

Micol Ferrara*

*A Scola for 'foreigners' in the modern-age Roman ghetto.
Preliminary findings of a work in progress*

*Some friends really make the heart smile.
To Alice and Ludovico, strangers in Rome.*

In this article I discuss the initial results of my research on the composition of the Jewish Community of Rome in modern times, with particular emphasis on the presence of individuals coming from abroad. Unlike the Middle Ages, which have been amply investigated¹, the presence of foreign Jews in Rome during the modern era constitutes a field of study still largely to be explored. In this regard, it is useful to mention at the outset that the existence of several Synagogues was recorded in Rome in 1471, each one representing a different group: the Synagogue of the Romans, the Synagogue of the Italians (non Romans), the Synagogue of the Germans (or Ashkenazi), the Synagogue of the French, and the Synagogue of the Catalans. As a consequence of the growing diversification of the Roman Jewish population, other new Synagogues were still being established over the sixteenth century: the Sephardi Jews had a Castilian and a Catalan Synagogue; the Italians founded the *Scola Nova*,

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¹ M.T. CACIORGNA, *Comuni, signori, ebrei nel Lazio meridionale*, in «Società e Storia», XLVIII, 1990, pp. 301-336; A. ESPOSITO, *Una descriptio relative alla presenza ebraica nel Lazio meridionale nel tardo Quattrocento*, in «Latium», II, 1985, pp. 151-158.

the *Scola Quattro Capi*, the *Portaleone*² and the *Siciliana*³. Roman Jews referred to the *Scola del Tempio*. Each *Scola* had its own representatives, its own social welfare institutions, and its own treasury and administration. The proceeds of each *Scola* came from donations made by members during the Saturday morning officiations; those who were invited to read out of the Pentateuch (*Parashot*) would also donate money as compensation for the honor received; alms were collected outside the Scole; and some would bequeath their possessions to the place of worship they had attended during their lifetime.

The papal bulls issued in the sixteenth century famously proclaimed a series of restrictive norms regarding Jews residing within the boundaries of the Papal States⁴. When Paul IV's bull of 14 July 1555 (*Cum nimis absurdum*) first established the ghettos⁵, it was decided that each ghetto should have no more than one place of worship. Pius V's bull of 26 February 1569⁶ (*Hebraeorum gens*), forced Jews to «abandon the lands which were property of the Pontifical State, with exception of those who lived in Rome and in Ancona»⁷.

After the parenthesis of Sixtus V's papacy, who with the bull of 22 October 1586 (*Christiana pietas*) had restored the right of the Jews to live in all of the Pontifical States and had allowed the practice of commercial activities, things worsened again under Clement VIII, who brought back the regulations issued by Paul IV and Pius V with the bull of 25 February 1593⁸.

Following these events, the number of members of the Jewish Community in Rome increased dramatically (as it had done previously, following the expulsion of the Jews from the territories under Spanish dominion at the end of the fifteenth century), causing considerable changes in internal

² G. SPIZZICHINO, *La scomparsa della sesta Scola. La sinagoga Portaleone*, Gangemi, Roma 2011.

³ See K. STOW, *Il Ghetto di Roma nel Cinquecento. Storia di una acculturazione*, Viella, Roma 2014.

⁴ R. SEGRE, *La Controriforma: espulsioni, conversioni, isolamento*, in *Gli ebrei in Italia*, I. Dall'Alto Medioevo all'età dei ghetti, a cura di C. Vivanti, Einaudi, Torino 1996 (Storia d'Italia. Annali, 11), pp. 709-778.

⁵ On the architectural structure of the Roman ghetto, see M. FERRARA, *Dentro e fuori dal ghetto. I luoghi della presenza ebraica a Roma tra XVI e XIX secolo*, Mondadori, Milano 2015.

⁶ N. PAVONCELLO, *Le comunità ebraiche laziali prima del bando di Pio V*, in «Lunario Romano», IX, 1980, pp. 47-77.

⁷ «Abbandonare le terre del dominio dello Stato Pontificio, ad eccezione di quelli che abitavano a Roma ed in Ancona» (see N. PAVONCELLO, *Ricordi di ebrei nella Campagna romana*, in «Lazio ieri e oggi», XV/6, 1979, p. 50).

⁸ M. CAFFIERO, *Storia degli ebrei nell'Italia moderna. Dal Rinascimento alla Restaurazione*, Carocci, Roma 2014.

relations, in customs and traditions, and in personal ties⁹. Some of these changes can be understood by looking at dowry records, which document the geographic expansion of the matrimonial relations of Roman Jews since the beginning of the seventeenth century¹⁰.

The papers of the funding of the *Scola Nova* (still in large part unpublished and held at the Archivio Storico della Comunità Ebraica di Roma)¹¹ can also at least in part contribute to the reconstruction of events regarding those Jews who were forced to a compulsory transfer to Rome and to integrate with the Roman Jewish Community¹². These fundings are documented in 31 files and 32 registries, principally administrative, covering a timeframe that goes from 1566 to 1897¹³. The documentation principally relates to the *jus gazagà* (the right to perpetual tenancy), to testaments, to the already mentioned matrimonial and dowry chapters, to conflicts between confraternities or other *Scole*, to revenues and expenditures. Of especial interest is the *Catalogo degli istrumenti stipolati in Roma riguardanti la Israelitica Scola Nova dal 1628 al 1843 [...]*¹⁴. The *Scola Nova* presumably gathered the Jews who came from other Italian cities, though its location before the establishment of the ghetto cannot be easily determined. There are, however, some documents from the late fifteenth century regarding works carried out on its interior. Later records show it was merged with the other remaining *Scole* (*Castilian, Catalan, Sicilian, and Temple*) in a single building located in Piazza Mercatello (later named Piazza delle Cinque Scole; see [Figg. 1-2](#)), as if to constitute a unique place of worship¹⁵.

⁹ A. FOA, *Ebrei in Europa. Dalla Peste Nera all'emancipazione XIV-XIX secolo*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2004.

¹⁰ A. ESPOSITO, *Gli ebrei a Roma tra Quattro e Cinquecento*, in «Quaderni Storici», 54, 1983, p. 826.

¹¹ Hence cited as ASCER (Historical Archives of the Roman Jewish Community).

¹² S.H. ANTONUCCI, *Fonti sugli ebrei laziali conservate presso l'Archivio Storico della comunità ebraica di Roma: la Scuola Nuova*, in *Gli ebrei e il Lazio (secc. XV-XVIII)*, Atti del convegno «La presenza ebraica nel Lazio: fonti e studi», Cassino, 11 giugno 2008, in «Archivi e Cultura», n.s., XL, 2007, pp. 111-142.

¹³ Unfortunately, nothing except the cover remains of many of the files.

¹⁴ See ASCER, Archivio Medioevale e Moderno, *Catalogo degli istrumenti stipolati in Roma riguardanti la Israelitica Scola Nova dal 1628 al 1843 redatto dal custode dell'Archivio Urbano Nicola Castelli 4 settembre 1863*.

¹⁵ Bice Migliau has provided invaluable information regarding the subdivision of the building of the Cinque Scole in B. MIGLIAU, *Il "risanamento" del Ghetto. Le vicende dell'edificio delle Cinque Scole*, in *Roma Capitale 1870-1911. Architettura e urbanistica. Uso e trasformazioni della città storica*, Marsilio, Venezia 1984, pp. 442-447. For the construction work of the Cinque Scole also see B. MIGLIAU, *Il significato e le vicende dell'edificio*

This occurred at some point after the closure of all the places of prayer of the Roman Jews, sanctioned by a papal order (the event is recorded in a page of the *Libro dei Decreti* held at the ASCER, reporting that «On Sunday the sixteenth of the month of Iyyar 326 which was on the fifth of May the Scole were closed as ordered in Pius V's bull and it was not mentioned [...] until today»¹⁶. But who were the members of the *Scola Nova*? In what way is it possible to retrace their arrival in Rome and follow their personal affairs?

A case of study of particular interest (already documented in the work of Attilio Milano)¹⁷ is represented by the Toscano family¹⁸. Giuseppe Toscano was a banker in Florence (hence the surname), who in 1570 was stricken by the order which cancelled all loans concessions to Jews. With his sons Salomone, Elia and Angelo, he then moved to Rome¹⁹. Around the year 1591 the Toscano family opened a loan-bank in Rome (possibly in Piazza Navona), and in 1605 branched out to Lugo di Romagna²⁰. It seems the family were experienced loan-bankers, who handed their business down from father to son. Indeed, the transmission from father to son was precisely the way banking licenses were inherited. Over the years they also invested in real estate, buying the rights to *jus gazagà* from numerous 'owners' in the Roman ghetto. In April 1619, Giuseppe Toscano's son Elia first took over the *jus gazagà* from Diana Caviglia, paying her the amount of 1,050 *scudi*. The tenancy consisted in a portion of a house in via Rua (one of the most important streets in the Roman ghetto; see Fig. 3), property of Lotario Conti, Duke of the Poli. A few months later, Elia added another portion of the house to the first, which by *jus gazagà* had Leone Asdriglia as a beneficiary. Thus, Elia came into possession of most of the lodging. The dismal conditions of the building made Elia strike an agreement with the Duke of the Poli, whereby Elia would renovate the

delle Cinque Scole, in *Atlante storico delle città italiane. Roma, 2. Il ghetto*, a cura di C. Benocci, E. Guidoni, Bonsignore Editore, Roma 1993, pp. 47-54.

¹⁶ «Di domenica alli 16 del mese di Iyyar 326, che fu alli 5 di maggio furono serrate le Scole per virtù della bolla di Pio V e non fu detto [...] fino a questo dì» (ASCER, Archivio medievale e moderno, *Libro de decreti vecchio della Scola Catalana-Aragonese*, 03U10, f. 201r).

¹⁷ A. MILANO, *Il Ghetto di Roma*, Carocci, Roma 1988, pp. 358-362.

¹⁸ On the Toscano family, interesting information can be found in K. STOW, S. DE BENEDETTI STOW, *Donne ebreë a Roma nell'età del ghetto: affetto, dipendenza, autonomia*, in «Rassegna Mensile di Israel», n. 52, III/1, pp. 63-103, 105-116.

¹⁹ On Jewish bankers in Rome, see C. PROCACCIA, *Banchieri ebrei a Roma. Testimonianze sull'attività di cambio mediante lettera nella seconda metà del Seicento*, in «Zakhor», VI, 2003, pp. 129-146.

²⁰ G. TODESCHINI, *La banca e il ghetto. Una storia italiana*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2016.

house at his own expense in exchange for a reduction of the rent due to the owner. With subsequent acquisitions of the *jus gazagà* in via Rua, the share of real estate owned by the Toscanos became substantial – so much so that the houses bordering the widening of via Rua took the name of 'Piazzetta dei Toscano' (Fig. 4)²¹.

The wealth of the Toscano family and their taste as art patrons has been studied by Daniela Di Castro²². Giuseppe Toscano and his sons pursued the family tradition of making substantial contributions to the embellishment of the *Scola Nova* and actively participated in its architectural renovation²³.

Like other family units of foreigners affiliated to the *Scola Nova*, the Toscano family made efforts to become integrated and establish ties with the social fabric of the city; these efforts involved intermarriage policies aimed to secure bonds of a social and professional nature, as was common among families involved in the banking business, such as the Di Segni and the Tedesco families. In spite of their careful management, the Toscanos were unable to prevent the decline of their loan-bank, which had to be closed down as soon as 1682, when money lending banks in Rome were banned.

A notable example of the intermarriage policy is supplied by the marriage between Orabona Toscano and Alessandro Viterbo (also a member of a famous family of bankers), celebrated in 1685. The Viterbos also belonged to the *Scola Nova* and their attachment to the institution is documented by their wills. When Alessandro died, three years after the wedding, he left all his property and assets to the *Scola*, leaving his nearest of kin completely destitute, and depriving them of the most basic means of support (the Viterbo family became soon renowned as one of the poorest in the ghetto).

Other 'foreigner' Jewish families managed to specialize in the import-export business, regardless of the economic constraints governing the ghetto inhabitants. The Baraffaels, who had moved to Rome from Ancona at the start of the eighteenth century, soon became one of the community's biggest contributors. Their trade didn't only involve spices «from the intermediate markets of Holland, England and France»²⁴ but also other products. Cited

²¹ By the end of the eighteenth century, with the decline of the Toscano family, this place name fell from use. Image 4 offers a hypothesis on the location of the «Piazzetta dei Toscano».

²² The donations made to the *Scola Nova* are described by D. DI CASTRO, *Arte ebraica a Roma e nel Lazio: committenti e doni alla Scuola Nuova alla fine del Cinquecento e nel primo Seicento*, in *Gli ebrei e il Lazio*, cit., pp. 43-58.

²³ Currently at the Museo Ebraico di Roma.

²⁴ «fatte venire dalle piazza intermedie dell'Olanda, dell'Inghilterra e della Francia» (see MILANO, *Il Ghetto di Roma*, cit., p. 101).

in the lists of eighteenth century contributors, Jacob Baraffael appears to have been the main importer of hides, rope and cloths, operating with his sons since the 1750s through the customs of Ripa and Terra²⁵.

In order to find out more about the composition of the families associated with the *Scola Nova* and their settling down in Rome, the census investigations held at the ASCER are an essential source, and particularly rich in information for the period that goes from the end of the seventeenth century to the end of the nineteenth century²⁶.

Our initial survey has shown that the majority of families were mostly active in the trade businesses, which were in fact the only ones permitted to Jews by ghetto legislation. In general, it appears that the Jews who had to leave their place of origin became well integrated into Rome's social fabric²⁷.

Members of the Alatri and Di Nola families were prevalingly dealers; the Dell'Ariceia and Tagliacozzo families were part merchants and part shopkeepers; the Di Tivoli were sellers, whereas the Caro and the Pitigliano families were involved in education. Families that frequently appear in the records of donations and bequeaths are the Biterbò, the Toscano, the Alatri and the Sermoneta²⁸.

Female labour was widespread and is well documented, with women mostly working as seamstresses – a profession which inevitably had to do with rag markets and second hand clothes: one of the occupations branches Jews were practice.

No information has yet been found regarding short-term stays taking place between the seventeenth and eighteenth century. The nineteenth-century census, however, provides valuable data. In fact, this document is the first to mention (ever since the institution of the ghetto) a *Scola Forestieri*, comprising six families and a total of with twenty-two individuals out of

²⁵ M. FERRARA, C. PROCACCIA, *Gli ebrei a Roma nel XVIII secolo: il commercio di lungo raggio*, in *Gli ebrei e il Lazio*, cit., pp. 175-194.

²⁶ Between 2007 and 2011 the 1868 census was entirely digitalized by the author, in collaboration with Professor Eugenio Sonnino. See E. SONNINO, D. SPIZZICHINO, *La demografia degli ebrei di Roma: un focus al censimento del 1868*, in *Ebrei a Roma tra Risorgimento e Emancipazione 1814-1914*, a cura di C. Procaccia, Gangemi, Roma 2013, pp. 79-87.

²⁷ A. FOA, K. STOW, *Gli ebrei di Roma. Potere, rituale e società moderna*, in *Roma, la città del papa. Vita civile e religiosa dal giubileo di Bonifacio VIII al giubileo di papa Wojtyła*, a cura di L. Fiorani, A. Prosperi, Einaudi, Torino 2000 (Storia d'Italia. Annali 16), pp. 557-581.

²⁸ On the Jewish population in Rome between the 1800s and the beginning of the nineteenth century see E. SONNINO, D. SPIZZICHINO, *Studi sulla popolazione ebraica di Roma tra Ottocento e inizi del secolo XXI*, in *La racconta delle anime (1987-2008). Il sacro, il sociale e il profano nelle fonti nominative confessionali*, a cura di C. Grandi, Rome, Aracne 2011, pp. 179-215.

a total of 3,567 residents in the ghetto area. However, no news as to the whereabouts of the *Scola Forestieri* seems to be available²⁹. What is certain is that it was not housed in the building of the *Cinque Scole* – probably due to the fact that access to the *Scole* was controlled more closely after the turn of the eighteenth century. This hypothesis is supported by two letters from the period forwarded by the Jewish Community to the representatives of the *Scola Nova*, communicating the regulations that were to apply to Jewish foreigners arriving in Rome:

[...] As for foreigners who have or will take up residence in this Community, they are obliged to produce a declaration within three years of their arrival in Rome, to be deposited at the archives of his Community, stating the name of the *Scola* which they intend to join, for all required offices. Without such declaration, no foreigner, although they attend a *Scola*, can claim naturalization. They may, in such case, be rightfully excluded by the *Scola* [...]. They must participate in the functions so as to appear in the registries³⁰.

In the assembly registries of the Community, the issue of opening a boarding house for foreigners travelling in Rome is discussed. However, the project was never executed because it was estimated the amount of foreigners visiting Rome was so small that the management expenses would weigh on the Community's treasury without bringing any returns.

These preliminary findings and the hypothesis concerning the *Scola Forestieri* do not at present allow us to provide certain answers regarding the dynamics of Jewish immigration to Rome in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Nonetheless, the sources open up promising research avenues that deserve to be further pursued, partly by consultation of sources and documents that aren't restricted to the Jewish domain.

²⁹ ASR, Camerale II, b. 1.

³⁰ «Quanto ai forestieri i quali hanno fissato o fisseranno stabilmente il loro domicilio in questa Università che esso forestiere sia obbligato entro il triennio del giorno del suo arrivo in Roma ad emettere una dichiarazione da portarsi nell'Archivio della sua Università esprimente il nome della Scuola ove intenderà aggregarsi, per eseguire all'occorrenza ogni sua funzione. In assenza di tale dichiarazione il ridetto forestiere sebbene abbia frequentato e frequenti da tempo una Scuola non potrà mai dirsi ivi naturalizzato. Sarà quindi lecito ad ogni scuola di levarlo [...] Tanto debbano partecipare alle funzioni perché li facciano risultare nei loro registri» (ASCER, Archivio Medioevale e Moderno, *Lettera della Università Israelitica diretta ai Sigg. Deputati della Scuola Nuova per informarli sul modo da tenersi dai forestieri che vogliono sistemarsi in Roma per l'elezione di una Scuola in cui vogliono iscriversi entro il termine di 3 mesi*, 6 dicembre 1835, fasc. 23).

ABSTRACT

Con la bolla *Cum nimis absurdum* (1555), furono istituiti i ghetti e furono imposti agli ebrei i segni distintivi di colore giallo, colpendo duramente la vita quotidiana degli ebrei e provocando migrazioni di massa all'interno dell'Italia. La Comunità di Roma crebbe notevolmente, subendo significativi cambiamenti delle abitudini e delle relazioni interpersonali. I documenti relativi alle *Cinque Scole*, conservati presso l'Archivio Storico della Comunità ebraica di Roma, possono contribuire a ricostruire questi cambiamenti. Tracce del flusso migratorio persistono in alcuni cognomi ebrei romani: l'onomastica può quindi aiutare a identificare gli ebrei che originariamente vivevano al di fuori degli Stati Pontifici. L'analisi dello *jus gazzagà* permetterà poi di esaminare la localizzazione degli stranieri nell'area del ghetto, mentre i cambiamenti nella geografia delle strategie matrimoniali possono essere indagati a partire dai contratti matrimoniali e dagli accordi concernenti le doti. Infine, per illustrare l'atmosfera di convivenza all'interno del ghetto, si è dimostrata utile l'analisi del registro riguardante le controversie tra la *Scola Nova* e le altre *Scole*.

With the Cum nimis absurdum bull (1555), ghettos were established and the identifying yellow mark was enforced, severely affecting the lives of the Jews and causing mass migrations within Italy. The Roman Community greatly increased, with significant changes in customs and in interpersonal relations. Documents pertaining to the Cinque Scole, held at the Archivio Storico della Comunità ebraica di Roma can contribute to reconstruct these changes. Traces of the migration flow persist in some Roman Jewish surnames: onomastics can therefore help to identify Jews originally living outside the Papal States. The analysis of the jus gazzagà will then allow to examine the localization of the foreigners in the ghetto area, whilst changes in the geography of matrimonial relations can be learnt from the matrimonial and dowry chapters. Lastly, to illustrate the atmosphere of cohabitation inside the ghetto area, the analysis of the registry regarding the disputes between the Scola Nova and other Scole has proven useful.

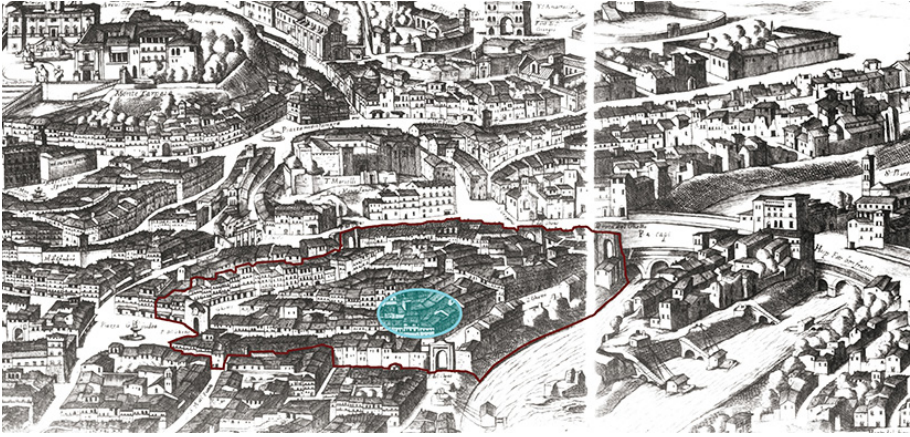


Fig. 1 – Location of the Cinque Scole building *Veduta di Roma*, by A. Tempesta. Revised and enhanced by M.G. De Rossi in 1693



■ S. TEMPIO ■ S. NOVA ■ S. CATALANA ■ S. SICILIANA ■ S. CASTIGLIANA

Fig. 2 – Subdivision of the Cinque Scole building space. Each Scola is shown in a different color

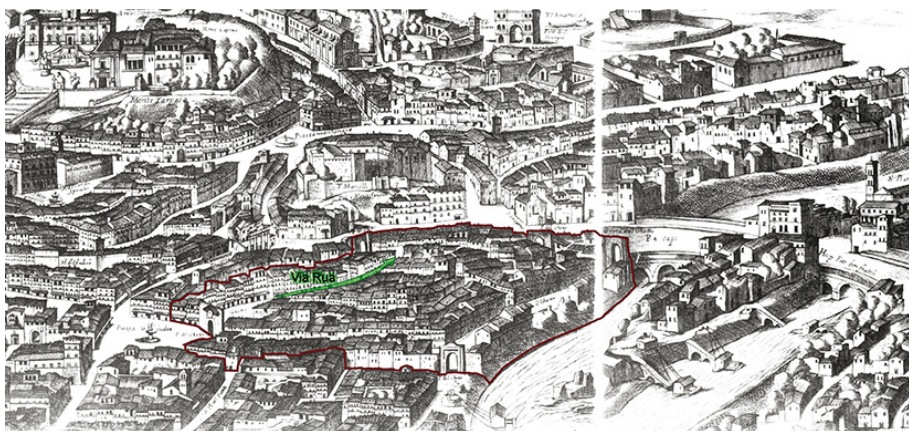


Fig. 3 – Location of via Rúa and of the property belonging to the Toscano family. *Veduta di Roma*, by A. Tempesta. Revised and enhanced by M.G. De Rossi in 1693

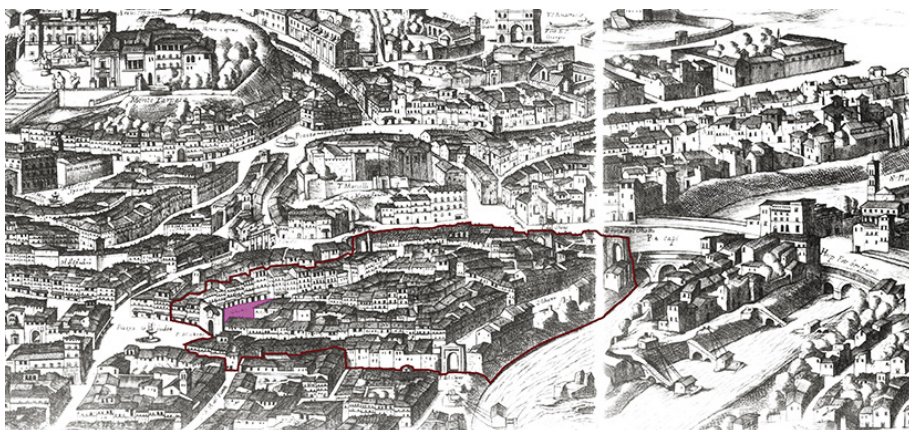


Fig. 4 – Hypothetical location of the old 'Piazzetta dei Toscano'. *Veduta di Roma*, by A. Tempesta. Revised and enhanced by M.G. De Rossi in 1693