

Marco Clementi, Eirini Toliou, *Gli ultimi ebrei di Rodi. Leggi razziali e deportazioni nel Dodecaneso italiano (1938-1948)*, (Roma: DeriveApprodi, 2015), pp. 307.

by Michele Sarfatti

Authored by an Italian historian and by the director of the Rhodes State Archives, this book deals with the Jews of Rhodes and with those who passed through this area during the Shoah. Rhodes and the other Dodecanese islands had been annexed by Italy in 1912, at the end of the Italo-Turkish War; their inhabitants were granted the so-called “small Italian citizenship.” The two authors have carried out accurate research in numerous archives in various countries, most particularly in Italian military archives and in the Rhodes State Archives. In the latter they have availed themselves (and it is the first time anyone has done so) of the documents of the Italian Governorate and of those of the Italian *Carabinieri*, who then acted as a police force. Bibliographical sources, on the other hand, have not been sufficiently taken into account.

One section of the book is dedicated to the ships that crossed the Dodecanese sea (and sometimes were shipwrecked there), while carrying Jewish migrants who were trying to reach Palestine illegally. It is the first time that scholars have made use of local documentary sources, containing information on the supply and support activities. One of those ships was the “Pentcho,” carrying approximately five hundred passengers. The vessel had previously been used only for river navigation. The “Pentcho” left Bratislava on 18 May 1940, sailed down the Danube, entered the Aegean Sea and eventually, after a voyage of almost five months, was shipwrecked near the small island of Kamilonisi, under Italian control. The refugees were aided by authorities in Rhodes. In February-March 1942, because of problems with food supplies on the island, they were transferred to the internment camp for foreign Jews at Ferramonti, in Southern Italy. On the basis of documentary evidence, the book disproves the testimony rendered in 1944 by one of the shipwrecked Jews (Heinz Wisla, a German) who claimed that the former passengers of the Pentcho had been helped by Pope Pius XII (pp. 72-77).

The authors tell the history of the Jewish community in Rhodes basing their description almost exclusively on archival sources, without incorporating other researches and memoirs. For the first time, they shed light on many specific events, such as the discord that arose in the 1930s between the Jews who adhered to Revisionist Zionism and Fascism and the other Jews, a conflict unwelcome to Italian authorities, who wished the community to remain united. In recounting

the Fascist anti-Jewish persecution, enacted by Rome in 1938 and extended also to the Dodecanese, the authors have used almost exclusively archival documents found in Rhodes. As a result, the book lacks a systematic general depiction, but on the other hand contains a description of important specific aspects, such as the revocation of Italian citizenship and the question of military service (which was a complex issue, as the “small citizenship” – as opposed to the Italian full citizenship – did not include military service).

The two chapters dealing with the consequences of the September 1943 armistice between the Kingdom of Italy and the Allies (which led to the Third Reich assuming military power on the island and to the deportation, on July 23 1944, of the Jews from Rhodes and Kos) are written by Clementi. The author describes the reorganization of the Italian police, now made up of *Carabinieri* who swore alliance to the new government of Mussolini's *Repubblica Sociale Italiana*. On April 17 1944 the Italian police asked the municipal authorities of Rhodes for a list of resident Jews, in duplicate copy. They received it on May 13. Four days later German authorities requested Italian police to verify the identity of all residents. According to an Italian note of July 21, one of the two copies of the list had been handed over “at the time” (a phrase that may, although not necessarily, refer to a period of two months) to the “German secret police” (pp. 182-183). By mid-July the police and the other Italian authorities sent out the German order that Jews must all report at a specified gathering point, and outlawed the transfer of real and personal property between Jews and non-Jews. Basically, they provided administrative assistance that was of the essence in identifying the people that were to be arrested, and that supported the entire deportation procedure. For the first time, this book documents events that were unknown until now and attempts a first reconstruction. It is to be hoped that there will be further research on this subject.

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