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ITALIAN SYNAGOGUES IN ISRAEL

THE CASE OF CONEGLIANO, 'FROM DEATH TO LIFE'¹

Abstract

The research proposes a reflection on the events that led to the demolition and reconstruction of around thirty Italian synagogues in Israel between 1952 and 1970. This phenomenon affected both extinct Jewish communities and surviving communities with few members, which decided to reduce the number of sacred furnishings. The Veneto region, located in north-eastern Italy, significantly contributed with a substantial number of synagogues and furnishings. Umberto Nahon, known as the 'synagogue collector', worked to ensure that as many sacred items as possible found a new life in Israel.

The first operation, in 1951, included the transfer of the synagogue of Conegliano (Treviso), which was freely given by the Jewish Community of Venice after the extinction of the Conegliano Jewish community. The temple was reconstructed in Jerusalem in a room at Ha Ma'ale High School and was inaugurated on April 4, 1952. The building in Conegliano that once housed the synagogue was demolished in 1965. Today, where the former Jewish ghetto stood, a new residential complex has been built.

In 1967, the Franceschini Commission highlighted the risk of transferring Jewish cultural heritage abroad, but this issue was not officially addressed. Among Italian cultural circles, there were different views regarding the transfer of religious assets – some justified the operation, while others condemned it.

Keywords

Veneto, Conegliano, synagogue transfer, Umberto Nahon, Ma'ale School, cultural heritage

¹ Federico Luzzatto, 'La comunità ebraica di Conegliano Veneto e i suoi monumenti', *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 22, 8 (1956), 354–360.