

The aim of this book is to offer the reader a critical edition of the petitions in their original Italian language that (Catholic) Jews residing in Italy submitted to the Fascist General Administration for Demography and Race (Demorazza). Their purpose was either to be “discriminated,” i.e., not subjected to various provisions of Mussolini’s racial laws of 1938, or “Aryanized,” i.e., be considered not of “the Jewish race,” as defined by the convoluted and inconsistent Fascist anti-Semitic legislation. Anyone born of parents who both were of “the Jewish race,” even though professing a religion other than Judaism, was deemed to be Jewish. Consequently, the racial laws affected not only those Italians who considered themselves Jewish, whether secular or religious, but also a significant number of Catholics whose ancestors had been Jewish, as the majority of the cases contained in this volume show.

All documents published in the present book come from the private archive of the Jesuit Pietro Tacchi Venturi, a key figure in Church-State relations during the entire period of the Fascist regime, 1922–43. Even though the forty-four stories of this volume constitute just a proverbial drop in the ocean, they are quite representative for a number of reasons. First of all, the authors of the petitions come from various regions of Italy: from Venice and Trieste to Milan and Turin, from Genoa to Florence, Rome, and Naples, from Tripoli to Addis Abeba. Some of the authors were born and grew up outside Italy, either within Sephardic or Ashkenazi culture. They represent different social classes, including the aristocratic families of Finzi Contini, Lumbroso, or Ottolenghi, although most of them were middle-class urban professionals, typically physicians, lawyers, army officers, or journalists. Some of them were low-profile citizens; many others were prominent figures in Italian science, culture, and politics. Their cases show a vast range of persecutions that resulted from the implementation of the racial laws: loss of citizenship, residence permit, job, property, and servants; non-recognition of marriage or baptism; non-recognition of military or civil merits toward the homeland and the Fascist regime; legal inequality within mixed families; dire economic situation; and emotional distress.

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