

Acts of Theft and Despoilment

Introduced on 9 February 1939, rdl 126/1939 – “Norms for the implementation and supplementation of the directives in art. 10 of the rdl of 17 November 1938-XVII, n. 1728, regarding the limitations imposed on Italian citizens of Jewish race in the ownership of real estate and the exercise of industrial and commercial activities ” – undoubtedly served to undermine the property holdings of Jews in the sectors concerned. However, it was police order n. 5 of 30 November 1943 (imposing immediate internment and the sequestration of property) and even more so the dlgs 2/1944 of 4 January of that year (“New directives regarding the assets of citizens of Jewish race”) which would set in motion a complex mechanism of sequestration and confiscation to be carried out by the prefectures themselves. The results varied from province to province. In some cases, special offices responsible for “Jewish affairs” were set up, whilst in others it was the EGELI that took over this responsibility, acting through the various land banks that were delegated to carry out the duties involved in the seizure, administration and sale of property.

“What also emerges is that the situation encouraged the action of minor and major informers and profiteers. Given that the Jews were concerned primarily with their very survival, they were forced to abandon most of their assets, with the result that the seizure thereof was not the exclusive preserve of the State acting on the basis of well-defined rules and regulations. On the one hand, such seizure tended to be the task of institutions which were already weakened and therefore increasingly at the whim of the functionaries who ran them; on the other hand, it might be the result of the initiative of single individuals who wanted to take advantage of the difficulties being faced by those subject to persecution, of the risks being run by their families and their property,”¹ comments one writer. And another observes: “Wedding dresses, wardrobes of clothing, toys, pictures, musical instruments, entire libraries: for many people, the disappearance of objects of symbolic/sentimental as well as commercial value would mark the disappearance of their own past, of family traditions. It was yet another demonstration of a clear rupture with the life of the past, of a world that had been lost once and for all. And like homes, commercial premises – from large department stores to small neighbourhood shops – were subject to theft or looting at the hands of the Nazis and the fascists of Salò.”²

Numerous publications regarding the persecution of the Jews – together with extant archive material and the police reports drawn up at the time – provide ample evidence that such incidents might be particularly odious and ferocious. Offering a brief but typical selection of such accounts, this Report draws primarily on documents from State Archives and from the records of individual Jewish communities (documents which were consulted either at the Central State Archives or in various other archive collections).

Before starting, one should point out that the discussion of these aspects of this period overlaps with material presented in various other sections of the Report, to which the reader is referred: see, in particular “Examples of Material Losses suffered by the Jews in the period 1938-1945.

Testimony, Reports, Documents” at the end of the present chapter, which provides further significant detail regarding these matters.

Bergamo

In the official receipt recording the transfer of the assets and property belonging to a Jewish citizen, the EGELI official concerned remarks that “all the seals the German authorities had placed upon the doors to every room occupied by the engineer Guastella were removed by those authorities during their last visit, when the material that remained was removed.”³ With regard to this case there is also an unsigned memo of 29 February 1944, which states that “some time ago, agents of the above-mentioned German Command came directly to the villa formerly occupied by the engineer

¹ F. Levi, *La restituzione dei beni*, in Fondazione Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea, *Il ritorno alla vita: vicende e diritti degli ebrei in Italia dopo la seconda guerra mondiale*, Editrice La Giuntina, Florence 1998, pp. 83-84.

² F. Barozzi, *L'uscita degli ebrei dalla clandestinità*, in Fondazione Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea, *Il ritorno alla vita: vicende e diritti degli ebrei in Italia dopo la seconda guerra mondiale*, Editrice La Giuntina, Florence 1998, pp. 36-37.

³ ASBg, *Prefettura, Gabinetto*, b. 2.

Guastella. Having seen to the removal of some of the furnishings and other objects, the agents sealed two rooms of the house after storing there all the remaining property. According to the Town Hall of Gazzaniga, the keys to these are in the hands of the German Military Command in Bergamo.”

In a letter of 7 February 1945, the EGELI informed the Bergamo Prefecture that its representative “[...] had gone to the place and learnt that part of the furniture concerned had been sold off, piecemeal, by German soldiers and by the caretaker of the furniture itself [...].”⁴

Brescia

Even though it does not strictly fall within the type of despoilment covered by this chapter, one might here mention the case of the business Apollonio & Co., which was sequestered in December 1943 and then obliged to work, under imposed terms and conditions, for the State Printing House.⁵

It is mentioned here as representative of other similar cases of coercion.

Following the sequestration of assets belonging to Oscar Reich and his wife, a significant note passed from the local police chief in Brescia to the Prefecture. It contains the following: “the Gors Bachman baby grand piano, indicated in the inventory, was transported to the Prefecture on 18 January, as per verbal order of the head of said office. However, being non-transportable, the kitchen range was left within the apartment in Via Martiri Belfiore at the use of his Excellency Luigi Giannitrapani who, as is known, has occupied that apartment since last February.”⁶

Como

In the rich collection of material transmitted by the State Archives in Como⁷ there are numerous references to incidents that fall within the subject covered by this chapter. As examples one might cite: a letter of 31 July 1945 from Signora Renata Reinach (*née* Astore) to the Como Police Headquarters, in which the writer reports that “various furnishings” from her villa, which had been occupied by the Germans, “are now to be found in certain villas in Cernobbio”; a note from the Como Police Chief, dated 30 June 1945, which states that many metres of fabric are missing from the supplies of textiles that had been sequestered from sig. Mario Giussani, it being pointed out that “this difference is due to the allocations made by the Police Headquarters of the day, without however there being any trace in the documents as to the recipients of the missing textiles”; a long statement from Sig. Cabibbe to the Como Police Chief, dated 5 June 1945, in which the writer provides detailed information regarding the property of his that had been arbitrarily sold, given away or seized by Commissioner Masina; a letter of 22 June 1945 to the Como Police Chief from the lawyer Parravicini on behalf of his client Sig. Choncol, in which the writer urges the “need to interrogate the former prefectural commissioner of Como, Mario Nosedà (recently found guilty of collaboration with the enemy by the Special Military Tribunal) because he was one of the main figures responsible for the seizure of goods and merchandise to the enormous value of 25 million lire owned by Sig. Choncol”; a long statement by Sig. Dalla Torre, complete with a list giving the objects and possessions of which all trace had been lost; a letter of 9 June 1945 from Sig. Levi to the court in Como, reporting the disappearance of jewels and shares that had belonged to his mother, evidently seized at the time of her arrest; a letter from Sig. Agiman to the Como Police Chief (16 July 1945) complaining of the “most serious and grievous” deficit of sums totalling well over one million lire; the long statement, of 27 June 1945, in which Sig. Aldo Levi gave detailed information on what had been missing upon his return from expatriation in Switzerland, complete with precise indications of names and circumstances; the long statement submitted by the lawyer Ottolenghi to the Como Police Chief on 13 June 1945, with a detailed reconstruction of the thefts of which he had been victim and an indication of a series of people (some already detained) who he claims knew the fate of the missing furniture. Similarly, there is a statement regarding such matters

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ ASBs, *Prefettura, Gabinetto*, b. 158, letter of August 1945 from the ‘Apollonio’ company to the Prefecture in Brescia

⁶ *Ibid.*, b. 158.

⁷ ASCo, *Questura, Gabinetto*, b. 109 e *Questura*, bb. 5, 17, 60, 570, 578, 638, 639, 640, 641, 642, 643, 644, 645.

presented on 7 August 1945 to the Public Prosecutor's Office at the Como Assize Court by the National Liberation Committee for North Italy.

General Hans Leyer, the Head of *Rüstungs-und-Kriegsproduktion* (RuK) in Italy, was known to have taken possession of one of the three "valuable pianos" which the owner, Oscar Morpurgo, had left in his villa when it was requisitioned. It would seem that the Germany Embassy itself, at Fasano del Garda, had taken an interest in one of the other two. Acting via its Foreign Ministry, the RSI's Ministry of Finance would however intervene to save these latter two from requisition by the Germans.⁸ In mid-February 1945 the former ministry would inform the Finance Department of the German Embassy that the second piano had been earmarked for "the Anglo-American editorial office of the Kampfsender 'Viktoria', which served propaganda purposes;" it was to be part of an orchestra "of such a high level that instruments which do not meet such [high] requisites are of no use." However, there was "a guarantee that the piano would be conserved in perfect condition", and there would be "the payment of a monthly rental fee."⁹

Cuneo

There is record of a statement by the Trustee of the Jewish Community of Saluzzo, reporting the theft that had occurred in the Administration Offices during "the enforced absence caused by the most savage racial laws."¹⁰ The material stolen comprised: 14 sheets of canvas, 12 sacks in grey canvas, 700 kilos of hard wood. Particularly regrettable was the theft of "sheets intended for charity". An enquiry into the affair was carried out and those responsible were charged and declared themselves willing to pay compensation. As one can see from the report drawn up by the Police Commissioner at the time, the motive given for the theft was symptomatic: "failure to pay rent and, even more so, the fact that what was taken was already the property of the Fascist Republican State and, from one moment to the next, might have been taken off by the Fascist Black Brigades, by other parts of the Italian army or by the Gestapo, which went from house to house of the Jews to take the best of what they found there, using for this our own inventories..."

Ferrara

There is indication that a lot of the sequestered material in this province was arbitrarily seized by the Germans. This was the case, for example, with numerous bolts and chests of fabric taken from the Sinigaglia warehouse in Argenta, or the effects belonging to the Casa Rocca business which were requisitioned by the German Armed Forces.

In a letter of 10 August 1944, the Head of Province in Ferrara informed the local German Command that certain German officers had gone to the Jewish company of Rocca Gastone and, in spite of the fact that the merchandise and goods there had already been sequestered, "had taken away with them what they thought fit, refusing to issue a receipt[...]"¹¹ With a note of 25 March 1944, the Head of the Local Revenue Office would pass on to the local corps of the Guardia di Finanza a report from the State Property Office that "at 6.30 pm yesterday some German soldiers, ignoring protests from the custodian who was engaged in cleaning the entrance hall, came into the Office, took various drawing-room carpets from the kitchen where they were stored and fixed to the door of the kitchen, which I myself had locked with a special padlock, the following sign: "the home of the Jew Zamorani has been requisitioned by the local German Command. Any removal of objects from this dwelling will be considered looting and, therefore, punishable by death[...]"¹² In a letter written on 25 June 1945, the Head Rabbi of the Jewish Community would, amongst other things, point out that "the vast majority of Jews returning to Ferrara find their homes gone and have also lost their furniture. Almost all have to face the very difficult problem of securing accommodation and the

⁸ ASMAE, *RSI, DGAAGG*, b. 164, pos. S-IV-1s (Ebrei), f. 1/6 (Sequestro beni ebraici da parte delle autorità tedesche in Italia), "Beni ebraici, Morpurgo Oscar - Como", P.C. 316, 18 December 1944-XXIII, signed "The Minister".

⁹ ASMAE, *RSI, DGAAGG*, b. 164, pos. S-IV-1s (Ebrei), f. 1/6 (Sequestro beni ebraici da parte delle autorità tedesche in Italia), "Beni ebraici, Pianoforti rinvenuti nella Villa ex Morpurgo di Cassina Rizzardi (Como)", P.C. 305, 17 February 1945-XXIII, signed "For Minister Fumei".

¹⁰ ASCn, *Questura*, b. 2, "Ebrei".

¹¹ ASFe, Prefettura, Gabinetto b. 3.

¹² *Ibid.*

even more difficult problem of finding or acquiring the minimum of furnishings and utensils that will enable them to set about putting together their homes and rebuilding their lives [...].”¹³

In a letter regarding “The Jewish Question in Italy” sent on 20 November 1945 from the Prefect of Ferrara to the Head Office of the State Police Force at the Ministry of the Interior, the former makes this comment “the frenzy was unleashed not only against people but also against their possessions; homes and temples were looted, and what could not be taken away was destroyed.”¹⁴

Florence

With regard to this province, see the specific chapter “The Seizure of Possessions of Artistic, Cultural and Religious Significance” and that dedicated to the city elsewhere in the Report. Here, however, mention will be made of other incidents that occurred in this city. On 25 September 1944, the Florence branch of the Monte dei Paschi informed its Siena Head Office that in Florence on 25 July 1944 the German authorities had “weapons in hand, seized all the capital belonging to Jews, demanding a list of names with the individual sums and the immediate payment of the sum total through a cheque drawn on the Banca d’Italia and endorsed for payment to the German Command.” The director of the Florence bank pointed out that “though facing the risk of serious consequences, I thought it advisable to declare only a very modest part of the accounts concerned, which amounted overall to L. 240,003.25, thus managing to save the most important accounts, all the share portfolios and the safe-deposit boxes (in a number of other banks in the city, these latter have been forced open and stripped of their contents).”¹⁵

A memo from the Jewish Community in Florence gives account of the thefts of which the Forti, Orefice and Melli families were the victim; as mentioned, there is also reference to these matters in the chapter “The Seizure etc”. A document drawn up by an employee of the Forti family states that the 28 rooms of Villino Forti were found to have been stripped bare. A statement submitted to the Florence Police Chief by this same employee after the liberation of the city indicates that the property seized (linen, clothes, furs, crockery, kitchenware, picture, silverware, carpets and furnishings) were handed over for sale to a company in the city. And when they returned to their home from Switzerland, the Orefice family found that, with the exception of one room, all the furnishings had been carried off (loaded on a German lorry). As for the Melli family, it is said that amongst the other thefts they suffered there was that on 4 June 1944, when fascists and members of the ‘Carità Gang’ made them hand over a bag containing jewels and a sum of money.

Genoa

In a letter of 6 March 1944, Genoa Police Headquarters¹⁶ reported that the Police Station at San Vincenzo had seen to the sealing of the four doors giving admission to the Synagogue at 6, Passo Assarotti. The letter added that “before this, the German Command had placed seals on the same doors, and had proceeded to arrest some members of the Community and confiscate keys to the premises. In these circumstances, it was not possible to enter the premises and draw up an inventory of the objects within it.” There is, therefore, no information regarding what – if anything – the Germans had taken away with them.

As often occurs in a period when things were far from ‘clear cut’, the German Command in Alessandria and the RuK in Milan revealed themselves to have designs upon the wagons containing “a sizeable load of household effects then stored in the Arquata Scrivia General Warehouses.” The intention, apparently, was to send this material to Germany, even if it was property which the RSI’s Ministry of Finance did not consider as belonging to “Jewish German citizens” but to “stateless persons or citizens of other States, some of whom had lived for periods of time in Germany.”¹⁷ The dispute would still be going on in the last days of the war.¹⁸

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ ASMPS, *Egeli*, b. 7, fasc. “Cassette di sicurezza”.

¹⁶ ASGe, *RSI, Prefettura*, b. 35 (10).

¹⁷ ASMAE, *RSI, Affari politici*, b. 45, pos. Italia 1/11 (Ebrei in Italia e leggi razziali/Sequestro agli ebrei), “Ministero finanze - Scambival. Sequestro proprietà ebraiche”, P. C. 316, 18 December 1944-XXIII, signed “Bortoletto”.

¹⁸ ASMAE, *RSI, Gabinetto*, b. 31, pos. Germania 1/1, note for the German Embassy, P. C. 305, 8 February 1945-XXIII.

Grosseto

In a letter of 25 August 1944 from the Grosseto Prefecture to the AMG (Finance Department, Office for Grosseto Province) regarding “Administration of the Jews’ Property and Assets”,¹⁹ the Prefect of the day points out, amongst other things, the “need to proceed with great urgency in recovering the large sums that were arbitrarily withdrawn, for other purposes, by the former Head of Province.”

In a letter of 27 January 1944, Rosaria Delfino had complained to that former Head of Province about what had happened at the Marsiliana Farm in Massa Marittimia (of which she – an “Aryan” – was co-owner): “ You know very well the far from attractive events that have taken place and created a most distressing impression throughout the area; and which you yourself have deplored. The soldiers who destroyed and seized [property] were clearly acting on their own initiative and certainly not upon your orders, their purpose being to pre-empt an official order of sequestration[...].”²⁰

Mantua

Here a significant document is a report to Mussolini himself from a “secret informer” who, as early as November 1943, had apprised the police that in Mantua “a Jew in person, assisted by his sons,” was carrying out “strange and suspect movements, transporting numerous chests and other stuff” into specially-created hiding-places.²¹ Far from unique, this episode would lead one commentator to observe “that the attention which the regime focused on Jewish property and assets seems to antedate the well-known police order n. 5 of 5 November 1943.” The episode also brings out how a far from negligible part of the sequestered goods did not figure in the subsequent confiscation orders and therefore could not, as the regime proclaimed, have been used to compensate the victims of air raids; presumably, it was exploited for the benefit of the functionaries and fascist hierarchs of the RSI.²²

Milan

A couple of months after the German “removal” of warehouse lots of furs and pelts belonging to a “Jewish” company that had been evacuated to the shores of Lago Maggiore – property of substantial value which had already been sequestered and confiscated by the Milan Prefecture – the RSI’s Ministry of Finance moved its first cautious protest via the Foreign Ministry.²³

Less than a month later, a carpet company would also receive a visit from the SS, who again removed a substantial quantity of stock – and again the RSI Ministry of Finance protested via the Foreign Ministry.²⁴

It would subsequently emerge that “the papers and account books of the company in question” had also disappeared, almost certainly not by accident (this supposition is borne out by the very fact that the return of these documents was urged precisely because “they are necessary to carry out the required assessment of the [financial] position of the company itself).”²⁵

Novara

As just one of the various known examples of what happened here one might quote the main passages from the report drawn up at the opening of a safe-deposit box belonging to some of the city’s Jews. In a letter of 13 September 1943, the Commissioner’s Office at the Novara Police Headquarters had, upon instructions received from the Command of the German forces in Novara,

¹⁹ ASGr, *Prefettura*, b. 765.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ ASMn, *Prefettura, Gabinetto* b. 14, fasc. “PFR”.

²² L. Cavazzoli, *Guerra e resistenza, Mantova 1940-1945*, Editrice Postunia, Gazoldo degli Ippoliti (Mantua), 1995.

²³ ASMAE, *RSI, DGAAGG*, b. 164, pos. S-IV-1s (Ebrei), f. 1/6 (Sequestro beni ebraici da parte delle autorità tedesche in Italia), “Beni ebraici, Prelevamento da parte delle SS Germaniche di pelli da pellicceria della Ditta Modiano Giacomo - Milano”, P.C. 316, 16 December 1944-XXIII, signed “The Minister”.

²⁴ ASMAE, *RSI, DGAAGG*, b. 164, pos. S-IV-1s (Ebrei), f. 1/6 (Sequestro beni ebraici da parte delle autorità tedesche in Italia), “Beni ebraici, Prelevamento tappeti S.A. “Iran” da parte del Comando SS della Polizia germanica di Milano”, P.C. 316, 15 January 1945-XXIII, signed “The Minister”.

²⁵ ASMAE, *RSI, DGAAGG*, b. 164, pos. S-IV-1s (Ebrei), f. 1/6 (Sequestro beni ebraici da parte delle autorità tedesche in Italia), “Beni ebraici, Prelevamento tappeti S.A. “Iran” da parte del Comando SS della Polizia Germanica di Milano”, P.C. 316, 19 February 1945-XXIII, signed “The Minister”.

issued orders concerning the sequestration of the bank deposits and the safe-deposit boxes belonging to persons of Jewish race. Enquiries at the bank had revealed the existence of such boxes held in the name of those who figured in a list provided by Police Headquarters. The report drawn up by the notary states that on 1 October he, together with Lieutenant Helmut Stande of the German Armed Forces, had gone to the bank, where the German officer requested “the forcing open of the afore-mentioned safe-deposit boxes so that he might remove and retain what was contained within them.” The report then says that, upon being broken open, the boxes proved to contain valuables, shares and other objects, which were then listed in individual manifests and removed on behalf of the German Military Command by the said lieutenant, in spite of the fact that the representative of the bank pointed out that “according to Italian law it was to be presumed that, with the exception of registered shares and in the absence of proof to the contrary, the contents of the said safe-deposit boxes belonged in equal measure to the two afore-mentioned account holders.” The report also states that Lieutenant Helmut Stande had left before the drawing-up and signing of the said document.²⁶

As the various sections of this very Report make clear, there were numerous incidents of safe-deposit boxes being forced open. In some cases – for example, the above one in Novara – there was some semblance of regulation procedures, if only because of the drawing-up of a written report; in others, there was no such pretence, and the contents of the boxes were removed without any official control. The latter cases were the more numerous.

Padua

In Padua there was the stripping of merchandise from the warehouses of the firm of Samuele Ancona in August 1944. In December of that year, the RSI’s Ministry of Finance would, via its Foreign Ministry, ask the German authorities in Verona to account for where those goods had been taken.²⁷

In response to this missive, the German embassy limited itself to the anodyne reply that it had “raised the matter with the competent authorities;” however, it did point out that “the sequestration dated back to the 30 August last” and therefore “it is not certain that the fabrics taken away at the time can be returned.”²⁸ In mid-March of the following year, the same embassy would – via the RSI’s Foreign Ministry – reply to the Ministry of Finance that “the textiles may have been under a lien from the Prefect but their sequestration did not yet have full legal force because the goods had not been inventoried and the order of requisition had not been issued”; however, it said, the material would be “returned to the Prefecture.”²⁹ In the meantime, the Ministry of Finance informed the Foreign Ministry, the Germans had stripped another goods warehouse that had already been declared “State property” by the Prefecture.³⁰

Piacenza

In the documents sent from the State Archives at Piacenza³¹ there are references to incidents that fall within the scope of this chapter. In a report to the *Centurione Capo* [Head] of the Political Investigation Office, it is stated that “taking advantage of the fact that the Jew Umberto Muggia had fled to escape internment, his tenants – brothers of the surname Dorini – had carried off the entire furnishings of the villa that Muggia had lived in, together with another sizeable body of furnishings. The stuff of greatest value – silverware, porcelain, crystal, carpets, pictures, table linen, sheets,

²⁶ ACS, MICA, *Restituzione beni asportati dai tedeschi*, b. 46.

²⁷ ASMAE, RSI, *DGAAGG*, b. 164, pos. S-IV-1s (Ebrei), f. 1/6 (Sequestro beni ebraici da parte delle autorità tedesche in Italia), “Beni ebraici, Prelevamento di merci dalla Ditta Ancona Samuele da parte delle SS Germaniche”, P.C. 316, 12 December 1944-XXIII, signed “The Minister”.

²⁸ ASMAE, RSI, *DGAAGG*, b. 164, pos. S-IV-1s (Ebrei), f. 1/6 (Sequestro beni ebraici da parte delle autorità tedesche in Italia), *Deutsche Botschaft und Dienststelle des Reichsbevollmächtigten in Italien* – note for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Fasano, 3 January 1945.

²⁹ ASMAE, RSI, *DGAAGG*, b. 164, pos. S-IV-1s (Ebrei), f. 1/6 (Sequestro beni ebraici da parte delle autorità tedesche in Italia), “Beni ebraici, Prelevamento di merci dalla Ditta Ancona Samuele da parte delle SS Germaniche”, P.C. 305, 22 March 1945-XXIII, signed “For Minister Fumei”.

³⁰ ASMAE, RSI, *DGAAGG*, b. 164, pos. S-IV-1s (Ebrei), f. 1/6 (Sequestro beni ebraici da parte delle autorità tedesche in Italia), “Beni ebraici, Padova, Montebarrocci Arrigo”, P.C. 316, 17 January 1945-XXIII, signed “The Minister”.

³¹ ASPz, Questura, Campagna antiebraica 1938-1945, b. 1.

wool mattresses, horsehair mattresses, ornaments, period-style furniture, beds, kitchen pots and pans [...] new bicycles, clothes and furs – was kept by the Dorini brothers. A lorry-load of stuff belonging to Muggia was taken to San Protaso, where the Dorini brothers hid it away in a room they had rented for the purpose. Another lorry loaded with stuff belonging to Muggia was hidden by the Dorini with Bruno Menta on the Santina di Polignano property [...].”

Pisa

In a letter of 4 March 1959, the local Office of Industry and Commerce in Pisa informed the city Prefecture that “in March 1944, by order of the Prefecture of Pisa [...] an inventory was drawn up of the goods in the Pisa shop and Capriona warehouses of S.A.T. Textiles Ltd, which had been placed under sequestration in January of that year. This inventory was lost as a result of the partial destruction of the Chamber of Commerce records during the war. As all this merchandise was pillaged during the emergency, and as the present writer must now draw up an estimate of its value for the establishment of war damages, the said Prefecture is kindly requested to forward a copy of the said inventory to the writer.”³²

Ponte San Pietro (Bergamo)

On the very eve of the collapse of the enemy front in Italy, at Villa Moroni in Ponte San Pietro (Bergamo), the commanding officer of the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* in the area seized a valuable car “that had formerly been the property of the Jew in question and then, as a result of confiscation, become the property of the Italian State,” whose Ministry of Finance would make repeated – and vain – demands for its restitution.³³

Reggio Emilia

Here one should mention an unsigned and dated memo that reads: “There are rumours, even in elevated circles, of serious irregularities in the administration of Jewish property. Amongst other things, there is talk of inventories that have disappeared, pieces of furniture that have been removed, etc. There is also mention of the furniture in the Melli home, which having been made available for use by the former Police Chief, Pozzolini, was apparently moved to the new Headquarters upon his orders. It would perhaps be advisable for the Chief Accountant at the Prefecture, or some other responsible and capable functionary, to carry out a rigorous enquiry.”³⁴ A printed communiqué from the local Police Headquarters, clearly produced some time after the Liberation, has a very different tone: “All those who removed furniture or other objects from the premises of the former Republican Police chief in Corso Garibaldi are hereby enjoined to return them within two days. No action will be taken against them. However, after that date, the possessors or purchasers of the said furnishings will be considered as looters and treated as such, with arrest and punishment laid down by the laws of war.”³⁵

In a letter of 27 April 1949 the Provincial Administration of Jewish Property informed the Prefecture that the balance owing to Sig.a Virginia Carmi as the result of the Fascist administration [of her property] was, “as far as it has been possible to determine on the basis of the chaotic bookkeeping of the RSI,” the sum of L. 56,639.44, the money being ready for the woman concerned. The letter added that “alone amongst all the various Jewish creditors who have already been paid, Sig.a Carmi does not intend to accept the said payment, claiming that she also has the right to damages for the destruction of a private park by the Nazi Fascists in 1944. The evaluation and eventual payment of the damages for this lie outside the brief of the present writer, whose task is simply to liquidate the surviving business concerns.”³⁶ On the subject [of the park] there are other documents, including a petition from Sig.a Carmi to the Ministry of Finance.

Rome

³² ASPi, Prefettura.

³³ ASMAE, *RSI, DGAAGG*, b. 164, pos. S-IV-1s (Ebrei), f. 1/6 (Sequestro beni ebraici da parte delle autorità tedesche in Italia), “Beni ebraici, Baer Lodovico e consorti, Milano, Fiat 508”, P.C. 316, 14 April 1945-XXIII, signed “The Minister”.

³⁴ ASRE, *Prefettura, Gabinetto*, b. I, fasc. “Nomina amministratori e sequestratari”, 1943-1949.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, b. II, “Razza ebraica”, individual files.

Here we draw upon some early information on this matter contained in a publication of the Jewish Community of Rome produced in 1961.³⁷ The Community Council would preface the work with certain comments, some of which are quoted below:

“One might say that an entire cycle in the history of the Jewish Community of Rome has come to completion in the autumn of this year of 1961 (5722). The Government of the Federal Republic of Germany has, in fact, returned to the Community the legal equivalent of the gold stolen on 26-28 September 1943 by the German SS, as well as compensation to cover the material value of the historic library which – in the name of Nazi civilisation and *Kultur* – the invading forces would ravage the following 13 October.

“In the published minutes of its own deliberations, the Community Council has already expressed its clear and firm position with regard to this event, reaffirming with due dignity and awareness that this restitution can in no way be considered as reparation – not even pecuniary reparation – for the wrongs suffered, which remain irreparable, unpardonable and unforgettable; indelibly set in tears and blood. However, it is undeniable that, from the purely logical point of view, there is some causal chain linking the bestial pillage of that autumn of 1943 and the bureaucratic gesture now made by the Federal Government; though so very different and unmistakably distinct from each other, the two form the far poles of the historical cycle that has come to completion.

“Hence, the Community is now publishing the following pages, containing largely unknown material that recounts the terrible hours of the tragic, initial moments of that cycle, captured in vivid and faithful detail by eye-witness accounts. Both disturbing and objective, these are the accounts left by some of those present at these events, who have handed down to posterity historical documentation of the criminal enormity then committed [...].

“In the name of all the Jews of Rome, this publication is a devout act of homage to the memory of those proud eyewitnesses, who in the most tragic hours of their lives showed determination and ability in leaving a concrete written record of those anguish-ridden days. This is an admonition to the ignorant, the sceptical and the forgetful, to friends and enemies; it reminds all men, of whatever political or religious creed, that neither neglect nor legend should ever erase from memory the reality that these pages so faithfully reflect. It is a song of thanks and praise to Eternal God, who in His inscrutable design then ordained Evil just as He now ordains Good, in allowing the survivors to savour these hours of Justice after having tasted those of anguish and desperation; in allowing us to ‘achieve these days’, as the ancient benediction has it [...] One need only recall these facts: in September 1943 the German troops imposed a ransom of 50 kg of gold on the Jews of the Community of Rome in return for a promise of safety that would then be broken 21 days later; in October of that year they would carry off all the books, incunabula and palimpsests from the Community’s library, borne away as a cultural trophy for the great Reich. Now, 18 years later, the defeated Germans – through the actions of the Bonn government of the Federal Republic – have implemented the decision of the Court of Restitutions set up by the peace treaty, paying to this Community, from which so much was extorted and taken, the sum of 2,500,000 DM.”

The following are further extracts from that publication; they are taken from the report written by Ugo Foà, President of the Jewish Community of Rome, regarding the racial measures the Germans themselves introduced in Rome after 8 September 1943 (the date Badoglio signed the Armistice). The report opens with a statement that:

“The person to whom I am entrusting this document was charged, should I die or be deported, to hand it over to the Command of the Allied troops when they entered Rome. As the Most High God allowed me to see Rome liberated, I was able to hand it over myself. I will also add one last clarification: the present report is dated 15 November 1943. Thus there is no reference to the persecutions that were later inflicted upon the Jews of Rome. One should, however, remember that, after the above date, the racial measures adopted in Rome against the Jews were not longer applied directly by the German Command - even if still inspired by them and carried out under their aegis –

³⁷ *Ottobre 1943: cronaca di una infamia*, published by the Jewish Community of Rome, 1961.

but by the authorities of the Italian Fascist Republic. The examination of such measures therefore lies outside the scope these notes have set themselves [...].”

The Preface to Foà’s report contains the following observations:

“The measures that were taken against the Jews in Italy after the Fascist State introduced its racial policy can be divided into two main periods: before and after the date of the Badoglio armistice (8 September 1943), which resulted in the armed occupation of Italy by the armies of the Reich. Those which fall within the first chronological period were undoubtedly serious and painful, but are not to be dealt with here; the norms and regulations on this matter introduced by the Italian government of the day – via laws, decrees and, not infrequently, even simple ministerial circulars – are now well-known and have been the subject of collections, publications and studies. Within the second group there were some measures taken more or less spontaneously by the Italian authorities – measures which undoubtedly merit discussion and censure; however, the most serious ones were those introduced by German military commands in response to direct orders from Berlin. It is these latter, knowledge of which is still fragmentary and rather vague, that the Presidency of this Community feels it necessary to describe in some precise detail. Hence, the present account, which recalls the events that occurred within this Community – one of the Italian Jewish communities which suffered the effects of these measures most severely; indeed, perhaps more severely than any other.”

The report continues:

“Organised chronologically, the following are the principle measures and incidents that resulted from the extreme ruthlessness adopted by the German military authorities towards the Roman Jews, guilty of nothing other than belonging to an age-old lineage which remained faithful to an ancient past they [the Germans] found invidious:

- a) the extortion of 50 kg of gold (26-28 September 1943);
- b) a raid on the offices of the Community, with subsequent search and the removal of all registers, a substantial part of the archive material and various papers, as well as the sum of L. 2,021,540 (29 September 1943);
- c) minor cases of harassment, including a blow in the face during the pillage of the Community’s administration offices and two libraries (from 30 September to 12 October);
- d) sacking of the Community library, one of the richest in Europe for Hebrew studies, and of the library at the Italian Rabbinical College (13 October 1943 and thereafter);
- e) the rounding-up and deportation of a large number of Jews, irrespective of age, sex or state of health (16 October and thereafter).”

With regard to each of these, the President of the Community provided detailed accounts, to which the reader is referred; some of them will be drawn upon in the chapter regarding Artistic and Cultural Property (with particular reference to the sacking of the library in the Community premises and of that in the Italian Rabbinical College).

There are some moving final comments to the report. “Given the present state of things, it seems more difficult to give an answer to the distressing question regarding the fate of the victims [...] There are discordant rumours regarding their place of detention [...] And the rumours regarding how they have been treated are equally contradictory [...] So all one can do for the moment is to wait, with neither excessive optimism nor catastrophic pessimism, for the painful veil of mystery that shrouds the fate of these unhappy people to finally be riven.” To this passage, the publisher adds a note: “The following is the grim net result of nine months of Nazi occupation in Rome. Deported: 1067 men, 743 women, 281 children (total:2,091). Returned: 73 men, 28 women (total: 101)!”

The publication cited also contains the diary of Rosina Sorani, an employee of the Rome Community at the time of the German occupation. This document provides an analytic account of the events already mentioned in the President’s report and of other painful incidents.

Many of the episodes of looting and despoilment are duly recorded in the morning report registers of the Rome Police Headquarters over the period December 1943-February 1944.³⁸ The following

³⁸ ACS, MI, RSI, *Segr. capo della polizia*, b. 70.

are cited as examples: “On the morning of the 16th of this month, German soldiers – together with three Fascists - broke down the door of the home of the Jew Piperno Tranquillo di Samuele, at n. 10 Via Ferruccio, without taking away anything. The following day, at 7 am, two Fascists in uniform, accompanied by a girl, entered Piperno’s home and carried away a large bundle whose contents are unknown” (morning report of 19 October 1943); “On the 5th of this month, towards 11.30pm, three militiamen appeared at the home of the Jew Anselmo di Angelo Caldò, taking away with them ten mattresses, all the clothing in wool and the shoes, which were loaded onto a lorry. When officers from the Trastevere Station arrived on the scene, one of the militiamen showed his personal identity badge, which identified him as Giulio De Angelis, together with a document with the stamp of the Military Command itself; he also said that he was acting under the orders of his commanding officers at Palazzo Braschi”(morning report of 7 November 1943); “The same persons then carried out another search in the apartment occupied by the Jewess Vittoria Dadone (widow Olper), located in the above-mentioned building, entering through a window overlooking an inner courtyard, as Dadone was absent from home. From this apartment, too, various documents were taken, together with a case of liqueurs and other objects. Dr. Poce, who was part of the group, stated that they were acting upon orders of the *Federazione dell’Urbe*” (morning report of 15 November 1943); “Captain De Castris, clerk of the War Tribunal, resident at n. 27 Via Plinio, has reported that on the 23rd of this month, at 1pm, three individuals who identified themselves as members of the police force entered the home of the Jew Giovanni Terracina, located on the second floor of 93 Piazza Monte d’Oro, and having asked to speak with him, treated him roughly and then carried out a house-search looking for gold bullion. The search having turned up nothing, the above-mentioned men informed Terracini that he had to hand over to them the sum of L.250,000. When he protested that he did not have such a sum, they demanded only L.70,000; of this, 3,000 were paid by Terracina himself and L.47,000 by Sig.a Domenica Menichelli, who resides in the same apartment, having been evacuated from San Lorenzo. After eating a meal of food found in the apartment, the three individuals left around 5 pm, saying that they would be back the next day for the remaining L.20,000. However, by the afternoon, they had not appeared. Before leaving, those very men had told Terracina that if he wanted clarification on the matter, he should apply to Dr. Pesci at Palazzo Braschi.” (morning report of 25 November 1943); “Yesterday morning, the 4th of the month, German soldiers went to the shirt shop at 6 Largo Chigi, run by the Jew Cesare Anticoli, and took away all the merchandise there [...] Yesterday morning, the 4th of the month, German soldiers went to the shop of the Jew Prospero Sermoneta, located at 74 Piazza Vittorio Emanuele, and took away all the merchandise there” (morning report of 5 December 1943); “The 4th of the month, members of the German Police went to the home of the Jew Romolo Umberto, son of the late Salomone, Pisa, at 11 Viale Rossigni, and took away various items of linen, clothing, blankets, carpets, shoes, four cases of kitchen utensils and cutlery, 6 electric fires, 60 bottles of wine, tins of meat and jam, a drum of fuel, 20 kg of machine oil, a bicycle with an electric motor and an Aprilia motor car. The residence has been taken over by a certain Mr. Bianconi, an employee of the German police;” “At 11 am on the 15th of the month (December) a German officer, a non-commissioned officer and three soldiers went to 10 Via Biccari, where they broke down the inner door through into the storeroom of the fur shop at number 17 in the same street, owned the Jew Riccardo Pace, who is at present absent, and carried away all the merchandise contained in the storerooms, including furs, overcoats, raincoats, men’s suits etc.. The merchandise taken away was loaded onto an small FIAT van with red hubcaps, a white tarpaulin and marked ‘WL’ without any number plate;” “The 16th of this month, towards 12 am, at 19 Via Monte della Farina, three German police officers, accompanied by various Italian labourers working for them, came together with lorries and carried away flannel underwear and a suitcase from the textiles storerooms of the firm of Giacomo Piperno;” “The morning of the 16th of this month, German members of the SS broke down the door to the premises of Artea Ltd [...], managed by the Jew Carlo Bises, taking away textiles there in numbered lorries” (morning report of 19 December 1943); “Following what was reported yesterday morning with regard to the textiles shop of the Jew Davide, son of the late Donato, Di Segni, located at 90-91 Piazza Vittorio

Emanuele, German soldiers this morning carried away yet more merchandise, after having spent the whole night in the shop itself;” “Yesterday, towards 8.30 am, some Germans went to the shirt shop in Largo Chigi owned by the Jewess Eugenia, daughter of the late Leone, Pontecorvo (married name: Anticoli), and after having ordered it to open carried away all the merchandise in a lorry” (morning report of 4 January 1943); “At 6.45 pm yesterday, some German soldiers forced open the shutters of the haberdashery at 10 Via Volturmo, managed by the Jew Arnaldo Spizzichino, made their way onto the premises and carried off most of the merchandise there” (morning report 12 January 1943).

In a telegram to the Ministry of 20 November 1943, the Police Chief points out that “individuals from Palazzo Braschi [...] forced open the warehouse [...] owned by the Jew Marco Anticoli [...]. The above-mentioned Fascists then carried off the merchandise in the warehouses. Informed of the matter, Palazzo Braschi [...] replied that they had ordered the sequestration of all property belonging to Jews.”

This informative summary of what was happening in Rome might end with reference to the property seized from a family of Jews and then kept in the storerooms of the Treasurer’s Office at the Ministry of the Interior. Documents show that the property was sequestered by Antonio Salvini, who referred to himself with the title of ‘*commandante*’ and was the trusted assistant of the then Chief of Police, Tamburini.

In a note dated 28 June, the Ministry steward testifies that, during a previous examination, the crates were found to contain clothing, plates, kitchenware etc; but subsequently they had been opened and a large part of the contents had gone. The remaining objects (pots and pans, kitchen utensils, personal linen) were collected together in four crates and kept at the premises of the Treasurer’s Office until 4 June 1945, when possession of them was taken over by the Jewish Community of Rome (either for return to the rightful owners or for use in a charitable institution).

In the documents there is no indication of the name of the Jew whose property was seized (it is never mentioned by the person responsible for the sequestration).

San Remo

In this resort on the eastern coast, the “German Armed Forces” not only occupied a building “belonging to the Jew Alberto, son of the late Gabriele, Veneziani,” but also issued “a sharp refusal to the request that they draw up a report of the furniture and objects within the building.”³⁹ The refusal makes any further comment unnecessary.

Siena

Symptomatic here is a letter of 22 May 1944 from the *Podestà* to the Head of Province and the EGELI, stating that “from the villa owned by the Jews Elda Cabibbe and Amalia Cantoni [...] which had been left unlocked and unguarded, both German troops and other unknown individuals have removed nearly all the furniture and fittings. An on-site inspection carried out at the Villa revealed that the following pieces of furniture are still there [...] As a precautionary measure I would request that the above-described objects be removed by the town authorities, and that this operation be witnessed by a delegated representative of the police force [...]”⁴⁰

Turin

The State Archives in Turin that have been made available to the Commission contain ample documentation regarding the claims for damages brought by Jewish citizens after the Liberation, together with requests for the return of their confiscated property.⁴¹

There are numerous references to property that had been seized, of which the following offer a representative selection. In a note of 25 January 1958 sent to the Local Tax Office in Turin by Captain Giuseppe Farina, an officer serving with the Turin command of the II local division of the Guardia di Finanza (Finance Police), there is the observation that “bearing in mind the situation and

³⁹ ASMAE, *RSI, DGAAGG*, b. 164, pos. S-IV-1s (Ebrei), f. 1/6 (Sequestro beni ebraici da parte delle autorità tedesche in Italia), “Beni ebraici, Veneziani Alberto fu Gabriele, Sanremo”, P.C. 316, 27 February 1945-XXIII, signed “The Minister”.

⁴⁰ ASSi, *Prefettura, Gabinetto*, bb. 296,297.

⁴¹ ASTo, *I.F.*, cartelle 3.625-3.627, “Domande di risarcimento per confisca beni ebraici”.

the system that applied at the time, it can be claimed that the seized assets not listed in the attached documents numbers 5 and 6 can be said to have been taken as a result of an abuse of power by the above-mentioned officer and that, as a result, Sig.a Virginia Berti can in no way be held responsible for the differences that have emerged. All of the property in the inventory itself is to be considered as lost, as it has not been possible to find out where it was sent.” In a report drawn up on 26 April 1955, Captain Amos Meliconi, head of section DG in the Local Tax Office, states that “in the above-mentioned storerooms was gathered and stored the property requisitioned from persons of Jewish race [...]” and that “frequently this storeroom, located on the fourth floor of the building, was visited by the Nazi-Fascist troops from the small barracks of Rivoli, who would take whatever they needed, without however leaving a receipt or any other document that confirmed what they had done.” Questioned at the offices of the Turin Command of the II local division of the Guardia di Finanza (Finance Police), Sig. Giovanni Rocci, the porter of the building at 4 Via Saluzzo, stated that Sig. Avigdor “as soon as he knew they were looking for him, locked up the accommodation and gave me the keys [...] A few days later, some policemen came with an articulated lorry, removed the seals and took away from the apartment everything inside, with no exceptions. I should point out that , together with the police officers – four squads of the *Brigate Nere* – there were also German soldiers of the SS [...] I do not think that any part of the things taken away from the storerooms within the building and from the cellar there were ever recovered by Sig. Avigdor.” In a statement made to the superintendent of the Local Tax Office in Turin, the concierge of the building at 2b.Via Vanchiglia declared that, in the first days of December, certain gentlemen had come to her porter’s lodge and demanded to know the whereabouts of the Artom family, whom they had not found at home. “A few days later, I can’t remember the exact date, others came – I think four of them – and wanted the keys to the apartment, making me come up with them. One stayed in the entrance, keeping an eye on me, whilst the others wandered through the rooms with a sheet of paper. Whilst I was standing there shaking, one of them went down stairs three or four times carrying large bundles that my now deceased husband (he died in 1945) later told me he had seen them loading up outside the main door to the building.” In a report of 9 March 1946, sent by Lieutenant Colonel Valentino Lajolo, commanding officer of the PTI in Turin, to the Local Tax Office, it is said that following the afore-mentioned prefectural order (of 29 January 1944), Sig. Giovanni Bonomi and Sig. Giulio Neri (respectively, secretary and clerk at the tax office) had, assisted by police officer Iginio Bianchi from the Borgo Pio Police Station, proceeded to remove the seals from the doors to the apartment previously occupied by Sig. Carlo, son of the late Beniamino, Arias, cataloguing in their report all the furnishings and objects they found there. Said furnishings were handed over to the German “Staffel Propaganda” Command and part of them transported to a room of the municipal warehouses at 57 Via Moretto in Turin; however, no note thereof or receipt was made. The fact is that “nothing of Sig. Arias’s property is now to be found in the said warehouses.”

Trieste

From the first part of a note drawn up by a properties & claims officer on 28 February 1950,⁴² emerge various points regarding what happened in Trieste after 8 September 1943. As is known, after the signing of the Armistice, the *Adriatisches Küstenland* Operations Zone – corresponding more or less to the zone A of the free territory of Trieste –was occupied by German troops and placed under the command of a Supreme Commissioner, who issued a law that all Jewish assets were to be confiscated and become the property of the German State. Later “on the basis of this law, all the Jewish assets in the zone were ruthlessly plundered. Furnishings and the contents of safes were removed from Jewish homes; the contents of bank accounts seized, as were all the chattels in storage at the General Warehouses. The Jews seized in the streets of Trieste were stripped of all personal effects; and those captured trying to cross the border had all their valuables confiscated. The Germans were prompt to take control of all the property and assets to be found in apartments and banks – all of which were listed in notarial documents that were kept in a special file for each

⁴² ASTs, *Comm. gen. gov. per il territorio di Trieste*, b. 137, fasc. 97.

property owner. Where the details regarding the property were incomplete – for example, material that had been seized in the street – the details that were available were entered in a file entitled ‘Details regarding the Valuables that Belonged to Various Jews’.” Further information on the situation can be gleaned from a letter of 7 March 1944, in which the Prefect of Trieste informs the *Deutscher Berater für die Provinz Triest*⁴³ that it had come to the attention of the Prefecture that “for some days now the Germans have been proceeding with the removal of the rich and varied household effects belonging to emigrant Jews which had been stored in large crates (around 2,000) that have for some time stood in warehouse 23 of the Free Port. The sorting of the materials is carried out by a team of twenty or so workmen employed by the Germans and working under their instructions; it appears that the household effects removed from the crates are being sent to Germany.” Further information can be found elsewhere in this Report, particularly in the section “The Adriatic Coast Operations Zone”.

Varese

In a message dictated over the phone on 4 August 1944, the Head of Province in Varese complained to the German Military Command in the city that in the previous few days “individuals identifying themselves as employees of the Command and claiming to act upon the orders of the Security Services went to the Varese Warehouses in [Via] XX Settembre and took away with them substantial bolts of blanketing and other fabrics to the value of around 12 million lire, all property of the Ministry of Finance as having been sequestered from Jews. Asked to show documents and identification, none was produced. When contacted, the Military Command in Varese telephoned without however giving a full explanation.”

A separate chapter might be written regarding the valuables sequestered from those caught trying to leave the country illegally. Various extant documents contain the reports of the interrogation of Jewish citizens who tried to flee via the mountain passes in the border areas. In some cases there is a record of the objects and valuables sequestered at the time; but one cannot be sure that such records were always kept, with the said objects and valuables thus being purloined. Furthermore, there is no certainty that, following the seizure and arrest of those attempting to flee, the Heads of Province concerned actually issued formal orders of sequestration and then confiscation (hence, after the war, it was difficult – and often impossible - to recover the property).

With regard to the sequestration of property from those trying to leave the country illegally there is an interesting “Note for *Il Duce*” drawn up on 21 January 1944⁴⁴. This states: “Since the middle of September the militiamen stationed on the border have recovered jewels and valuables to the value of more than 15 million lire belonging to Jews who were trying to leave the country (main names: Sacerdoti and family, Foà, Levi, Ascoli and Ottolenghi). Said valuables were all turned over to the Head of Province in Como. Further finds included numerous pictures and art objects of value (around thirty million) that belonged to the former Duca di Bergamo and were discovered in the private homes of the duke’s friends at Carlazzo (Como) and Induno (Varese). Again, all this material was handed over to the Prefect of Como upon his direct request, following it seems upon an order from the Minister of the Interior.” A few days later (28 January 1944), this note was modified and supplemented by a “Private-Confidential” message from the Head of Province in Como to Giovanni Dolfi, Mussolini’s private secretary.⁴⁵ This pointed out that “the information sent to this Private Secretariat regarding the presence of valuable pictures and millions of lire in gold at this Prefecture was not entirely exact. The active work of the police in recent times – particularly in its efforts to thwart the attempts at illegal expatriation by Jews and other citizens wanted by the law – has led to the sequestration of substantial quantities of jewels, gold and currency. All of the currency has been paid into the local branch of the Banca d’Italia and converted into cheques. These – together with the jewels – have then been suitably inventoried by the Chief

⁴³ ASTs, *Prefettura, Gabinetto*.

⁴⁴ ACS, *RSI, PCM*, 1943-1945, b. 67.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Accountant and deposited in the Prefecture's safe. Copies of the relevant reports have been sent on to the Ministry of the Interior (Minister's Office and Head Office of the Police). At this Prefecture there are also all the objects (works of art, clothes, books, etc) that formerly belonged to the Duca di Bergamo and were discovered in the home of the duke's private secretary. Here again, the Ministry of the Interior has been informed of the existence of this material."

It is also informative to quote a small article that appeared under the heading "Tears in the Synagogue" in *Il Cantachiaro* on 16 November 1945. "In 1943-44, the RSI police in Como and Varese would, working in cahoots with the Fascist looters of the *Bande Nere*, rob Jewish refugees caught trying to cross the Swiss border of all their possessions, clothing, money and jewels before handing them over to the Nazi assassins for deportation to the death camps in Germany. Part of the valuables was duly recorded in the reports of the sequestration, which are still within the police office archives. It would seem that, upon the liberation of North Italy, part of the stolen haul turned up in the Police Headquarters in Valdagno. However, it does not seem that the Ministry of the Interior has taken the necessary steps to return what was stolen, or at least pay commensurate compensation to those who have a right to it."

To illustrate the painful and disturbing extortion that might take place as a result of these unsuccessful attempts to flee the country, one might quote two post-war sentences handed down by the courts. In the first,⁴⁶ the Novara Assize courts (Special Section) sentenced a person found guilty of causing the capture in the area of Verbania of "Italian citizens of Jewish race [...] after pretending to help them, upon payment, to cross the border into Switzerland". In the second,⁴⁷ the same assize court (Joint Section) sentenced another person for extorting from a Jew "L. 22,400 and L.10,000, playing upon the threat that, for political reasons, the German authorities posed to the Jews". Other examples of theft and extortion at the border are given in the chapter "Repercussions on the property of those who fled to Switzerland".

As well as outright theft, there were numerous cases of the improper use of Jewish property by the authorities (police chiefs, Heads of Province), institutions and German military commands. In a note of 3 July 1944 to the Head Province in Verona from the Office for the Identification and Administration of Jewish Property⁴⁸ it is pointed out that "the scrupulous, truthful and complete compilation of inventories to serve as the basis for confiscation orders necessarily goes together with the diligent and conscientious identification and preservation of the furnishings and effects concerned. However, both in the past and in the present, there has been interference, with decisions emanating from bodies to whom no authority in this matter has been recognised by law – a fact that makes the task much more difficult. The end result has been that only part of the Jewish assets have become the property of the State [...] In the same period, other furnishings have been removed by the local military command, by the special tribunal, by the town hall, etc. For example, after the dissolution of the Jewish Community in Verona and the confiscation of its property, a full inventory was being prepared of the synagogue's furnishings, religious artefacts and library etc.; however, this Office was forced by the German armed forces to relinquish occupation of the premises and abandon its survey of the contents of the building, which has been – for who knows how long, or upon whose order – occupied by a detachment of the Guardia Nazionale Repubblicana." Again in Verona, there is a list of some 69 Jews from whom the German Military Command might take any furnishings it deemed necessary for its purposes. And in Como there is a very detailed list of the furnishings, pictures, utensils, clothing and linen that had belonged to the Jews but were handed over to the Police Chief for his own residence. Given that such practices were widespread, one can reasonably assume that a far from negligible part of all property seized was purloined and disappeared without trace.

⁴⁶ Assize Court, Novara, *Sezione speciale*, sent. 87/1946 n. 30/46 R.Gen. 9 July 1946.

⁴⁷ Assize Court, Novara, *Sezione unica*, sent. 132/1946 n. 90 R.Gen. 30 October 1946.

⁴⁸ ASVr, *Prefettura, Gabinetto*, b. unica "Amministrazione di beni ebraici."

If the recovery and restitution of the property officially sequestered and confiscated was far from easy, it was much more difficult – and, in many cases, absolutely impossible – to recover that which had been stolen and seized by force. However, as is clear from discussions elsewhere in this Report, sometimes such purloined possessions might be recovered, even if they had been seized without official paperwork. This was the case, for example, with the five saddlebags containing objects that had presumably been confiscated from Jews by German occupation forces in the Adriatic Coast Operations Zone, or with the contents of the Library at Rabbinical Institute in Rome. However, for most of this property – belonging to Jews who had been arrested and deported or else were forced into hiding – it is true to say that it was lost for good. Here, one single statement serves to sum up the entire situation. “For many of the Jews who escaped deportation, the return to their homes was neither simple nor immediate. Most of those who had not managed to entrust their homes to trusted Catholic friends before being forced to flee hurriedly on 16 October – the day the rounding-up of the Jews started – would find their homes occupied by evacuees, and stripped of furniture and valuables.”⁴⁹ And what was true of the homes was also true of the shops and businesses. “So, after the Liberation, whilst most shops and businesses struggled and pulled themselves back onto their feet, some were forced to close down due to lack of funds or stock, whilst others that had been entrusted to fake “Aryan” partners in order to get round the racial laws were never returned to their rightful Jewish owners.”⁵⁰

⁴⁹ F. Barozzi, *L'uscita degli ebrei di Roma dalla clandestinità*, in Fondazione Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea *Il ritorno alla vita: vicende e diritti degli ebrei in Italia dopo la seconda guerra mondiale*, Editrice La Giuntina, Florence 1998, p. 35.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, pag. 37.