

## The Archival Series Concerning the Confiscation of Jewish Property Found in the Archives of the Prefecture of Venice

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### Introduction

I am honored to open this International Workshop, organized by the CDEC Foundation in collaboration with the Master in Digital Humanities program - Università Ca' Foscari Venezia. Today, in 2017, all of the Italian State Archives are able to make available their documents regarding the Second World War to scholars of the period, because more than seventy years have passed since those events. On this subject, the archives of the Prefectures and Police are especially rich.

In Italy, the anti-Jewish Laws were passed in 1938. But it was only from 1943 that the Italians themselves began to participate in genocide, with the creation of concentration camps in Italy, from which the Jews were deported to Auschwitz.

I will speak briefly about the series that concerns the confiscation of Jewish property, found in the Prefecture, while Dr. Andrea Pelizza will speak about the other archival series that the State Archives of Venice has brought to the attention of researchers.

The Fascist Italian Social Republic (already called, as a sign of contempt, "Republic of Salò") instituted its anti-Jewish measures, without making any distinction or consideration of the merits of certain people who were part of the Jewish community. Thus they moved first to strike at Jewish property, by taking it for the Italian nation.

The legislative decree of January 4, 1944, number 2, established new policies concerning property owned by Italian citizens who were of the Jewish "Race". The process of confiscation was brutal, whether real estate, furniture, and businesses. Orders were given to the Prefects, the heads of the Provinces, to issue their own decrees to organize the seizures, by making use of the lists of Jews in each territory which had been compiled in 1938.

After the Racial Laws of 1938, Jews were excluded from civil life, but at that point part of them had not yet suffered the confiscation of their property: certain categories of Jewish citizens were exempted from the harshest measures. The so-called "discriminati", that is, those persons who

could demonstrate having made contributions to the Fatherland, and Jews who were married to someone of the "Arian race", were not initially affected by that measure. By January of 1944, however, the persecution grew harsher, more ferocious; no one was exempt and all Jews were deprived of their possessions, furniture, property and money. The goods confiscated fell under the administration of the Office of Property Administration and Liquidation (EGELI), which was charged by the State to administer and sell them according to the norms established by the Ministry of Finance. For the administration of the EGELI moveable goods, the participation of local banks was necessary. In the case of Venice, the bank involved was the Istituto di Credito Fondiario delle Venezie, located in Verona. The Prefect's decree contained the name of the owners of the goods, bureaucratically defined as companies; the lists of all of the good possessed; and the places where these goods were situated. The decrees concerned Venice and its province. The documents also contain the timeline of the seizures. The employees of the Prefect enter the homes, which are often empty because the inhabitants were warned to avoid being caught. Nonetheless there is some resistance, especially on the part of the elderly, who saw their entire lives diminished. In June of 1945, with the defeat of Nazism and Fascism, the goods were returned to their legitimate owners, with a new decree from the new Prefecture. The State Archives of Venice has created a census of all of the existing decrees, in the archival series of the Prefecture, titled "Beni ebraici", or "Jewish Property". We have identified 206 decrees regarding immovable property of 206 families, 685 decrees regarding moveable goods with their financial worth, and 34 decrees regarding businesses. We can look one of those decrees: **The Prefecture of Venice Decree Article1**

Regarding the confiscation by the State of the goods listed below which belong to Jewish firm of Dr. Ravà Mario di Max, owner, and Ravà Massimiliano Giorgio fu Graziano, partial usufructuary, sentenced to the sequester by the Prefect's decree n. 396 on January 13th 1944; Venezia Cannaregio, Calle della Ca' d'Oro 3934 civico al 3937-3938 sub. 2; House with four floors and 54 rooms, San Felice folio 12 mapped 2504 with a value of 30.600 lire.

The material confiscated includes furniture, works of art, decorations, furnishings, and any other types of moveable objects currently in said home and in the possession of the two above-named citizens of Jewish race.

**Article2** The transfer for the administration and subsequent profit from the goods indicated in the preceding article to the Institute of Administration and Liquidation of Properties (E.G.E.L.I.), located in San Pellegrino Terme (Bergamo), entrusted by the State with the task of administrating and selling these properties, in accordance with the norms that will be established by the Ministry of Finance.

The State Archives of Venice created a data base of the series "Beni ebraici" and this database will be available on the website of the Archive.