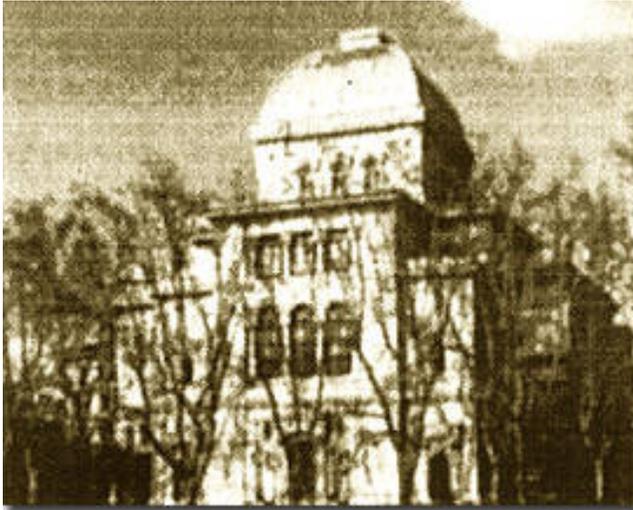




## Chapter 8 Mussolini and Anti-Semitism

"Synagogue overlooking the Tiber."



In 1914, Mussolini shrewdly noted, during a visit to Berlin, that militarism was once again rearing its head. He saw and objected to Pan-Germanism; first because it was dangerous to Italy, and second because of the general acceptance of the racial theories of Houston Stewart Chamberlain [1] and others, which were subsequently adopted by Hitler. They seemed to him to be ridiculous. He was opposed to anti-Semitism on the grounds that the Jews were an essential historical and useful element in Italian society.

Condemnation of anti-Semitism abounded in Mussolini's speeches, writings and conversations. In 1933 and 1934 he was an open opponent of Germany's racial policies. He instructed the Italian ambassador in Berlin to make personal representations to Hitler expressing Italy's concerns concerning those odious policies. These unsolicited and unwelcomed representations became unpleasant to Hitler and he rejected out of hand the ambassador's Fascist views on these matters of German social policy.

Mussolini chose and relied on Jewish friends as readily and as freely as he would any other person in his journey, regardless of their race or creed as long as they were in agreement with his Fascist ideals and goals. Two women who influenced him in those days were Jews; Angelica Balabanoff and Margherita Sarfatti. Aldo Finzi held an office in Mussolini's first cabinet and Guido Jung was his finance minister for many years. Jews sat as Fascists in the Italian Parliament and, at the very beginnings, five Jews were at the founding meeting of Fascists in Milan, in 1919.

He was however strongly opposed to Italian and international Zionism on the basis that Zionism was more political than a representation of the Jews of the world, and that it was calculated to provide a conflict of loyalties in the Jewish people. He wanted to demonstrate to the world that Fascism, with its Latin humanity, was a superior and more desirable option than the Nazi barbarism, then becoming a social reality.

Jews were brought to Rome by Pompey the Great and were soon appreciated for their financial and medical skills. They continued to prosper and grow in numbers. Jews migrated to every other region and province in Italy, where they formed important and viable communities.

Only in 1556, when they were forced to live inside a walled enclosure in the middle of Rome, was there any systematic persecution of the Jewish population of Rome.

He knew that certain people in the West wanted and needed a war, and that in Adolph Hitler, there existed a prepared and anxious contestant in the political problems then facing Europe and the Far East. Given the horrific economic conditions then existing in most capitals of the world due to the protracted and unprecedented Great Depression, an all out war was not only inevitable, but imminent and desired. It was the emergence of the legitimization of the newly born Zionist movement by the English parliamentarian, Lord Balfour with the passage of the Balfour Declaration which placed, on the European scene, another antagonist at this critical time in European and world history. These European disputes had been simmering since the Treaty of Versailles and were now no longer capable of being placated or ignored. Where was Italy to go in this scheme of things? To remain neutral, while others prepared for war, seemed to Mussolini to be a dangerous stop-gap measure. Also Italy was too important to both the Western powers and to Germany, its modern navy controlled the Mediterranean waters and its airforce, one of the world's best at this period of history, the skies.