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'Aiding gli Ebrei' - Delasem under fascism, 1939 to 1945

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‘Aiding gli Ebrei’ - Delasem under Fascism, 1939 to 1945

This thesis is presented for the degree of Master of Arts

University of Notre Dame Australia

2016

Submitted by Laura Bava

Declaration of Authorship

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Laura Bava

Date

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	IV
FIGURES	VI
ABSTRACT	VII
INTRODUCTION	1
<i>The Jews in the Italian peninsula</i>	1
<i>Mussolini's ambition for an Italian Empire</i>	8
<i>The beginning of the Italian Holocaust</i>	9
Research question and aims	19
Research Design	21
CHAPTER 1 - LITERATURE REVIEW	23
The appeasement group	23
The genocide group	33
CHAPTER 2 - DELEGAZIONE ASSISTENZA EMIGRATI EBREI	41
Delasem's operations between December 1939 and June 1940	43
Delasem's role between June 1940 and December 1941	54
Italian internment camps	58
The decreasing of Delasem's exodus activities	68
Changes in Delasem's structure	69
Delasem's activities between June 1941 and September 1943	76
<i>Delasem's clothing appeal</i>	76
<i>Medical assistance provided by Delasem</i>	77
<i>Delasem's aid appeal for non-Italian Jews children</i>	78
Delasem: re-establishing its role	81
Summary of Delasem's role between June 1941 and September 1943	83
Delasem September 1943 to May 1945	85

CHAPTER 3 - INTERPRETATION	91
Genocide versus appeasement	92
<i>Delasem evidence supporting the appeasement argument</i>	94
<i>Evidence supporting the genocide group</i>	96
Delasem's documents in the context of Fascist government attitudes to Jewish people	98
<i>The tabling of the Racial Laws in 1938</i>	98
<i>The 1938 census of Jewish people</i>	100
<i>Foreign Jewish people in Italy post 1939</i>	101
<i>The establishing of internment camps</i>	103
Summary: the Fascist government's attitude to Jewish people through Delasem documents	106
<i>The Fascist government compared with the Nazis</i>	109
<i>Summary – the appeasement and genocide debate</i>	110
<i>Finally, Delasem's existence due to Fascist help</i>	111
<i>Nazi and Italian Fascist anti-Semitic policies</i>	113
CHAPTER 4 - CONCLUSION	115
BIBLIOGRAPHY	121

Figures

Figure 1: Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini, Rome May 1938	12
Figure 2: Pietro Badoglio, the Italian Prime Minister from September 1943	16
Figure 3: The signing of the armistice between Italian and Allied representatives, Cassibile, 3 September 1943	18
Figure 4: A group of internees play stringed instruments in the Campagna internment camp. Walter Wolff is standing second from the right	32
Figure 5: The Historical Archives of the Jewish community of Rome (ASCER, centre) Rome 2012	40
Figure 6: Dante Almansì, President of Delasem Genoa, 1939	43
Figure 7: Lelio Vittorio Valobra, Vice-President of Delasem Genoa, 1939	44
Figure 8: The location of the Jewish communities in 1938	45
Figure 9: Delasem's Office, Lungotevere Sanzio, Rome 2012	49
Figure 10: Genoa port, 1940	54
Figure 11: The location of internment camps in Italy and occupied territories	59
Figure 12: Foreign Jewish and local police on the steps of San Bartolomeo internment camp, Campagna 1940	62
Figure 13: Jewish refugees in Lisbon boarding a ship transporting them to the United States, June 1941	74
Figure 14: Pupils and teachers at Ferramonti di Tarsia internment school, 1941	81
Figure 15: Convento dei Capuccini, Via Sicilia 159, Rome, 1943	87
Figure 16: Joint Distribution Committee representatives visit childcare facilities at a displaced persons camp, Europe, 1945	90

Abstract

This study investigated how the organisation Delasem ('Delegazione Assistenza Emigrati Ebrei') operated unrestricted in their support of Jewish people under Mussolini's Fascist regime between 1939 and 1943. It includes a brief historical background of Italy that focuses on the life of Jewish people since their first arrival in Italy about 2000 years ago. This historical section was presented so that the reader could understand Italian culture and its changing attitude to Italian and non-Italian Jewish people in Italy. This section outlined the circumstances of Italian Jews under Mussolini's Fascist regime that resulted in Delasem's formation and the flood of Jewish refugees into Italy from parts of Nazi occupied Europe.

The result of this thesis' research question is that Delasem operated as an aid agency for Jewish people from 1939 to 1943 because of direct and indirect assistance from Mussolini and his Fascist regime.

The study of Delasem's documents allows one to understand what happened in Italy to Jewish people from the promulgation of the 'Leggi Razziali' in 1938 to the fall of Mussolini's Fascist regime in 1943. It complements and contributes to other research on the topic of the dichotomy that exists between Mussolini and the Jews in Italy. There is a division between those believing that Mussolini was ambivalent to the issues of Jewish people in Italy and those who consider Mussolini to be little different to the more infamous Nazi individuals associated with the murder of about six million Jewish people.

This research complements and contributes to the study of Jewish people in Axis countries during the Second World War. Furthermore, it shows how Mussolini allowed Delasem to exist and to operate in an environment supposedly hostile to pro-Jewish views after the Fascist government tabled the Racial Laws in 1938.