 7, 2025), translated by the author.

open discussion. From our side, we aimed to underline the individuality of each historical event, explaining the fallacies and risks of any comparison, while recognizing the importance and urgency of remaining vigilant and active as to the events of the present time. Other inmates shared their opinions, impressions, emotions, and personal connections to the situation in Israel/Palestine, and the general setting remained open and respectful even amid disagreements. Eventually, we convened that from here, away from violence and destruction, our main role is to convey and amplify voices of solidarity, humanity, and peace. On that note, we spoke about the possibility of bringing the theatrical adaptation of Colum McCann's book *Apeirogon* to San Vittore,[8] with the aim of having a closer encounter with the stories of Palestinians and Israelis. The episode ended up being proof of what we had been told: at La Nave, people manage to discuss topics that are usually considered intractable, around which it is easy to have heated confrontations.

*Fig.3. Nanni Fontana, A detainee at La Nave, picture.*

## A Different Context: The Female Estate

The experience in the female estate was dramatically different. From the very beginning, the setting appeared problematic: there was no member of the prison staff in charge of the project, the time dedicated to the workshop overlapped with the detainees' working hours or even with their outside time. Moreover, the very poor conditions in the women's division made it extremely difficult for them to focus on anything other than their impellent needs: often they did not have access to a change of clothes or the possibility to call their loved ones or lawyer. They had no pens or paper, and the general situation of the department was extremely poor. For all these reasons, there was no consistency in their participation in our workshop (each meeting was attended by new and different participants, so we could not proceed from where we had left off the previous time) and

[8] Colum McCann's *Apeirogon*, accessed December 25, 2025: https://columnmccann.com/apeirogon/. Published in 2020, *Aperiogon* is a novel recounting the story of two men, one Palestinian and one Israeli, each of whom loses a daughter during the conflict.

we were unable to establish a relationship of trust from which to start. My impression was that when detainees are this occupied with their basic needs, there can be no space to focus on more intellectual activities. For this reason, we tried to be sensitive to what the women brought each time, to listen to them and engage with their problems, sometimes at the cost of leaving aside the work on the archival material. After a few months, we agreed that under such circumstances, it would not make sense to continue the workshop. Moreover, the situation in the female estate made the great gap between the island of La Nave and the rest of the prison system even more evident.

## Conclusions from the First Part of the Workshop

At one of the first meetings in the female estate, a sassy and active Italo-Brazilian woman in her fifties told us that behind the prison wall, they felt completely invisible to the outside world. "Anyone who passes by just a few meters away has no idea about us," she recounted. I told her that since I was a young girl, I have thought of the people who were inside the prison every time I passed it. I saw a smile of slight relief on her face, and that for me was in and of itself a meaningful part of our workshop: to show detainees that there is interest in their stories and conditions.
While at the beginning of the workshop, during our first encounters, we sometimes felt that our path of engagement was somewhat hazy, as we proceeded, we realized that the more we anchored ourselves to the documents, the more meaning and scope we would find in what we were doing. As my colleague Jasmine Ferrario Sardi put it:

> In each session, we listened to sincere and intense stories, which testified to the connection with the surrounding space, but above all, with the inner dimension that each of us cultivates within ourselves. The texts shared by the participants and the exchanges that emerged during the workshop raised questions, opened discussions on various topics, and stimulated reflections on the forms, dynamics, and meanings of the human experience; which, as the name of the department, "The Ship," suggests, is a journey undertaken together with others.

Beyond the human exercise of being in touch with our inner world, which is in and of itself a valuable result, there are several practical lessons that we learned during the workshop and that helped us to gain a better understanding of life in prison and the different stratagems that detainees invent to have a semblance of normality where nothing seems normal. For example, they explained to us how they build portable ovens on an aluminum gas stove to bake cakes and pasta *al forno*, or how they assemble model boats with toothpicks and fabric that they sell outside. These are just anecdotes, and yet for us, they represent the possibility of better understanding the realm of San Vittore prison.
Similarly, the detainees have progressively come to know our work and the material in our archive, and they have produced a collection of writings that are preserved in the folder designated for the project. We still do not know what exactly we will produce with this material; there are some ideas, though nothing final. However, we already understand that they represent precious testimonies of modern life within the prison, and they are the fruit of participants' commitment and their ability to listen and share their experiences.

## General Conclusions

Each time we arrived at San Vittore, we would cross the detention center and climb four floors to arrive at La Nave department, ensuring that we did not look around too much to try and go unnoticed. However, as we walked by, the stark difference in the atmosphere with the last floor was evident: in the lower floors detainees were locked inside cells, bored and aimless, merely waiting for another day to pass. That atmosphere became much more critical as summer approached: the heatwave and the lack of cooling system within the prison immobilized detainees on their beds. So, when we passed by, I was struck by a pervasive sense of depression and alienation that made me wonder what could possibly come out of such a situation.

Unlike most detention centers, San Vittore is built as a *panopticon* in the very center of Milan. In terms of numbers, it is the worst prison in Italy. On paper, there are 450 spaces, but at the end of June, there were 1,113 inmates, representing 247 percent overcrowding.[9] The framework of La Nave is indeed unique, and this became even more glaring when compared to the other parts of the prison: both the female and all the other male ones. There is an abyss between what happens on that last floor and what occurs on the others. And there is an abyss between the detainees' personal journeys. This is what I keep in mind when thinking about our project: a detention center with no educational and therapeutic activities is simply a warehouse where society parks individuals involved in crime. It has no purpose, and it achieves no goals. A prison must not be merely a place of punishment.

In this sense, *San Vittore: Esperienze di ieri, voci di oggi* was a pioneering initiative for the CDEC Foundation in that for the first time, it allowed us to use our archival material for social purposes and to put ourselves at the service of the community with wider goals. As the first experience of this kind, it opened new horizons for our work and revealed the unexplored potential of some of our resources. For instance, our documentation reveals information and data about central places in our country, enabling us to engage with wider sections of citizens as well as marginalized populations. Finally, the workshop reinforced the importance of emphasizing the human experience behind historical or social events and brought us to reflect on and rethink the meaning of punishment and detention in our societies.

## *Author's note*

The present article was originally written in June and July 2025, when the first part of the workshop had been concluded and before the summer break. The workshop was expected to resume in September, with the first round concluding by December 2025. However, as of October 2025, when this article is about to be submitted for language review, the project has unfortunately been interrupted. This is because the new prison director has yet to be nominated, and this administrative void means that all external projects have been halted. We sincerely hope to be able to proceed with the second part of the workshop as soon as possible and to decide with the inmates how best to organize and valorize the testimonies of their detention that they have produced within the framework of our

[9] Luigi Mastrodonato, "La crisi delle carceri italiane vista da San Vittore," *Internazionale*, July 22, 2025. Accessed December 20, 2025, https://www.internazionale.it/reportage/luigi-mastrodonato/2025/07/22/carcere-italia-san-vittore.

workshop.

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**Riccardo Abram Correggia**
Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa & Sciences Po Paris
riccardoabram.correggia@sns.it
Orcid: 0009-0009-2853-5684

# "This is the story…of a Great Movement"

## The Hashomer Hatzair Italy Collection at the CDEC Foundation

**ABSTRACT**

This article examines the newly available Hashomer Hatzair Italy collection held in the CDEC Foundation Archives, acquired as a result of a project launched in October 2022. This is the first comprehensive collection on the subject, comprising newspapers, interviews, working materials, videos, pictures, official reports, and manifestos. Drawing on a selection of these sources, this article reconstructs the formation of the collection, highlights its research potential, and outlines related future projects. In particular, by incorporating personal memoirs, it also engages with ongoing debates. In doing so, it not only brings attention to these significant new sources, but also serves as a guide to their contents, clarifying the movement's distinctive language and the key events that shaped its history, as reflected in the donated materials. Finally, this article identifies some lines of research for which this collection holds considerable historiographical value for the CDEC Foundation and its scholarly community.

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## Introduction

A summer evening bonfire with communal singing accompanied by a guitar, *riqudei 'am* (folk dances)[1] in a green field, a vigorous discussion about Ber Borochov's socialism and its application in the Kibbutz Movement,[2] the wearing of the *hultzah shomrit* (the characteristic blue shirt with a single white lace, Fig. 1), which has been worn by thousands of individuals, or a Pesah *seder* attended by more than one hundred people. These are just a few of the vivid images that may come to mind for those who are or have been members of Hashomer Hatzair. The present work aims to describe the collection project entitled "Questa è la storia…di un gran Movimento" undertaken by the CDEC Foundation, which led to the first archival collection relating to the Hashomer Hatzair movement in Italy. It will identify its peculiarities, main subjects, and research lines, as well as its inherent possibilities for researchers, future projects, and challenges. I will analyze the material available in the CDEC Foundation Archives, intertwining my knowledge with the literature on the subject, information gathered in other similar archival collections, and anecdotes from my own experience.


*Fig. 1. An example of the shirt (hultzah shomrit) typically worn by members of Hashomer Hatzair. Jonathan Rimini, "Vestiti e oggetti," Hashomer Hatzair collection, folder 15, subfolder 12, CDEC Foundation Archive (henceforth ACDEC), Milan.*

[1] On the role played by Jewish folk dances as a means of nation-building, see Martina Topic, "A Dancing Nation—Cultural Sociology of Dancing in Israel: An Introduction," *Israel Affairs* 23 (2017): 995-1002.

[2] By the "Kibbutz Movement," I mean Kibbutz Ha'artzi. In this sense, Kibbutz Ha'artzi is one of four *kibbutz* movements created prior to 1948 before the foundation of the State of Israel. These were networks of *kibbutzim* with shared ideologies that were mutually supportive. Kibbutz Ha'artzi held a socialist view of life, and in 1999, it merged with the United Kibbutz Movement. Moshe Schwartz, Orit Degani Dinisman, and Uri Weber, "Can a New *Kibbutz* Ideology Emerge in the Twenty-First Century?", in *The Metamorphosis of the Kibbutz*, eds. Eliezer Ben Rafael and Orna Shemer (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 156.

It is important that I specify my positionality: I am a modern history scholar, and I have been an active member of the Milanese branch of Hashomer Hatzair Italy for almost fifteen years. I have been part of the movement for the majority of my life, entering the Milanese *ken* (local branch, literally "nest") when I was ten years old and "officially" leaving the position of *shaliah* (emissary) at the age of twenty-six, when I started my PhD. For this reason, I recall many more evocative moments: eating with two hundred people from all over Italy in a dining room built of wooden poles and cords; driving to the Polish-Ukrainian border to bring necessities collected by volunteers for war refugees hosted in a Hashomer Hatzair-run kindergarten; the commemorative *mifqad* (ceremony) for Yitzhak Rabin's funeral held in the dim candlelight in the movement's Milan base (ken). And while on the one hand, my involvement gives me a particular privileged and immersive standpoint when analyzing this archival project, on the other, my emotional engagement with the subject may affect my objectivity and academic distance.
In this article, I will focus on answering these leading research questions: What can we learn about Hashomer Hatzair Italy from this collection? What new insights might these collections offer within the panorama of Jewish studies? To address these questions, I will first briefly examine the movement's ideological structure and the debate over its origins and historical characteristics in Italy. Then, I will delineate the history of the fund's collection, its peculiar structures, and the primary subjects relevant to the history of Hashomer Hatzair Italy. As a result, this article will serve as a guide to diving into the collection's language, symbols, and key historical aspects.
The title of this article alludes to the opening line of a song commonly performed within Hashomer Hatzair Italy ("This is the story…of a great movement")[3], and it will resonate with anyone who has ever attended a Hashomer Hatzair Italy summer or winter camp. For exactly this reason, the CDEC's project to produce an archive for Hashomer Hatzair Italy, inaugurated in October 2022, was named after it.

## A "Great Movement": The Ideological Pillars of Hashomer Hatzair

As a grassroots youth movement active all around the globe, Hashomer Hatzair's ideology is multifaceted and has undergone many changes over time. It was founded in 1913 in Polish Galicia from a union of the Hashomer scout movement and the Tzeirei Tzion study group, as an answer to antisemitism, assimilationism, and right-wing Zionism. Over time, it expanded to many areas of the world, and today it has branches in Europe, North and South America, South Africa, and Australia, with its central headquarters in Israel. Originally, it operated a synthesis between Marxist socialism, Zionism, the idea of a Jewish revival, and the creation of new Jewish men through Scoutism.[4] Over time, its ideological system came to encompass the values of collectivism, egalitarianism, social activism, informal education, and pioneerism, being profoundly influenced by figures such as Ber Borochov, Rosa Luxemburg, Martin Buber, David Gordon, Baden Powell, Gustav Wyneken, and Bertha Pappenheim.[5]

[3] "Questa è la storia… di un gran movimento."

[4] In the long term, this concept contributed to the development of the ideal of the "Muscular Jew," further contrasting the "pioneers" with those living in the Diaspora. For further information on the subject, see Patrick Farges, *Le Muscle et l'Esprit. Masculinités germano-juives dans la post-migration: Le cas des yekkes en Palestine/Israël après 1933* (Brussels: Lang, 2020).

[5] There is a considerable body of literature on the early years of Hashomer Hatzair's formation and diffusion in Europe and North Africa; of particular interest are Elkana Margalit, "Social and Intellectual Origins of the

The three main pillars in the movement's historical development were socialism, Zionism, and Scoutism, while in modern times, new values have come to define its practices. Most importantly, a new pillar, Judaism, was integrated into its ideology—replacing Scoutism—during the 2008 *ve'idah* (ideological congress) in Holit, a kibbutz in the south of Israel.[6] Its profound impact on Jewish youth, besides its ideological system and its structure, may be explained through the importance of the concept of *hagshamah* (self-fulfillment). The interpretation of this concept has varied over time, originally being strictly connected to the idea of making *'aliyah* to a shomeric kibbutz, while evolving to encompass other options after the 2008 congress. The trajectory of Hashomer Hatzair has been further defined by the institutional nexus between its worldwide branches, MAPAM, and Kibbutz Ha'artzi, establishing a multidirectional flow of ideological and operational influence across the movement's global network.[7] Nowadays, the Hashomer Hatzair World Movement is separated from the Hashomer Hatzair Israeli Movement. Both movements have a centralized structure where every local branch maintains its connection with the movement through a shaliah, which supervises its activities and delivers the ideological formation to every member in the local branch, or ken.

## "This Is the Story…"? The Debate on the Origins of Hashomer Hatzair in Italy

Like almost all the Italian members of Hashomer Hatzair, growing up within the movement I was well aware of the core principles and formative milestones that shaped its identity, particularly the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and resistance during the Second World War, the social struggles that Hashomer Hatzair supported around the globe, and the desire to create a utopian socialist society through the kibbutzim.[8] However, when the discourse stumbled onto the history and origins of the Italian movement, the answer was a vague "after WWII." This does not mean that we never heard versions of the story from speakers

Hashomer Hatzair Youth Movement, 1913–20," *Journal of Contemporary History* 2 (1969): 25-46; Ofer Nordheimer Nur, "Hashomer Hatzair Youth Movement 1918–1924 from Eastern Galicia and Vienna to Palestine: A Cultural History" (PhD diss. University of California, 2004), 25-139.

[6] Among them, besides collectivism, egalitarianism, democracy, and antifascism, the main recent debates have concerned intersectional feminism and environmentalism. For more about current Hashomer Hatzair ideology, see "Ideology," Hashomer Hatzair World Movement, https://www.hholami.com/ideology, accessed Decembre 20, 2025.

[7] MAPAM means "Union of the Workers of Eretz Israel." It was founded in 1948 as an expression of Kibbutz Ha'artzi's and Hashomer Hatzair's position, with a strong socialist-Marxist policy and a pro-Soviet Union stance until 1956. Many Hashomer Hatzair members, from Meir Yaair and Mordechai Bentov to Abba Hushi and Shulamit Aloni, were part of the political intelligentsia of MAPAM and other leftist parties in the State of Israel, and later the Meretz party. In this sense, Tal Elmaliach also notes that MAPAM was a mediator between Kibbutz Ha'artzi and national institutions: Tal Elmaliach, *Hakibbutz Ha'artzi, Mapam, and the Demise of the Israeli Labor Movement* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2020), 22. For a perspective on Hashomer Hatzair's role in Israeli politics, see the interview with Roberto Della Rocca in the Audiovisual Collection ACDEC. Elmaliach also observes that every kibbutz depended on a central organization—Kibbutz Ha'artzi in the socialists' case—operating "for financial, organizational, and political support. Young members and graduates of Hashomer Hatzair who had received pioneer training and sought to carry out the movement's ideals joined these existing kibbutzim or founded new ones with the help of the bigger organization": see Elmaliach, *Hakibbutz Ha'artzi*, 15.

[8] In this context, it is also interesting that the Nakba has become a subject of study in Hashomer Hatzair. However, its relationship with the Palestinian population remains a subject of controversy: see Joel Benin, "Knowing Your Enemy, Knowing Your Ally: The Arabists of Hashomer Hatza'ir (MAPAM)," *Social Text* 28 (1991): 100-122; Areej Sabbagh-Khoury's analysis of three different cases of kibbutzim from Hashomer Hatzair described as collectivist settler colonies born on Palestinian villages—Mishmar ha-Emek, Hazorea, and Ein Hashofet—in Sabbagh-Khoury, *Colonizing Palestine, the Zionist Left and the Making of the Palestinian Nakba* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2023).

from all over Italy, all of whom proudly claimed to have had some involvement in inaugurating Hashomer Hatzair in our country. This contributed to uncertainty regarding the Italian movement's past, which persists to this day. Indeed, the CDEC Foundation Archives' records on the subject reveal that in recent decades, the only consistently commemorated anniversary was the 2013 centenary of the movement's foundation in Polish Galicia. This stands in contrast to sporadic Italian celebrations, such as the thirty-fifth and fiftieth anniversaries of Hashomer Hatzair Italy (1981, 1996)[9] and the twentieth anniversary of the Milan ken (1988), with the latter being documented in a special edition of *Daf Haken*.[10]

The debate about the origins of Hashomer Hatzair in Italy is closely tied to the very definition of Hashomer Hatzair Italy. While there are many scholarly works about Hashomer Hatzair worldwide, writing about Hashomer Hatzair in Italy is a challenge that has rarely been taken up by historians.[11] It means entering a world of symbols, experiences, emotions, specific languages, groups, and individual people with their private relations, ideology, and historical knowledge.

Attempting to answer the when and how of Hashomer Hatzair Italy allows the researcher to offer a new perspective on the post-WWII Jewish Italian communities, their connection to Zionist movements, the *hakhsharot*,[12] displaced persons (DP) within camps, and the Jewish Brigade. All these experiences have already been aptly analyzed by scholars such as Guri Schwarz, Marcella Simoni, Arturo Marzano, Chiara Renzo, and Stefano Scaletta.[13]In this sense, these topics cover one of the CDEC Foundation's main fields of historical interest, directly intertwined with collections such as those on the Federazione Giovanile Ebraica d'Italia (FGEI), the Associazione Donne Ebree d'Italia (ADEI), the Emanuele Cohenca collection, the Comunità Ebraica di Milano (CEM), or the new Rav Schaumann collection. Here, I intend to focus on a specific debate regarding Hashomer Hatzair Italy to demonstrate its cruciality for the CDEC Foundation and Jewish studies in Italy.

The term "Hashomer Hatzair Italy" encompasses various branches, a characteristic that

[9] See the cover of an issue of *Deot*, a newspaper published by Hashomer Hatzair Italy, commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the Italian movement. See also Daniel Soria, "*Deot-Opinioni*, dicembre 1996," Hashomer Hatzair collection, F. 14, Sf. 6, ACDEC.

[10] Sabrina Sciama, "*Daf Haken* edizione per il ventesimo anniversario," Hashomer Hatzair collection, F. 3, Sf. 1, ACDEC.

[11] As mentioned above, there is literature about Hashomer Hatzair and its origins. However, there is a lack of sources regarding Hashomer Hatzair in post-WWII Italy. The first person to bring the topic into a scientific framework was Marcella Simoni, "Young Italian Jews in Israel, and Back: Voices from a Generation (1945–1953)," in *Italian Jewish Networks from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century*, eds. Francesca Bregoli, Carlotta Ferrara Degli Uberti, and Guri Schwarz (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 173-200.

[12] Hakhsharah (literally "preparation"): training for kibbutz life, or a group undergoing such training.

[13] Regarding the generation, history, and perceptions of the first *'olim* (migrants to Israel) from Italy after WWII, see Simoni, "Young Italian Jews," which mentions the origins of Hashomer Hatzair and Bnei Akiva (literally "Akiva's sons, Jewish religious youth movement) and their rivalry with the non-Zionist Federazione Giovanile Ebrei d'Italia (FGEI). The CDEC collection also intersects with the work of Arturo Marzano, "Italian Jewish Migration to Eretz Israel and the Birth of the Italian Chalutz Movement (1938–1948)," *Mediterranean Review* 3 (2010): 1-29. Furthermore, Chiara Renzo undertook a profound investigation of the complex system of Italian DP camps, also digging into the experiences of the hakhsharot and the Zionist movements that ran them: Chiara Renzo, *Jewish Displaced Persons in Italy 1943–1951: Politics, Rehabilitation, Identity* (London: Routledge, 2024). On the Jewish Italian communities and their reconstitution after Fascism, see Guri Schwarz, *After Mussolini: Jewish Life and Jewish Memories in Post-Fascist Italy* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2012). For the Jewish Brigade's role in post-war reconstruction in Italy, see Stefano Scaletta, *La brigata ebraica tra guerra e salvataggio dei sopravvissuti alla Shoah (1939–1947)* (Turin: Silvio Zamorani, 2024).

represents a distinctive feature of the Italian movement.[14] Nowadays, there are *kenim* (plural of ken) that have operating continuously in Rome (Yad Mordechai), Milan (Holit-Andrea), Turin (Degania), and Florence (Nirim),[15] with two *shlihim* (emissaries) sent from Israel,[16] one dealing with the north of Italy and the other with the center-south. From personal recollections, we can certainly claim that Hashomer Hatzair has been continuously active in these four cities since the 1950s or 1960s. Other branches, such as those in Venice (Merchavia), Genoa, or Trieste,[17] were created in the golden decades of Hashomer Hatzair Italy (the 70s and 80s), but did not last.[18] However, the present-day structure of the youth movement was developed in the 1960s.[19]

There are two main versions of how and when Hashomer Hatzair arrived in Italy. One perspective suggests that the movement emerged directly after the Second World War, with the formation of Hashomer Hatzair's hakhsharot, or with the presence of Hashomer Hatzair's shlihim in DP camps, often identifying the year of the official foundation of Hashomer Hatzair Italy in 1954, as end of this constitutional process.[20] The other posits that the official foundation of Hashomer Hatzair Italy dates to the late 1950s in Rome and the late 1960s in Milan.

According to Giuseppe Tedesco's memoirs, in 1947, in the DP camp of Avigliana, near Turin, Shlomo Cahana,[21] known as Silika, a Romanian Jew, and Avraham Przysuskier, from the Negba kibbutz, both of whom were enrolled in the British army, introduced Hashomer Hatzair's education and ideology, based on socialism and ʿaliyah to shomeric kibbutzim, to

[14] Brazil is the only country with a comparable organizational structure to Italy, as both have numerous active and collaborative kenim. France, which once had two active *kenim*, no longer maintains this structure.

[15] In the past decade, there have been attempts to create branches in Naples and Padua.

[16] Previously, the structure was different. Between the 1990s and the early 2000s, for instance, the role of shaliah in Milan was often filled by Israeli individuals already residing in Italy, sometimes with support from *shlihonim* (young emissaries). Currently, there is a shaliah based in Rome, with a satellite operation in Florence, and a second in Milan, who also oversees activities in Turin and in Northern Italy.

[17] The experience of ken Merchavia can be understood through the files of Gadi and Alisa Luzzatto Voghera: Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, "Giornali del *ken* Merchavia," Hashomer Hatzair collection, folder 3, subfolder 6, ACDEC; interview with Alisa Luzzatto Voghera, Audiovisual Collection ACDEC. Traces of other kenim can be found in Daniel Soria, "Giornali *Deot*," Hashomer Hatzair collection, F. 14, Sf. 1, ACDEC.

[18] The Hashomer Hatzair movement has consistently focused on engaging with Jewish communities considered peripheral within the Italian system. Its strategy involved establishing new local branches, wherever there was interest. This strategy makes it difficult to accurately trace and date the movement's presence throughout Italy.

[19] The organizational structure of Hashomer Hatzair varies across different cities; however, the movement's *kenim* (plural of *ken*, local branch) are typically directed by a *shaliah* (emissary). The primary decision-making and educational body is the *mo'etzet habogrim*, an assembly composed of *bogrim* (seniors, generally aged between fifteen and eighteen). These senior members also serve as *madrikhim* (leaders/educators) for the younger *qvutzot* (peer groups).

In many European contexts, there is also a *shlihon* (junior emissary); this is usually a graduate of the movement who has remained active within the ken. The shlihon acts as a mediator between the *mo'atzah* (council), the shaliah, and the *va'adat horim* (the parents' committee). The latter is an elected committee composed of the parents of Hashomer Hatzair members, providing a bridge between families and the institutional leadership. In some countries, such as Italy, there are groups of adults who continue the Hashomer Hatzair lifestyle in various ways (in Europe, this takes the form of cultural houses or *qvutzah* life).

[20] The interview with Edda Schwarz clarifies this context: see the interview with Edda Schwarz in the Audiovisual Collection ACDEC. Furthermore, the link between hakhsharot and Holocaust survivors has been well described by Verena Buser and Chiara Renzo, "Training for Aliyah: Young Jews in Hakhsharot across Europe between the 1930s and late 1940s," *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC* 21, no. 1 (2022), https://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/training-for-aliyah-young-jews-in-hachsharot-across-europe-between-the-1930s-and-late-1940s/, accessed December 20, 2025.

[21] Cahana died in the Arab-Israeli War on 24 May 1948. Simoni mentions that he was singing *Bandiera Rossa* in Italian before he died. Simoni, "Young Italian Jews," 183; Marco Cavallarin, *Zofim 1944–1946, la meglio gioventù ebraica* (Milan: Keshet, 2011).

DP youngsters in the camp.[22] As Simoni stresses, Cahana and his legacy strongly influenced the *Tzofim* (Scouts),[23] founded in 1944 immediately after the liberation of Rome,[24] involving young Italian Jews and young Jewish refugees from across Europe with the assistance of Jewish soldiers from the British Army.[25] The Jewish Brigade's[26] enthusiastic support for the formation of the GEEDI (Giovani Esploratori Ebrei d'Italia), the Italian Jewish Scouting movement, or Tzofim,[27] is described by Edda Schwarz in an interview preserved in the CDEC Foundation Archives, when she recalls the sense of newness, after the racial laws, of singing songs in Hebrew or attending Zionist camps.

In this sense, Hashomer Hatzair's activities in Italy can be traced through the presence of many Jewish soldiers or other volunteers in Italy who held the role of shlihim sent from the Yishuv[28] to encourage 'aliyah among young people, originating what Simoni refers to as "Generation '48," the first Italians in post-WWII Italy to migrate to Palestine. The shlihim came from different movements in the Yishuv, but were active in Italy within the framework of the Hehalutz ("Pioneer") umbrella organization,[29] which encompassed all ideological movements with the ultimate aim of 'aliyah, but mainly shared the direction of the Israeli MAPAI party.[30] However, the Yad Yaari archive contains Yiddish records of activities and *hovrot* (booklets) written by members of Hashomer Hatzair that were conceived specifically for Italy.[31] Furthermore, in many Italian cities, such as Rome, Milan, Genoa, Turin, and Trieste, the development of the GEEDI has a troubled history of schism between its scoutist and pioneering tendencies, which resulted in the division between the SEI (Scout Ebrei d'Italia) and the GEEDI, regarding the approach to religion, 'aliyah, and socialism. Occasional direct relations to Hashomer Hatzair, which influenced the GEEDI's leftist position, surfaced in Avigliana with the creation of a section of the GEEDI explicitly

[22] Cavallarin, *Zofim*, 79-88; Renzo, *Jewish Displaced Persons in Italy*, 111. Interestingly, the course on Palestinography was taught by the future president of the CDEC, Eloisa Ravenna. Her death was notably commemorated by Hashomer Hatzair in a document in Tamara Rabà, "Alle istituzioni ebraiche e agli amici dell'Hashomer Hatzair, 9 settembre 1973," Hashomer Hatzair collection, F. 4, Sf. 4, ACDEC.

[23] Simoni references an interview with Bruno Segre (Haifa, 28 July 2009), in which he recalls a key figure with the statement: "Silica era un profugo attivista di Hashomer Hatzair che è piombato a Torino e ci ha silicato tutti" ("Silica was an activist refugee from Hashomer Hatzair who landed in Turin and 'silicated' all of us"): Simoni, "Young Italian Jews," 183.

[24] The issue of Deot mentioned above affirms that the Tzofim were created in 1945 in Via Unione, Milan. It is possible that both are true.

[25] This information is given by Ziva Fischer aka Grazia Modiano, in an interview with Anna Segre published in Segre et al., eds., *Hashomer Hatzair Ledor Vador* (Rome: Hashomer Hatzair, 2013).

[26] Simoni mentions their support in hakhsharot, as in Rome (Via Balbo, 33) and Milan (Via Unione, 5), in Simoni, "Young Italian Jews," 179-182.

[27] In *Hechalutz* 10, no. 2 (1955), it emerges that the Tzofim were created in 1945. In Milan, the GEEDI were first created under the influence of Beniamino Matalon, Franca Brod, Ferruccio Voghera, and Adele Rimini. See Segre et al., *Hashomer Hatzair Ledor Vador*, 34-36.

[28] Yishuv literally means "settlement" and refers to the Jewish community in Palestine before 1948.

[29] The Hehalutz movement is best understood, as Elmaliach suggests, as an "umbrella organization of all the pioneering youth movements that had been founded." See Elmaliach, *Hakibbutz Ha'artzi*, 6. In Italy, the movement was established in 1945 at Ceriano Laghetto, as documented by Hehalutz newspaper on 1 June 1946. As Simoni notes, the movement included representatives from various kibbutz affiliations. For instance, Max Varadi, whose correspondence with Rabbi Shachmann is featured in the new CDEC collection, served as a shaliah for the religious Kibbutz Movement (Kibbutz Ha-Dati). See Simoni, *Young Italian Jews*, 183.

[30] MAPAI (The Workers' Party of the Land of Israel) was the leading party in the Labour Zionist movement. Its leaders have included David Ben-Gurion, Berl Katznelson, and Moshe Sharett.

[31] See Hashomer Hatzair Italy, files 3-2-04/000002/000002 (*pirsomet*); 3-2-04/000002/000001 (*hovrot*), Yad Yaari Archive, Archive Hashomer Hatzair Movement in Israel and Worldwide, Giv'at Haviva (Israel).

affiliated with Hashomer Hatzair in September to October 1949.[32] Other examples included booklets about Kibbutz Ha'artzi published by the Hehalutz movement in the journal *Hehalutz*[33] and a shaliah, Eldad Hadar, presenting himself as coming from Hashomer Hatzair, publishing articles entitled "Shabab" and "Zofim a Congresso" in *Hehalutz* in 1950.[34] The hakhsharah of Tel Broshim, in Tuscany near Cevoli, uniting Hehalutz and the GEEDI, constituted a milestone for the foundation of Hashomer Hatzair in Italy. Here, *garinim* (groups) were formed and prepared for 'aliyah.[35] By integrating the interviews with other material in the CDEC Foundation Archives, such as Guido Valabrega's photographs, or *Hehalutz* (which the CDEC holds in its entirety), which was regularly published in Florence, researchers can dig into the history, political debates, or cultural, economic, political, and social life of Tel Broshim.[36] This place soon became one of the operative and ideological centers of Hehalutz and had three noteworthy aspects. First, it was connected to both Jewish and non-Jewish society.[37] Second, the Hehalutz movement had lost power and had faced multiple crises after its members had left for Israel. Third, the influence of Kibbutz Ha'artzi and MAPAM's socialistic ideas was steadily increasing,[38] with a considerably high number of members making 'aliyah to shomeric kibbutzim such as Ruhama, Bar Am, Ein Dor, or Nir David.[39] The growth of its influence reached the point that members of the French *hakhsharah* of Hashomer Hatzair in Zette, near Toulouse, came to Tel Broshim, together with Arieh Yaari, the director of Hashomer Hatzair in Europe, declaring the GEEDI as the successors of Hehalutz and as a branch of Hashomer Hatzair on 15 August 1954.[40] This interpretation further supports the narrative that both Hashomer Hatzair and Bnei Akiva[41] arose in Italy from the ashes of the GEEDI and Hehalutz.

[32] This meant officially belonging to the GEEDI until the age of seventeen and then joining Hehalutz. See Cavallarin, *Zofim*, 87-88.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Eldad Hadar "Shabab," *Hehalutz* (5 October 1949); Hadar, "Zofim a Congresso," *Hehalutz* (7 September 1950). Simoni underlines his importance for *Hehalutz*, together with Corrado Israel De Benedetti, a crucial figure.

[35] Marcella Simoni focuses on the history of the hakhsharah in Tel Broshim. Interestingly, she outlines the history of "Generation '48" as a collective history.

[36] There are two significant examples of the collective life of Tel Broshim: firstly, they had a cow, and secondly, they cultivated a garden. For these reasons, they received school certification from the ORT (the Jewish network of schools for the promotion of skilled trades). See "Produzione della Hasciarà Tel Broshim," *Hehalutz* (20 October 1950): 6, and Cavallarin, *Zofim*, 15.

[37] There is another interesting case, occurring in an Italian context of a strong political polarization, in which they were accused of killing Don Ugo Bardotti, as they were leftist and Jewish. See Segre et al., *Hashomer Hatzair Ledor Vador*, 20-22.

[38] Interestingly, the vast majority of the personal recollections described a watershed moment, the shift of power toward the socialistic ideals of Hashomer Hatzair in the Zionist scouting movement within the hakhsharah of Tel Broshim in 1954. See the interviews with Edda Schwarz and Giuseppe Franchetti in the Audiovisual Collection ACDEC. In the same years, MAPAI was embracing the idea of ceasing its activities in Italy: see Segre et al., *Hashomer Hatzair Ledor Vador*, 23-25.

[39] Simoni observes that the majority of "Generation '48" made 'aliyah to kibbutzim affiliated with Kibbutz Ha'artzi: see Simoni, *Young Italian Jews*, 184. Interestingly, there are also many cases of people coming back, such as Giuseppe Franchetti, Giordano D'Urbino, Bruno Cases, and Tamara Rabà. For their reasons for doing so, see the interview with Giordano D'Urbino and Bruna Cases in the Audiovisual Collection ACDEC.

[40] According to Franchetti's recollections, a 1956 camp in Pian de Falco was attended by eighty-three young members of Hashomer Hatzair from Tunisia. Furthermore, he noted that the GEEDI sent a representative from Ferrara named Renzo Bonfiglioli to the MAPAM delegation. He also held this role after Beniamino Matalon (the promoter of the Zofim in Milan). Segre et al., *Hashomer Hatzair Ledor Vador*, 23-25.

[41] Bnei Akiva is a global youth movement active to this day, with branches in Rome and Milan. Its ideology is based on "Torah ve-'Avodah" ("Torah and work"), and it was born as an expression of Kibbutz Ha-Dati and of the religious section of the GEEDI. On Hashomer Hatzair, Bnei Akiva, and their relations with the communities, see also Giovanni Battista N. Paglianti, "Profilo dell'associazionismo giovanile ebraico," in *E li insegnerai ai tuoi*


*Video 1. Giuseppe Franchetti explains the steps toward the creation of the Hashomer Hatzair movement in Italy. Interview with Giuseppe and Margherita Franchetti, CDEC Audiovisual Collection.*

The alternative narrative does not deny Hashomer Hatzair Italy's tight connection to the GEEDI or the influence of Hashomer Hatzair in France. However, it emphasizes two key aspects for claiming Hashomer's origins: the continuous presence of Hashomer Hatzair kenim,[42] and the constant presence of a shaliah sent from Hashomer Hatzair central headquarters in Israel. This leads the supporters of this interpretation to the conclusion that the formation of Hashomer Hatzair should be fixed in Rome to around 1955 to 1956, in Milan to 1967 to 1968, and in Turin to 1973. In this sense, the collection's interviews with Yehuda Szneider and Gabriele Eschkenazi[43] elucidate the foundation of Hashomer Hatzair in these cities, supporting the second version of the narrative. Furthermore, material evidence of the movement's activity in the CDEC Foundation Archives can be traced from the mid-1960s onward, with the oldest document currently present in the archival collection containing the name "Hashomer Hatzair Italia" being the material list for the camping trip in Cerevazza in 1966.[44]

To conclude the debate around the origins of Hashomer Hatzair Italy, the answer probably combines elements of the two interpretations, sharing an idea of continuity between the two movements and the people active within them (Dan Funaro in the case of Rome). This

*figli. Educazione ebraica in Italia dalle leggi razziali a oggi*, ed. Anna Maria Piussi (Florence: Giuntina, 1997), 201-209.

[42] In Rome, the first ken of Hashomer Hatzair was established in the Via delle Zoccolette. This choice of location was necessitated by the Roman Jewish community's disapproval of the movement's ideological shift, which led to them being forbidden to hold their activities in the community's premises. In Milan, after the first meetings in the synagogues, the first ken was established in the Via Torino. See Segre et al., *Hashomer Hatzair Ledor Vador*, 72-73.

[43] See the interviews with Gabriele Eschenazi and Yehuda Szneider in the Audiovisual Collection ACDEC. See also Segre et al., *Hashomer Hatzair Ledor Vador*, 45-55, which stresses the continuities in Rome thanks to the figure of Dan Funaro.

[44] Interestingly, we can see that they had to bring clothes for skiing, the hultzah shomrit, and material to sew. See Gabriele Eschenazi, "Hashomer Hatzair Italia Campeggio invernale 1966 Cervarezza," Hashomer Hatzair collection, F. 1, Sf. 6, ACDEC.

controversy reveals that despite the scarcity of Hashomer Hatzair in pre-1960s official records or postwar Italian Jewish historiography, these sources provide nuanced insights into its connections with 'aliyah, DP camps, hakhsharot (notably Tel Broshim), and Zionist networks. Within the CDEC Foundation Archives, putting Hashomer Hatzair's collection in dialogue with those of the CEM (the series on the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration [UNRRA]), Emanuele Cohenca, Adele Rimini, the FGEI, Rav Schaumann (for its relation with Hapoel Hamizrahi and Kibbutz Ha-Dati, later represented by Bnei Akiva), and the ADEI could permit further investigation of the dynamics inside and among those movements and institutions.

While core elements, such as camping trips or ideological pillars, have remained central to the movement's identity,[45] the period following the mid-1950s witnessed remarkable changes from the origins (1945-1954), impacting Hashomer Hatzair's structure until today. This development and continuity resulted in the creation of strong intergenerational social networks within Italian Jewish communities, forged by shared ideas, practices, and symbols.[46]

## The Hashomer Hatzair Italy Collection

The collection of documentation regarding Hashomer Hatzair Italy is not a new idea. Each ken has always had a room in which to assemble materials or bureaucratic papers, and a project aimed at creating the Hashomer Hatzair Memory Bank was undertaken in the 1990s. Similarly, the Yad Yaari archive in Giv'at Haviva contains a section about Hashomer Hatzair in Italy.[47] Furthermore, one of the main goals of the one-hundredth anniversary celebrations was the creation of a Hashomer Hatzair archive. For this occasion, Marco Krivaceck, Anna Segre, and Lidia Kriger conducted around seventy interviews with Hashomer Hatzair members.[48] This collection of interviews was recently donated to the CDEC Foundation, becoming an integral part of the Hashomer Hatzair Italy collection.

In 2022, the head of the World Movement, Oren Zuckierkorn, and Yahal Linternari, the head of Hashomer Hatzair Europe, visited Milan and then Rome as a *mishlahat* (delegation) to foster contacts and relationships with Jewish and non-Jewish society alike. On this occasion, one of the shlihim at the time, Ruben Correggia, organized a meeting with the CDEC Foundation's director Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, its head of communications Bianca Ambrosio, and a CDEC Foundation researcher named Sara Buda, all three of them former Hashomer Hatzair members, to discuss future collaborations and plans toward the movement's 100th anniversary. The idea of a collection campaign and the creation of an archival collection in the CDEC Foundation was then developed together with the Hashomer Hatzair movement, with endorsement from the head of the CDEC Foundation Archives, Laura Brazzo. The campaign aimed to engage all generations within Hashomer Hatzair across Italy, collecting, digitizing, and cataloging donated materials. While initially

[45] These concepts have remained central to the discourse, even as their meaning and application have evolved. For example, as previously discussed, the concepts of 'aliyah and *halutzism* differ significantly in their contemporary and historical contexts.

[46] For the creation of networks of generations of *shomrim* and *shomrot*, see the interviews with Tamara Rabà and Michelle Mimun, Ruth Haube, and Vito and Michaela Foa in the CDEC Audiovisual Collection.

[47] Riccardo Sorani, "Progetto per la realizzazione Banca Hashomer Hatzair," Hashomer Hatzair collection, F. 7, Sf. 5, ACDEC.

[48] Around one hundred members and former members of Hashomer Hatzair took part in this project. This work resulted in the publication of Segre et al., *Hashomer Hatzair Ledor Vador*.

launched in Milan for practical reasons, the project is designed to expand to all Italian branches of Hashomer Hatzair and to establish archival connections with the Yad Yaari Archive.

The first phase of the collection took place during Sukkot 2022, from 10 to 13 October, as the inauguration of the 110th anniversary celebrations. People gathered in the Milan ken, spent the evening together, recalled past times—there were even the riqudei 'am for one group—and gave some of their materials to members of Hashomer Hatzair Milan who had previously undergone training with CDEC archivists. The second phase consisted of a group of youngsters from the movement who, after the training, put in order, read, and scanned the donated materials, under the supervision of CDEC archivists Daniela Scala and Paola Cipolla. This phase began in January 2023 and officially concluded at the end of the academic year. The third phase began in September 2023 with the cataloging of the collection by me, a former Hashomer Hatzair shaliah, which finished in September 2024 with the publication of the CDEC Foundation's Digital Library.[49]

Hashomer Hatzair's archival collection is structured as follows. It is divided, for now, into three sections: Hashomer Hatzair Milan, Hashomer Hatzair Turin, and an audiovisual collection integrating the interviews made on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary celebrations. It has been cataloged with respect to the single collections and individual donations, which is one of the main peculiarities of the CDEC Foundation Archives. For this reason, the personal collections have been preserved, named after their respective donors, but they have also been divided into groups (*qvutzot*), usually named after Hashomer Hatzair kibbutzim, which represent the core unit within the movement's branches. To sum up, the Hashomer Hatzair Milan section of the collection contains a list of groups (qvutzot), specifying the age of the branch in brackets. Each group's record then identifies its associated donors. This organizational structure reflects the understanding that these individuals grew up collectively within the youth movement, sharing largely similar experiences from diverse perspectives, and that they continue to identify as members of their respective qvutzot.

Besides some conservation issues presented by certain documents,[50] this structure poses crucial challenges. A single *qvutzah* can include members from different age groups, which complicates the process of identifying a specific person. Moreover, nicknames found in archival materials must be integrated into the research data to reflect these specific social dynamics. However, the most substantial challenge, closely related to the project's future development, stems from the current partial nature of the collection. It includes only the cities of Milan and Turin, with some important documents from the ken of Rome and Venice.[51] Furthermore, this also relates to the temporal span of the documents, revealing a significant gap from the qvutzot between 1980 and 1997. This chronological lacuna does not necessarily indicate a dearth of documentation from those years, but rather a significantly diminished representation within the current collection. Finally, it is crucial to note that the documents were donated by individuals and that they therefore depict their singular experience within the movement.

By far the richest part of the collection is its Hashomer Hatzair Italy journals. It includes

[49] See the digital collection on the Digital Library of the CDEC Foundation, https://digital-library.cdec.it/cdec-opac/tree/IT-CDEC-ST0081-000001/hashomer-hatzair-italia?t=inventario, accessed December 20, 2025.

[50] The primary conservation issues include mold, tears, and the use of adhesives or fountain pens, the ink from which can make the text difficult to read.

[51] For Venice, see Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, Hashomer Hatzair collection, F. 3, Sf. 4-8, CDEC Foundation Archives. For Rome and other cities, see the documents in Tamara Rabà, Hashomer Hatzair collection, F. 4, Sf. 2, ACDEC.

publications issued monthly or weekly at a local level, such as Daf Haken in Milan or Qol Hashomer in Rome,[52] or nationally (Deot-Opinioni), and the special editions produced for specific camps, seminars, or festivities. The journals' themes differ with the time and type of publication, ranging from recreational to ideologically driven debates about activities, the movement's stances on a single event, or critical subjects such as antisemitism.[53] Thanks to this complexity,[54] the journals emerged as the main tool for internal and external communication and remain so to this day. These documents offer insights into interpretations and perspectives on international—particularly Israeli—politics, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and other related topics.[55] Just in the last decade, social media has replaced paper journals as a communication tool.

Another critical category of documentation pertains to educational activities. These are mainly related to ideology and are structured as plans for activities on a particular topic, encompassing subjects related to the ideology of the movement (socialism, Zionism, Judaism, or Scoutism), such as practice-related activities about feminism or environmentalism. Furthermore, it is worth noting the presence of activities concerning current topical issues[56] and those connected to group-building on identity and communal life, which were often intended for the youngest age groups. As a movement working via informal education, these activities are delivered via many different methods. Interestingly, it is easy to observe that the subjects of the activities do not vary too much and that they often give rise to strong political activism, mainly inside Jewish institutions. This activism has changed over time because of historical fractures affecting the Jewish communities, such as the Lebanon War in 1982, the Rome Synagogue attack,[57] the crisis of the Kibbutz Ha'artzi movement, and the evolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For example, I always wore my blue hultzah shomrit (Fig. 3) to the 25 April demonstrations and others.[58] Shomrot and shomrim would promote demonstrations in the streets or in front of the embassies with Shalom 'Akhshav,[59] in attempt to affect the politics of Jewish communities. Notwithstanding the importance of Hashomer Hatzair's engagement in public life via its actions,[60] its primary concern today remains the cultivation of a critical, secular Jewish

[52] Daf Haken was led by Gabriele Eschenazi, while Kol Hashomer was launched in 1966. The first issues of these publications in the archive are those edited by Sira Fatucci and Ghidon Fiano. See Tamara Rabà, "Kol Hashomer, 1973," Hashomer Hatzair collection, F. 4, Sf. 2, ACDEC.

[53] Ghitta Kahan, Hashomer Hatzair collection, F. 8, Sf. 1-2, ACDEC. On this note, it would be interesting to dig further into Hashomer Hatzair's position in relation to antisemitism, still a highly debated subject. For the main contemporary debate on antisemitism, see Carlotta Ferrara Degli Uberti, "Combattere l'antisemitismo attraverso le definizioni," *Passato e presente* 120 (2023): 61-77.

[54] For example, some of the journals published in Milan and Rome were named Chevra, Kol Hashomer, Daf HaKen, Hed HaKen, Anachnu, and Achshav.

[55] For instance, it is particularly enlightening to examine how Hashomer Hatzair members commented on Rabin's assassination in 1995, given his central role within the movement due to his commitment to the peace process. Daniel Soria, "*Deot*, dicembre 1995," Hashomer Hatzair collection, F. 14, Sf. 1, ACDEC.

[56] These include activities related to the 1973 Yom Kippur War, the 1977 Lebanon War, and even the 2001 attack on the Twin Towers.

[57] For the effects of the 1982 synagogue attack on the Jewish Italian community, see Arturo Marzano and Guri Schwarz, *Attentato alla Sinagoga. Roma 9 ottobre 1982. Il conflitto israelo-palestinese e l'Italia* (Rome: Viella, 2013).

[58] Hashomer Hatzair's public resonance was notably amplified by events such as the April 25 demonstrations.

[59] Shalom 'Akhshav—Salam Al'an—Peace Now is an Israeli peace movement, founded in 1978. For more about it, see Tamar Hermann, "The Israeli Peace Movement," in *Mobilizing for Peace: Conflict Resolution in Northern Ireland, Israel/Palestine, and South Africa*, eds. Benjamin Gidron, Stanley N. Katz, and Yeheskel Hasenfeld (eds.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 101-109; and Mordechai Bar-On, *Peace Now: The Portrait of a Movement* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1985) [in Hebrew].

[60] The kenim of Hashomer Hatzair Italy hosted important personalities in Italian culture and politics for different events, for example, Giorgio Gaber, Herbert Pagani, Leo Herzog, and Noam Chomsky (online), or the deputies Piero Terracini, Pierfrancesco Majorino, and Emanuele Fiano.

identity, as well as education toward values such as egalitarianism and collectivism.


CORRIERE DELLA SERA

Di Maio attacca: Conte costringerà Siri a lasciare

OMER HATZA

TIFA

«No al baratto della libertà con l'ordine»

Minacce dei rider ai clienti famosi: diremo dove abitate

*Fig. 2. Article on Hashomer Hatzair Milan's participation in the 25 April demonstration. Gabriele Della Seta,* Corriere Della Sera, *April 26, 2019," Hashomer Hatzair collection, F. 15, Sf. 6, ACDEC.*

Besides its weekly activities, Hashomer Hatzair Italy's main focus, as emerges from the CDEC collection, lies on the activities delivered during the summer and winter camps. These documents highlight a clear connection to the scouting movement: its symbols and methods, such as sleeping in tents or singing around bonfires, distinguish the Italian movement from the other branches of Hashomer Hatzair worldwide to this day. Unsurprisingly, the majority of the memories and anecdotes recalled in the interviews are related to events that happened during the camps. Today, the camps are organized in winter and summer (*mahane horef/qaitz*), hosting more than two hundred youngsters, and are jointly led by the *mo'etzet habogrim* (the assembly of the leaders of the group) discussing the educational activities and the shlihim. To prepare, the mo'etzet habogrim establishes a work plan (known as a PDL; that is, "piano di lavoro") about a specific subject, usually valid for all the groups. I remember devoting all my strength and knowledge to preparing a work plan on "Socialism and Work." While a comprehensive analysis of summer and winter camps requires separate study, newspapers and personal recollections from the CDEC collection provide unique insights into their evolving activities, emotional landscapes, and collective memories.

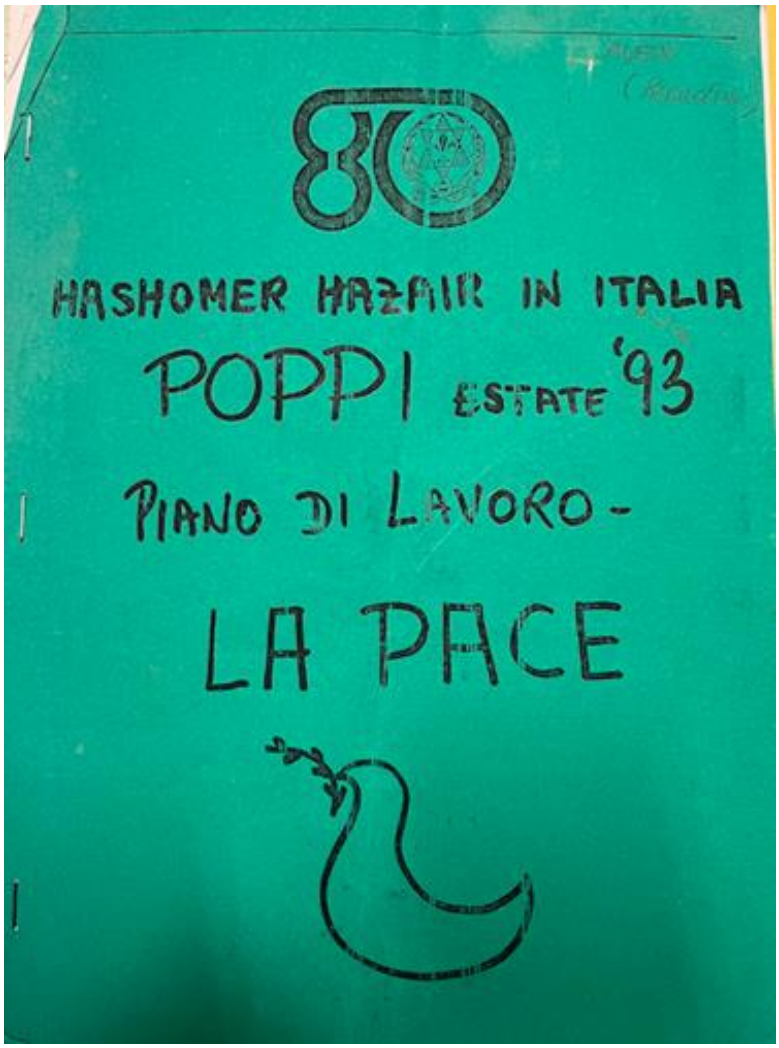


*Fig. 3. Work plan for the 1993 summer camp entitled "Peace." Alex Soria, "Hashomer Hatzair in Italia Poppi, Piano di Lavoro— La pace," Hashomer Hatzair collection, F. 9, Sf. 3, ACDEC.*

Among the CDEC collection, the materials prepared for Jewish festivities (including *shironim*, or collections of songs, *haggadot*, or stories, plays, invitations, events, and specialized journals)[61] stand out. They represent a precious source for the CDEC and for Jewish studies in Italy, because they contain an insight into secular Jewish society and how it perceived Jewish festivities. Hashomer Hatzair does not consider itself a religious movement, but it adapts itself to the societies in which it is active. In this sense, the encounter between Hashomer Hatzair practices and ideology and the Jewish communities worldwide is very interesting. For instance, the activities are held on a Saturday, the Jewish holy day of rest.[62] Although its members are permitted to observe religious practices such as festivities and *kashrut*, they are not officially enforced within the movement. As a result, Italian rabbis currently advise individuals considering conversion to Judaism against

[61] There is a rich tradition of reinterpretations of *haggadot* booklets, not just in the Hashomer Hatzair environment. Furthermore, numerous plays were created for both Pesah and Purim. See Hashomer Hatzair Turin, "Recite," Hashomer Hatzair Collection, ACDEC, currently uncatalogued.

[62] Before the 1990s, the activities in Milan and Rome took place on Fridays.

participating in Hashomer Hatzair's activities.[63] Even though it is not a religious movement, Judaism is one of its three pillars, and many activities are intended to teach about Judaism and its values. In this sense, members of Hashomer Hatzair Italy created their own system of rituals that are partly connected to traditional ones, with secular values taking precedence over religious practices. This way of celebrating these festivities might also have influenced many Italian Jews and their families.


pesach 1996 - 5756

Abbiamo il piacere di invitarvi

al tradizionale Seder di Pesach dell'HASHOMER HATZAIR che si terrà presso la Scuola Ebraica-via Sally Mayer 4-6 domenica 31 marzo 1996 alle ore 18:00

programma:

Tradizionale Seder dell'H.H: canti, balli, coro degli amici dell'H.H. coro Col Hakolot

..... e infine una grande Lotteria

Vi attendiamo

R. S. V. P

*Fig. 4. Invitation to Hashomer Hatzair's Pesah seder. Daniel Soria, "Invito al seder di Pesah 1996," Hashomer Hatzair collection, F. 14, Sf. 2, ACDEC.*

Finally, the last and pivotal group of materials illustrates the depth of the relations, transnational networks, and social activism expressed by the Italian movement. For instance, as already stated, it is worth mentioning the influence of the French, Tunisian,

[63] Interestingly, as Yehuda Szneider notes, it was not always like this in the past; he recalls that Rav Toaff from the Roman community endorsed Hashomer Hatzair for Italian Jewish youth despite preferring Bnei Akiva. See the interview with Yehuda Szneider in the Audiovisual Collection ACDEC.

and Algerian branches of Hashomer Hatzair in the creation of the Italian movement,[64] ideological relations established in European or international congresses,[65] official documents attesting the status of the Hashomer Hatzair World Movement, letters exchanged with MAPAM and books about the party,[66] manifestos for Peace Committees in the Middle East,[67] and relations and debates with other Jewish youth movements (the FGEI and Bnei Akiva). Among the documents concerning international seminars, the records of those that took place in Poland may be particularly relevant for researchers. From the 1990s, the Hashomer Hatzair movement started organizing journeys of remembrance to Poland for the older age groups in each ken.[68] These trips, revolving around the Shoah, antisemitism, and antifascism, became one of the crucial steps for the *bagrut* (literally "adulthood") within the youth movement. They are preceded by specific preparatory work before the seminar, which is lived as a collective experience, in which Hashomer Hatzair members study how the Second World War marked a watershed moment in Hashomer Hatzair's history: British Palestine became the operative center of the movement, while the branches in Poland became forever remembered for their resistance against Nazism in the ghettos.[69] In this sense, Mordechai Anilewicz, *rosh ken* (literally "head of the nest") in Warsaw and one of the operational leaders who lost his life during the uprising, underwent a process of heroization, becoming the main icon of the movement to this day.[70]

[64] Furthermore, the works of Benin reveal the active role of Hashomer Hatzair in Egypt, and its connections with the Israeli and international movement. See Joel Benin, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry, Culture, Politics, and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora* (Berkley, Los Angeles-London: University of California Press), 121-140.

[65] Marco Krivacek, "Seminari internazionali," Hashomer Hatzair collection, F. 7, Sf. 1, ACDEC.

[66] Gabriele Eschenazi, "Federazione Sionistica Italiana e MAPAM," Hashomer Hatzair collection, F. 2, Sf. 2, ACDEC.

[67] Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, "Comitato giovanile per la pace," Hashomer Hatzair collection, F. 3, Sf. 5, ACDEC.

[68] The historical component for the Italian delegation to the first seminar was overseen by Professor Marcello Pezzetti (the first seminar in Poland was led by the Shoah survivor Shlomo Venezia: see Alex Soria, "Opuscolo sul viaggio in Polonia 1994," Hashomer Hatzair collection, F. 10, Sf. 3, ACDEC). From the late 1990s onward, Professor Andrea Bienati took over the historical preparation for these trips (co-leading the eightieth anniversary trip with Talia Bidussa). The first documented seminar in Poland for the Italian movement took place in 1990, after the fall of the Soviet bloc. See Alex Soria, "L'Hashomer Hatzair sulle tracce della Shoah, 1991," Hashomer Hatzair collection, F. 10, Sf. 3, ACDEC. This followed earlier, sporadic tours to Mauthausen in the 1970s. See Sabrina Sciama, "*Daf Haken*, 30 aprile1976," Hashomer Hatzair collection, F. 3, Sf. 1, ACDEC.

[69] For instance, members of Hashomer Hatzair played a significant role in organizing uprisings in cities such as Warsaw, Vilna (now Vilnius), Białystok, Tarnów, and Częstochowa. On the shift in operational centers from Poland to British Palestine. Rona Yona, "From Russia to Palestine via Poland: The Shifting Center of Socialist Zionism," *Contemporary European History* 30 (2021): 513-527.

[70] For example, Mordechai Anielewicz's last letter was put on the cover of the booklet (curated by Edna and Yehuda Livn and Gilia and Dudi Dankner) for participants in the seminar in Poland in 1996. Daniel Soria, "*Choveret* Polonia 1996," Hashomer Hatzair collection, F. 11, Sf. 2, ACDEC.


*Fig. 5. Front page of the seminar for the fiftieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in Poland produced by Hashomer Hatzair Italy, Alex Soria, "Choveret, L'Olocausto Seminario Europeo 1993," Hashomer Hatzair collection, F. 10, Sf. 2, ACDEC.*

The collection's inclusion of the material produced for these trips helps to illustrate the engagement with the Shoah for educational purposes in an international movement such as Hashomer Hatzair, how this content affected the organization's members, or whether and how it shaped the Italian discourse about the Shoah.
To conclude this overview of some relevant documents, Hashomer Hatzair Italy emerges as a highly politicized, communal, recreative, educative, secular movement connected to a strong Italian tradition, and at the same time to the international movement.

## Future Developments and Conclusions

With the materials and topics of the Hashomer Hatzair archival collection now outlined, this section aims to offer possible suggestions for future research lines, elucidating why it is so crucial for the CDEC Foundation to house these documents. For instance, the collection permits an in-depth analysis of debates about Judaism, particularly how its secular interpretation was perceived by part of Italian Jewish society after the Second World War. This is intrinsically connected both to the analysis of secular religious practices and their development, and to their reception within the Italian Jewish religious

environment. Furthermore, this archival collection offers a unique perspective on the fluid and constantly evolving intersections within Zionism and leftist ideologies, how they were approached by Jewish youngsters all over the world, and how they vary and interact over time, depending on specific historical events. Interestingly, this analysis is closely tied to the study of this ideology's transnationality and practical interconnections, not just in the European context. Seeing how young Jewish leftists around the globe formulated their thoughts and discussions concerning socialism and Zionism, or which personalities they referred to, allows for a better comprehension of both leftist and Zionist movements. For instance, a vast number of sources concern the kibbutzim, with shomrim and shomrot narrating their nuanced experience within them. Thus, it is crucial to employ the information in this collection to interpret the multifaceted relations between Israel, Italy, and the Jewish communities.

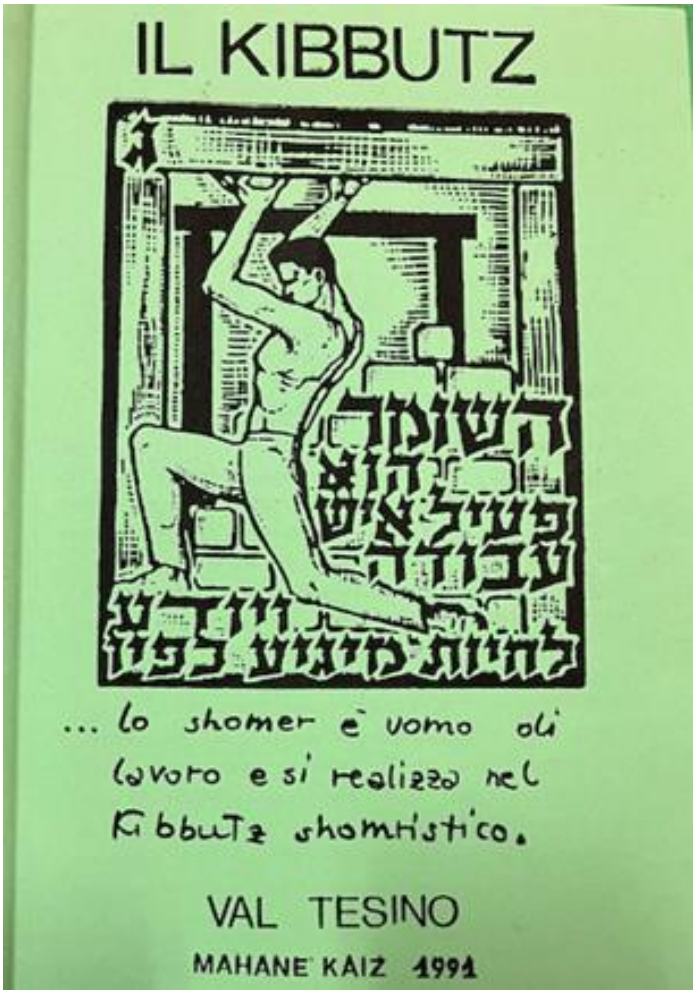


*Fig. 6. Work plan for the 1991 summer camp entitled "The Kibbutz." Alex Soria, "Il Kibbutz—Val Tesino Mahane Kaiz 1991," Hashomer Hatzair collection, F. 9, Sf. 3, ACDEC.*

This wide variety of sources enables different methodological approaches. They can provide insight into gender relations within the Jewish or Hashomer Hatzair community over time. From a similar perspective, they exemplify languages and symbols of the Italian youth of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s and their discussions and troubles, serving as an important tool for cultural studies. At the same time, they can help with some biographical studies of famous and important Italian personalities who belonged to this youth movement. The list of possible subjects is very long, including the development of an

informal educational system, the memory of the Holocaust, the internal dynamics of grassroots movements, and social activism of Jewish communities and Jewish Scoutism, to mention only a few.

Thus, the CDEC Foundation project reveals its foresight in having been attentive to comprehending the dynamics of modern Italian Judaism and giving researchers the possibility to intertwine these documents with those in other collections (the CEM, the FGEI, Rav Schaumann, Cohenca, Edoth,[71] and the ADEI). However, other important steps are required to amplify the relevance of the project. This includes bringing in new researchers and the establishment of new connections with other archives. The project should be enlarged not just to include other cities, countries, and timespans, but also to involve other movements, such as Bnei Akiva in Italy. This expansion would enable the exploration of new and deeper research lines and would permit many comparative approaches regarding ideology, religion, and relations to Israel among post-WWII youth movements in Italy: the GEEDI, the FGEI, Bnei Akiva, and Hashomer Hatzair, encompassing a timespan from hakhsharot and "Generation '48" until the present day. A collection like this one reveals the need to research Zionist movements—not only their institutional and ideological characteristics, but also their symbols and traditions—in order to better engage with their history and heritage. Increased attention should also be directed to thoroughly documenting themes that are currently difficult to find in it, such as materials related to the ghetto uprisings, to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or to other cultural and symbolic aspects of this movement. Much work still has to be done, but the foundation is very promising.

[71] Edoth is a CDEC Foundation project researching the histories of Jews migrating from countries in the Middle East and North Africa. Interestingly, many Hashomer Hatzair members had migration backgrounds from those countries, and these experiences and identities contributed to the shomeric community and lifestyle. See the interview with Tamara Rabà and Michelle Mimun in the Audiovisual Collection ACDEC.

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**Chiara Renzo**
Fondazione Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea, CDEC
renzo.chiara@gmail.com
Orcid: 0000-0002-1444-0643

# Tracing Routes and Memories

## The Jews of North Africa and the Middle East in TRAME, a Digital Humanities Project

**ABSTRACT**

This article examines *TRAME: Tracing Routes and Memories—Entangled Jewish Experiences across the Mediterranean*, a digital humanities project developed by the CDEC Foundation to document and interpret the migration of Jews from North Africa and the Middle East to Italy during the twentieth century. Building on the *Edoth* oral history fond, TRAME transforms oral testimonies, photographs, and archival materials into an interactive digital environment, offering new tools for research, education, and public engagement. Through digital mapping, story narratives, and thematic essays, the platform visualizes individual trajectories and collective experiences, highlighting how political, social, and personal factors shaped Jewish mobility across the Mediterranean. The project reweaves fragmented memories into a collective narrative, offering insight into the transnational origins of Italian Jewry and contributing to broader reflections on migration, memory, and identity in contemporary Europe.

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## Reweaving Jewish Migrations

Throughout the twentieth century, Italy occupied a complex position in the geography of Jewish migrations. Initially a country of passage for refugees, traders, and travelers, it gradually evolved—particularly in the aftermath of World War II—into a stable destination for Jewish immigration.

Nowhere was this transformation more visible than in Milan. At the beginning of the century, the city's Jewish community counted only 3,373 members, while by the postwar period, it had become one of the most dynamic Jewish centers in the country, with 8,488 members in 1965.[1] This growth was largely the result of successive waves of migration from diverse regions—Central and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa—making it a crossroads of Jewish diasporic trajectories and a microcosm of twentieth-century Jewish mobility.[2] Milan's evolution parallels broader demographic changes in Italian society. In the postwar decades, Italy itself shifted from a country of emigration to one of immigration, gradually becoming a destination for foreign populations seeking new opportunities.[3] The city of Milan emerged as a central hub in these migratory processes, attracting both internal migrants from southern Italy and newcomers from abroad.

During the 1930s and 1940s, thousands of Jews from Central and Eastern Europe passed through Milan, often en route to safer destinations or their long-awaited new homes. Before Italy entered the war and closed its borders to migrants, Milan—together with cities like Trieste and Genoa—had already emerged as a crucial transit hub for Jews crossing the Alps and seeking embarkation ports for overseas destinations.

[1] Sergio Della Pergola, "Demografia, economia e società. Le trasformazioni della popolazione ebraica nell'Italia del Novecento," in *Ebrei nel Novecento Italiano*, eds. Vittorio Bo and Mario Toscano (Genoa: Sagep, 2024), 29.

[2] For a selection of studies that shed light on the varied composition of Milan's Jewish community from demographic, anthropological, and social perspectives, see Sergio Della Pergola, "La Comunità ebraica di Milano: Tendenze socio-demografiche passate, presenti e future," in P*er ricostruire e ricostruirsi. Astorre Mayer e la rinascita ebraica tra Italia e Israele*, ed. Marco Paganoni (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2010), 59-74; Rony Hamaui, *Ebrei a Milano* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2016); Piera Rossetto, "Mind the Map: Charting Unexplored Territories of In-visible Migrations from North Africa and the Middle East to Italy," *Jewish Culture and History* 3, no. 2 (2022): 172-195.

[3] Michele Colucci, *Storia dell'immigrazione straniera in Italia: Dal 1945 ai nostri giorni* (Rome: Carocci, 2018).

*Fig. 1. Canteen of the Reception Center for Jewish refugees, Trieste, 1930s, CDEC Foundation Archives (henceforth ACDEC), Milan.*

*Fig. 2. Passengers departing for Brazil at the Genoa maritime station, 1939, ACDEC.*

After the war, Milan once again became a major arrival point for survivors: beginning in May 1945, the reception center at Via Unione 5 housed the principal Jewish relief organizations, offering immediate assistance to displaced persons and helping them to reintegrate into Italian Jewish communal life.[4]

*Fig. 3. Room for preparing parcels for refugee children in Milan, 1941, ACDEC.*

*Fig. 4. Refugees camped at Via Unione 5 in Milan, ca. 1945, ACDEC.*

[4] Cinzia Villani, "Milano, Via Unione 5: Un centro di accoglienza per displaced persons ebree nel secondo dopoguerra," *Studi storici* 50, no. 2 (2009): 333-370.

From the second half of the 1940s, however, the city became a point of arrival for a new migratory trajectory—one that connected Italy to the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean. As documented in the records of the Milanese Jewish Community preserved in the CDEC Foundation, it was during these years—when community institutions were already dealing with thousands of European Jewish refugees—that they received the first requests for assistance from Jews of Middle Eastern and North African origin.[5]

Jews from Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, and Libya settled in Milan, bringing with them diverse backgrounds and memories that profoundly reshaped the local community. While these migratory experiences differed in character and circumstances, they were all driven by a shared quest for safety and the hope of rebuilding life elsewhere, at a time when the situation for Jews in many Middle Eastern and North African countries was becoming increasingly precarious. Within this broader framework, the history of Jewish migration to Milan offers a lens through which to explore how patterns of mobility and integration shaped both the broader Italian society and the cultural landscape of contemporary Jewry.

It was precisely thanks to reflection on this distinctive mosaic of Milanese Jewry that the CDEC Foundation began to develop a new line of documentation and research in the last two decades. As several contributions to this issue of Quest have shown, the CDEC was originally established in order to document the persecution of Jews in Italy and their participation in the resistance against Nazism and Fascism. Over time, it broadened its mission, building a rich and diverse archival collection that mirrors the plural dimensions of Italian Jewish life. One of its most innovative initiatives was Edoth,[6] an oral history project launched in 2010 to collect oral testimonies, documents, and photographs of Jews who arrived in Italy from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region in the second half of the twentieth century, whose experiences had often been marginalized or absent from mainstream narratives of Italian Jewish history.

The Edoth collection today includes n. 139 oral interviews, most of which were recorded in Milan with a smaller number later being collected in Rome among Jews of Libyan origin. Conducted with both men and women—representing approximately 40 percent and 60 percent of the participants respectively—the interviews offer vivid portraits of first-generation immigrants. They provide insight into family histories, everyday life in their countries of origin, encounters with local societies, and the political transformations that marked the second half of the twentieth century and often drove them to leave their homeland. The interviews also shed light on the experience of migration itself—the journey, the arrival in Italy, and the gradual process of integration—while reflecting on identity, belonging, and the ways in which uprootedness and resettlement reshaped the interviewees' identity.

Building upon the sources collected through Edoth, in 2023 the CDEC launched TRAME: Tracing Routes and Memories—Entangled Jewish Experiences across the Mediterranean.

[5] Between 1948 and 1949, the Jewish Community of Milan received several requests for assistance, particularly concerning the extension of documents and residence permits submitted by "Jews from the Middle East" due to the state of war in their countries (Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt). Pratica egiziani, siriani e iracheni, 1948-1949, 109, Comunità Ebraica di Milano, b. 16, ACDEC.

[6] The Hebrew term edoth means "ethnic groups" or "communities.' For more information on the Edoth project, https://www.cdec.it/ricerca-storica-e-progetti/aree-di-ricerca/edoth-ebrei-del-mediterraneo-e-del-medio-oriente/ (accessed December 20, 2025).

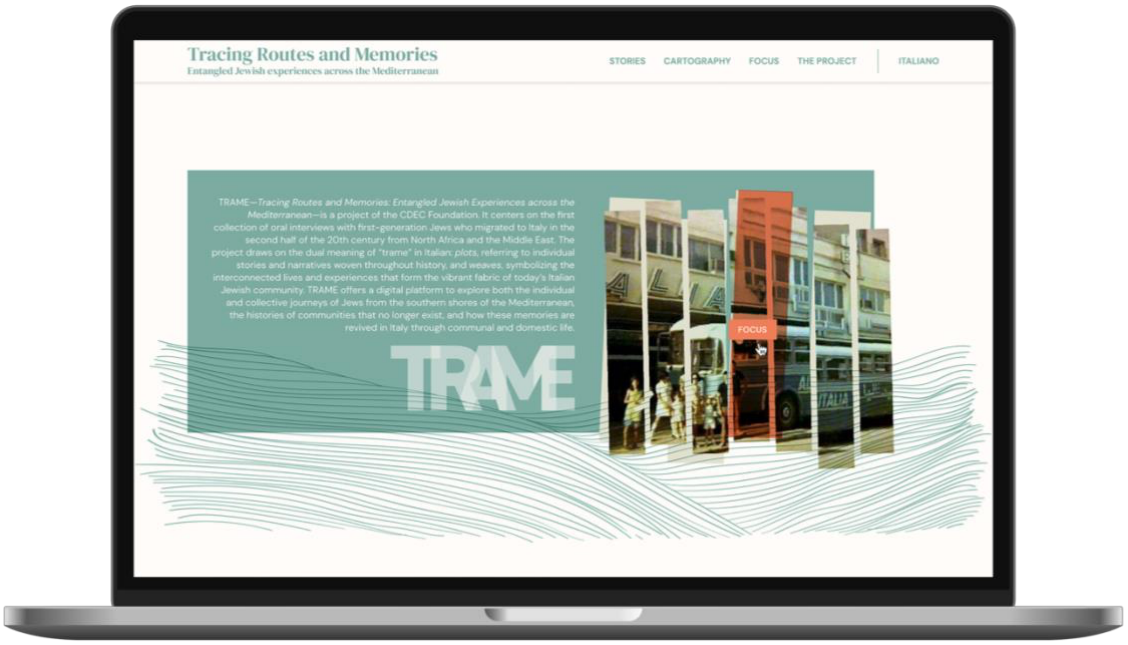


*Fig. 5. Homepage of the website trame.cdec.it.*

The project pursues a dual objective: first, to transform the oral and visual documentation gathered during the previous years into a structured archival collection explorable through the CDEC Digital Library, and second, to develop a dedicated online platform to make these histories available and meaningful through the tools and methodologies of the digital humanities (trame.cdec.it).[7] By shedding light on this unique archival corpus—unprecedented in the Italian context—and with the aim of creating an accessible narrative space, TRAME seeks to weave together individual life stories into a collective tapestry of Jewish migration, linking personal memories to the broader historical processes that have shaped contemporary Italian Jewry and Italy's evolving relationship with Jews in and from the MENA region. At the same time, the project has an educational and public outreach dimension, as TRAME aims to serve as a resource for teachers, students, and the wider public interested in the intertwined histories of migration, memory, and identity in the Mediterranean.

## Tracing Trajectories

Drawing on the rich audiovisual and photographic materials collected through the Edoth project, TRAME explores the complex migratory routes and memories of the first generation of Jews from the MENA region who arrived in Italy between the 1940s and the 1980s. The Italian word *trame*, meaning both "threads" and "plots," reflects the project's emphasis on the narrative dimension of each personal journey and on the plurality of voices that compose the mosaic of contemporary Jewish life in Italy.
The bilingual website—available in Italian and English—is structured around three interconnected sections. The first is called Focus and offers historical and thematic essays

[7] The TRAME website was developed in collaboration with Sara Radice (graphic designer) and Fabio Sturaro (web developer), with the support of Laura Brazzo, Vice Director of the CDEC Foundation and Head of the ACDEC.

written by expert scholars, contextualizing the history of individual communities within broader historical frameworks and addressing the transnational dimensions of the Jewish presence across the Mediterranean.

The second section of the website is called Cartography.[8] It provides a visual analysis of data collected from oral testimonies and archival sources held in the CDEC Foundation, transformed into interactive maps and visualizations that facilitate the interpretation of various aspects of migration and lived experience. For instance, the digital map Looking for a new home, developed from the data taken from the interviews, enables users to explore the migration routes of the first generation of Jews who arrived in Italy from the MENA region during the twentieth century. By combining spatial and temporal dimensions, the map reconstructs both individual and collective trajectories, showing points of origin as well as the intermediate stops that preceded settlement in Italy. A timeline illustrates the continuity of these movements from the postwar years through the 1980s, against the backdrop of profound historical and political transformations across both shores of the Mediterranean. These migrations were driven by a variety of factors: political—linked to decolonization, the deterioration of living conditions for Jews, regional conflicts, and the evolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict; economic—connected to the search for new opportunities; and educational or personal—such as the pursuit of studies abroad or family circumstances that prompted relocation.

[8] Following data extraction, collection, and structuring by Chiara Renzo, this section was developed in collaboration with Giovanni Pietro Vitali (historian and digital humanist), Sara Radice (graphic designer), and Fabio Sturaro (web developer), with the support of Laura Brazzo (ACDEC).


*Fig. 6. Digital Map from the Trame Project: "Looking for a New Home."*

The new and slowly expanding migratory flows of Jews from the southern shores of the Mediterranean began at the end of the 1940s and marked a significant shift: Italy, which had largely functioned as a transit country in the immediate postwar period, increasingly became a destination for permanent settlement. Whereas earlier migrations to Italy had been predominantly European, these new arrivals represented a continuous movement from across the southern and eastern Mediterranean.

For some, Italy served as a temporary stop; for others, it became a new home. Although fewer migrants remained in Italy compared to other destinations such as Israel, France, or the United States, their presence was sufficient to reshape Italy's Jewish demographic and social landscape. Indeed, the proportion of foreign-born Jews in Italy rose from just over 2% at the beginning of the twentieth century to 27% by 1975, with immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East accounting for roughly 30% of arrivals between 1945 and 1955 and nearly 70% between 1955 and 1965.[9]

[9] Sergio Della Pergola, *Anatomia dell'ebraismo italiano* (Assisi-Rome: Benedetto Carucci Editore, 1976), 62-67.

The first major wave of Middle Eastern Jewish immigrants consisted of Iranian Jews, primarily from Tehran but descended from the Mashhad community, which had faced forced conversions in the nineteenth century. Their presence expanded in the 1960s, driven by economic motivations and reinforced by dense family networks. Most settled in Milan, where by the 1980s, the community numbered around 1,600 individuals.[10] Smaller groups from Syria and Lebanon also established themselves in the city, supported by similar familial and communal ties.[11] Following the Suez Crisis of 1956, about one thousand Egyptian Jews settled in Milan, while others transited through Italy before emigrating elsewhere. Predominantly from urban middle-class backgrounds and often holding European citizenships—including Italian, preserved under the capitulations regime—these families contributed significantly to the growth and consolidation of Milanese Jewry.[12] The local community responded with assistance, and interestingly, the communal school system saw its enrollment double between 1950 and 1960, reflecting the growing number of students from Middle Eastern backgrounds.[13]

After the Six-Day War in 1967, a further migratory wave occurred when the Jewish community of Libya faced violent fueled by anti-Jewish and anti-Zionist propaganda accompanying the resurgence of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Approximately 4,000 Libyan Jews initially found temporary refuge in Italy. The Italian government, invoking historical ties with its former colony, offered provisional accommodation; however, with the rise of Muʿammar Gaddafi and the 1970 expulsion decrees, a permanent return to Libya became impossible.[14] Around 1,500 Libyan Jews ultimately settled in Italy, with a significant concentration in Rome. Migration from Syria and Lebanon continued until the Yom Kippur War of 1973 and was further curtailed by the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975. Within this broader context of twentieth-century mobility—driven by persecution, political and economic instability, and the precarious legal status of Jews in their countries of origin—Italy gradually emerged as a center of immigration, rooted in long-standing Mediterranean connections.

[10] Ariane Sadjed, "Belonging from Afar: Diasporic Religiosity among the Jews of Mashhad," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35, no. 11 (2022): 2202-2222; Sadjed, "Conversion, Identity, and Memory in Iranian-Jewish Historiography: The Jews of Mashad," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 53, no. 2 (2021): 235-251; Daniel Fishman, *Il grande nascondimento* (Florence: La Giuntina, 2015); Fiona Diwan, "Da Mashad, la forza della tradizione," *Il Bollettino della Comunità ebraica di Milano* 5 (2014): 12-15.

[11] Paul Andreson, "A Circular Society, Reconsidered: Syrian Jewish Merchant Networks after the Exodus from Aleppo," *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies* 41, no. 2 (2023): 33-56.

[12] Paolo Zanini, "Tra due diaspore: Ebrei levantini ed egiziani in Italia (1948–1957)," *Mediterranea* 19 (2022): 41-68.

[13] Proposta della Delibera del consiglio della comunità inerente la costruzione delle nuove scuole e del centro sociale, undated, Scuola di via Soderini (1) 1959–1970, 70, Comunità Ebraica di Milano, b. 12, ACDEC.

[14] Andrea Umberto Gritti, "Enfants trouvés de la décolonisation. Gli ebrei di Libia e la cittadinanza italiana, 1948-2001," *Contemporanea* 22, no. 2 (2019): 195-224; Giordano Bottecchia, "'Radio Le Caire incitait les Libyens à se soulever, à tuer les Juifs, à chasser les Américains': Reflets de la propagande nassérienne sur les violences de juin 1967 en Libye," *Diacronie* 45, no. 1 (2021): 39-58; Piera Rossetto, *Juifs de Libye. Constellations de mémoires* (Arcidosso: Effigi, 2023); Chiara Renzo, "Gli ebrei di Libia nel processo di decolonizzazione (1948–1970)," *Passato e presente* 122 (2024): 43-60.

## Representing memories

Beyond the broader geographical and historical dimensions of Jewish mobility across the Mediterranean, TRAME—through its Stories section—foregrounds the voices, emotions, and lived experiences of those who undertook these journeys. Through the platform's advanced search interface, stories can be filtered by gender, country of origin, year of birth, reasons for migration, or family composition. This allows users to shape their own paths of exploration across both individual and collective trajectories. Central to this approach is the data portrait,[15] a visual and interactive representation that condenses key biographical and migratory information for each interviewee. Each portrait combines biographical data, dates and routes of migration, and other relevant details into a single, interpretable visualization.

[15] A data portrait is an artistic rendering of a specific set of biographical data, portraying the individual through information rather than physical likeness. As Judith Donath and others have theorized, such visualizations mediate between the artist's vision, the subject's data, and the audience's engagement. Following this concept, the data portraits developed by Sara Radice specifically for the TRAME project provide a "portrait" of each participant based on selected data points relevant to the project's aims.

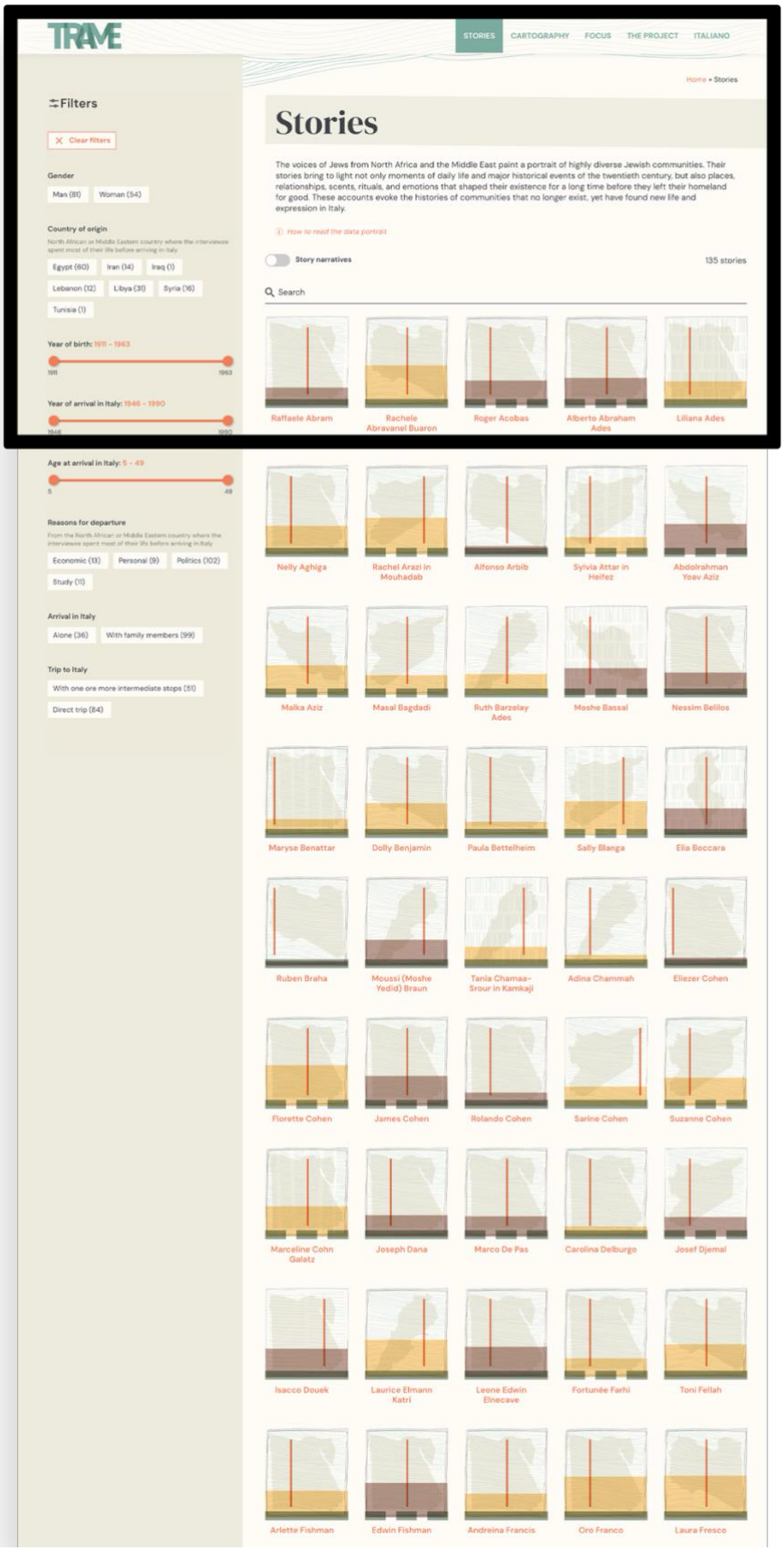


*Fig. 7. Data portraits in the section "Stories" of TRAME website.*

By integrating narratives with visual and interactive tools, the data portraits enable TRAME to present data not as a static record, but as an active, interpretable resource. On the search page of the Stories section, users can obtain an overview of the interviewees' overall profile, while clicking on the individual names reveals how one person's migration connects to larger patterns while also engaging with the intimate, personal dimensions of memory. Combined with a map that allow users to visualize the geography of the migration of each individual interviewee, the data portrait functions as a bridge between quantitative and qualitative information, providing an at-a-glance overview of a person's trajectory.

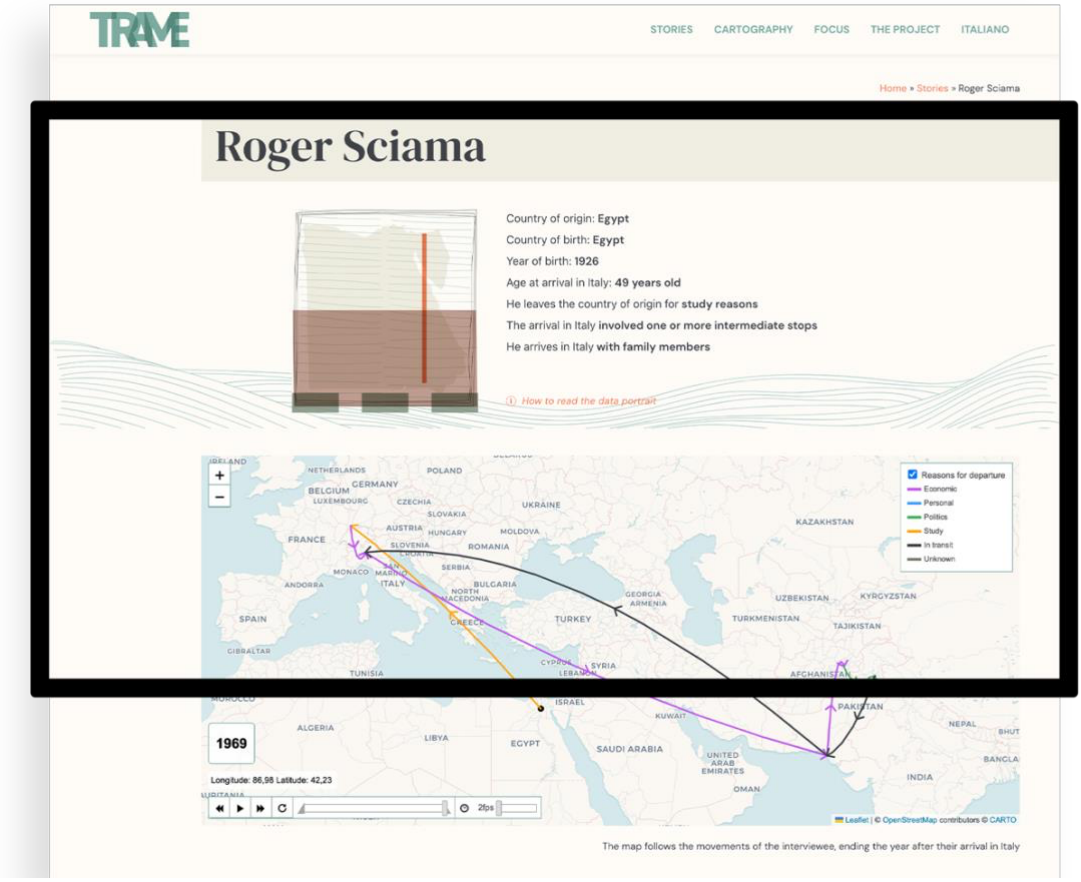


*Fig. 8. Example of individual story in the TRAME website, the case of Roger Sciama.*

The Stories section emphasizes the plurality and complexity of identities shaped by colonial histories, cosmopolitan milieus, and transnational networks. For example, Elise Mirna Legziel, born in Benghazi in 1939, came from a Jewish family with deep Libyan roots and historical ties to the communities of Livorno and Istanbul. Her early years were marked by wartime instability, Fascist racial laws, and military clashes as Benghazi became a contested battlefield between Italian and British forces. In 1941, her family fled Libya, following the retreating British army, first to Egypt—staying in assembly camps in Alexandria and Cairo—and later to Palestine, where they lived for nine months in Tel Aviv.

*Fig. 9. Saul and Noemi Legziel with their daughter Elise Mirna Legziel. Tel Aviv, December 1942, ACDEC.*

Archival photographs, such as images of Mrs. Legziel in Tel Aviv with her parents, and in the arms of a soldier from the Jewish Brigade in Benghazi, alongside audio excerpts from interviews, bring to life the experience of displacement, the reconstruction of community, and the role of international Jewish organizations like the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the Jewish Agency in supporting the reconstruction of Libyan Jewish life.

*Fig. 10. Mirna Legziel in the arms of a soldier from the Jewish Brigade. Benghazi, around 1945, ACDEC.*

The Legziel family's eventual return to Benghazi in 1943 and their permanent emigration to Milan in 1949 exemplify the interplay of local, regional, and transnational forces in shaping migratory decisions, such as the socio-cultural and linguistic ties the family established with Italy as the former colonial power that moved them toward the decision to immigrate to Milan. As one of the first Libyan families arriving in Milan, the Legziels witnessed the presence of the European Jewish refugees who were crowding the offices of the Milanese Jewish community in search of assistance in Via Unione 5.
Similarly, Arlette Fishman's story illustrates the complex layering of identity and mobility in mid-twentieth-century Cairo. Born in 1926 into a family of European descent—her father Romanian, her mother Austrian—Arlette grew up in the affluent Kasr El-Nil district, absorbing European culture while actively participating in the life of local Jewish youth associations.

*Fig. 11. Albert and Grety Fishman with their children, Edwin and Arlette, on a trip to the Suez Canal, 1938, ACDEC.*

Arlette Fishman attended French, English, and American schools, eventually enrolling in the American College for Girls associated with the American University of Cairo. Alongside her brother Edwin, she joined the Maccabi sports club, which combined athletic, cultural, and Zionist education, and traveled to Palestine to experience kibbutz life and participate in Haganah activities.

*Fig. 12. Arlette Fishman in the Egyptian desert with companions from the Maccabi group, circa 1940, ACDEC.*

Life for Jews in Egypt was increasingly deteriorating, and many families, including the Fishmans, were beginning to consider the possibility of leaving the country. Arlette Fishman's arrest in May 1948 and her subsequent imprisonment in the Prison des Étrangers, followed by her marriage to an Italian citizen of Ashkenazi origin, brought this discussion to the forefront; yet fear of the unknown ultimately prevailed.


*Excerpt from the interview with Elisa Mirna Legziel (2012), Edoth Collection, CDEC Foundation Archives. Also available on the TRAME website*

> INTERVIEWER: At that time, did [your husband] Izzy think it was time to leave Egypt? Was that even considered?
> ARLETTE FISHMAN: Yes, we thought about it, but it wasn't easy because we didn't have the means. Yes, he worked in their store, and we lived well because we were doing fine, it was a good family…but there was also a fear of leaving Egypt. We thought about going to Italy, but without any guarantees. In fact, it was very hard.[16]

[16] Arlette Fishman, interview by Jaffa Kahan, January 30, 2012, Edoth, ACDEC.

The second time she was arrested—along with her husband—and separated from their two young children, the family's departure from Egypt following the Suez Crisis became inevitable. The interactive map tracing her journey from Cairo to Milan, combined with photographs and oral testimony, illustrates how personal memory, political engagement, and regional conflict shaped both her migration and her process of identity formation.
Vittorio Mimun's biography further exemplifies the layered and often precarious trajectories of North African Jews. Born in Benghazi in 1933 into a Sephardic family with roots in Cyrenaica and Jerusalem, Vittorio and his family relocated to Tripoli during World War II with special authorization from the Italian authorities, avoiding the internment camps that affected much of the Jewish community.

*Fig. 13. Elia Mimun (Vittorio's father), second from the right. Benghazi, 1930s, ACDEC.*


*Excerpt from the interview with Vittorio Mimun (2012), Edoth Collection, CDEC Foundation Archives, Milan. Also available on the TRAME website*

VITTORIO MIMUN: I lived in Benghazi until 1942. After that, with authorization from the Italian government, from the Italian governor, my father was allowed to move from Benghazi to Tripoli, while most of the Jewish community—a good part of it—was sent to concentration camps around Tripoli.
Interviewer: What was the camp called?
V. M.: The camp was in Yefren, a town 50 km from Tripoli. Among them were my father's brothers and sisters. My father, however, since he represented major Italian textile companies, received an authorization document—which I think I still

> have—that allowed Mr. Elia Mimun and his family to move to Tripoli, avoiding the concentration camp.[17]

Vittorio continued his education at Italian schools in Benghazi and Tripoli and witnessed the increasing tensions and violence of 1945 and 1948. He married and continued to manage the family's business affairs in Tripoli, but the outbreak of the Six-Day War and subsequent anti-Jewish demonstrations compelled the family to emigrate to Milan permanently in 1967. Vittorio's story highlights the complex interplay of local networks, colonial legacies, and transnational migration, emphasizing how individual memories illuminate broader historical dynamics.

## Reimagining Jewish Mobility

TRAME demonstrates how digital humanities methodologies can profoundly enhance our understanding of Jewish migration histories—particularly those that have long remained marginal within traditional national or communal narratives. By combining oral history, archival research, and interactive visualization, the project moves beyond static forms of documentation toward a dynamic, relational model of historical representation. The visualization of routes, places, and biographies enables users to perceive Jewish mobility across the Mediterranean not as a linear succession of migrations, but as a complex network of entanglements shaped by political upheavals, transnational cultural ties, and individual agency.

From a historiographical perspective, TRAME contributes to two major debates. First, it broadens the geography of Italian Jewry by integrating North African and Middle Eastern experiences into the study of postwar Jewish life. Second, it engages critically with the epistemological implications of digital representation—examining how spatial and narrative interfaces can convey the diverse, fragmentary, and affective dimensions of memory. The platform's cartographic and narrative tools not only facilitate access to sources, but also act as interpretive instruments, fostering new connections between individual life stories and the broader transformations of twentieth-century Mediterranean societies.

Equally significant is the project's contribution to the field of public history, as it translates complex archival materials into accessible digital narratives. It invites scholars, students, and general audiences alike to actively engage with the lived and emotional dimensions of diasporic and migratory experiences. Through its methodological integration of storytelling, data visualization, and oral testimony, TRAME transforms the archive into a living space of encounter, where personal and collective histories intertwine. In doing so, it not only reweaves the fragmented threads of Jewish migration across the Mediterranean, but also underscores the centrality of digital humanities in reimagining the historiography of mobility, belonging, and identity in contemporary Italy.

[17] Vittorio Mimun, interview by Michele Sciama, December 6, 2012, Edoth, ACDEC.