FROM NEGLECT TO CIVIC MOBILISATION: THE PESARO (ITALY) SYNAGOGUE AS A CASE OF SHARED HERITAGE GOVERNANCE

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Resumo | Abstract

Italian synagogue heritage presents a distinctive configuration within the European landscape: a network of historically rooted communities, often small in size and located in medium or small scale urban centres, whose synagogues have experienced abandonment, changes of use, dispersal of furnishings, and complex preservation processes throughout the twentieth century. Within this framework, the seventeenth century synagogue of Pesaro (in the Italian region of Marche) constitutes an emblematic case for analysing the dynamics of Jewish heritage management in post community contexts. Drawing on a substantial documentary *corpus* preserved in the «Tullia Zevi» Library Archive (Rome) and in the records of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities (Rome), this paper reconstructs the events that, between the 1930s and the 1980s, shaped the fate of Pesaro's synagogues and their furnishings, showing how structural fragilities, urban planning policies, internal conflicts, and limited resources contributed to the progressive deterioration of the buildings and the mobility of their movable heritage.

The sources attest to the dispersion of the furnishings — from the Aron transferred to Livorno in 1970 to the ritual objects relocated to Ancona and Israel — and to the inability of the Jewish Community to ensure the preservation of the site.

Yet the case of Pesaro is equally marked by an unusually strong civic and municipal engagement in safeguarding both the building and its historical memory. Popular petitions, sustained pressure from local citizens, interventions by the Superintendency, initiatives promoted by the Municipality, attempts at public acquisition, and proposals for cultural reuse reveal a broad, collective effort to prevent the disappearance of the synagogue and to reassert its significance within the urban fabric.

This case study offers a critical lens through which to examine heritage mobility, institutional responsibilities, and conservation strategies for identity bearing sites that no longer serve a ritual function.

Palavras-chave | Keywords

Italian Jewish heritage; Pesaro; heritage mobility; Jewish memory; synagogue.

Resumo biográfico | Short biography

Valeria Rainoldi holds a PhD in Culture of Europe. Environment, Spaces, Histories, Arts, Ideas from the University of Trento (June 2018). Her research focuses on Jewish architecture, religious spaces, cemeteries, and early hospital structures. Her 2020 monograph, Il Ghetto di Verona e la sua sinagoga. Tutela, demolizione e ricostruzione dal XVIII al XX secolo, was published by Cierre (Verona).

Since May 2024, she has been a member of the Board of Directors of the Foundation for Jewish Cultural Heritage in Italy.

For the years 2024–2026, she has received a research grant from the European Association for Jewish Studies (EAJS) for the project Venetian Synagogues from Italy to Israel.

Together with Sharon Reichel, she is the curator of the exhibition Viaggio in Italia. Alla scoperta del patrimonio culturale ebraico, to be held at the National Museum of Italian Judaism and the Shoah-MEIS (Ferrara), from 10 October 2025 to 14 June 2026.