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Undated file photo of Pope Pius XII. Researchers have discovered new documentation that substantiates reports that Catholic convents and monasteries in Rome sheltered Jews during World War II, providing names of at least 3,200 Jews whose identities have been corroborated by the city's Jewish community, officials said Thursday, Sept. 7, 2023. The documentation doesn't appear to shed any new light on the role of Pope Pius XII during the Nazi occupation of Rome. (AP Photo)

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Researchers have discovered new documentation that substantiates reports that Catholic convents and monasteries in Rome sheltered Jews during World War II, providing names of at least 3,200 Jews whose identities have been corroborated by the city's Jewish community, officials said Sept. 7.

Researchers from the Pontifical Biblical Institute, Israel's Yad Vashem Holocaust research institute and Rome's Jewish community released the findings at an academic workshop Sept. 7 held at the Museum of the Shoah, part of Rome's main synagogue.

The documentation doesn't appear to shed any new light on the role of Pope Pius XII during the Nazi occupation of Rome. Historians have long debated Pius' legacy, with supporters insisting he used quiet diplomacy to save Jewish lives and critics saying he remained silent as the Holocaust raged across Europe, and even as Roman Jews were rounded up and deported from the Vatican's backyard in 1943.

Rather, the new documentation provides names and addresses of Romans who were sheltered in Catholic institutions during the war, which had only previously been reported in vague terms and numbers by Italy's preeminent historian of the period, Renzo de Felice, in a 1961 book, according to a joint statement from the Pontifical Biblical Institute, Yad Vashem and Rome's Jewish community.

The documentation was discovered in the archives of the Biblical Institute, which is affiliated with the Jesuit-run Pontifical Gregorian University. It lists more than 4,300 people who were sheltered in the properties of 100 women's and 55 men's Catholic religious orders. Of those, 3,600 are identified by name, and research in the archives of Rome's Jewish community "indicates that 3,200 certainly were Jews," the statement said.

"Of the latter it is known where they were hidden and, in certain circumstances, where they lived before the persecution. The documentation thus significantly increases the information on the history of the rescue of Jews in the context of the Catholic institutions of Rome," the statement said.

The names are not being released to protect the privacy of the people and their descendants, it added.

It is unclear whether any of the Jews listed were baptized. Recently opened Vatican archives of the Pius papacy suggest that the Vatican worked hardest to save Jews who had converted to Catholicism or were children of Catholic-Jewish mixed marriages, according to the book "The Pope at War," by Brown University anthropologist David Kertzer.

Claudio Procaccia, in charge of the cultural department of Rome's Jewish community, said the documentation doesn't provide any information as to whether the Jews identified had been baptized. But he stressed that the lists provided an important "new element in understanding qualitatively and quantitatively" who was sheltered and their origins.

"This is a very important step," he said in an interview after the workshop, adding that further research was necessary to corroborate further the names listed and their histories, including with other lists in other archives. He noted that discrepancies are likely to emerge down the line since it is known that some people pretended to have Jewish last names to find shelter in Catholic convents, even if they weren't necessarily Jewish.

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Procaccia noted that the Jewish community in 2013 published its own research into the fate of Jews during the Nazi occupation of Rome, entitled "After October 16," the date in 1943 when more than 1,000 of Rome's Jews were rounded up and, two days later, deported to Auschwitz.

Fr. Dominik Markl, of the Pontifical Biblical Institute and University of Innsbruck who helped coordinate the research, said he was moved by the fates of the people named in the documents, "those threatened to be murdered because of the persecution by the Nazi regime, and the many anonymous religious sisters and

priests who risked their own security to help them survive."

In a statement to The Associated Press, Markl noted the significance of the joint research between Catholic and Jewish scholars on an fraught issue which has long divided scholars and often strained relations between Rome's Jewish community and the Holy See.

"We are extremely grateful for the collaboration with the Jewish Community of Rome and Yad Vashem, which is promising to lead towards a more profound understanding of the history of the Shoah in Rome and beyond," he said.