

JEWISH HERITAGE AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN ITALY AND SLOVENIA: THE PROJECT OF RESTORATION AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE ANCIENT JEWISH CEMETERY OF GORIZIA

(VALDIROSE / ROŽNA DOLINA, NOVA GORICA)

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Introduction

The Foundation for Jewish Cultural Heritage in Italy (www.beniculturaliebraici.it) aims to promote the recovery, conservation, restoration and enhancement of the Italian Jewish historical and artistic heritage, and to spread its knowledge in Italy and abroad. For these reasons in 2016, the Foundation began to take an interest in issues related to the restoration, conservation and enhancement of the ancient cemetery the Jewish Community of Gorizia (now in Slovenian territory after the division of the city between Italy and Yugoslavia in 1947) immediately identified as a "special" place to work on. The Jewish presence in Gorizia, that has been attested since the XVIth century, with the Morpurgo and Pincherle families, engaged in lending activities. The Jewish component has left numerous signs of its presence and given to the city illustrious personalities, such as the rabbi Isaac Samuele Reggio and the philosopher Carlo Michelstaedter. The Jewish Community of Gorizia was almost completely cancelled with the deportation in the camps between 1943 and 1944. A witness of the Jewish presence in Gorizia are the Synagogue and the ancient cemetery of Valdirose, with more than 600 gravestones, the oldest of which dates back to 1371, and today in a state of serious degradation. The urgent restoration and recovery interventions are therefore the last chance to save this precious heritage that allows us to read and trace historical, cultural, religious and human paths of great interest, and that is moving towards a rapid destruction due to different motivations: the degradation caused by the variation of the microclimate and forms of "social" aggression such as vandalism and attempts at theft.

Methodology

The project, which has a total cost of around 500,000 euros, will start at the beginning of 2021 and will be developed in two directions:

- 1. Historical research.* The restoration project foresees an archival research aiming at the collection of indirect sources that are relevant to the history of the cemetery, from its establishment to the present day. The collection of data on burials is also of particular importance, in order to identify the quantity of tombstones, often buried today, and their dating. The documents relating to the constructive development of the cemetery, the registers of burials and any available graphic documents will also be sought, consulting both the state and municipal archives and the archive of the Jewish community. Once the archival material has been identified, it is planned to carry out its computerized reproduction and its inventory. All this work will be carried out in collaboration with the University of Udine, with whom we have recently formalized a convention.
- 2. Architectural restoration.* We proceeded to set up the whole activity of restoration of the cemetery and tombs trying to involve as much as possible the Italian and Slovenian productive, craft and educational realities. For this reason we plan to develop the project through the construction of a site / school of experimental restoration in which students will be assisted by two tutors (artisan restorer and builder) and a coordinating technician. The whole area of the cemetery has been divided into sectors and the first phase of the construction site will develop in each sector the excavation of the ground, carried out by hand or with small equipment, for the search and discovery of gravestones that have remained buried and covered by earth and vegetation. Then, the different phases of the restoration will be carried out: cleaning, gluing, filling, consolidation and protection. Finally, the project also includes the realization, in the ex-temple of the funerary rites, of a permanent exhibition and information space regarding the restoration project, the history of the cemetery and of the Jewish community of Gorizia, as well as the famous people buried here.

Conclusions

The project of restoration and enhancement of the Jewish cemetery of Valdirose was certainly one of the strong points that determined the recent victory of the joint candidacy of the Italian as European Capital in 2025. The goal is therefore to complete the project in all its aspects by that date. The realization of this ambitious project will allow, on the one hand, to rediscover at an international level this very special and "unique" historical and architectural heritage, and on the other hand that Gorizia and Nova Gorica, in the past lacerated by political and ethnic fractures, regain together the Memory in the name of the common Jewish Heritage.

