



Journal of Israeli History: Politics, Society, Culture

Publication details, including instructions for
authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fjih20>

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Available online: 18 Jun 2008

To cite this article: Eva Pfanzelter (1998): Between Brenner and Bari: Jewish refugees in Italy 1945 to 1948, *Journal of Israeli History: Politics, Society, Culture*, 19:3, 83-104

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13531049808576140>

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Between Brenner and Bari: Jewish Refugees in Italy 1945 to 1948

Eva Pfanzelter

THE EXODUS OF JEWISH REFUGEES from Eastern Europe did not culminate in Austria. Many Jews continued on to Italy in order to reach Palestine by ship. For most of them, Italy was the "last haven" before they reached their new home — either Palestine, the United States, or Canada. There are a number of reasons why Italy specifically became this "last haven." Geographically, Italy was favorably located with a long coastline that was difficult to monitor. From the Italian coast, the only thing that separated the refugees from Palestine was a sea journey across the Mediterranean. Furthermore, Italy's population was not overtly anti-Semitic. True, in the last years of Mussolini's dictatorship, there were traces of anti-Semitic propaganda and legislation, but fundamentally this outlook did not gain the support of the Italian population. Another reason for the influx into Italy, according to observers, was that the country's penurious situation made looking after Jewish refugees an additional burden, and thus brought pressure to bear on Britain to increase the entry quotas for Palestine. The American observer Ellery W. Stone, in any case, saw Italy as the Jewish Brigade's "dumping ground" for Jewish refugees.¹

Many of the procedures and phenomena that have been noted about Austria reoccurred in Italy. As in Austria, the refugees in Italy found a network of aid organizations under the guise of the *Merkaz Lagola* or the *Bricha*, and as in Austria they were housed, fed, and transported on illegally. But in many respects Italy differed from Austria. This article will present the basic structures of this Jewish exodus in Italy. Special attention will be focused on the South Tirol area, because most of the Jewish refugees crossing the Austrian border initially came to South Tirol, their first stop being with the *Bricha* in Meran. Unfortunately, this chapter of the Jewish exodus in Italy — and hence in South Tirol as well — is still one of those periods in postwar history to which insufficient attention has been paid, in both Italian and South Tirol historiography.²

1 Report by Ellery W. Stone to Allied Forces Headquarters, 8.8.1945, HQ AC, Office of the Chief Commissioner. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 11202/105/65.

2 The only contemporary reports available are a few partially contradictory and short references in longer works, such as Ephraim Dekel, *B'riha: Flight to the Homeland*, New York, 1973, p. 382; Yehuda Bauer, *Flight and Rescue: Brichah*, New York, 1970; Aba Gefen, *Unholy*

The Organization of Refugee Affairs in Italy

When Allied troops in Italy began to advance northward in the fall of 1943, they found that many of the internment camps which the Fascists had set up for mainly foreign Jews had been abandoned. Many Jews had been deported to the extermination camps before the German Wehrmacht had withdrawn. The inmates who were in these camps left them as soon as the German troops had departed in order to seek safety elsewhere. Thus in the spring of 1945, the only German-run camps still operating were the police transit camp in Bozen-Gries³ and the one at Risiera di San Sabba⁴ in Trieste.⁵

As early as the winter of 1944, the Allies were confronted by a large number of refugees, not only Jewish ones. Various institutions were set up to tackle the resultant problems.⁶ The most important was the Displaced Persons and Repatriation Sub-Commission (DPRSC), which in February 1945 submitted plans for coordinating and organizing the flow of refugees and those returning home for the postwar period in Italy. Order was to be created out of the chaos in two phases. The first phase was to look after the war refugees in the camps, while the second phase was concentrated on efforts to repatriate them. The Allies expected about one million Italians to return home across Italy's northern border after the end of the war, with about 30,000 non-Italians migrating from Northern Italy to their homelands in Central and Northern Europe. That meant that returnees as well as transits would pass through South Tirol, and many would make an intermediate stop there. As a result, the Allied plan for South Tirol envisaged the following organization of camps: group headquarters (still to be defined) in Julisch-Venezien; an assembly center in Bozen with a border repatriation

Alliance, New York, 1975; and *Ebrei dell'Alto Adige negli Ani Trenta e Quaranta*, Florence, 1994, pp. 11–137. As a basis for this article, extensive use has been made of the files of the US occupying forces in Italy. These are often reports and letters from the Displaced Persons and Repatriation Sub-Commission of the Allied Commission in Rome, or the offices in the various regions of Italy.

- 3 On the concentration camp in Bozen, cf. Juliane Wetzell, "Das Polizeidurchgangslager Bozen," Wolfgang Benz, ed., *Die vergessenen Lager* (Dachauer Hefte 5), Dachau, 1989, pp. 28–39.
- 4 On the Risiera di San Sabba concentration camp, see *inter alia* Karl Stuhlpfarrer, "Das Tötungslager in der Risiera di San Sabba in Triest," *Zeitgeschichte* 23 (1996), Vol. 3/4, pp. 113–121; further information on "La Risiera di San Sabba" can be found at <<http://www.windcloak.it/cultura/risiera.htm>>. Date: 6.10.1997.
- 5 Klauf Voigt, *Zuflucht auf Widerruf. Exil in Italien 1933–1945*, Vol. 2, Stuttgart 1993, pp. 425 ff.; DPRSC sources refer to 108 Jews, who were liberated on April 28 and 29. Comité International de la Croix Rouge Administration, 6.6.1945. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 11202/128/36.
- 6 Voigt, *Zuflucht*, p. 430; National Archives of the United States (Ed.), Subject File Heading for the Records of the Allied Control Commission (Italy) 1943–1947, Washington D.C. 1982.

point in Sterzing; and an additional border repatriation point in Innichen for the assembly center in Udine. Transport onward from Bozen and Udine would be routed via Verona.⁷

As it turned out, the plan was soon superseded by reality. An uncontrollable stream of returnees and refugees from the north flooded Italy before the internment camps and assembly centers could be set up and coordinated. By June 1945, a daily total of 2,000 people were counted in Bozen arriving from Austria and Germany by military trains.⁸ Most of these arrivals were Italians returning to their home towns and villages. But as early as June, a relatively large number of refugees of other nationalities also made their way to Italy.⁹ These included a stream of East European Jews who had not been expected by the Allies.

In addition in June 1945 there were already in Italy many Jews — former internees — who had no intention of returning to their countries of origin. Most of them were looking for ways of emigrating to the United States or Palestine, legally or illegally. The upshot was that thousands of refugees spent months living in the refugee camps in Italy where they had to be fed and clothed. In tackling this task, the Allied authorities and aid organizations were confronted not only by financial problems, but above all by the constantly changing directives from the Allied and Italian authorities who were responsible. In addition, coordination with offices and agencies north of the Brenner Pass in Tirol and Bavaria was extremely difficult.¹⁰

In order to solve these problems, in mid-June 1945 the Allied headquarters in Italy and Germany decided to issue directives for coordinating the stream of refugees through Europe. As a result of these directives, the migratory movement through Italy soon proceeded in a slower but relatively routine fashion. However, there were still no provisions for dealing with the problem of the Jewish refugees. By the middle of August 1945, Allied authorities also gave permission for larger groups of Jewish refugees to enter Italy. In one case, a particularly large group of 700 Jews from Switzerland were allowed to travel directly to Southern Italy so that from Bari they could locate some means of transport to Palestine.¹¹

7 DPRSC Plan for Northern Italy, 28.2.1945, HQ AC, DPRSC. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10000/164/1048.

8 Report for Week Ending 13 June 1945, 13.6.1945, AMG Bolzano, Repatriation Division. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 11202/128/36.

9 Monthly Report for May 1945, HQ AC, DPRSC. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10000/164/1747.

10 Monthly Report for May 1945, HQ AC, DPRSC. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10000/164/1747.

11 Monthly Report for July 1945, *ibid*; Monthly Report for August 1945, 4.9.1945, HQ "A" Group, DPRSC. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10000/164/1742.

However, it was not until the winter of 1945-46 that the emigration of Jewish refugees to Palestine and the attendant migratory movement through Europe became a major problem for the Allied authorities.¹² Time after time during the next few months and years, there were vain attempts to solve the question of the immigration of Jewish refugees to Italy and their onward migration to Palestine.¹³ Ultimately they concentrated on simply offering at least food and shelter to the flood of new arrivals in Italy. Up to 1948, there were several dramatic incidents, including one in the spring of 1946 in La Spezia, involving the two ships "Fede" and "Fenice." After a hunger strike that lasted for weeks, several hundred Jews forced entry into Palestine.¹⁴ From August 1946 onward, the British maritime blockade of Palestine further aggravated the situation. As a result, the Italian government, justifiably apprehensive about the prospect of the refugees remaining in Italy for an extended period, changed its policy and politely but firmly rejected the Americans' request to temporarily accommodate an additional 25,000 refugees housed in Austrian camps.¹⁵ However, there was no tightening of border checks.

Jewish Refugees in Italy

Once the Jewish refugees had reached Northern Italy, sooner or later they finished up in one of the Allied camps where at least they were clothed and fed. At the end of May 1945, a start had been made in Northern Italy to set up DP assembly centers and inspection camps that required representatives from each nation be appointed to be responsible for the repatriation of their countrymen. Thus national concentrations soon developed in the camps. For example, in the Verona and Bozen camps there were mainly Germans, Hungarians, Czechs, Romanians, and Bulgarians, while stateless people and Jews were housed in the UNRRA camps at Di Bagnò, Di Leuca, and Ferramonti.¹⁶

By the end of August 1945, the first camps were closed and administration was transferred from the Allies to the Italian authorities since most of

12 Monthly Report for September 1945, HQ AC, DPRSC. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10000/164/1747.

13 Cf. Katrin Oberhammer, "Mit der Bricha durch die französische Zone nach Südtirol," pp. 199-224, Thomas Albrich, ed., *Flucht nach Eretz Israel: die Bricha und der jüdische Exodus durch Österreich nach 1945*, Innsbruck, 1998.

14 Ze'ev Venia Hadari, *Second Exodus. The Full Story of Jewish Illegal Immigration to Palestine, 1945-1948*, London, 1991, pp. 135-140; Gefen, *Alliance*, p. 105.

15 Thomas Albrich, *Exodus durch Österreich. Die jüdischen Flüchtlinge 1945-1948* (Innsbrucker Forschungen zur Zeitgeschichte 1), Innsbruck, 1987, pp. 125ff.

16 Monthly Report for May 1945, HQ AC, DPRSC. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10000/164/1747; Monthly Report for June 1945, *ibid*; Monthly Report for July 1945, *ibid*.

the Italian returnees had already been repatriated.¹⁷ In contrast, the influx to the camps with Jewish inmates continued unabated.¹⁸ In June alone, some 4,500 foreign Jewish refugees arrived from Innsbruck; in September some 6,000 were accommodated in the camps in Italy. The Allied authorities decided to solve the problem by immediately diverting the refugees to Austria. However, at first there were no plans for implementing this operation. In addition, at this point the Allies still believed that the end of the Jewish exodus would come by September 1945.¹⁸ The situation eased for the time being because in October not only were 400 Jewish refugees able to emigrate from Italy to Palestine, but in addition Italy received 800 entry visas for Palestine since the quota in Northern Europe had not been fully used up.²⁰ However, this fortunate situation for the authorities did not last long. By the beginning of December 1945, the camps in Cremona and the South were full again.²¹

Jewish Aid Organizations in Italy

As elsewhere, the most important agency to offer help to Jewish refugees in Italy was the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (the Joint), whose headquarters were in Rome. While the Joint's official duties were limited to promoting the reintegration of Jews and to providing assistance to those who wanted to emigrate to the United States, the organization also tried to help the illegal Jewish refugees also by any means that were allowed. Above all this meant financial support for Jewish aid organizations and providing papers.²² As in Germany and Austria, the Joint was confronted in Italy with a situation where the Italian Jewish religious communities wished to have little to do with their "brothers and sisters" from the East. Thus only in the years immediately after the war did the Joint receive the support of the local communities, and it was practically impossible to persuade Italian

17 The last camps were only handed over at the end of 1946. Monthly Report for November 1945, *ibid*; Monthly Report for October 1946, *ibid*.

18 Monthly Report for July 1945, *ibid*; Monthly Report for September 1945, *ibid*; Monthly Report for November 1945, *ibid*.

19 Repatriates and Displaced Persons Situation in Northern Italy as at 29 July 1945, 7.8.1945, HQ AC, DPRSC. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10000/164/1048; Repatriates and Displaced Persons Situation in Northern Italy as at 9 September 1945, 10.9.1945, *ibid*.

20 Monthly Report for October 1945, HQ AC, DPRSC. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10000/164/1747.

21 C.B. Findlay for distribution, "Accommodation Centres for those of Jewish Faith," 3.12.1945, HQ AC, Displaced Persons and Repatriation Commission, AMG. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10000/164/2203; Monthly Report for November 1945, HQ AC, DPRSC. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10000/164/1747.

22 *Ibid*.

Jews to welcome newcomers into their communities.²³ In part, this may explain why ultimately, so few Jewish refugees remained in Italy.

Illegal flight in Italy was supported mainly by two Jewish organizations: the Delegazione Assistenza Emigrazione, better known as DELASEM, which acted as the organizer of refugee aid; and the Jewish Brigade and the "Center for the Diaspora" (Merkaz Lagola) in Italy, which consisted largely of soldiers from this unit and at the same time constituted an assembly point for *Bricha* personnel,²⁴ who carried out irreplaceable work.

After Mussolini's order in December 1939 disbanding the Comitato di Assistenza agli Ebrei in Italia (COMASEBIT), DELASEM was set up as a department of Italy's Israelite communities with its headquarters in Genoa. The Ministry of the Interior allowed DELASEM to organize travel to Palestine by Jews or to aid those who wished to travel. As early as June 1940, however, a majority of DELASEM members were arrested and interned. DELASEM managed to survive, but its work was greatly curtailed until the organization entirely disappeared from the scene in the course of 1941-42. Only after the Allies invaded Southern Italy was it resuscitated in Bari in the summer of 1944 by its former personnel. With financial support from the Joint, it soon opened offices in Naples, Rome, and Florence.²⁵

After the end of the war DELASEM played a major role with offices in all Italy's major cities and in the vicinity of important train stations. The organization channeled the flow of refugees through Italy and arranged for food and papers. DELASEM offices did not hesitate to use their own stamps to authenticate documents. This probably made DELASEM the only underground organization to issue "legal" papers. The office in Milan, at No. 3 Via Conda, became the largest distribution point of DELASEM documents.²⁶ The Merkaz Lagola also had its headquarters in a hotel situated at No. 4 Via Unione in Milan, and as a result Milan was generally the first destination for Jewish refugees.²⁷

At the same time, the Jewish Brigade was important when it came to establishing escape routes and to help with escaping, a role that it had assumed rather unwittingly. As early as June 1945, Jewish refugees were running into members of the Jewish Brigade while crossing the Italian border at

23 Yehuda Bauer, *Out of the Ashes: The Impact of American Jews on Post-Holocaust European Jewry*, Oxford, 1989, p. 246.

24 Gefen, *Alliance*, p. 72.

25 Voigt, *Zufucht*, pp. 275-286 and 441.

26 Vincent La Vista to Herbert J. Cummings, Report "Illegal Emigration Movements in and through Italy", 4.8.1947. NA, RG 84, Austria, Political Advisor, Top Secret, Gen. Records 1945-1955, Box 2, Appendix "C".

27 Gefen, *Alliance*, pp. 72ff.

Tarvis in an unorganized fashion. The latter willingly continued to help the refugees and gradually this turned into organized transports from Austria to Italy.²⁸ However, the Jewish Brigade was not entirely unprepared for this role. In 1944, shortly after arriving in Italy, it had set up a committee to act as an aid organization for the refugees. This was the “Center for the Diaspora” in Italy, Merkaz Lagola, mentioned above. Eventually the Brigade, or the Merkaz Lagola, set up its main camp at Pontebba, near Tarvis, and refugees were transferred from there to the regular Allied DP camps in Udine and Modena. Mordechai Surkis, the first head of the *Bricha* in Europe and the contact to the *Bricha* in Austria, also worked in Pontebba.²⁹ Pontebba soon became the reception center for hundreds of Jewish refugees from the British zone in Austria, who were smuggled in military trucks across the border at Tarvis or via East Tirol and Innichen to Pontebba.³⁰ In the short period during which the Brigade was in Tarvis — May to July 1945 — 8,000 Jewish refugees reached Italy with help from this organization.³¹

These activities did not, of course, remain unnoticed for long. Thus the Jewish Brigade also received its marching orders on July 22, 1945, and on July 28 it left Tarvis for Belgium.³² At this time, however, personnel from Palestine — including one of the *Mossad* heads, Yehuda Arazi — had joined the Brigade, and some 100 members of the armed forces did not move on with the troops. They formed the hard core of the *Bricha* in Italy, and were very soon cooperating closely with the *Bricha* base in Meran. They also helped care for the refugees and organized the setup of kibbutzim and teaching Hebrew.³³

In order to camouflage its activities, the Merkaz Lagola — which had also been active since 1945 under the name “Organization of Jewish DPs in Italy” and issued a weekly newspaper *Badderech* (“On the Way”) as an information sheet³⁴ — set up a series of other organizations under a whole range of names through which Jewish refugees could obtain assistance. These camouflage organizations were most important as ostensible legal addresses for the Joint’s financial assistance. Of the following aid organizations that existed in Rome in the summer of 1947, practically all are simply camouflage addresses of Merkaz Lagola: Convertiti, Via Sicilia 159; Union of Italian Israelite

28 Bauer, *Flight*, pp. 96ff.

29 Gefen, *Alliance*, p. 72.

30 Bauer, *Flight*, pp. 96 ff.; Bauer, *Out of the Ashes*, p. 25.

31 Bernard M. Casper, *With the Jewish Brigade*, London, 1947, pp. 62, 83.

32 For further detail, cf Albrich, *Exodus*, pp. 22ff.

33 Dekel, *B’riha*, p. 279; Bauer, *Out of the Ashes*, p. 42; Hadari, *Second Exodus*, p. 123.

34 Conference of Jewish Displaced Persons in Italy, November 26–28, 194, 31.11.1945. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10000/164/2203.

Communities, Lungo Tevere Sanzio 2; American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Via San Basilio 9; Delegazione Assistenza Emigrazione (DELAEM), Via Principe Amadeo 2; Merkaz Lagola,³⁵ Via dei Mille 26; Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS); Nuova Organizzazione Sionistica (NOS), Via Nomentana 44, Int. 1;³⁶ Ufficio Palestinese, Via Catalana 3; Organizzazione Semitica, Via Principe Amadeo 2.³⁷

The "Underground Railway" from the Alps to Bari

The Jewish underground had also organized itself efficiently and was able to feed thousands of refugees and transport them directly through Italy, even using the official DP facilities for that purpose. The authorities soon spoke of the "underground railway" which brought Jewish refugees from the Alpine passes via the shelters in Milan and Rome to the ports in the south of Italy. Despite the many different groups, the transport of refugees operated practically without a hitch, testifying to careful planning and coordination. For many in the South, this "underground railway" led to ships to Palestine. A second secret route to the ports in Southern Italy led to ships coming from Yugoslavia and crossing the Adriatic to Bari. Several times a week, small vessels with some 30 Jewish passengers arrived in Bari from Yugoslavia. This route was used mainly from November 1946 onwards, because the harsh winter made the Alpine passes extremely difficult to negotiate.³⁸

But the Jewish aid organizations' "underground railway" network did more than simply transport and feed the refugees. Once they reached Italy, the often stateless refugees were still without passports, travel permits or other documents. As a result they had to make their way, frequently with the help of the Jewish aid organizations, to Milan or Rome, where they reported to a Jewish DP camp or to one of the Jewish aid organizations and received the necessary documentation. As noted above, the Jewish aid organizations ran the camps or at least made administrative personnel available while the UNRRA looked after feeding and clothing the refugees. In Italy, as in the

35 Vincent La Vista mentions here an organization called "Merkes" and adds the expression "Jewish Central Committee": This is the Merkaz Lagola, Vincent La Vista to Herbert J. Cummings, Report "Illegal Emigration Movements in and through Italy," 4.8.1947. NA, RG 84, Austria, Political Advisor, Top Secret, Gen. Records 1945-1955, Box 2.

36 This is probably the Federazione Sionistica Italiana: in a letter from the Federazione Sionistica Italiana to Admiral Stone, 3.8.1945, NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10000/164/2203.

37 Vincent La Vista to Herbert J. Cummings, Report "Illegal Emigration Movements in and through Italy," 4.8.1947. NA, RG 84, Austria, Political Advisor, Top Secret, Gen. Records 1945-1955, Box 2.

38 Ibid., Appendix "C".

camps in other transit countries, the number of inmates remained constant while their identity changed all the time.³⁹ The reasons for this practice have already been described in detail.⁴⁰

However, the refugees were housed not only in UNRRA camps. Many were accommodated in the camps of the Allied Commission, in the numerous kibbutzim and, as a last resort, in private quarters that had been purchased and for which the Jewish aid organizations paid in advance. In addition, refugees were also frequently housed on the premises of Italian-Jewish organizations, in Jewish schools, etc.⁴¹

From Austria to Italy: Escape Routes across the Alpine Passes

However, first the Jews had to reach Italy. The main escape routes from Austria were the Alpine passes and the scarcely checked crossings from Yugoslavia to North-East Italy to the camps at Tarvis, Pontebba, Trieste, Udine, and Padua. At the beginning of the Jewish exodus it was possible for Jewish refugees to use the border checkpoints from Yugoslavia to Italy with practically no problems on account of help from the Jewish Brigade.⁴² However, as early as July 1945 the Jewish Brigade was transferred, precisely because it had been assisting the Jewish refugees, and hence greater use had to be made of other border crossing-points. From then on, the main routes used were through the Alps from Austria to South Tirol: the border crossing at Sillian/Innichen, the Krimmler-Tauern route, and first and foremost the Brenner and Reschen Passes. These four routes are described below according to their importance as escape routes for Jewish refugees. Other Alpine passes that never became important escape routes were also used.

One of the first escape routes was across the border between East and South Tirol. This crossing near Sillian and Innichen was used by Jewish aid organizations only during the first weeks after the 1945 liberation when the Jewish Brigade was stationed in North-East Italy. There were a number of reasons for this state of affairs: East Tirol was part of the British occupation zone, and hence it was extremely difficult to smuggle Jewish refugees to Italy. In addition, there was only one method of crossing the border here: The

39 Ibid.

40 Albrich, *Exodus*; cf. Marko Feingold, "Meine Tätigkeit bei der Bricha," pp. 187–192, and Oberhammer, "Mit der Bricha durch," in Albrich, *Flucht nach Eretz Israel*.

41 Vincent La Vista to Herbert J. Cummings, Report "Illegal Emigration Movements in and through Italy," 4.8.1947. NA, RG 84, Austria, Political Advisor, Top Secret, Gen. Records 1945–1955, Box 2.

42 Report by Ellery W. Stone to Allied Forces Headquarters, 8.8.1945, HQ AC, Office of the Chief Commissioner. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 11202/105/65.

refugees mixed with the Italian homecomers⁴³ and tried to reach the camps at Pontebba near Tarvis, Udine⁴⁴ or Meran.⁴⁵ The camps at Tarvis could, however, be reached in a simpler fashion via Klagenfurt, without having to make the detour via East Tirol, and this was probably also one of the reasons why this route was only used for a short period. When the Jewish Brigade was transferred out of Italy at the end of July 1945, it was scarcely possible, however, to continue to use these routes and camps because of the stringent British controls.⁴⁶

The route across the Krimmler Tauern, the only direct crossing from the American zone in Austria to Italy, was also used for only a relatively short period, July and August 1947. According to official data, in July 1947 up to 250 and in August up to 500 Jews each week undertook the long and arduous route across the Tauern Mountains in order to reach Meran.⁴⁷ As a result of the weak presence of Italian police in Ahrntal and their sympathetic attitude to the refugees, only a few illegal transports were tracked down and sent back.⁴⁸ Dani Laor, one of the *Bricha* leaders in Meran, rented a house in Ahrntal near the Italian border crossing from the commander of the Italian border patrol. Any refugees who were picked up were locked up in this house until they were taken back to Innsbruck. A *Bricha* member from Meran would then normally pick up these refugees, and only a handful of Jews left at the house would then be taken back to Austria the next morning by the new patrol. These "illegals" would then be released in the woods just after crossing the border, and from there they would soon walk back to Italy.⁴⁹

Originally the Italians had suggested bringing the prisoners to the British base in Sillian, where British soldiers would take them to the American zone. However, the British authorities did not agree to this procedure, recognizing the difficulties this would make in their own zone and that this would harm their reputation.⁵⁰ On the other hand the American authorities refused to react to the British requests and to strengthen the inspection points in Krimml, since at this time instructions had been issued by Washington to

43 Bauer, *Flight*, p. 97.

44 Report by Ellery W. Stone to Allied Forces Headquarters, 8.8.1945, HQ AC, Office of the Chief Commissioner. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 11202/105/65.

45 Dekel, *B'riha*, p. 283.

46 For details see Albrich, *Exodus*, pp. 22ff.

47 Unfortunately, on the basis of the files no answer can be provided to the question of why the refugees undertook the detour from the Puster Valley (Pustertal) to Meran instead of traveling on directly to Verona and Milan. In addition, the same question also applies to transports from the Brenner Pass via Bozen. Meran must have been more important than can be shown by the current state of the files.

48 Report to Deputy Commissioner, undated, Fall 1947. PRO, FO 1020/3452.

49 Gefen, *Alliance*, p. 235.

50 Albrich, *Exodus*, p. 166.

neither aid nor obstruct the Jewish refugees.⁵¹ For this reason, the crossing through the Krimmler-Tauern was used throughout the entire summer. However, when the first snow fell in September 1947 the crossing again became impassable.⁵²

During the entire period, the main routes across the Austrian-Italian border were through the Brenner and Reschen passes. While it was only possible to smuggle small groups via the remote and sparsely patrolled border crossings in the mountains, the Brenner and Reschen passes were also suitable for larger groups who tried to enter Italy either on trucks or in trains, using forged documents.⁵³ Crossing through the two passes was a relatively straightforward undertaking. If the refugees arrived on trucks, they were unloaded a few kilometers before the border, walked across the border, and sent to the trucks waiting on the other side of the border. In this way, up to 500 Jews frequently arrived in Italy every week on foot. Vincent La Vista from the American Secret Service describes the situation as follows: "In spite of all attempted control, this method of entering Italy is so simple that it is merely a matter of walking across the border and, if apprehended, being turned back to try again the next day. The process is repeated until success is achieved."⁵⁴ In addition, many Jewish refugees — despite official reports about their deportation — were not sent back to Austria, but instead went first to the IT 23 camp in Bozen and then to Verona where Jewish organizations looked after their co-religionists.⁵⁵

The Reschen Pass became a topical issue in the winter of 1945-46 when checks along the Brenner route were stepped up. Transports via the Reschen came either directly from Salzburg, or from Gnadenwald near Innsbruck.⁵⁶ Once the refugees were in South Tirol, they were accommodated in the Vintschgau district in private houses in St. Valentin auf der Heide, in Mals, Spondinig or Schlanders, where they waited for vacancies in the Jewish community's accommodation in Meran or for direct onward transport to Verona and Milan.⁵⁷ As a well-known spa town, Meran offered an ideal refuge because the *Bricha* was able — particularly in the winter and spring of

51 Ibid., pp. 165–168; Report to Deputy Commissioner, undated, fall 1947. PRO, FO 1020/3452.

52 See also Viktor Knopf, "Der Fluchtweg über den Krimmler Tauern," in: Albrich (ed.), *Flucht nach Eretz Israel*, pp. 193–198.

53 Aide-mémoire, Director, Political Division, US Element, 23.11.1946. PRO, FO 1020/2406.

54 Vincent La Vista to Herbert J. Cummings, Report "Illegal Emigration Movements in and through Italy," 4.8.1947. NA, RG 84, Austria, Political Advisor, Top Secret, Gen. Records 1945–1955, Box 2, p. 8.

55 Gefen, *Alliance*, pp. 76ff.

56 See Gefen, *Alliance*, pp. 85–90.

57 Aide-mémoire, Director, Political Division, US Element, 23.11.1946. PRO, FO 1020/2406.

1946 — to send hundreds of refugees, camouflaged as TB patients, to the Meran sanatorium “to be cured.”⁵⁸ Entry over the Reschen Pass peaked at the beginning of April 1946, when the French unexpectedly opened the crossing for Jewish refugees for a three-day period. After this, a definitive ban was imposed on their crossing through the Reschen Pass. During this time — and because the stream of refugees continued in the next few days also — the *Bricha* brought some 1,100 Jews from Innsbruck to Meran.⁵⁹

The Brenner was the number one refugee route, although it was earmarked solely for the repatriation of Italians and was closed to all other refugees. On July 1, 1945, the pass was officially opened for rail transports of returning Italians. The trains normally went directly from Innsbruck to Verona without stopping. This brought some 3,000 individuals to Italy every day, and then in accordance with an agreement between the Allied headquarters in Germany and Italy after July 20, this was stepped up to some 5,000 people a day.⁶⁰ As early as July, the first reports were received in Italy about illegal border crossings by Jews from Austria. On July 27, as many as 4,204 people passed across the Brenner, of whom just 1,700 had arrived the previous day. The Allies did not wish to see such a flow of refugees occurring. Practically all the refugees claimed to be Italians and were smuggled into Italy via Mittenwald on the German border and Innsbruck. The British authorities vehemently insisted on more stringent checks on travel documents and demanded that these transports be banned.⁶¹

In the early summer of 1945, the *Bricha* in Innsbruck and Meran managed to pass off Jewish refugees as Italian returnees, prisoners-of-war and forced laborers and to send them to Italy with false papers and Italian uniforms in sealed railway carriages bought by the *Bricha*.⁶² This practice was maintained for a considerable period, but increasingly they had to use other means as well: Often the Italian military was bribed to allow the Jewish refugees to cross the border unchallenged. In subsequent years, checks at the Brenner Pass were constantly stepped up, but normally this lasted for only a few days. As a result, in December 1945 the British set up their own check-post at the Brenner Pass after they tracked down groups of some 300 Jewish refugees who had entered illegally in trains of returnees.⁶³

58 Bauer, *Flight*, pp. 174ff.

59 Gefen, *Alliance*, pp. 104ff.

60 Monthly Report for July 1945, HQ AC, DPRSC. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10000/164/1747.

61 Telegrams, 27.7.1945 and 1.8.1945. PRO, FO 1020/2405.

62 Gefen, *Alliance*, pp. 82–84; Bauer, *Flight*, pp. 172ff.

63 Dekel, *B'riha*, p. 141; letter by A.L. Hamblen to Chief Commissioner, HQ AMG/AC, 30.11.1945. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10000/164/2203.

On both sides of the Brenner Pass there were organized gangs of smugglers who would take entire families and their possessions to Italy in return for money. The services of smugglers were used particularly by Hungarian Jews who came to Tirol in the summer of 1947. In addition, many Jews made their own way across the border. In Italy they then had to rely on the help of personal acquaintances or the support of organizations from their home countries. This applied above all to Hungarians and Yugoslavs who were able to receive documents, housing and food from a series of associations for political refugees from their home countries. For example, Hungarian refugees received help from a Hungarian night porter in Bozen who did not require any documents from Hungarians and gave them tips as to how to deal with their onward journey.⁶⁴

Time Spent in South Tirol

Many Jewish refugees normally spent a short time in South Tirol on their way to the large camps in North and South Italy, unless they were transported directly to Verona. The most important places of refuge during this time were certainly the accommodations of the Jewish aid organizations in Meran, as well as private accommodations which the *Bricha* organized along the travel route in the Vintschgau district between the Reschen Pass and Meran. However, the DPRSC official refugee camps — in the spring and summer of 1945 there were five such camps in South Tirol, including a soup kitchen in Bozen — also housed Jewish refugees time and time again.

From June 1945 onward, the Allied authorities in South Tirol used several camps for the repatriation of Italians. Responsibility for coordinating the flow of refugees and channeling them to the appropriate camps lay with the headquarters of the “A” camp group in Bozen (Samtalerstrasse 21), which was also in charge of the following camps: the IT 22 camp in Innichen, in the Pustertal district, which could house some 5,000 inmates; the IT 51 camp in Mals for some 3,000 individuals; in Bozen the IT 24 camp at the “Istituto della Previdenza Sociale” in the Dominikanerplatz which was able at times to accommodate 3,000 people; and the IT 23 camp in the former concentration camp on the Meranerstrasse, from which 108 Jews were liberated on April 28 and 29, 1945, for 800 people. The IT 52 camp in Verona also belonged to the “A” camp group.⁶⁵

64 Vincent La Vista to Herbert J. Cummings, Report “Illegal Emigration Movements in and through Italy,” 4.8.1947. NA, RG 84, Austria, Political Advisor, Top Secret, Gen. Records 1945–1955, Box 2, Appendix “D”.

65 Repatriated and Displaced Persons Situation in Northern Italy as at 22 June 1945, 25.6.1945, HQ AC, DPRSC. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10000/164/1048; letter by Col.

Most camps in South Tirol were closed down during the summer of 1945 after most of the Italians had been repatriated. The camp in Innichen was closed down in August and the buildings returned to Italian military units. The camp in Mals continued to exist until September, but with a minimum complement under the command of a British lieutenant. In the course of September, the IT 24 camp in the Dominikanerplatz in Bozen was also closed down. As early as August, a major part of this camp was handed over to the new J Assembly Center established under Allied supervision in a free wing of the old hospital. Up to the beginning of September, this kitchen fed all of the 190,000 refugees and returnees.⁶⁶ From the end of September onward, the only camp left in Bozen was IT 23 on the Meranerstrasse.

The IT 23 camp was primarily a refuge for returning South Tirolese Optanten and for this reason was also earmarked for housing Reichsdeutsche (Reich Germans) and Austrians. Nevertheless, it was constantly providing accommodation for Jewish refugees. Although the Allied authorities were not allowed to document the Jews as a separate nation — strictly speaking the refugees were to be assigned to their country of origin — they were nevertheless registered as Jews since they constituted a “special problem.” By September 1945, officially, 6,000 Jews had gone through the Group “A” camps, which by then consisted only of the camps in Bozen, Verona and Udine; in October, the figure was 1,200; and in November around 1,000.⁶⁷ Because of the close of other camps, the camps in Verona and Bozen experienced an increase in inmate numbers of up to 50 per cent in October and November 1945 as a result of the arrival of Jews and Greeks.⁶⁸

At the end of 1945, Meran then became the main refugee for Jewish refugees in South Tirol. Since the fall of 1945, a group of *Bricha* personal, recruited mainly from Jewish Brigade soldiers had been involved here in smuggling Jews across the Brenner, the Reschen, and later the Krimmler-Tauern or other passes, arranging accommodation, organizing onward transport to Verona or if possible directly to Milan and Rome, and issuing false

Findlay to Provincial Commissioner, 28.7.1945. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 11202/128/36; letter by William E. McBratney to all Staff Sections and CAOs, 31.7.1945, *ibid.*, McBratney press communiqué, 22.8.1945, *ibid.*; Comité International de la Croix Rouge Administration, 6.6.1945. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 11202/128/36.

66 Monthly Report for August 1945, 4.9.1945, HQ “A” Group, DPRSC. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10000/164/1742; letter by McBratney, 4.6.1945. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 11202/128/36; Handing over or Closing down Northern Camps, 22.8.1945, HQ AC, DPRSC. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10000/164/1698.

67 Monthly Report for October 1945, HQ Venezia Region AMG, ACC Italy, 10000/105/248; Monthly Report for November 1945, *ibid.*

68 Monthly Report for August 1945, 4.9.1945, HQ “A” Group, DPRSC. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10000/164/1743.

papers for their onward journey. Meran offered a number of amenities: accommodation, medical care, sufficient personnel, and above all it was a convenient point of departure for onward travel to Milan or the camps in the south of Italy.

In the very first weeks after the war, Jewish Brigade soldiers had brought hundreds of refugees from the British zone to Meran, via Villach and Innichen. Under the command of a Jewish Brigade veteran, the *Bricha* unit then quickly developed into group of 35 persons who until 1946 passed themselves off as a team of American wartime volunteers, taking lodgings at the Terminus Hotel.⁶⁹ The *Bricha* heads in Meran were Boris Jochvedson,⁷⁰ Marko Schoki, and Dani Laor.⁷¹ In the first few months after the war, they made sure that it was known in the South Tirol camps and in many jails in Northern Italy that Jews could find refuge in Meran. However, until the end of 1945 the influx into Meran remained limited. This only changed when in January 1946 the *Bricha* in Innsbruck and Salzburg discovered the Reschen Pass as a favorable crossing for truck transports. This turned Meran into a Jewish assembly center where refugees were housed for a few days, and then transported on to Bozen or Milan, normally at night. Walter Götz remembers an average of 250 to 400 refugees a week coming through Meran from February 1946 until the spring of 1947.⁷² It should not be forgotten, however, that there were also peaks, such as the 1,100 already mentioned who arrived within a few days in April 1946 and had to endure the overcrowded camps in Meran for a longer period because all accommodation in Milan was occupied as a result of the “Fede” incident.⁷³

Meran had its own sad history: The relatively large prewar Jewish community had been completely destroyed by Fascism and National Socialism, and any surviving Jewish property had been confiscated by September 1943, when German troops invaded Italy.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, after the end of the war a

69 Dekel, *B'riha*, p. 283. The size of the *Bricha* group and the fact that most Jewish refugees were smuggled through Meran shows that Meran was more than simply a small-scale transit station. Was Meran the *Bricha* center in Northern Italy? Was Meran the turntable of the Jewish exodus in Italy?

70 Federico Steinhaus, *Ebrei/Juden, gli ebrei dell'Alto Adige negli anni trenta e quaranta*, Florence, c. 1994, pp. 129–132.

71 Monthly Report for August 1945, 4.9.1945, HQ “A” Group, DPRSC. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10000/164/1742; Gefen, *Alliance*, pp. 234–236.

72 Steinhaus, *Ebrei/Juden*, pp. 129–132.

73 Some 1,200 Jews were picked up at the beginning of April 1946 at the port of La Spezia and detained for around six weeks after trying to reach Palestine illegally on the “Fede” and “Fenice” ships. Gefen, *Alliance*, pp. 112ff.

74 Cinzia Villani, *Ebrei fra Leggi Razziste e Deportazioni nelle Provincie di Bolzano, Trento e Belluno, Trento* (Collana di Monografie edita dalla Società di Studi Trentini di Scienze Storiche), Trient, 1996.

few Jews returned to Meran and tried to revive the Jewish community. A major figure was Walter Götz. Provincial Commissioner William E. McBratney appointed Götz "Commissary Prefect" for the Meran Jewish community on June 20, 1945, with the task of reestablishing the Jewish community. Götz first restored the synagogue and the cemetery and then devoted himself to looking after the Jewish refugees.⁷⁵

One of his main goals was to get the sanatorium in Meran operating again. In September 1945 it was handed over to the Jewish community, and with the help of the Joint he managed to get the building back in shape by February 1946 and used it to house Jewish refugees. It was only returned to its original purpose in May 1946. The first director of the sanatorium was Sidney Gottlieb, who was in close contact with the *Bricha* heads in Meran and the Allies' Public Health Sub-Commission. In subsequent years, the sanatorium provided accommodation for many refugees. The existence of the sanatorium allowed a number of *Bricha* transports to be brought to Meran under the guise of transporting invalids.⁷⁶

In addition to the sanatorium, a number of private houses in Meran provided accommodation, above all Rametz Castle and Labers Castle. The strangest rumors circulated about these two stately homes and their inmates. Rametz Castle belonged to Albert Crastan, a member of the Jewish community who passed himself off as Swiss consul and member of the International Red Cross. During the war Crastan had belonged to the SS company stationed at Labers Castle, also known as the "Wendig Group," under Major Friedrich Schwendt, who for his part was responsible only to Ernst Kaltenbrunner and Heinrich Himmler. Four other former "Jewish agents" of this group — Isaac van Harten, Carlo Lovioz, and two others called the "Manser brothers" in the source material — remained free after the end of the war despite their earlier activities. As early as 1947, Van Harten was already living in Tel Aviv and demanded compensation from the American government to the tune of five million dollars for his property which the Americans had confiscated after May 1945. It turned out that this was former SS property from Castle Rametz, Castle Labers, and other buildings in Meran. Part of the confiscated SS holdings was comprised of large amounts of counterfeit British pound notes. In 1947, Carlo Lovioz, also a Jew — a former agent of the Schwendt Group and former director of the Banca Commerciale in London — was living in Como where he was once again acting as a Banca Commerciale director. The two others — the "Manser brothers" — were known for their success in managing to constantly

75 Letter by McBratney to Capt. Earl, 20.7.1945. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 12303/205/140; Steinhaus, *Ebrei/Juden*, pp. 115ff.

76 Ibid., pp. 26–29.

gain access to various authorities with the assistance of the International Red Cross. The links between the rest of the company at Labers Castle and the Jewish underground were not known to the Allied secret services in Italy.⁷⁷

Van Harten was probably the most inscrutable figure. He is well remembered by contemporary witnesses such as Yehuda Bauer. Federico Steinhaus called the “v.H.” case a unique one. He was originally from Hungary, had Dutch citizenship, and from March/April 1945 was ostensibly a director of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Meran and Bozen. The civilian population in Meran praised him highly for his work, as the Americans found when checking up on him in June 1945. After the end of the war, van Harten had the Joint issue him a certificate stating that he had no criminal record and attesting that in 1935 (sic!) he had been arrested for taking part in the Röhm putsch and excluded in 1938 from the NSDAP, whereupon he had become involved with saving thousands of Jews from Germany. The American Counter-Intelligence Corps, on the other hand, had found that van Harten was a member of the German counter-espionage service who had been decorated by the NSDAP and was being sought on war crimes charges: Since 1943 he had issued papers for Jews attesting that they could emigrate to Palestine, as a means for gaining control of their possessions.⁷⁸ It is also a fact that as early as 1945 van Harten took up contact with *Bricha* members who were on the way from Austria and Hungary, giving them counterfeit pound notes as means of payment. The pound notes were then always used in emergencies until it ultimately became known that they were false.⁷⁹

However, a more detailed investigation is called for into what happened in connection with Castle Rametz, Castle Labers and the Jewish refugees in Meran, and it is to be hoped that further archival material can be located with the Jewish community in Meran. According to information provided by Walter Götz, some 17,000 Jewish refugees migrated through Meran during the period from February 1946 to the spring of 1947.⁸⁰

Official Agencies' Problems with Jewish Refugees

There were a number of “special problems” caused by Jewish refugees. Anger about failure to comply with agreements was one of these, as were repeated

77 Vincent La Vista to Herbert J. Cummings, Report “Illegal Emigration Movements in and through Italy,” 4.8.1947. NA, RG 84, Austria, Political Advisor, Top Secret, Gen. Records 1945–1955, Box 2, Appendix “C”.

78 Steinhaus, *Ebrei/Juden*, p. 134.

79 Bauer, *Flight*, pp. 106ff.

80 Steinhaus, *Ebrei/Juden*, p. 133.

black-market offenses and forged documents that were constantly being confiscated. In 1947, Vincent La Vista was even convinced that the entire Jewish underground was financing itself by selling Red Cross food packages on the black market.⁸¹ Forgery of documents often assumed such proportions that things became too much even for the most liberal authorities, as contemporary witnesses reported:

On April 14 another group was sent to Innsbruck, the idea being to utilize the Nauders arrangement and transfer them to Italy. But this time they were stopped by a British sergeant at Resia, on the Italian side, and returned to Austria. Ironically, Yonah'le Eisenberg, who had been sent there to save the situation, was caught by the Americans dressed in British Army uniform and with papers under four different names. This was too much even for the Americans, and Yonah'le was tried by a military court. Through the intervention of an American captain who was working with Gefen, the young dare-devil was released.⁸²

At the end of October 1945, the commander of the "A" camp group had concluded a report about Jewish DPs on a resigned note: "No refugees have ever given so much trouble." The authorities rarely managed to send the Jewish DPs and refugees on to the next camp in an orderly fashion. Generally either half as many or twice as many as scheduled arrived at the camp to which they had been allocated. It was impossible to control the flow of refugees, or to issue directives because in any case the directives were not complied with.⁸³ The situation was most aptly summarized by Colonel Hartley, the liaison officer for the Allied Commission in Bari:

The organisation [*Bricha*] has complete control of the Jews in the camps. It shifts people from one camp to another, it makes lists of the inmates and decides who is to sail for PALESTINE. Those whom it prefers to select are the young and strong and, for the most part, males. The organisation is constantly acting without reference to the Camp Commandants with the result that they are being reduced to the position of hotel-keepers and issuers of food and

81 Vincent La Vista to Herbert J. Cummings, Report "Illegal Emigration Movements in and through Italy", 4.8.1947. NA, RG 84, Austria, Political Advisor, Top Secret, Gen. Records 1945-1955, Box 2.

82 Bauer, *Flight*, p. 176; the person in question was Captain Stanley M. Nowinski, cf. Gefen, *Alliance*, pp. 114-116.

83 Monthly Report for October 1945, HQ "A" Group and "F" Group, DPRSC. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10000/164/1742; letter by S.U. Nahon, HQ AC, to JAP, 2.1.1946. CZA, Z 5/1021.

clothing. Many of those Jews reported absent without leave in the previous paragraphs may merely have been shifted to another camp by the Committees, in order to complete a KIBUTZ. [...] control of movement is impossible.⁸⁴

It was also difficult for the authorities to distinguish legal DPs from Jewish refugees who had entered the country illegally. Most of them had crossed the border and entered Italy with forged papers, sometimes with the support of UNRRA offices or with French identity papers. An example was the group of 30 Jews who arrived at a camp in Verona in December 1945, bearing the marching orders of a French officer instructing them to make their way “via Italy to Palestine.”⁸⁵

Often the authorities were also simply confronted by faits accomplis. A campaign at the beginning of December 1945 aroused a special sensation: Two groups, each of 300 Jews, demanded to be admitted to the Padua camp after in one case actually being sent from Bozen to the camp at Como, or in the other case after it had been decided to send them back to Austria.⁸⁶

Nor were the authorities successful in controlling the flow of refugees by means of an official refusal to accommodate Jewish refugees who had entered the country illegally in Allied Commission camps. If they tried this tactic, suddenly the new arrivals again became Poles, Romanians, or Yugoslavs fleeing political persecution, or claimed to have been born in Palestine and to have moved to Eastern Europe for reasons to do with work or a visit between 1925 and 1938.⁸⁷

With time, the Jews in the camps organized themselves efficiently and left the camps whenever they wanted without the permission of the camp commander. The practice also became instituted of giving another camp nearby as the place of origin when arriving at a camp, so that the camp management did not know who had just crossed the border and could not expel the refugees from the camps as illegals.⁸⁸ The refugees' discretion also gave the authorities quite a few headaches:

84 H.S. Hartley, “Notes on confidential enquiries made at the UNRRA Camps for displaced Jews at Santa Cesara, Tricase, Santa Maria di Leuca and Santa Maria Bagni, between 17 and 19 November 1945, by AC Liaison Officer, Bari,” AMG. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10000/164/2203.

85 Monthly Report for November 1945, HQ “A” Group, DPRSC. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10000/164/1743. Monthly Report for December 1945, *ibid.*

86 Letter by A.L. Hamblen to Chief Commissioner, HQ AMG/AC, 30.11.1945. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10000/164/2203.

87 HQ Venezia Region, AMG, “Displaced Persons” Report, undated. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10000/164/2203.

88 Report by Col. C.B. Findlay to G-5 Section AFHQ, 12.12.1945, *ibid.*

It will be seen that no two camps show the same information, and this can be understood only by realising that the refugees are concealing as far as possible both their origin and their means of crossing the border.⁸⁹

Hence in Italy they lived without undergoing any controls or influence on the part of Italian and Allied authorities, whose inexperience made them helpless to deal with the problem.

*".... more than simply saving life alone...":
Zionism as a Starting Point and a Goal*

The entire Jewish underground in Italy — including DELASEM and the Jewish Brigade, Merkaz Lagola and the *Bricha* — naturally had a marked Zionist orientation. This could be seen above all in the training that these aid organizations gave the Jewish survivors on the way to Palestine.⁹⁰ Efforts were also made in the Jewish camps to imitate the kibbutz organizations in Palestine and encourage the refugees to run their own affairs,⁹¹ as well as to obtain papers and ships to get them to Palestine. For Yehuda Arazi, who arranged for most of the illegal ships to Palestine, "Aliya ... was more than simply saving life alone. Immigration to Palestine was more than a goal in itself, it was another form of war [against the British]."⁹²

In the Jewish camps, Jewish Brigade soldiers had not only quickly established organizations that were responsible for dealing with the flow of refugees and for communication between the individual camps, but also set themselves the goal of preparing the Jews who had come from the concentration camps and the East for future lives in Palestine. Instructional material came from Palestine and the United States.⁹³ In addition, DELASEM and the Jewish Brigade organized a series of groups in which 50 to 100 young Jews in each group were prepared by agricultural training for life in Palestine. On the one hand these organized groups were centers for Jewish culture, but in addition they also acted as a framework for young people to receive basic military and agricultural training. By the beginning of 1946, over 2,000

89 DP Officer to HQ AC for DPRSC, 28.8.1945, *ibid*.

90 "Emigration to Palestine" is also one of the goals laid down in writing of the "Organization of Jewish DPs in Italy," Conference of Jewish Displaced Persons in Italy, November 26-28, 1945, 31.11.1945. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10000/164/2203.

91 Letter by Nahon, HQ AC, to JAP, 2.1.1946. CZA, Z 5/1021.

92 Cited by Hadari, *Second Exodus*, p. 122.

93 Letter by Nahon, HQ AC, to JAP, 2.1.1946. CZA, Z 5/1021.

individuals were already organized in these frameworks, which were established and financially supported by the Jewish aid organizations.⁹⁴

As has been indicated, the reason for setting up this infrastructure was the Zionist orientation of those who organized the Jewish exodus. With an eye to Palestine, the *Bricha* primarily channeled young, single, strong men and marriageable young women to these organized groups in Italy. American observers had no problem discerning the underlying intention: Only the young could be prepared for the struggle in Palestine; unmarried individuals were important, because upon their marriage, an individual entry visa to Palestine allowed two people to enter the country legally.⁹⁵ The age structure of the Jewish DPs and refugees in Italy reflected this policy: more than 75 per cent were aged between 19 and 40 years — in other words, of a suitable age for military service — some ten percent were aged between 14 and 18 years, one percent were small children, and only ten percent or so were over 40 years old.⁹⁶ Out of this relatively young refugee population, only the most qualified would then make the journey to Palestine.⁹⁷

How many Jewish refugees actually reached Italy prior to the founding of the State of Israel can only be estimated. There are few official statistics about the Jewish refugees in Italy, and these are extremely contradictory. Apparently at the end of 1945 there were some 14,000 living in the country,⁹⁸ with some 16,000 there in February 1946.⁹⁹ Other sources speak of 15,000 just for the period May to mid-August 1945.¹⁰⁰ According to its own figures, in 1946 the *Bricha* smuggled some 13,000 refugees to Italy despite the clearly hardening Italian attitude; of these, just 7,500 could be taken illegally to Palestine in the course of the year on *Hagana* ships. In the course of 1947, fewer than 15,000 Jewish refugees managed to enter Italy, while approximately the same number were transported by ship from Italy in the direction of Palestine.¹⁰¹ However, during the entire 1945–1948 period, just

94 H.S. Hartley "Notes on confidential enquiries made at the UNRRA Camps for displaced Jews at Santa Cesarea, Tricase, Santa Maria di Leuca and Santa Maria Bagni between 17 and 19 November 1945, by AC Liaison Officer, Bari," AMG. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10000/164/2203; Letter by Nahon, HQ AC, to JAP, 2.1.1946. CZA, Z 5/1021.

95 Report by Col. C.B. Findlay to G-5 Section AFHQ, 12.12.1945. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10000/164/2203.

96 Memorandum on the Jewish Situation in Italy, 24.2.1946. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10000/164/1835.

97 Gefen, *Alliance*, p. 221.

98 Report by Col. C.B. Findlay to G-5 Section AFHQ, 12.12.1945. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10000/164/2203.

99 Memorandum on the Jewish Situation in Italy, 24.2.1946. NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10000/164/1835.

100 Bauer, *Flight*, p. 97.

101 Bauer, *Out of the Ashes*, p. 247.

5,375 Jews from Italy actually reached Palestine; most *Hagana* vessels were intercepted by the British and their passengers interned in Cyprus.¹⁰² At the beginning of 1948, therefore, it may be estimated that some 20,000 were still living in DP camps and kibbutzim in Italy.¹⁰³ According to *Bricha* figures, during the entire 1945–1948 period, some 50,000¹⁰⁴ Jewish refugees came to Italy from Austria and Germany. Vincent La Vista identified the uncertain nature of all these figures — not just for the Jewish refugees — as early as the summer of 1947:

The undisputed fact remains that the number of authentic displaced persons in Italy will never be known. Reliable estimates are that there are upwards of one hundred thousand, but equally reliable estimates place the number at approximately one million. There is absolutely no way of knowing exactly who in Italy is a legitimate displaced person, and who is not. There are so many forged and fictitious passports and identity documents in circulation that their actual number will never be known.¹⁰⁵

102 Hadari, *Second Exodus*, pp. 280–298.

103 Bauer, *Out of the Ashes*, p. 247.

104 Dekel, *B'riha*, p. 285.

105 Vincent La Vista to Herbert J. Cummings, Report "Illegal Emigration Movements in and through Italy," 4.8.1947. NA, RG 84, Austria, Political Advisor, Top Secret, Gen. Records 1945–1955, Box 2.