

REPERCUSSIONS ON THE PROPERTY OF THOSE WHO FLED TO SWITZERLAND

1. General information and statistics

According to the latest studies, when the Fascist regime fell on 25 July 1943 there were around 45,000 people in Italy who were defined as of “the Jewish race” according to the General Management of Demography and Race of the Ministry of Internal Affairs; of these around 6,500 were foreigners or stateless.¹ On the eve of the proclamation of surrender on 8 September 1943, around 43,000 Jews were in the country, of whom around 35,000 were Italians and 8,000 foreigners or stateless. Around 29,000 of these managed to save themselves by hiding in Italy while around 8,000 were deported from the Italian zones occupied by the Germans and governed by the RSI. Over 6,000 of these people were killed. Around 500 of the others managed to flee to the areas of Italy that had been freed, while over 6,000 fled to Switzerland.

Around 6,200 (4,500 Italians and 1,700 foreigners) therefore managed to emigrate to Switzerland, the only free, neutral country that bordered on the areas of Italy occupied by the Germans and the neo-Fascist government. At least 600 were sent back at the border, although the figure is approximate since a more accurate quantification is extremely difficult. Indeed, it appears that many Jews did not even manage to reach the border. Of these 600 confirmed “Jewish” *refoulés*, the majority was able to hide in Italy in safety despite the desperate conditions; countless other people were captured by German or neo-Fascist units at the border while returning to Italy and were imprisoned, deported and killed at Auschwitz.²

2. Repercussions on property from going underground and escape

As was the case at each and every moment of anti-Jewish persecution in Fascist and neo-Fascist Italy from 1938 to 1945, the attempt to emigrate to obtain asylum also had direct and/or indirect economic-property repercussions that were anything but secondary and, more often than not, were actually considerable.

After 8 September 1943, once the victim of persecution had gone into hiding, he or she could only count on his/her own means but since sequestration and confiscation of all “Jewish” property was endorsed, it became increasingly complicated to have such means at one’s disposal. Going into hiding is an act of camouflage that is extremely difficult and full of the unknown since it requires extensive and impenetrable complicity and silence, not just amongst the favourable and/or “neutral” population but also partially from the very authorities themselves. Moving from one hiding place to another was risky since it was both common and frequent to be stopped at any time and asked to prove one’s own identity. Furthermore, since the Jews were not persecuted as individuals but as a group, those trying to find refuge were entire families, or sometimes even more than one family nucleus who were fleeing together. Any other thoughts aside, life, or rather survival, in such circumstances was hard – also financially – since it meant using all their possessions or whatever they were able to scrape together to finance a constant flight or life underground, resorting to the “black market” that multiplied the price of anything they bought and forced them to use the meagre savings that had not been confiscated.

During those months, the sequestration/confiscation of even small amounts of money was a matter of life or death since a small amount of cash represented the means to survive for one more week, or being able to bribe officials if need be, paying to go into hiding or abroad. That is why the economic-property repercussions of living underground or trying to emigrate were so great -

¹ R. De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo*, Turin, Einaudi, 1988 (fourth edition revised and expanded), p. 475; L. Picciotto Fargion, *Il libro della memoria. Gli Ebrei deportati dall’Italia (1943-1945)*, Milan, Mursia, 1991, p.805; M. Sarfatti, *Gli Ebrei nell’Italia fascista. Vicende, identità, persecuzione*, Turin, Einaudi, 1999, pp. 232-233.

² See also the individual forms of those who were accepted or turned back, published in the appendix of: R. Broggin, *La frontiera della speranza. Gli ebrei dall’Italia verso la Svizzera 1943-45*, Milan, Mondadori, 1998, pp. 451-517.

because money, jewellery and valuables in general were no longer the measure of a certain life style, but a very question of life and death. This meant they were forced to take everything with them, whether chattels, money, valuables. In short, cash and negotiable objects were of the utmost importance.

And this meant abandoning any property that had not been or could not be liquidated - goods, supplies, businesses – thus leaving them to be pillaged by anyone. “We hid first in Macherio and then in Songavazzo”, remembers Amelia Orefice Soria, for example, who found refuge in Switzerland. “Luckily our landlord warned us of the danger so we were able to flee with the help of a local, but he took advantage and stole everything we had.”³

During the terrible journey towards the border the fugitives also ran the risk of being blackmailed and robbed, or reported by those who were well aware that they had all their belongings with them. If one summarises these conditions in an attempt to gain a general overview of the property profile of the Jews who tried to emigrate to Switzerland, whether successfully or not, it is possible to list various forms of impoverishment or destruction of property either before, during or after expatriation, if successful:

- a. abandoning their property while in hiding in Italy;
- b. the use of money and property to survive while in hiding during their flight;
- c. the cost of being accompanied to the border by Catholic, resistance and/or illicit organisations;
- d. the cost of crossing the border was frequently in addition to that of being accompanied, if in the form of blackmailing guards and/or the fugitives themselves being blackmailed;
- e. loss of property during the flight and/or crossing the border;
- f. sequestration and confiscation of the property of those captured at the border by regular and/or irregular German and/or neo-Fascist soldiers;
- g. payments “to convince” the Swiss guards and/or civilians once they had crossed the border;
- h. obligatory deposit as caution in the Banca Popolare Svizzera (BPS) in Bern, of the property and/or belongings they brought with them;
- i. costs borne during internment in Switzerland;
- l. withdrawals to secure “liberation” from military control and lead a “liberated” life in a house or hotel;
- m. refund of the internment costs in Switzerland when repatriated.

Although very schematic, this list makes it very clear that this played anything but a secondary role in the loss of property caused by the “racial” laws.

3. The sources

The sources for the study of the property profile of the Jews who fled to Switzerland, whether successfully or not, are as follows:

- documents from the police offices of the Swiss army’s territorial headquarters in the Cantons along the border with Italy (Geneva, Vallese, Ticino, Grigioni);
- documents from the district headquarters of the customs in Geneva, Chur, Lugano and Lausanne;
- documents from the Police for foreigners, from the Federal department of justice and police, of the Federal Public Ministry in Bern;
- *Personaldossier*, a personal file that the police offices of the Swiss army’s territorial headquarters opened for each refugee, before sending them to Bern where all documentation regarding expatriation is kept;
- documents from the headquarters of the German and Italian border police;
- documents from the prefectural offices, local police headquarters, prisons, detention areas, law courts and internment camps;

³ Private archive Renata Brogini, Locarno, “Testimonianza di Amelia Orefice Soria, Milan, 11 November 1997”.

- various documentation from after the War with requests for compensation and claims for the restitution of what was sequestered or confiscated;
- documents in private archives,
- direct evidence from survivors of expatriation, living underground, deportation or from their relatives.

The archives where the largest collections of these documents can be found are named at the end of this chapter.

The most important sources – in particular the archives in the *Schweizerisches Bundesarchiv*, in Bern, and in the *Archivio di Stato* (former *Cantonale*), in Bellinzona – for the reconstruction of what happened to the property of fugitives is, without a doubt, the “interrogation record”, filled in by the police authorities of the Swiss army’s territorial headquarters who were responsible for their reception and the “questionnaire” that the refugees themselves had to fill in during their “quarantine” in the quarantine camp; both documents were included in the each refugee’s *Personaldossier*.

There are 22 questions in the “interrogation record” (German, French, Italian), covering personal details, motives, circumstances and how they fled, state of health, acquaintances in Switzerland and their property. Each adult was questioned separately. This questioning, which was of a political nature and concluded the provisional one that had taken place at the customs, took place in transit or “quarantine” camps and in the police offices. It was handwritten in one of the national languages by the official in charge and signed by the refugee. The document heading is that of the “Federal department of justice and police – police department” and is called “*Einvernahmeprotokoll, Procès-verbal d’interrogatoire, Verbale d’interrogato*”, including the place and date of compilation.

The questions are as follows. 1. Surname, 2. Name, 3. Nationality, 4. Previous nationality (for stateless subjects), 5. Father’s name, 6. Mother’s name and maiden name, 7. Date of birth, 8. Place of birth, 9. Previous domicile, 10. Profession, 11. Marital status, 12. Religion, 13. Relatives accompanying the person in question, 14. Documents of legitimation, 15. Military incorporation, 16. Motives and circumstances of flight and the route followed, 17. Place, date and time of crossing the border, 18. State of health, 19. Relatives and acquaintances in Switzerland, 20. Any guarantors in Switzerland, 21. Detailed description of property in Switzerland and abroad, 22. Has the person in question been informed of the “Communication for refugees”? This was followed by the words “Questioned by” and a space for the signature under “The refugee”.

Under number “16. Motives and circumstances of flight and the route followed” in the “interrogation record” one frequently finds a testimony of the sequestration and confiscation of property, spoliation, plundering and misappropriation of other kinds that the refugee was subjected to either in Italy or his original country (if a foreigner or stateless) following the introduction of the “racial laws” (in the mid 1930s abroad, and in Italy obviously in 1938), the price paid for the flight and expatriation to Italy – if foreigners or stateless – and from Italy to Switzerland if residents in national territory.

Number 21 in the “interrogation record” asks for a detailed description of property in Switzerland or abroad and number “VII Financial means, caution and accommodation. These declarations must be made in Swiss francs and documented. It asks for a detailed and accurate list of the individual securities in Switzerland and abroad, it must also include where they are deposited and kept. On the basis of declarations of this kind, the authorities are able to form an accurate idea regarding the possibility of liquidation and the current value of the fortune”.

Both give information regarding how much property was saved or lost in Italy after 8 September 1943, sometimes including the kind, genre, value and other interesting information that can be used as a cross reference with the information in Italian archives. While there are many people who declare they no longer have any property – and these are mainly foreigners and stateless subjects but also a lot of Italians – there are also some who give details of how much they own or believe they own, with the exception of possible plundering, destruction, confiscation, theft or likewise after their flight (we limit ourselves to the Italian testimonies although there are also some in French and German).

– Beniamino Debenedetti (Asti, 1861), from Turin, wealthy: “*in Italy*, chattels and real estate with an approximate value of 1,500,000-2,000,000.”⁴

– Elena Levi (Biella, 1904), from Turin, housewife: “*In Italy* The total income of L.200,000 that was frozen following the racial laws.”⁵

– Giulio Levi (Florence, 1870), from Milan, retired general: “*In Italy*: Bank account with a balance of L. 40,000, 1 house and land in Piemonte a Fossano, 1 apartment in S. Margherita, treasury bonds of L. 10,000 with an overall value of around L. 1,500,000. All the aforementioned property in Italy is in the name of my wife Levi Norzi (née Bianca).”⁶

– Carlo Tedeschi (Ferrara, 1892), from Ferrara, industrialist: “*in Italy*: a house in Central Pescara worth L. 200,000, a house in Ferrara, Via Garibaldi 119, 121, 123 123a, which I donated to my wife for racial reasons since she is Aryan, worth L. 800,000, - a house in Ferrara, Via della Concia 12 and 14 worth L. 150,000, bank securities for L. 900,000, - various bank accounts and savings books for L. 600,000, a pharmaceutical business in Bologna worth around L. 1,000,000. I brought with me: L. 32,000 in cash, a watch (Longines brand), and a ring with two diamonds.”⁷

– Vitale Varon (Dardanelli, 1895), from Milan, merchant: “*In Italy*: goods reported to the Government (probably sequestered) with an approximate value of L. 200,000. Goods hidden with a value of around L. 300,000. Deposits in an Italian bank with a liquid value of L. 430,000 in savings books deposited in the Military Headquarters in Bellinzona.”⁸

The *Personaldossier* of each refugee also included all the financial incomings and outgoings of the aforementioned while interned or “liberated” – as well as, as shall be shown later, the costs they had to pay after repatriation to repay the costs borne by the Swiss Confederation for asylum. The observations and statistics in this chapter present the most exemplary cases, which are the result of the detailed study of: 4,012 *Personaldossier* – basically all the adults who entered Ticino – and which are conserved in the State Archives (the former cantonale Archives) in Bellinzona, capital of the Republic and Canton of Ticino.

4. The border

After 8 September 1943, the only way for Jews to leave the country was clandestinely, a crime that had always been punished harshly and even more so during the war. This meant crossing a border that was carefully controlled on both sides. Just getting there was a dramatic undertaking, for reasons that have already been mentioned, that is, the impossibility of moving around occupied Italy during the day unless one had false identification and using support “networks” for any kind of need, no matter how small. Furthermore, the cost of documents and transits was considerable. If

⁴ ASB, *FI*, scatola 27, fasc. 5 “Debenedetti, Beniamino”, and SBA, E 4264 (-) Bd. 1985/196, *Personaldossier*, No. 18.154 “Debenedetti, Beniamino”, Interrogation record, Castelrotto, 24 January 1944.

⁵ ASB, *FI*, scatola 47, fasc. 7, “Levi, Elena”, and SBA, E 4264 (-) Bd. 1985/196, *Personaldossier*, No. 13.794 “Levi, Elena”, Interrogation record, Locarno, 6 April 1945.

⁶ ASB, *FI*, scatola 48, fasc. 1, “Levi, Giulio”, and SBA, E 4264 (-) Bd. 1985/196, *Personaldossier*, No. 20.295 “Levi, Giulio”, Interrogation record, Ricovero Immacolata Roveredo, 19 January 1944.

⁷ ASB, *FI*, scatola 82, fasc. 1, “Tedeschi, Carlo”, and SBA, E 4264 (-) Bd. 1985/196, *Personaldossier*, No. 20.477, “Tedeschi, Carlo”, Interrogation record, Bellinzona, 20 January 1944.

⁸ ASB, *FI*, scatola 85, fasc 7, “Varon, Vitale”, and SBA, E 4264 (-) Bd. 1985/196, *Personaldossier*, No. 18.882, “Varon, Vitale”, Interrogation record, Bellinzona, 5 January 1944.

nothing else, the price had to be one that gave the guarantor the possibility for self-financing and therefore keeping the “chain” active, perhaps also bribing public functionaries and officials.

As far as the State border was concerned, this was garrisoned by small barracks and patrolled day and night by soldiers selected from divisions to stop any clandestine entries or departures. It was almost inaccessible from the higher mountains in the provinces of Aosta, Vercelli, Novara and Sondria and in the more accessible points in the provinces of Novara, Varese, Como and Sondria it was protected by uninterrupted wire netting with barbed wire on top with the occasional bells; small gates allowed the guards to walk along it on both sides. On 8 September 1943 the border was controlled by three different divisions on the Italian side: the *Guardia di finanza* (financial police), the *Carabinieri* (military police), and the *Milizia volontaria per la sicurezza nazionale di frontiera o confinaria* (voluntary border militia) who all monitored the movements of the "subversive". After the armistice and the German occupation, the whole border was almost completely undefended for around one week, from 9 to 16 September, as the border patrols were the first to flee. This is described very effectively in the memoirs of the Commander of the GdF legion from Milan, Colonel Alfredo Malgeri.⁹

However, the Germans and neo-Fascists soon regained control. The first measure introduced on 16 September 1943 was German occupation of the border area; the V division of the *Grenzwache* from the recruits' school in Innsbruck was sent to Varese to patrol the mountainous and lake border area between Varesotto and the Ticino Canton.

The Italian army soon returned to the border, in collaboration with the *Grenzwache* - first the Border Police – MVSN and then the GNR Border Police – made up of Fascist soldiers who were to make sure the border was completely impenetrable. In October 1944 the 1st GNR "Monviso" Legion was initially entrusted with surveillance in Moncalieri, then in Colico; the 2nd "Monte Rosa" was deployed to Como; the 3rd, "Vetta d'Italia" were first barracked in Bolzano in April 1944 and then in Sondrio. The 2nd Legion was the most active in patrolling the Italian-Swiss border and in arresting fugitives, including Jews. On 24 May 1944 the "Duce" issued a decree establishing a "no-man's land" that was three kilometres wide, where transit and occupation were forbidden unless the necessary authorisation had been given. This was a further restrictive disposition that, once again, was an attempt to resolve the problem of controlling the border area and to limit clandestine emigration, which also meant the evacuation of nearly all towns along the whole border with Switzerland between Valle D'Aosta and Valtellina.¹⁰

5. The dynamics

No matter how far away they lived, those who decided to flee across the border to Switzerland despite the increasingly tight controls had no choice but to find someone who would accompany them by contacting the locals who lived along the border and knew how to do it. Most of these people were smugglers or “mules”, who were used to crossing the border illegally with goods – rice in particular - so they could sell it on the "black market".

Since they knew the mountains and surveillance system along the border, the sentry shifts – sometimes doing “business” with them or knowing who was “softer” depending on whether they belonged to the GdF rather than the GNR border police – knowing where to wait, and when was the best time to cross the border, were all facts that made them an invaluable support. They were also much sought after as guides since they were also aware of the punishment in case of arrest, and the

⁹ A. Malgeri, *L'occupazione di Milano e la liberazione*, Milan, Comune, 1983, II ed., pp. 41-51 (original edition Milan, Editori Associati, 1947).

¹⁰ Dlg 24 May 1944, No. 282. "Dichiarazione di zona chiusa alla frontiera Italo-Svizzera" [Declaration of no-man's land along the Italian-Swiss border].

risks and tricks of the trade. By the time both the demand and dangers increased and they had become a reference point for the fugitives, the payment the smugglers demanded depended on what the fugitives were actually able to pay - "each Jew has his price", they would say. Merchants, industrialists and professionals were all "assessed" at exorbitant sums. Aldo Schön, a lawyer from Padua, crossed the border at Chiasso on 15 December with his wife Nelly, two children Aldo and Gabriella, his mother Ester and aunt Caterina Hirsch, and gave the following statement in his report:

"Il s'est rendu alors à Como chez son beau frère Schubert Gualtiero qui lui a donné l'adresse d'un passeur *Ernest* qu'il a trouvé à Como, habitant très près de Ponte Faloppia. En auto a été conduit à Uggiate (Como) puis à pied jusqu'à la protection métallique et ne pouvant passer il retourne pendant 3 jours dans une maisonnette à 5 km en arrière. Il repart ensuite et est conduit dans une maison située sur la frontière, traverse une rivière et se trouve en Suisse. A été immédiatement arrêté et conduit au poste de douane de Ponte Faloppia. A payé son guide 75.000 liras plus 6.000 pour l'auto. A payé en outre 1.500 liras pour les trois jours où il a été enfermé en attendant de pouvoir entrer en Suisse."¹¹

Although the price varied depending on the individual situation, the testimonies still have a lot in common. Dori Schönheit Bonfiglioli says: "they were people who were doing it to make a lot of money; it cost L. 5,000 a head";¹² Lilla Hassan Coen says: "1 franc was 5 lire; we paid the smugglers L. 12,000 for four people";¹³ Bruna Cases. "they gave us money for the smuggler, a canvas-covered lorry and a farmer's house to wait in, the price: 10,000 a head";¹⁴ Clara Servi Calò says: "we gave the smugglers the sum we had agreed upon - L. 5,000 a head";¹⁵ Marialuisa Cases says: "they gave us the name of a lady from Lanzo d'Intelvi [...] we left her L. 40,000, which was an enormous amount at that time".¹⁶ Ignazio Bassi says: "The finance patrol helped us across for a bit of money";¹⁷ Elena Kahn Aschieri says: "They made Gabriella Bergmann stop; there was a Yugoslav who said: "Have you got any money? Give me 15,000 to get across," she gave half to the Italian guards and half to the Germans and one said: "We're Austrians, we have nothing to do with the Germans," then they took the money and we got across."¹⁸ Other testimonies continue: Vito Soavi says: "We met a smuggler who was taking Italian fugitives across the border. But this cost L. 70,000 (in those days), money that went to the Germans, an enormous amount! My father didn't have the money so he left me at the smuggler's house and went back to Milan by car to get it."¹⁹

"In the meanwhile I reached the border alone and could see my brother through a closed gate. We exchanged a few words. But then a finance officer came up to me and told me to leave the border zone. During the short stretch I walked with the soldier I took the opportunity to show him the wad of banknotes I kept hidden in my pocket and asked him if he could show me the safest way to cross the border. Lots of young Italian ex-soldiers were trying to flee to Switzerland during that period and he wasn't at all surprised by my request. On the contrary, when he saw my nest egg of money, he didn't hesitate to show me the place where there was a ditch below the fencing separating Italy and Switzerland. It was possible to get to the other side; you just had to be careful not to touch it. He also told me to go there after ten p.m."²⁰

¹¹ ASB, *FI*, scatola 77, fasc. 2, "Schön, Aldo", and SBA, E 4264 (-) Bd. 1985/196, *Personaldossier*, No. 19.792, "Schön, Aldo", *Procès verbal d'interrogatoire*, Lugano, 15 December 1943, e *ibid.*, *Einvernahmenprotokoll*, Rovio, 28 December 1943.

¹² Private Archive Renata Brogгинi, "Locarno", Testimonianza di Dori Schönheit Bonfiglioli, Milan, 9 May 1997.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Testimony by Lilla Hassan Cohen, Milan, 18 February 1996.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Bruna Cases, *Diario*.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Testimony by Clara Calò Servi, Jerusalem, 26 January 1998.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Testimony by Marialuisa Cases, Milan, 18 February 1998.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Testimony by Ignazio Bassi, Milan, 10 January 1996.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Testimony by Elena Kahn Aschieri, Milan, 10 November 1995.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Testimony by Vito Soavi, Milan, 2 June 1995.

²⁰ E. Mortara, *Il nonno ha aperto i cassetti della memoria*, Milan, private edition, 1998, pp. 89-90.

Guido Perugia: “I saw the scene when these soldiers arrived with their guns, and they told my family to follow them to the barracks below. My mother started talking but I couldn’t hear what she was saying because I was hiding in the woods around 100 metres away with my brother and the workmen. Then I saw my father open his wallet, my mother got out a bag with her jewellery, and then my aunt did, too. These soldiers took everything my family had. My parents never told me exactly how much they had to give. They never wanted to. But the soldiers shouted at them: “We haven’t seen you, go away!”²¹

Another unknown factor was how honest the guards actually were. When fleeing with his wife Maria Lusia and their children Amalia, Ermanno and Paola, Bruno Acht said: “the guides abandoned us and I had to go through the fence lots of times, once with the children, another with the parcels and suitcases: it was terrible.”²² Ada Segre Camerini: “our anti-Fascist friends in Parma had said ‘we’ll send people’, they organised everything but they told us not to take money or jewellery ‘otherwise the guards will steal it and betray you’; dei Valobra, Sacerdoti, Bruno de Benedetti ... the guides realised they had jewellery and took it.”²³

Maurizia Jesi Veneziani: “we paid a lot, during the journey the price kept going up, they stole our suitcases; after the War one of my cousins started a lawsuit but my parents didn’t want to because, suitcases or not, they took us to safety.”²⁴

Olga Fiorentino: “The smuggler pushed us into the water and went with us midway through the river then he abandoned us. We were up to our necks in freezing, fast running water. Pia was about to start shouting. I stopped her just in time. Do you want the Germans to hear us? It was hard to drag her to the other bank. We let ourselves go as if we were in the softest bed while the water was flowing as if it was caressing us. We kissed the ground in tears. Later I found out that Vittoria had asked the smuggler for her belt back, but he insisted on keeping it as payment and closed Vittoria in the hen-house. ‘Pay me straight away or I’ll report you’. There was no point trusting such cowards, Vittoria paid and left as quickly as possible.”²⁵

Amelia Orefice Soria: “One of the smugglers went ahead to see and said he could see Alsatian tracks, that we couldn’t go across, that they were going to leave and ... come back the next day. My brother Giorgio Carlo put his hands in the pockets of his trench coat and pretended to have a gun: ‘if you leave we might die, so you shall die too: I’m going to shoot you!’. His pocket was empty. Then they decided to get us across somewhere else. We paid L. 2,500 a head.”²⁶ Other declarations, which were chosen from hundreds that are basically very similar, recorded in the 4,012 *Personaldossier* kept in the Bellinzona State Archives:

Ester Ancona-Foa (Alessandria, 1899), from Milan, housewife: “nous avons payé L. 14.000.”²⁷

Mario Giacomo Levi (Padua, 1878), from Milan, full professor of chemistry at the Politechnic: “We reached the border in a public car: I paid the smuggler-guide L. 5,000.”²⁸

Arrigo Tedeschi (Milan, 1893), from Milan, owner of a fur business: “floh er nachdem man ihn verhaften wollte mit seiner Frau und den beiden Kindern von Mailand nach Viggiù und von dort

²¹ Private Archive Renata Brogginì, “Locarno”, Testimony by Guido Perugia, Turin, 2 December 1997.

²² *Ibid.*, Bruno Acht, handwritten.

²³ *Ibid.*, Testimony by Ada Segre Camerini, Genua, 19 January 1998.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Testimony by Maurizia Jesi Veneziani, Milan, 29 April 1997.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Olga Lombroso-Fiorentino, *Appunti manoscritti redatti al suo rientro in Italia*.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Testimony by Amelia Orefice Soria, cit.

²⁷ ASB, *FI*, scatola 3, fasc. 1, “Ancona-Foa, Ester”, and SBA, E 4264 (-) Bd. 1985/196, *Personaldossier*, No. 19.479, “Ancona- Foa, Ester”, *Procès verbal d’interrogatoire*, Bellinzona, 15 February 1944.

²⁸ ASB, *FI*, scatola 48, fasc. 3, “Levi, Mario Giacomo”, and SBA, E 4264 (-) Bd. 1985/196, *Personaldossier*, No. 18.559, “Levi, Mario Giacomo”, Record of interrogation, Lugano, 18 November 1943.

unter Führung eines Passeurs, gegen bezahlung von L. 30.000 – zu Fuss nach der nahen Grenze die er bei Clivio/S. Pietro Ligornetto illegal überschritt.”²⁹

Arturo Tedeschi (Brescia, 1880), from Milan, former head of a telegraph office, forced to retire in 1938: “mit einer Gesellschaft von zusammen 9 Personen, unter Führung von 3 Unbekannten, die von ihm mit L. 10,000 batschädigt werden sind.”³⁰

Magda Tedeschi (Ferrara, 1904), from Ferrara, housewife: “Un guide qui nous suivait depuis Como, et auquel mon mari a payé par l’entremise d’un ami 10.000 Lire environ pour la famille, nous a accompagné à la frontière, à pieds.”³¹

Renzo Tedeschi (Turin, 1923), from Turin, student: "My father paid the guide L. 10,000 for the whole family.”³²

Irma Tirelli (Venice, 1886), from Venice, housewife: “Ihr Bruder und der Schwager unterhandelten mit Schmugglern aus Viggiù, die gegen eine Entschädigung von L. 35,000 die Führung übernahmen (für 11 Personen).”³³

Luigi Gino Torre (Fiorenzuola, 1892), from Fiorenzuola, fabrics tradesman: “I was led by a smuggler and he gave himself up at the watch post. I paid the unknown guide L. 16,000.”³⁴

Angelo Usiglio (Milan 1872), from Milan, PhD in chemistry: “I left Milan on 9.12.43, by train from Milan to Como and then by bus until Maslianico, accompanied by two smugglers whom [*sic*] I paid L. 20,000 for the service, including my wife.”³⁵

Roberto Vita (Turin, 1912), from Ivrea, chemical and mechanical engineer: “Un guide inconnu auquel j’ai payé Lit. 15,000 en plus des 27.000 que j’avais payées à Milan, m’a conduit à la frontière de Gaggiolo que j’ai passée sous la toile métallique.”³⁶

And there were many other cases that ended well, with the protagonists’ emigration and escape. After the War, however, the Varese and Como Assizes sentenced various people – at times real criminal groups - who had accompanied the Jews to the border, then abandoned them in a land they did not know, and frequently in the most dangerous zones due to intense patrols, at times just a short distance from safety; cases such as these were also reported by Jews who had been saved.

Yvonne Pino (née Teitel) (Terni, 1902), from Turin, stateless but "of Italian birth", an ex-Pole and housewife: “On 11 January ’44 I arrived in Cannobio and on the 16th at 16.00, led by a boy, I set out through the mountains and walked for hours. At a certain point, the boy left me, saying we had reached Swiss territory. Along the way, I joined another group of refugees who were so tired they

²⁹ ASB, *FI*, scatola 82, fasc. 1, “Tedeschi, Arrigo”, and SBA, E 4264 (-) Bd. 1985/196, *Personaldossier*, No. 19.688, “Tedeschi, Arrigo”, *Einvernahmeprotokoll*, Lugano, 12 January 1944.

³⁰ ASB, *FI*, scatola 82, fasc. 1, “Tedeschi, Arturo”, and SBA, E 4264 (-) Bd. 1985/196, *Personaldossier*, No. 19.973, “Tedeschi, Arturo”, *Einvernahmeprotokoll*, Bellinzona, 6 December 1943.

³¹ ASB, *FI*, scatola 82, fasc. 2 “Tedeschi, Magda”, and SBA, E 4264 (-) Bd. 1985/196, *Personaldossier*, No. 20.472 “Tedeschi, Magda”, *Procès verbal d’interrogatoire*, Bellinzona, 10 February 1944.

³² ASB, *FI*, scatola 82, fasc. 2, “Tedeschi, Renzo”, and SBA, E 4264 (-) Bd. 1985/196, *Personaldossier*, No. 19.287, “Tedeschi, Renzo”, Record of interrogation, Bellinzona, 30 November 1943.

³³ ASB, *FI*, scatola 82, fasc. 8, “Tirelli, Irma”, and SBA, E 4264 (-) Bd. 1985/196, *Personaldossier*, No. 19.989, “Tirelli, Irma”, *Einvernahmeprotokoll*, Rovio, 2 January 1944.

³⁴ ASB, *FI*, scatola 83, fasc. 5, “Torre, Luigi”, and SBA, E 4264 (-) Bd. 1985/196, *Personaldossier*, No. 18.855, “Torre, Luigi Gino”, Record of interrogation, Bellinzona, 30 November 1943.

³⁵ ASB, *FI*, scatola 84, fasc. 7, “Usiglio, Angelo”, Record of interrogation, Acquarossa, 13 January 1944.

³⁶ ASB, *FI*, scatola 87, fasc. 2, “Vita, Roberto”, and SBA, E 4264 (-) Bd. 1985/196, *Personaldossier*, No. 21.592, “Vita, Roberto”, *Procès verbal d’interrogatoire*, Bellinzona, 13 May 1944.

were no longer able to continue so I went on ahead, leaving my luggage with them. Since I thought I was in Switzerland, I was going to call the guards so they could help me and this family. Then I met a man who told me I was still on Italian ground, and he accompanied me to the patrol post in Cortaccio. I told them what had happened. I spent the night in the barracks and the following day, since there was no trace of that family, I was taken to Brissago and then to Bellinzona on the same day.”³⁷

Other occasional or professional criminals gained two-fold, the first for the price of the passage and then with the reward for reporting victims to the Nazi and/or neo-Fascist persecutors. This meant many of the unlucky refugees had ended up losing all their possessions, only to be betrayed and handed over to the border patrol on Italian territory.³⁸

6. The arrests

The presence of numerous German and neo-Fascist patrols along all the Italian borders to discourage and stop the phenomenon of expatriation was explicitly mentioned at the PFR National Congress in Verona, 14 November 1943. The person to bring the up subject, Paolo Porta, the Federal Commissioner of Como, was the delegate of the province most affected by clandestine emigration. In the handwritten minutes of the meeting one reads:

Como. “[...] We have decided that the entire border is to be controlled by the Border Police. Since 18 September the border has been controlled by true revolutionary soldiers (*hurrah*), because the Financial Police were taking the Jews, the refugees, over, all of them (*voices: 50,000 Lire a head*), with banknotes from 1,000 to 5,000, they were cheaper here. So when this evidence was received - I supplied the necessary documentation and Sondrio and Varese can confirm this - how can we possibly trust such people to have any power? (*voices: the Financial Police come from the smugglers*).”³⁹

“I have been told from a reliable source that every day around twenty Italians, most of whom are Jews, enter Switzerland from the border of Locarno through Valle Maroggia. Most of them are industrialists and wealthy people”, Francesco Scassellati, Head of the Province of Como reported to the Commander of the II GNR border legion "Monte Rosa", Colonel Marcello Mereu⁴⁰ and to the Local Police Chief of the city, Colonel Lorenzo Pozzoli, in February 1944. “It has been reported that on the Stabio border (Gaggiolo), an Italian captain, (presumably a member of the Financial Police), whose identity is not better known, encourages free expatriation from Italy. Make sure this is looked into closely and report.”⁴¹ While just a few days later there is a memorandum stating:

Clandestine emigration – “The flow of elements, mainly Jewish, across the border, helped by members of ethnic minorities, is continuing. The meeting place is in Via Brogeda, and it is from here that they pass the border fence at dusk, some have particularly heavy luggage with them. Surveillance is necessary after dusk, along the stretch of border from the Post of Ponte Chiasso, almost in the country and up to Ponte Maslianico. The Financial Police are helping this clandestine emigration.”⁴²

During the autumn of 1943 and the summer of 1944 in particular, which was when the number of fugitives heading for the Italian-Swiss border reached its peak as a result of the orders to increase

³⁷ ASB, *FI*, scatola 82, fasc. 3, “Teitel, Yvonne”, and SBA, E 4264 (-) Bd. 1985/197, *Personaldossier*, No. 20.471, “Teitel, Yvonne”, Interrogation record, Bellinzona, 19 January 1944.

³⁸ See: Franzinelli, *Delatori. Spie e confidenti anonimi: l'arma segreta del regime fascista*, Milan, Mondadori 2000.

³⁹ ACS, *RSI, SPD, CR*, b. 61, fasc. 630 sfasc. 12, “Prima Assemblea Nazionale del Partito Fascista Repubblicano”.

⁴⁰ ASCo, *Prefettura Gabinetto, 1943-1945*, u.v. 1943-44, Scassellati, b. IV, fasc. 337, “Comuni. Maroggia”, to Colonel Mereu, Como, 4 February 1944.

⁴¹ ASCo, *Prefettura, Gabinetto 1943-1945*, u.v. 1943-44, Scassellati, b. IV, fasc. 379, “Comuni. Stabio frontiera”, Memorandum for the Local Police Chief, Como, 15 February 1944/XXII.

⁴² *Ibid.*, Copy, Como, 22/2 [1944].

border controls using the German and/or Fascist units and divisions. There was a stream of arrests and deportations of Jews, after all their possessions they had been forced to take with them in their attempt to escape (as already mentioned) had been seized and/or confiscated.

A report written by Colonel Mereu to the Head of Province of Como concerning the rearrangement of the programme for control services to stop clandestine expatriation states that:

“In view of the situation resulting from the establishment of the Social Republic Government – reflected in the exodus of Jews – after receiving the opinion of the Provincial Head of Como, the undersigned has decided to rearrange the border police services, to adapt them to the needs of the current situation and to identify those who are assisting the expatriates in question - follow them up to the border – and then stop them crossing at the moment in which – once they have collected the exorbitant fee – they attempt to get Jewish groups onto Swiss territory, usually taking with them the booty, valuables and cash they hide amongst themselves, and all to the detriment of the national wealth. This is how the Jews who are trying to get to the border and reach Swiss territory – a refuge for rabbis – in an attempt to evade the providential and lapidary Fascist laws, are stopped by the vigilant units of the Republic National Guard which unflinchingly patrol even the most dangerous stretches, no matter what the weather, time or shift, which they extend voluntarily to stop any obscure or menacing activity by these accursed sons of Judas. Since October, so far the number of Jews stopped in this province comes to *fifty-eight*. Numerous operations have been carefully arranged thanks to the constant contacts the undersigned has had with his Excellency the Head of Province who has always shown particular interest in this cleansing action, encouraging its success with the appropriate advice and materials. Particularly commendable were the operations that resulted not only in the arrest of persons, but also in the seizure of the considerable valuables, an inventory of which is here enclosed: [...] During the operations in question, the correct and decisive behaviour of the Border Police was of such seriousness, tact and bravery that even those arrested, who have always deliberately repudiated [*sic*] the inestimable strength of Fascist Italy, were amazed.”⁴³

The Border Police compiled lists of the people arrested and sent them to Mussolini himself, with the annotation “clandestine expatriation attempt” or “attempted to enter national territory clandestinely” – that is, also the people who were sent back by the Swiss guards and were forced to return to Italian soil: an initial list for the Roder—Como area listed 64 arrests from 13 February to 12 December 1943; while a later one from 2 August 1943 to 29 July 1944 listed 159 arrests. Many were Jews.

It remains unclear, however, whether they were trying to leave the country or return: According to the memories of some survivors, several "expatriates" had actually been sent back by the Swiss guards. In some cases, the lists also included details of the possessions that had been seized and/or confiscated at the border, prior to the preliminary investigation of the office seizure and/or confiscation report in the Local Police Headquarters or prison.⁴⁴ These reports were written by either the officials or non-commissioned officers of the various border police, signed by both the aforementioned and the fugitives, and stored in the neo-Fascist Prefectural Office and Local Police

⁴³ *Ibid.*, b. 126, cat. XII (Attività che porta documento alla Repubblica), “Fermo di ebrei”, Como, 12 December 1943-XXII, signed “il comandante della Legione console Marcello Mereu”.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, b. 109 (ex 107), cat. XII (Situazione tratto frontiera Italo-Svizzera. Proposte di sistemazione servizi) [Situation along Italian-Swiss border. Proposal for rearrangement of services], fasc. XII, Prospetto dei fermi operati dai reparti della Guardia di Finanza nel tratto di frontiera compreso fra Cippo 16 A (Rodero) e Pizzo Martello (Como), s.d. [7 January 1944-XXII]; ACS, *RSI, SPD, CR*, b. 77, fasc. 648, sfasc. 5 “Guardia repubblicana di finanza”, List of the arrests made along the border by the units of the Republic Financial Guard from 25 July on, s.d. [August 1944]; Private archive, Franco Giannantoni, Varese, List of the arrests made along the border by the units of the Republic Financial Guard from 25 July on, s.d. [August 1944], with lists of the assets seized.

headquarter archives of the border provinces, in particular Novara, Varese, Como⁴⁵ and Sondrio. They were usually long lists of money, belongings, jewellery and various valuables, the value of which is difficult to assess in the lire of the time or that of today.

The cash and assets seized were generally given in custody to the local Prefectural Office while awaiting any further decisions. Almost immediately, in particular in the province of Como, in neo-Fascist circles there was a stream of anonymous reports against officials suspected of the misappropriation of considerable amounts of the possessions that had been intercepted “Valuables seized from clandestine expatriates. Since 10 September jewellery and hard currency for a value of over fifteen million has been presented to the Border Police, belonging to Jews who were attempting expatriation (main names: Sacerdoti and family, Foà, Levi, Ascoli, Ottolenghi). All these valuables were deposited with the Provincial Head of Como.”⁴⁶ The latter wrote the following to the “Duce’s” private secretary on the matter:

“Dear Dolfín, the report made to the private Secretary regarding the existence of paintings worth millions of **in gold** in this Prefectural Office is not completely accurate. The recent activity of police organs, in particular regarding the suppression of clandestine expatriation attempts by Jews and other citizens persecuted by the law, has led to the seizure of considerable amounts of valuables, gold and money. This has all been deposited in the local branch of the Banca d’Italia and has been made into checks which, together with the valuables, have been appropriately catalogued by the head accountant and deposited in the safes in this Prefectural Office. Copies of the relative reports have been sent to the Ministry of the Interior (Office and Police Head Office).”⁴⁷

With the exception of a part that remained *in loco*, and was retrieved and returned at the end of the War by “internal”⁴⁸ CLN officials in Como to the Prefectural Office, these possessions were then sent to the PS Head Office of the neo-Fascist Ministry of the Interior in Valdarno (Vicenza) in June 1944.⁴⁹ When they were discovered by the Allies in the safe of the aforementioned Head Office, they were handed over to the local branch of the Banca d’Italia.

7. The cost of internment and “release”

Even the Jews who managed to obtain asylum in Switzerland (as has already been said, around 4,500 Italians and 1,700 foreigners or stateless individuals) had to risk most of their patrimony due to the detailed and severe control procedures foreseen by Swiss laws for foreign possessions. In actual fact, whether one was admitted did not depend on the size of one’s fortune. However, the Swiss authorities wanted to have “a precise idea of the possibilities of liquidation and the current value of the fortune” of each refugee to make sure that the wealthier people would not cause any offence to the local population – who were forced to quite severe rationing and quotas – or to the other poorer refugees. It was also to ensure that those with liquid means, jewellery and belongings of other kinds, actually repaid the asylum costs when they returned to Italy once the War had ended.

A list was made of what each person had with them and it was deposited in the Banca Popolare Svizzera (BPS) in Bern upon issue of a receipt; it was then frozen in an account that did not bear interest, as a guarantee for the repayment of the internment costs. The refugees also had to deposit

⁴⁵ ASCo, *Prefettura, Gabinetto 1943-1945*, u.v. 1943-44, Scassellati, b. 109 (ex 107), cat. XII (Situazione tratto frontiera Italo-Svizzera. Proposte di sistemazione servizi) [Situation along Italian-Swiss border. Proposal for rearrangement of services], fasc. XII, and ASCo, *Questura 1943-1945*, bb. 5, 17, 60, 570, 578.

⁴⁶ ACS, *RSI, PCM, Barracu*, b. 3, fasc. 182, “436 ris./Espatrii clandestini sequestro valori”, Information for the Duce, 21 January 1944.

⁴⁷ ACS, *RSI, PCM, Barracu*, b. 4, fasc. 234, “995 ris./Como: Sequestro di oggetti e valori del Duca di Bergamo e di ebrei e di cittadini privati comunicazione del Capo della Provincia” [Como seizure of objects and valuables belonging to the Duke of Bergamo and to Jews and private citizens Memorandum from the Head of Province”.] To his Excellency Giovanni Dolfín, private secretary of the Duce, Como, 28 January 1944/XXII, signed “Franco Scassellati”, italics underlined in the original.

⁴⁸ Private archive Manlio Fulvio Lucca, List of objects seized during the RSI and surrendered at the Liberation by the CLN, 1945.

⁴⁹ ACDEC, *AG, AI*, fasc. “Egeli”, The EGELI and its activities, S. Pellegrino Terme, May 1945, p. 40, signed “Il Commissario”.

any sums they received later and faced punishment if they did not do so, which could be either internment or *refoulement* in the country of origin.⁵⁰

Gold, diamonds, valuables, art objects, stamp collections all remained “the depositor’s property” but they were not allowed to access it before repatriation unless the Police division gave their consensus. Everyone was allowed to keep 50 Swiss francs and a few personal belongings; cameras had to be handed in to the Swiss Head of the internment camp and they were only returned when the person was “dismissed from the transit camp”.⁵¹

During their internment, those refugees with means were entitled to *Taschengeld* or *argent de poche* [pocket money], 30 francs a month per person, which was taken from their personal account. The same sum could be paid by their embassies, consulates, institutions or relatives; if the sum was higher it had to be deposited in the bank account to avoid any strident inequality in the treatment of the needier refugees and the Swiss population itself:

“One of the issues that is of the most concern to a certain group of people, who have the means or relatives abroad, is that of managing to obtain regular transfers that are compatible with the current financial regulations of each individual country. Since these regulations are not stable, we can indicate those who are authorised to have such transfers directly, but the banks, the institutions and the receivers must pay the funds they receive into the Banca Popolare Svizzera in Bern, into the account that has been frozen for each refugee, and any withdrawals from the aforementioned account must be authorised by the Bern DFP.”⁵² (text is identical to the original from a brief translation from the German text by Swiss officials).

If the refugee needed an advance on the valuables deposited (after their “release”, for hospital treatment or special costs), the bank could agree once the legitimacy of the applicant's costs had been verified. Each request had to be justified, even for authorised purchases (clothing or shoes). This explains the huge increase in circulars, justification vouchers, receipts, bookkeeping notes, complaints and misunderstandings. Accurate bookkeeping meant that when it was time for repatriation nobody - if they had saved the means - could avoid the refund for internment, unless they wanted to be banned from returning to Switzerland after the War:

“charge for board and lodging” in the camps, “*contribution en faveur des institutions suisses d’aide aux Emigrantes*” or “*contribution de solidarité*”, local and national defence taxes were all rigorously calculated on the basis of the patrimony the asylum applicant had declared when he/she entered Switzerland clandestinely. This also had negative repercussions on the patrimony of those who had previously been persecuted for “racial” reasons.

“Liberation” from the camp, i.e. no longer under military control in the internment camp, meant being authorised to live privately, but dependent on the Canton police authorities. This “liberation” was not a right but rather a concession from the Federal Foreigner Police. It was necessary to be an Italian citizen to leave the camp – no foreign or stateless Jews were released unless they were doctors or rabbis, or to give assistance in some way – and they had to have the financial means for at least one year – 5,000 francs, with the right to withdraw a monthly maximum that was specified in advance, in the specially created account in the Volksbank in Bern - or have a “guarantor” who would provide board and lodging.

“Release” from the camp was so expensive that it was an option only open to the wealthier individuals. However, after several months, a considerable number of ex-internees renounced that very privilege since they found the cost of living unbearably high and therefore returned to the

⁵⁰ SBA, E 4264 (-) Bd. 1985/196, No. 331, *Au Commandant du campo de réfugiés Casa d’Italia, Lugano. Rimesse dall’estero*, Bern, 6 January 1944.

⁵¹ SBA, E 4264 (-) Bd. 1985/196, *Personaldossier* No. 32.025, “Stock, Mario”, *Übergabeprotokoll und Empfangsbestätigung - Procès verbal de remise et accusé de réception*, Bern, 21 October 1943.

⁵² SBA, E 4264 (-) Bd. 1985/196, No. 331, *Au Commandant du campo de réfugiés Casa d’Italia, Lugano. Rimesse dall’estero*, cit.

"camp" voluntarily. The maintenance costs for the "liberated", that also led to the gradual diminishment of their patrimony, were therefore also a further impoverishment that was indirectly caused by the "racial" persecutions of the RSI in the twenty months from 1943-1945.

APPENDIX

Archive sources.

a) Schweizerisches Bundesarchiv, Bern

All the *Personaldossier* of the approximate 4,500 Italian Jews and around 1,700 foreigners allowed into Switzerland across the southern border are in the archive collections E 4264 1985/196 and 197.

b) State Archives (former cantonale), Bellinzona

The following collections are of the utmost importance:

– *Internati italiani 1943–45*, 91 boxes with around 10,000 names, of whom over 4,000 are of Jews who entered the Canton Ticino;

– *Fondazione Piero e Marco Pellegrini-Guglielmo Canevascini, Internati*, box 30 on help given "to refugees", some Jews.

c) Archivio del Corpo guardie di confine IV Circondario, Lugano

Registri di frontiera di profughi accolti e respinti nel Canton Ticino e nella Mesolcina.

d) Archivio della Curia Vescovile, Lugano

Vescovo Jelmini, Opere caritative, fascicolo "profughi", e *Monsignor Felice Camponovo, Rifugiati*, scc. 1–10, correspondence between the Apostolic administrator, Monsignor, Angelo Jelmini, and the *Caritas diocesana* on helping the refugees, some Jews, 1943–45.

e) Private archive Renata Broggin, Locarno

The private archives with the most complete collection of diaries and private correspondence of Italian and other foreign refugees in Switzerland between 1943-1945.

f) Central State Archives, Rome

Has materials that are of fundamental interest, in particular in the following collections:

RSI, Segreteria particolare del duce, Private correspondence, with data regarding the number of arrests on the border, also of Jews;

Ministry of the Interior, RSI, Secretary Head of Police, with reports, briefs, espionage and more on the refugees;

g) Archivio storico-diplomatico del Ministero degli affari esteri, Rome

Numerous informative sources for a new historiography in the collections:

RSI, Gabinetto, Italia 11, Italia 19, Italia 28, Svizzera 29, Svizzera 87, Varia 145, Varia 148, Varia 164, Svizzera 166, many documents on Italian refugees in Switzerland 1943/45;

Affari politici 1931-45, Svizzera 28, Svizzera 29, Svizzera 30, Svizzera 31, a great many documents on Italian refugees in Switzerland 1943-45;

h) Centre for Contemporary Jewish Documentation, Milan

Documents that are of particular interest are to be found in the collections: Lelio Vittorio Valobra and Emilio Canarutto, who were two of the founders of the Delasem and aid to "Jewish" refugees in Switzerland.

i) State Archives, Como

Prefettura, Gabinetto 1943-1944 (Franco Scassellati-Prefetto) and 1944-1945 (Renato Celio): Various documentation on the arrests at the border, property seizure and confiscation of "Jewish" property.

l) Private archive Franco Giannantoni, Varese

Collection of acts and documents from the Prefectural Offices and the Local Police Headquarters of Varese, including information on clandestine expatriats from Varesotto in Switzerland 1943/45.

m) Private archive Mario Martinelli, Capiago Intimiano

Correspondence from the neo-Fascist Local Police Headquarters of Como 1943-45 and illegal border crossings from Comasco in Switzerland.

