



"POPE GREGORY I THE GREAT"
(FRANCISCO DE ZURBARAN)



● LONGOBARDI
● ROMANI D'ORIENTE

THE JEWS IN EARLY MEDIEVAL ITALY (BASED ON THE LETTERS OF GREGORY THE GREAT)

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Introduction

In the third and fourth centuries, due to the Christianization of the Roman Empire, the position of the Jews changed significantly. The imperial laws restricted the Jews in some activities, but granted some autonomy to the Jewish religion, provided some protection. But many things changed with the fall of the Western Roman Empire. The position of various population groups in this transition period is understudied, especially the Jews. It is interesting to trace what changed in the life of the Jews after the fall of the Western Roman Empire, during the formation of the barbarian states.

THE LETTERS OF GREGORY THE GREAT

One of the few sources that contain information about the real situation of the Jews at that time is the letters of Pope Gregory I the Great (540-604). During this difficult period, the Pope's power was not limited to church affairs, as he had to solve practical problems of supply and defense (in particular, because of the threat of the Lombards). Some problems also arose between Jews and Christians, and the Pope had to intervene, so it was reflected in his correspondence.

1. With the help of the letters of Gregory, first of all, we note a certain presence of Jews in Italy, just as it was in former times. We cannot say how many of them there were, but they lived there, especially in the south of Italy, in Sicily. And it was confirmed by archaeological data.

2. Also, the letters of Gregory I can give us some information about the social status and occupations of the Jews. The Jews were *coloni* (tenant farmer) on the Papal lands in Sicily, possessors of estates, ship-owners, slavers, merchants.

3. The letters also provide some information about the Judeo-Christian interaction. This interaction was different, peaceful and friendly or hostile. Gregory's letters give examples such as the forced conversion of Jews, the seizure of synagogues (which was illegal), while elsewhere relations between Jews and Christians were more friendly, for example, Gregory was concerned that some Christians in Rome were observing the Sabbath with the Jews.

Gregory tried to keep the peace between all people. He wrote to a bishop: "when there is alarm from the enemy, you ought not to have a divided people" (Book IX, 6).

Conclusion

Thus, we can say that the Jews were an ordinary part of early medieval society, they were involved in various activities permitted by law, actively interacted with their Christian neighbors, and were not afraid to defend their rights in case of violation, hoping for a fair decision of the authorities, in particular in the person of the Pope.

ST. GREGORY AND HIS PARENTS. (Plantin. Antwerp. 1612.)

