



Gli abitanti del ghetto di Roma: La Descriptio Hebreorum del 1733.
Edited by Angela Groppi.

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This volume contains the only census administered between 1527 and 1796 of the Jewish community in Rome, a community that in 1733 numbered 4,059 men, women, and children. The census is accompanied by five scholarly essays. The *descriptio hebreorum* is a document of inestimable importance for the history of the Roman ghetto, established by Paul IV in 1555, as well as for our knowledge of early modern Italian Jews. It also throws light on papal government and on early modern Rome more generally. The census of the Jewish population took place in seven visits between July 27 and August 17, 1733; it was recorded by one of the notaries of the Reverenda Camera Apostolica (RCA), the papal bureau responsible for state finances, and bound with his notarial acts for that year. Hidden in plain sight, the text was finally discovered and published by historian Angela Groppi.

The notary, evidently taking his cue from the annual parish censuses of Rome's Christian population that had begun in the 1590s, enumerated each Jewish family, recording the name of the apparent head of the household, usually an adult male but sometimes a widow, and providing the name of each member of the family with a number. Additional information often lacking in Christian censuses might include the age of the inhabitants (if children), their relation to the head of the household, and their physical or mental condition. So, for example, we read that Moisè Seer, head of a family of five, lived with his wife Ester, his mother Graziosa, and his two sons Benedetto, aged sixteen, and Samuele, aged fourteen (272). We also learn that two of Sabbato Sabbatel's children were lame (269) and that Giuseppe Lattes and his wife gave shelter to Anselmo, Giuseppe's mentally deficient (*scemo*) brother (250). Manuela Militi has transcribed the complete text; the volume also includes a useful index of surnames.

Micol Ferrara has prepared a remarkable series of maps indicating the main thoroughfares of the Roman ghetto in 1733 and the households enumerated on each of the seven visits. Architectural drawings of the plans and

facades of some of the Jewish residences from other archival sources complement the census and enhance our understanding of the setting. The five accompanying essays help to contextualize this unique document and its data, so that the volume as a whole now serves readers of Italian as the finest available introduction to the history of the early modern Roman Jewish community.

The *descriptio hebreorum* has much to teach about the Jews of Rome and about their relation to the Papal States, but it also holds broader lessons about sources for historians of any era, as Raffaele Pittella's essay reminds us. Students of early modern Rome have long lamented the lack of demographic data on what is often termed Europe's oldest Jewish community, in contrast with the wealth of information available for the city's Christians. In addition, for more than a century archivists and scholars researching the history of papal government have expressed amazement at the early modern state's lack of concern for institutional memory and the resulting losses of documents this entailed. The "discovery" of the 1733 census casts doubt on the assumption that most documents are lost. It may be that we need to think like an early modern institution and thereby learn how and where to look for them. In the Roman case Pittella rightly emphasizes the papacy's reliance on the services of its staff notaries not only to give legal validity to its own pronouncements but also to ensure the truthfulness of the data it collected. Now we need to add to these services the task of keeping its records, as Felice Antonio Paoletti, one of the notaries of the RCA, did when he bound the ghetto census in his neatly foliated and precisely dated volume. Nor was the census even forgotten—at least not as late as the eighteenth century. Groppi finds the census cited in a lawsuit between the Jewish community and its attorney, and Pittella locates it in the RCA's own inventory of state papers held in the volumes of its notaries.

Nonetheless, the 1733 census was an unicum, undertaken, as several essays explain, by the papacy's financial arm in order to show the reluctant Jewish community that it was perfectly capable of paying the full complement of almost a dozen different taxes that it owed to the RCA. As Giancarlo Spizzichino details, the papal fisc had subjected the Jews of Rome to a plethora of imposts from at least 1595. These included a flat tax per household, a five percent tax on capital, a tax on dowries, subsidies to the institution that sheltered Jews who had converted to Catholicism, the costs of the soldiers who guarded the ghetto during the tumultuous periods between papal reigns, and a flat tax per household to priests of the adjacent parishes to compensate for their loss of expected income from baptisms and Christian marriages. The Jews had been in arrears for decades, as Kenneth Stow shows, their economic condition within the ghetto steadily declining owing to successive papal restrictions on Jewish businesses and ever-increasing taxation.

The ghetto inhabitants' oppression by the state worsened in the 1730s. The Holy Office, the papacy's lead agency on heresy, began competing with the RCA to discipline the Jewish community, raiding its archive for account books and illicit Talmud commentaries. In addition, the papal authorities ordered the confiscation of a small property just outside the ghetto walls that had been used as a fifth synagogue by Jewish immigrants from all over the Mediterranean with differing religious rites; this despite the Jews' efforts to show that their existing synagogue could not accommodate any more worshippers. In this context, a hostile official from the Holy Office estimated that the population of the ghetto was at least sixteen thousand and that its inhabitants could well afford twice the amount they were paying the treasury. As both invoked arguments about ghetto numbers, the RCA sent its notary to take an actual head count in the summer of 1733.

Both Jews and the government must have been disappointed by the census results, though they probably favored the claims of the Jewish community. As several of the authors point out, the census is not referred to again in any subsequent communications between the two entities. Christian officials were suspicious of the community's cries of poverty, but, in fact, there were not as many Jews as they had imagined. At the same time, the numbers failed to buttress the Jews' case for expanding their synagogue, which Church officials would have been unwilling to countenance in any event.

Although contemporaries might not have welcomed the census results, historians of early modern Rome have every reason to celebrate its discovery. This document gives us our first accurate picture of the city's Jewish inhabitants, providing statistical data that Michaël Gasparoni has carefully analyzed and compared to Roman Christian households and to Jewish families in other Italian ghettos. From roughly one thousand in 1500 the number of Jews in Rome grew rapidly in the sixteenth century, thanks in great part to the Iberian expulsions. After 1600 there was little immigration, however, and natural increase was offset by the 1656 plague.

At around four thousand members, the Jewish community constituted a relatively stable proportion of the total population of the city, hovering around 3 percent. This was similar to the percentages in Venice, Trieste, and Torino, but less than that in Ferrara and much less than the thirteen percent in Livorno. Family size changed hardly at all over time: it remained small, averaging 4.55 in the 1733 census, only slightly lower than that of Christian Roman families. Gasparoni ponders the reasons for the undoubted penury of this community compared to other Italian ghettos. The Roman Jews' own laws, he notes, restricted marriages between Roman Jewish brides and Jews elsewhere, which dampened economic prospects by preventing certain types of profitable long-distance trade based on kinship. Gasparoni traces this obstacle back to its source, the fiscal pressure of the papacy, which by taxing Jewish dowries put a premium on keeping dowries local.

Just as precious as the information itself in the *descriptio hebreorum* is the way this source can be used to shed more light on ghetto society. Gasparoni has followed husbands and wives listed in the census back to their marriage contracts in the notarial archives, determining their relative wealth and beginning to reconstruct economic hierarchies within the Jewish community. As Stow points out in his preface, it will now be possible to ask new questions about the inhabitants of the Roman ghetto. What distinctions of wealth marked this society? How did these manifest themselves in household and urban space? Who were the community's elite families? Were they an oligarchy or was leadership relatively open?

The diligent research undertaken by all the authors in the dispersed archives of present-day Rome has yielded a rich cache of footnotes directing scholars to sources on the Papal States in the early modern period. It is fascinating to watch as Catholic officials query Jewish social practices that sharply distinguish Jews from Christians. In one case RCA officials complain that the Jews allow every child to marry, a practice quite alien to the family strategies of the majority population in Italy. In another, an ecclesiastical investigator notes that while the Jews bemoan their poverty, they still insist on providing schoolteachers at the community's expense. Monsignor Bolognetti remarks that few Catholics, in contrast, expected to educate their children for free. As these and other examples attest, Groppi and her team have provided an invaluable service to historical scholarship in bringing the 1733 census of the Roman ghetto to twenty-first century readers.