Gli abitanti del ghetto di Roma: La Descriptio Hebreorum *del 1733*.
Angela Groppi, ed.
I libri di Viella 187. Rome: Viella, 2014. 288 pp. €27.

In early modern Italy, parish priests were in charge of "counting souls." Street by street, building by building, and family by family, they systematically counted their congregations. In Rome, by 1736 these so-called *stati delle anime* started incorporating "heretics, Turks, and other infidels"; Jews, however, remained always excluded. Since the Roman Jewish community — the oldest and one of the largest in Italy — did not maintain an internal census, its numbers have frequently been disputed. Early modern estimates ranged widely, from 7,000 to 15,000 individuals; modern demographers such as Roberto Bachi, for their part, placed the Jewish population between 3,600 and 4,000 people.

Until very recently, scholars could rely on scant early modern data. A description completed before the Sack of Rome of 1527 calculated the presence of 1,772 Jews, while Jewish records from 1796 listed 3,617 individuals. Now historian Angela Groppi's discovery of a detailed census of the Jewish community, compiled in 1733 and listing 4,059 individuals by name and age, offers scholars an invaluable tool to assess more precisely the demographic composition of the Roman ghetto, revise long-standing assumptions, and launch new investigations. Her new edited volume includes the list, transcribed by Manuela Militi, with four accompanying essays and an introduction by Kenneth Stow.

The origins of this unusual "descriptio Hebreorum" stem from purely administrative purposes, Groppi clarifies. Her essay contextualizes the census in relation to the fiscal crisis of the Jewish community, burdened by heavy debts contracted with the Camera Apostolica throughout the early modern period. It was the Camera Apostolica that commissioned the document, attempting to ascertain the solvency of the ghetto and the exact number of its inhabitants. Employing the same techniques as a Catholic *stato delle anime*, its officers proceeded to describe the ghetto's inhabitants, building by building and family by family. Working between 27 July and 17 August, they visited the enclosure over the course of seven days; the specific itinerary has been reconstructed by Micol Ferrara, whose excellent cartographic representations are included in full color. This isolated census, however, failed to

This content downloaded from 193.204.146.061 on June 14, 2016 11:26:02 AM
All use subject to University of Chicago Press Terms and Conditions (http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/t-and-c).

influence later estimates. Throughout the rest of the century, extravagant figures continued to circulate among Jews and non-Jews, a sign that "little value was attributed to population numbers and consistency in a pre-statistical age" (67).

Michaël Gasperoni's rich demographic study exemplifies the fresh new directions for research that this discovery is opening up. Through a comparison of the 1733 census with the 1527 one, a sample of the city's Christian population, and data from other Italian communities, Gasperoni shows the exceptionality of Jewish Rome vis-à-vis both other Italian ghettos and the rest of the city. Within the Roman enclosure, stability was constant over time. Family size remained stable (while it contracted in Christian Rome), and the Jewish population hovered around 3 percent of the city's residents. Rome's sui generis makeup — which included unconventional family structures, numerous single individuals, and more men than women — did not apply to the ghetto, where nuclear families prevailed and male-female ratio approximated one-to-one. The characteristic mobility of early modern Italian Jews, despite their ghettoization, did not extend to Rome either. Its ghetto hardly attracted spouses from other Italian communities, and financial restrictions prevented young women from marrying outside of the city. Only future studies on the economic opportunities effectively open to eighteenth-century Roman Jews might ease the sense that demographic stability reflected profound stagnation.

The two remaining essays, by Giancarlo Spizzichino and Raffaele Pittella, shed further light, respectively, on the 1730s, a decade characterized by repressive measures initiated by the Holy Office and the Camera Apostolica against the Jewish community, and on the institutional conditions and early modern notarial practices that allowed for the document's survival. Spizzichino's emphasis on the "ghettarello," a Jewish space outside of the ghetto that hosted warehouses and, until 1731, a synagogue, forcefully reminds us that norms did not necessarily inform reality in early modern Rome, and that Jews and Catholics intermingled daily despite restrictive legislation.

The importance of the 1733 census cannot be overstated. Its discovery has already ushered in new elaborations on eighteenth-century Roman Jews, as this volume makes clear. This publication is a very welcome addition for historians of early modern Italian Jewry, as well as early modern demographers more generally.

FRANCESCA BREGOLI, *CUNY, Queens College*

This content downloaded from 193.204.146.061 on June 14, 2016 11:26:02 AM
All use subject to University of Chicago Press Terms and Conditions (http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/t-and-c).