

## Perugia and its University. Persecutions of Jews in 1938

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**Abstract.** In 1938 the University of Perugia, led by the anti-Semitic rector Paolo Orano, implemented rapidly the racist laws passed by the Fascist regime. Three professors were expelled: Cesare Finzi, *ordinario* of *Chimica farmaceutica*, Gino De Rossi, *ordinario* of *Microbiologia agraria*, and Giorgio Todesco, *straordinario* of *Fisica*. Bernardo Dessau, a well-known physicist retired and *professore emerito* in 1938, was cancelled from the yearbooks of the University and excluded from the academic life. Two *assistenti* were initially expelled and then reinstated: Quinto Micheletti, who taught *Patologia speciale chirurgica*, and Leonardo Viviani, *assistente* at the Faculty of *Scienze politiche*.

**Keywords:** Anti-Semitism; Italian racial laws of 1938; University of Perugia.

### Perugia. A Fascist university

In the early 1920s, Perugia was a small university struggling to survive, crushed by the lack of funds and continuously forced to raise its already high student fees. It was only in November 1924 that the effects of the Gentile reform were felt, when the University was declared “free” by a decree of Vittorio Emanuele III, leading to the university being subject to the laws of the Kingdom. However, it was not until the following year that Perugia’s transition to the status of *Regia Università* was made and it was included with the so-called type B universities provided for under the reform, a change that allowed Perugia to access state funding, in addition to the investments of private entities. This entailed the transformation of the *Scuola di Veterinaria* in *Istituto superiore*, alongside the two historical Faculties of *Giurisprudenza* and *Medicina e Chirurgia* (including the School of *Farmacia* and that of *Ostetricia* for aspiring midwives, in addition to the aggregated *Stazione Idrobiologica del Trasimeno*); at the same time, the *Università per Stranieri* (University for Foreigners) was also officially founded [Dozza, 1991; 385-392].

Subsequently, under the rectorate of Sergio Panunzio, one of the theorists of Fascism closest to Mussolini, the Faculty of *Scienze politiche* was created in 1927 [Di Nucci, 2011; 71-84], destined to become the jewel in the crown of the university courses of the regime that wanted to create a strategic cultural centre in the city which had been the headquarters for the March on Rome [Treggiari, 2014; 229-232]. “Fascism, which has become the State, and the historical character of Italian civilization, - as Panunzio explained from the pages of the “Popolo d’Italia”- needs its doctrine and its political, economic and legal institutions to be the subject of methodical study by young people who are heading for administrative, trade-union, corporative, diplomatic and colonial careers” and these lessons could be best taught by the *Facoltà fascista* of *Scienze politiche* [Campi, 2006; 19-21].

The University was therefore in rapid expansion and moving closer to complete alignment with the Fascist regime. The reception reserved for the PNF (National Fascist Party) secretary Filippo Turati, received by a cheering crowd in 1928 and by a speech praising the regime given by the then rector Lanciotto Rossi, professor of *Diritto processuale civile*, was one clear sign of this; other signs were the subsequent awarding of the *honoris causa* degree in *Giurisprudenza* to the President of the

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Senate Luigi Federzoni [Treggiari, 2014; 233-234], and the growing popularity of the *Gruppo universitario fascista* (GUF - Fascist university group), among the first founded in Italy [Giuntella, 1992; 208; Varasano, 2012; 413].

In this context, in 1931, faced with the obligation to swear an oath to Fascism, the University of Perugia lost Edoardo Ruffini Avondo, who immediately refused to submit to the imposition of the regime [Goetz, 2000; 97-110; Boatti, 2001; 181-186, 199-204, 206-211]. The decision by this professor of *Diritto* caused great alarm amongst his colleagues, and the new rector Leonardo Dominici asked Ruffini to withdraw his resignation letter, forcing the jurist to write another in which the real political reasons for his refusal were replaced by alleged family reasons [Treggiari, 2014; 236]. The rector could not allow a “stain” to slow the University’s growth or impact the perfect harmony reached with Fascism. For their part, most teaching staff of *Giurisprudenza* preferred to submit to the obligations of the regime rather than make the same choice as their esteemed colleague or identify with him.

Having risen in the ranking to grade A in October 1936, as a result of perfectly adhering to the boundaries set out by the Fascist regime, the University of Perugia now had six Faculties: *Giurisprudenza*, *Scienze politiche*, *Medicina e Chirurgia*, *Veterinaria*, *Agraria*, and *Farmacia* [Dozza, 1991; 430]. At its helm in the academic year 1935-36 was Paolo Orano, professor *ordinario* of *Storia del giornalismo* at the Faculty of *Scienze politiche* and assigned to teach *Storia e dottrina generale del fascismo*. Orano, whose political and scientific activity was publicly celebrated by the University in the lecture theatre named after Benito Mussolini<sup>1</sup>, embodied the perfect man of culture dear to the Fascist ideology, capable of bending science and eloquence for the purposes of the regime [Fabre, 2013].

There is no need to wait until Orano’s appointment as rector to find examples of his Fascist oratory, but his first opening speech of the academic year 1935-36 cannot fail to capture our attention: it is a text which Orano himself compared to an agenda that bound the whole university. The rector declared himself a rigorous representative “[of] the spirit and [of] the command sought by the Fascist party”, interpreting his role as a participant “of the militarization of souls”, driven by Mussolini to reach “the culmination of power and glory indicated by [him] from the first day of his arrival in government”. So, for the sake of the homeland, the whole university, with its 561 students, as well as all 77 “comrade” professors, called to give purpose to their life through acceptance of a fasces-bearing Italy, had to show “perfect discipline and total dedication” to Fascism<sup>2</sup>.

The political positions and the intransigence of the rector manifested themselves even more clearly in the direct appointment of the Faculty deans: in 1937-38 he decided to replace Federico Chabod, removed as dean of *Scienze politiche*, with Carlo Curcio; the latter, author of the statute of the PNF, in Perugia as a lecturer since the academic year 1927-28, was certainly a more suitable figure to guide the most Fascist of the Faculties than the secular and anti-clerical historian who in 1925 had helped his teacher, the anti-Fascist Gaetano Salvemini, to escape [Venturi, 1980].

### **The application of measures in defence of the race: exclusions, reinstatements and resignations**

When the racial laws were enacted, the University of Perugia was obviously ready to apply yet another Fascist provision without delay, and its rector was at the forefront in denigrating Italian Judaism. One of Orano’s best known publications, *The Jews in Italy*, was what brought about the

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<sup>1</sup> *Per il quarantennio dell’attività politica, scientifica e letteraria di Paolo Orano*, in Regia Università degli Studi di Perugia, *Annuario per l’a.a. 1936-37*, Perugia, Tipografia della Rivoluzione fascista G. Donnini, pp. 37-39.

<sup>2</sup> *Relazione letta dal rettore magnifico on. prof. Paolo Orano nella solenne inaugurazione dell’anno accademico 1935-36-XIV (20 novembre 1935-XIV)*, in Regia Università degli Studi di Perugia, *Annuario per l’a.a. 1935-36*, Perugia, Tipografia della Rivoluzione fascista G. Donnini, anno XIV, p. 5 ff.

resumption of the anti-Semitic campaign in Italy in 1937 and, although Mussolini later distanced himself from the rector's stance, Orano's publication gives us a clear indication of what a determined and convinced supporter of anti-Semitism it was who was leading the Umbrian university in the aftermath of the enactment of the racist laws of 1938 [Germinario, 1999; Dell'Era, 2018; 3n].

In the inaugural speech of 1938-39, Orano placed little emphasis on the exclusion of Jewish lecturers; in less than three lines he said that "in application of the R.D. of 5 September 1938 n. 1930-XVI, the following professors will cease teaching: Gino De Rossi, Cesare Finzi and Giorgio Todesco". Orano also reported on the "voluntary" resignation of Professor Lanciotto Rossi<sup>3</sup>. The rector dispelled thus any doubts about the misunderstanding that had arisen in early September of that year when the name of Lanciotto Rossi, former rector before Dominici, and Faculty dean of *Giurisprudenza*, had been included among the teachers of "Jewish race" in the lists published in national newspapers; an error taken from the local pages of the Umbrian regional edition of "La Nazione". The following week, however, both the national newspapers and the local page of "La Nazione" had published Rossi's dry denial, who had probably been confused with Gino De Rossi<sup>4</sup>.

The fact remains that Orano tackled the "Jewish question" in just a few lines, stating that the academic situation was to be considered absolutely normal since the Jewish professors had already been replaced and new assignments had been made. This was a very hasty statement, confirmed by the fact that the names mentioned did not constitute a complete list of those involved in the exclusion. Indeed, on an undated unheaded typed page, signed by the general coordinator of the library service and added to the copy of the Yearbook in consultation at the Rectorate of Perugia university, in addition to the three names mentioned are those of Bernardo Dessau, Quinto Michlstader (Michelstaedter?) Micheletti, and Leonardo Viviani<sup>5</sup>.

But let us now look at the two lists, following the order of the two lists, to reconstruct the professional careers of each of the expelled professors.

Cesare Finzi, born in Parma in 1885, had been a professor at Perugia of *Chimica farmaceutica* – and subsequently from 1936, of *Chimica farmaceutica e tossicologica* – since 1929 when he had been appointed dean of the Faculty of *Farmacia*, a position he held continuously until his exclusion in October 1938<sup>6</sup>. After numerous years spent at the University of Parma, first as an *assistente* and then as an *aiuto* (from 1907 until 1920 and then from 1921 onwards), Finzi had accepted the invitation from the University of Perugia, initially trying to keep both positions. He was then formally dismissed from the University of Parma because he had not returned at the end of a long period of leave, thus concluding his experience at Parma<sup>7</sup>.

Finzi had started teaching a course in Perugia which had only been created two years prior; yet he had achieved significant results, which in turn led to him being given a permanent position – from *straordinario* to *ordinario* from November 1932<sup>8</sup> – and recognition by the University for his work in shaping the new degree course and the *Istituto di Chimica*, while at the same time also covering the

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<sup>3</sup> Regia Università degli Studi di Perugia, *Annuario per l'a.a. 1938-39*, Perugia, Tipografia G. Guerra, anno XVII, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> The newspaper reference is found in Tommaso Rossi, to whom thanks are due for having allowed us access to a part of his dissertation *L'applicazione della legislazione antiebraica in una realtà locale. Perugia 1938-1944* discussed at the Università degli Studi di Perugia, Facoltà di Scienze Politiche, a.a. 2002-03, supervisor prof. Loreto Di Nucci.

<sup>5</sup> M Pieroni, *Applicazione RD 1390/1938 epurazione docenti di razza ebraica*, in Regia Università degli Studi di Perugia, *Annuario per l'a.a. 1938-39*, Perugia, Tipografia G. Guerra, anno XVII, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> Regia Università degli Studi di Perugia, *Annuario per l'a.a. 1938-39*, Perugia, Tipografia G. Guerra, anno XVII, p. 57.

<sup>7</sup> Acs (Archivio centrale dello Stato), Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Direzione generale istruzione universitaria, divisione prima, fascicoli personali professori ordinari, III versamento, b. 200, fasc. Cesare Finzi, Letter from the rector of Parma to the Ministry, 3 June 1929.

<sup>8</sup> Ivi, Report by the evaluation commission for the promotion of prof. Cesare Finzi to *ordinario*, «Bollettino Ufficiale», 25 May 1933.

chairs of *Chimica generale* and *Chimica analitica* at the Faculty of *Farmacia*, and that of *Chimica* at the Faculty of *Medicina*<sup>9</sup>.

In 1937 he was awarded the honour of the *Ordine della Corona d'Italia* (Order of the Crown of Italy) and in the same year he became secretary of the Fascist chemists' Union of Perugia<sup>10</sup>; so he could not be defined, according to Orano's theories, as the "classic" anti-Italian Jew opposed to Fascism. Finzi, like many others, had not been reticent in participating in local initiatives supported by the regime; for instance, in July 1938 he had held a city conference during which he made reference to Arturo Barillaro, the *manipolo* leader recently killed in the Spanish civil war<sup>11</sup>. Likewise he had not shied away from taking the oath in 1931<sup>12</sup>.

The meeting minutes of the two faculties are as emotionally detached as the rector's speech, and in perfect bureaucratic style. The Faculty of *Farmacia* minutes of 27 September 1938 state that "Professor Finzi, being suspended from the duties of dean in compliance with ministerial provisions concerning professors of Jewish race, is replaced in his functions by Professor Polimanti", and the minutes of the Faculty of *Medicina*, recalling Finzi's Jewish race, and his position teaching *Chimica*, report the annulment of his appointment<sup>13</sup>. The same tones of "normality" a few months later characterised the journal "La Chimica e l'industria" (Chemistry and industry), on whose pages it was written that Finzi had been relieved of his duty and that his place had been taken by Antonio Angeletti, after few months of deanery of Primo Dorello<sup>14</sup>. The gaps were formally filled by simply replacing one name with another; in this way the many notes of appreciation regarding the work carried out by professors such as Finzi were removed, inflicting damage on Italian research, which was increasingly closed in a sterile autarchy and which renounced that internationalization so long sought after in the post-war period, especially in the scientific sectors.

Finzi had moved to Parma, his hometown, by December 1938, and when he was called to collect the additional sum to the pension awarded to "university professors released from service due to the racial laws", he did not appear in person before the Perugia authorities<sup>15</sup>. Finzi settled in Collecchio with his wife and son until 1943. After 8 September he hid in the Apennines near Parma (in Pianadetto), risking his own life and that of his family several times and also collaborating with the partisans and allies [Delsante, 2019; 40-49].

He returned formally to the Umbrian university in January 1944 following his reinstatement as a supernumerary *ordinario*, and took up his position as a lecturer officially from 1945, although in a letter of June of the same year addressed to the *Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione*, he requested to be transferred to another university<sup>16</sup>. We do not know if his request was due to family reasons or if Finzi was unwilling to return to the University that had banished him and that was now reinstating him as supernumerary personnel.

However, his post-war career resumed in Perugia and was marked by certain events. The year following his reinstatement, he was accused – and later fully exonerated – by the attorney general at

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<sup>9</sup> Ivi, Copy of meeting minutes of the Scuola di Farmacia, 5 January 1933.

<sup>10</sup> Ivi, Communication of the general manager to Finzi, 22 February 1937; Communication of the minister of the Corporazioni to the Ministry of Pubblica Istruzione, 10 March 1937.

<sup>11</sup> Cfr. «Il Messaggero», 2 July 1938, regional page, taken from Tommaso Rossi.

<sup>12</sup> Acs, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Direzione generale istruzione universitaria, divisione prima, fascicoli personali professori ordinari, III versamento, b. 200, fasc. Cesare Finzi, Prestazione di giuramento (Oath), 30 November 1931.

<sup>13</sup> AsUniPg (Archivio storico dell'Università di Perugia), Scuola di Farmacia, meeting minutes, vol. 5 from 14 March 1938 to 26 July 1939, meeting 27 September 1938; Facoltà di Medicina, meeting minutes from 28 January 1937 to 14 September 1939, meeting 27 September 1938.

<sup>14</sup> «La Chimica e l'industria», 1, 1939, p. 49; Regia Università degli Studi di Perugia, *Annuario per l'a.a. 1938-39*, Perugia, Tipografia G. Guerra, anno XVII, p. 57.

<sup>15</sup> Acs, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Direzione generale istruzione universitaria, divisione prima, fascicoli personali professori ordinari, III versamento, b. 200, fasc. Cesare Finzi, Communication from the Prefect to the Ministry of Educazione nazionale, 28 August 1942.

<sup>16</sup> Ivi, Letter from Finzi to the Ministry, 1<sup>st</sup> June 1945.

the Court of Appeal of Perugia of falsifying the chemical report in a murder trial; in November 1952, because of an error of homonymy, only subsequently corrected, he was asked to retire 8 years earlier than his official retirement date<sup>17</sup>. He then became Faculty dean of *Farmacia* once again, from 1955-56 to 1960, when he retired; in 1962 he became emeritus professor<sup>18</sup>.

Gino De Rossi, born in 1874 in Pisa, where he graduated in *Medicina e chirurgia* with a thesis on hygiene<sup>19</sup>, moved to Perugia in 1907 following his appointment as *professore straordinario* of *Batteriologia agraria* at the city's *Istituto Agrario*. Despite being a doctor, at the outbreak of the First World War, De Rossi turned out to be the only bacteriologist in the province responsible for the Military Hospitals' bacteriological service, so his exemption from military service was requested following his enlistment call from the district of Lucca<sup>20</sup>.

Having become *ordinario* of *Batteriologia agraria* in 1919 and director of the *Laboratorio di Batteriologia dell'Istituto Agrario*, De Rossi held the teaching post for *Igiene* from 1910 to 1938; in addition to this specialization, he began to focus on *Microbiologia agraria* during the 1920s. At the time of his expulsion, De Rossi was therefore an esteemed and well-known tenured professor of *Microbiologia agraria e tecnica* at the Faculty of *Agraria*, as well as being director of the *Istituto d'Igiene* of Perugia<sup>21</sup>. In the personal file present in the University Archive, various documents have been found which attest to De Rossi's scientific worth. It is also worth noting that the professor was a member of the *Consiglio nazionale delle ricerche*, had contributed to the Italian Encyclopaedia, and was held in high regard by local and national politicians for his expertise [Di Trocchio, 1991].

Despite this, the Faculty of *Agraria* was not slow to replace him, giving his teaching position to Tommaso Castelli, a *libero docente* and *aiuto* to the chair of *Microbiologia*, while for the *Igiene* teaching post, the Faculty decided to appoint for free Enrico Puccinelli, professor of *Patologia generale*, and afterward Enrico Calisti<sup>22</sup>.

However, De Rossi did not give up. Following the expulsion order, he filed for discrimination but his request was not successful<sup>23</sup>. In January 1939 he obtained the definitive settlement of his pension, and in 1942 he received the recognition of an additional allowance, initially denied, that was due to public employees even if they were exempted from service<sup>24</sup>. This was a small victory, especially if we consider that, following the loss of his job, the professor was forced to limit his work to writing scientifically popular texts from his home in Rome, the city where he was living on June 1, 1944 when the two January decrees concerning the readmission of Jewish teachers allowed his reinstatement<sup>25</sup>.

The minutes of the Faculty of *Agraria* of 20 November 1944 reported De Rossi's readmission to service and the fact that pro-rector Giuseppe Ermini wanted to write to him to find out if he intended to resume his courses, applauding "the act of justice accomplished"<sup>26</sup>. The professor of *Microbiologia*

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<sup>17</sup> Ivi, Communication from the rector to the Ministry, 9 August 1946, Note for the minister, 11 March 1952.

<sup>18</sup> Ivi, Note for the minister, 27 April 1961.

<sup>19</sup> Acs, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Direzione generale istruzione universitaria, divisione prima, fascicoli personali professori ordinari, III versamento, b. 168, fasc. Gino De Rossi, Stato personale (Personal status).

<sup>20</sup> Ivi, Telegram from the director to the Ministero dell'Agricoltura, 28 September 1918; Letter from the minister of Agricoltura to the Ministry of Guerra, 24 October 1918.

<sup>21</sup> Ivi, Service record.

<sup>22</sup> AsUniPg, meeting minutes of the Facoltà di Agraria, vol. 4 from 1<sup>st</sup> June 1936 to 23 February 1946, meeting 14 October 1938; meeting minutes, Facoltà di Medicina, from 28 January 1937 to 14 September 1939, meeting 22 October 1938.

<sup>23</sup> AsUniPg, De Rossi Gino fascicolo personale, Letter of the rector to De Rossi, 3 January 1939.

<sup>24</sup> Acs, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Direzione generale istruzione universitaria, divisione prima, fascicoli personali professori ordinari, III versamento, b. 168, fasc. Gino De Rossi, Letter from De Rossi to the Ministry, 4 July 1940; Letter from the Ministry to De Rossi, 19 January 1941; Decree of Minister Bottai, 12 March 1942.

<sup>25</sup> Ivi, Decree of readmission to post, 30 July 1944; Letter from the pro-rector Caronia of the Università di Roma to the Ministry, 29 August 1944.

<sup>26</sup> AsUniPg, De Rossi Gino fascicolo personale, Estratto del verbale della seduta della Facoltà di Agraria, 20 November 1944; Letter from the pro-rector to De Rossi, 10 November 1944.

actually returned to his chair on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1945<sup>27</sup> and, when in 1947 it was a matter of choosing between teaching and an appointment as *commissario straordinario dell'Istituto nazionale di Entomologia pura e applicata* in Rome, he declined the offer, to continue teaching in Perugia<sup>28</sup>, where the following year he moved from the chair of *Microbiologia agraria e tecnica* to that of *Industrie agrarie*<sup>29</sup>. De Rossi, in retirement from 1<sup>st</sup> November 1949, also received recognition at the end of his career, being awarded the title of emeritus professor<sup>30</sup>.

Giorgio Todesco, whose academic experience offers us a further insight into the dynamics of exclusion, had graduated in *Fisica* at the University of Bologna in 1921 and had become a *libero docente* in *Fisica sperimentale* in 1929, and was subsequently made permanent in December 1934<sup>31</sup>. From 1935 he became *straordinario* professor at the University of Sassari, with teaching assignments in Bologna too, and he moved to Perugia following the express request made by the four scientific faculties' deans to the rector. Orano himself had contacted the *Ministero* so that Todesco could be transferred from Sassari to give the stability needed to the chair of *Fisica* and to the leadership of the department, held with difficulty by Professor Kahanovicz due to health reasons<sup>32</sup>. Todesco then moved permanently to the Umbrian University to teach *Fisica* at the Faculty of *Medicina* in January 1937, and for the academic year 1937-38 he was also assigned to teach *Chimica fisica* at the Faculty of *Farmacia* and *Fisica superiore* at the University of Bologna, where he was highly esteemed thanks to his collaboration with the *Scuola di perfezionamento in Radiocomunicazioni*<sup>33</sup>. Indeed, in his personal file there is a letter from the well-known scientist Quirino Majorana who asked Orano to give his authorization so that his pupil could teach in Bologna from Saturday to Monday, certain that the qualities Todesco had already shown would mean the courses in Perugia could also continue. Todesco himself said he was sure he could work at his best between several universities for the sake of his subject, with his utmost commitment for the Perugia *Istituto di Fisica*<sup>34</sup>.

So here was a physicist working between multiple locations, thanks to his skills in a sector strategic for the development of the regime, who was shown the door by two different universities and forced to interrupt a brilliant career. In just over nine months from when the request was made to keep both teaching positions, the situation had radically changed. In the aftermath of the promulgation of the racial measures, Todesco wrote to the Rector of Perugia to thank him for the job opportunities he had had at the Umbrian University; at the same time he received a certificate from the dean of the Faculty of *Medicina* in which the Faculty recognized his undoubted value as a scholar, scientist, teacher and *Istituto* director<sup>35</sup>. This certificate was certainly an indication of the respect these colleagues had for the physics professor, but it is in no way comparable to making a public stand against the exclusion

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<sup>27</sup> AsUniPg, De Rossi Gino fascicolo personale, Communication from the rector to the director of the Tesoro, 3 December 1945.

<sup>28</sup> Ivi, Letter from the rector to De Rossi, 17 October 1947; Letter from De Rossi to the rector, 7 November 1947.

<sup>29</sup> Ivi, Communication from the minister to the rector, 13 April 1948.

<sup>30</sup> Ivi, Communication from the rector to the dean of the Faculty of Agraria, 28 April 1949; Estratto del verbale della seduta della Facoltà di Agraria, 22 November 1949.

<sup>31</sup> AsUniPg, Todesco Giorgio fascicolo personale, Stato di servizio (service record); Acs, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Direzione generale istruzione universitaria, divisione prima, fascicoli personali professori ordinari, III versamento, b. 455, fasc. Giorgio Todesco, Università di Bologna ufficio del personale, 1<sup>st</sup> July 1958.

<sup>32</sup> AsUniPg, Todesco Giorgio fascicolo personale, Letter signed by the deans to the rector, 12 June 1936; Letter from the rector to the minister, 4 July 1936; Letter from the rector to the minister, 29 October 1936.

<sup>33</sup> Ivi, Communication from the rector to Todesco, 13 November 1937; Letter from the rector of Bologna to the rector of Perugia, 24 December 1937.

<sup>34</sup> Ivi, Letter from Majorana to the rector, 28 December 1937; Letter from Todesco to the rector, 28 December 1937.

<sup>35</sup> Ivi, Letter from Todesco to the rector, 15 October 1938; Declaration of the dean of *Medicina e chirurgia*, 26 October 1938.

from teaching and from all Italian cultural spheres. In addition to being relieved of his academic duties, transferred to Ivo Ransi, Todesco was also excluded by the major scientific societies [Capristo, 2002; 349-350] and only thanks to the application of discrimination was he allowed to work for the *Società elettrica e chimica italiana* [Dragoni, 2002; 188]<sup>36</sup>.

Forced into hiding in Milan during the months of the Nazi occupation, the Physics academic returned to his Bologna residence and a few days after the Liberation he asked the *Ministero* to be reinstated in his previous role; he returned to Perugia in July of the same year and made himself available to the University that had expelled him, “in the renewed spiritual climate of the liberated homeland”<sup>37</sup>. Just as for Finzi, in the session of July 1945 Perugia’s *Consiglio della Facoltà di Farmacia* wanted to officially record its satisfaction in seeing Todesco return to his position, without, however, making any reference to the infamy of the racial laws<sup>38</sup>.

A few months later, his colleagues of the Faculty of *Medicina e Chirurgia* put forward Todesco to the Ministry for promotion to *ordinario*<sup>39</sup>. Once he had obtained his professorship, he moved permanently to Parma from November 1947<sup>40</sup>, while he returned to the University of Bologna to teach when he was entrusted with the *Onde elettromagnetiche* course in the academic year 1946-47 [Salustri, 2004; 2009; 2010].

We do not know how much the anti-Semitic legislation might have influenced his decision to leave the University of Perugia permanently; from his parting letter it is clear that the professor considered his task at the city’s *Istituto di Fisica* at an end, carried out “in the midst of significant difficulties”<sup>41</sup>, and it is not hard to imagine that his whole family’s residence in Bologna, including his 6 children, was a valid reason for speeding up his transfer to a location closer to home. For its part, the University of Perugia thanked him for his continued work even after the Liberation through the words of the rector Giuseppe Ermini who, retracing Todesco’s career and suspension “due to a hateful provision of the Fascist government of the time”, recalled the certificate of merit expressed in his favour by the Faculty of *Medicina*<sup>42</sup> at that time. This was an acknowledgment, or, perhaps, an attempt to “save” face, at least in appearance, on the part of the Faculty which, like all the others, had done nothing to help save a colleague from the “hateful” anti-Semitic laws.

In the second, additional list mentioned previously, there is also the name of Bernardo Dessau, Todesco's predecessor at the chair of *Fisica* and emeritus professor of the University of Perugia when the racial provisions of 1938 were issued. A leading figure in Italian physics, Dessau was an internationally known scholar thanks also to his collaboration with Augusto Righi and Guglielmo Marconi [Focacci, 2012; 11]. Before his retirement on 29 October 1936, the Faculty of *Medicina e chirurgia* had recognized his great worth and, through the rector Orano who expressed his approval

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<sup>36</sup> His militancy in the Gruppo nazionale fascista della Scuola, his enrolment in the Partito nazionale fascista dated 1932, and his military service in the First World War were recognised. No trace of this information is in his personal file.

<sup>37</sup> Acs, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Direzione generale istruzione universitaria, divisione prima, fascicoli personali professori ordinari, III versamento, b. 455, fasc. Giorgio Todesco, Letter from Todesco to the Ministry, 30 April 1945; Letter from Todesco to the Ministry, 9 July 1945. AsUniPg, Todesco Giorgio fascicolo personale, Telegram from Todesco to the rector, 30 June 1945.

<sup>38</sup> AsUniPg, meeting minutes of Facoltà di Farmacia, vol. 5 from 14 March 1938 to 26 July 1939, meeting 11 July 1945.

<sup>39</sup> Acs, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Direzione generale istruzione universitaria, divisione prima, fascicoli personali professori ordinari, III versamento, b. 455, fasc. Giorgio Todesco, Seduta del Consiglio della Facoltà di Medicina e chirurgia, 3 November 1945.

<sup>40</sup> The transfer documents are present in both files conserved in Acs and in AsUniPg.

<sup>41</sup> AsUniPg, Todesco Giorgio fascicolo personale, Letter from Todesco to the rector, 31 October 1947.

<sup>42</sup> Ivi, Letter from the rector to Todesco, 5 November 1947.

in writing, Dessau was put forward for emeritus professor. The ministry therefore gave its official approval, after verifying that Dessau's record showed nothing politically compromising even if he was not a member of the Fascist National Party<sup>43</sup>.

Originally from Offenbach am Main, Professor Dessau, Righi's *assistente* in Padua and then in Bologna where he had become a *libero docente* in 1896<sup>44</sup>, taught *Fisica sperimentale* in the Faculty of *Medicina* of the University of Perugia for over thirty years starting in 1905. He was also assigned *Fisica e Meteorologia* at the *Regio Istituto superiore agrario sperimentale* and he held the chair of *Fisica sperimentale* in the *Scuole di Farmacia e Veterinaria* [Focacci, 2012; 15]. He had a long teaching career, though it was interrupted from 1917 to 1920 when, due to his German origins, he was removed from the chair after some students reported him, accusing him of having received money from Germany in exchange for his espionage work<sup>45</sup>. These serious accusations prompted the prefect of Umbria to place him under close surveillance and to inform him that "his presence and that of his family is not welcome in Italy"<sup>46</sup>. This was a similar fate to that of other intellectuals and teachers originating from the central European empires – regardless of whether or not they were Jewish – during the First World War and in the years that followed; for the first time, the full involvement of culture in war was apparent [Salustri, 2017], and this outcome weighed heavily on Dessau, humiliated by the provision and forced into financial straits in Florence.

After his suspension ended, the Physics professor's career resumed quickly: he became *ordinario* of *Fisica sperimentale* at the Faculty of *Medicina e Farmacia*, of which he was dean before Finzi, from 1920-21 to 1928-29; he was assigned the courses of *Fisica chimica* for *Farmacia* and *Fisica* at the *Istituti di Agraria e Veterinaria*; he was also director of the *Istituto di Fisica* and director of the *Osservatorio meteorologico* from 1921 to 1926. His life was therefore dedicated to teaching, studying and research - so much so that in 1929 he was invited to join the *Consiglio nazionale delle Ricerche* [Focacci, 2012; 23-24, 27] -, but it was also dedicated to his involvement in the Jewish community. With his wife Emma Goitein, a renowned painter, he became one of the main figures of Perugia's Judaism, transforming his home into a centre of Jewish activity and an intellectual cénacle [Toaff, 1975; 186], as well as being a staunch supporter of the Zionist movement in Italy.

If, in 1937, according to the rector Orano, Italy's Jews should have aligned themselves against all their fellow European Jews to prove their belonging to the Fascist homeland, it was precisely in Dessau's Zionism that Orano found the best representation of his worst enemy. It is perhaps no coincidence that, despite having expressed his approval in writing for Dessau's promotion to emeritus professor, in the memo of the general manager of the *Ministero dell'Educazione nazionale* there is a note added to the Faculty of *Medicina*'s decision showing Orano did not pronounce on the matter, but rather left the decision to the Ministero<sup>47</sup>.

As was the case in other universities, the Physics professor did not forfeit his title but, in accordance with the ministerial circular of December 1938, he was totally excluded from participating in academic life; the man whom Righi had defined his best *assistente* was in an instant expelled from all Italian scientific societies. His fate was not dissimilar to that of the younger Gabor Dessau, Bernardo's son, a *libero docente* of *Giacimenti minerari* and assigned professor at the *Politecnico di Torino*, who was excluded from both the University and the *Ispettorato generale minerario* (Mining Inspectorate) [Capristo, 2002; 236-237].

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<sup>43</sup> Acs, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Direzione generale istruzione superiore, fascicoli personali, II versamento, 2 serie, b. 49, fasc. Bernardo Dessau, Copy of the meeting minutes of the Faculty of *Medicina e chirurgia*, 5 July 1936; Memo from the general manager of the Ministry, s.d.; Letter from Orano to the Ministry, 23 January 1937; Decree of emeritus nomination, 10 February 1937.

<sup>44</sup> Acs, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Direzione generale istruzione superiore, Biblioteche e affari generali, Archivio generale, Università e istituti superiori, 3 serie, b. 22, fasc. Bernardo Dessau, Documents for the *libera docenza*, 1895-96.

<sup>45</sup> Acs, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Direzione generale istruzione superiore, fascicoli personali, II versamento, 2 serie, b. 49, fasc. Bernardo Dessau, Consiglio accademico, 17 December 1919.

<sup>46</sup> Ivi, Letter from the Prefect to the Ministry, 14 December 1916.

<sup>47</sup> Ivi, Memo from the general manager of the Ministry, s.d.

Having escaped deportation together with his wife, Dessau died in 1949 and had a private funeral, in accordance with his will, without the public recognition due to one of the most important Italian physicists of the first half of the twentieth century<sup>48</sup>.

All that remains is to trace the events of the two assistants indicated in the additional page in the Yearbook of 1938-39.

Quinto Micheletti, originally from Pola (Pula), *assistente incaricato* to the chair of *Patologia speciale chirurgica e propedeutica clinica* at the Faculty of *Medicina* received the suspension letter on 19 October 1938<sup>49</sup>. A few days later a ministerial telegram asked that the *assistente* be informed that, due to further investigations, he should send statements relating to his mother's nationality<sup>50</sup>; a few months later, a new telegram arrived at the University of Perugia requesting Micheletti to produce documents relating to his father's nationality<sup>51</sup>. The *assistente* replied by sending Orano his father's birth certificate, "born in the redeemed lands" and the documentation relating to his obtaining Italian citizenship "with full rights"<sup>52</sup>. As a result, the expulsion order was cancelled by ministerial provision on 19 October 1939.

The story of Micheletti highlights how, with the cumbersome anti-Jewish legislation, the regime had been forced to deal with several professors repeatedly to ask for clarification of their Jewish origins, but also how the regime enforced a fierce "Jew hunt" which had not to let anyone evade the measures. Micheletti was an Italianized surname, as was the case for many inhabitants of the Redeemed lands; in 1933 a prefectural decree established that the surname Michelstaedter be transformed into Micheletti. The assistant, born in Pola, and from a Jewish family originating in Trieste, was related to the well-known Italian writer Carlo Michelstaedter, and a large part of his family had moved to Umbria between the 1920s and 1930s, bringing with them their Italianized surname [<http://www.narnia.it/micheletti%20LA%20STORIA.pdf>].

Micheletti remained in service at the University of Perugia as an *assistente incaricato* until April 30, 1940 when he resigned. In May 1942, Orano, at the request of the president of the civil hospital of Terni, replied that he could not provide any news regarding the *assistente*, who was no longer employed at the University<sup>53</sup>. A document from the late 1960s confirms that Micheletti never returned to holding any post at the University of Perugia after 1940<sup>54</sup>.

Finally, let us briefly recall, as far as documents allow, the story of Leonardo Viviani, *assistente incaricato* at the *Istituto giuridico-politico della Facoltà di Scienze politiche*. Suspended for a few months from October 16, 1938 with the same communication that Micheletti received, Viviani hurried the next day to present a written declaration in which he claimed to be of "Italian race", son of an Italian father and mother, of Catholic religion like his parents<sup>55</sup>. The same day he sent his declaration, a telegram from the *Ministero* arrived for Orano, in which it stated that, following the verification of the "new personal file produced by the interested party", Viviani should be removed from the list of those suspended. The rector cancelled his previous provision and communicated it to the interested party<sup>56</sup>. A few months later, when Micheletti's suspension was still in the balance, Viviani's was declared definitively closed<sup>57</sup>. The *assistente incaricato*, author in 1934 of the *Storia di Malta*, with an introduction by Paolo Orano and presented as the work of a young son of the Fascist school of political science in Perugia who had exceeded the expectations of his teachers<sup>58</sup>, was able to continue in his academic position.

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<sup>48</sup> Ivi, Communication from the rector to the Ministry, 21 November 1949.

<sup>49</sup> AsUniPg, Micheletti Quinto fascicolo personale, Copy of the ministerial letter 6515, 14 October 1938 and Letter from Orano to Micheletti, 19 October 1938.

<sup>50</sup> Ivi, Telegram from the Ministry, 24 October 1938 e Communication from Orano to Micheletti, 5 November 1938.

<sup>51</sup> Ivi, Telegram from the Ministry, 24 April 1939 e Communication from Orano to Micheletti, 5 November 1938.

<sup>52</sup> Ivi, Hand-written note from Micheletti to the rector, 20 May 1939.

<sup>53</sup> Ivi, Letter from the rector to the president of the Civil Hospital of Terni, 20 May 1942.

<sup>54</sup> Ivi, Personnel office note, 31 October 1969.

<sup>55</sup> AsUniPg, Leonardo Viviani fascicolo personale, Suspension from duty, 19 October 1938 and signed declaration, 20 October 1938.

<sup>56</sup> Ivi, Ministerial Telegram to the rector, 20 October 1938 and Decree of rector, 20 October 1938.

<sup>57</sup> Ivi, Letter from the Ministry to Orano, 10 December 1938.

<sup>58</sup> The note is in the «Archivio storico di Malta», 7, 1935, p. 100.

## Not just academic personnel

From the regional pages of “La Nazione” on 4-5 September 1938, an article revealed the size of the Jewish population present in the University and, in addition to the three teachers (De Rossi, Finzi and Todesco), it listed 10 foreign students, of which 9 male and 1 female, and 12 Italian students, of which 11 male and 1 female<sup>59</sup>. Therefore 22 Jewish students, out of a total of 573 enrolled, were excluded from the University following the introduction of the racial measures. These represent a tiny number of foreign university students if we think how attractive Italy was for many Jewish students fleeing countries where racial measures had already been introduced [Gentlemen, 2009; 2000], but can be explained by the local competition from Perugia’s *Università per Stranieri*.

As for the university students mentioned, it was not possible to find useful sources to discover what really happened during their stay in Perugia; however, we do know that the local *Gruppo universitario fascista* (GUF) was very active in promoting state racism. The GUF in Perugia could count on leading figures of the Fascist youth organization such as Fernando Mezzasoma, who from secretary of the local group became one of the major executors of Starace's policy, capable of bringing his political and organizational dynamism from the periphery to the centre [During, 2008; 115, 134-135]. This is not the place to retrace the rise (to the detriment of all the pre-existing associations) and the growth of the Perugia GUF, whose activities were among the first to be reconstructed by historiography as regards the history of single university groups [Giuntella, 1992]. However, it is important to underline the relationships that closely linked this organization to the political life of the city, as well as to the University, confirming how much the Fascism of the universities went hand in hand with the formation of a new generation forged by the regime and called to local and national government in the name of Fascism [Varasano, 2012; 411-426].

The activism of the Perugia GUF therefore marked some key passages in the history of the relationship between university students and Fascism throughout the twenty-year period. One of these was undoubtedly the racial campaign that the GUF of Perugia were keen to promote by establishing a *Corso di studi e propaganda della razza* (*Course of study and propaganda of the race*) in August 1938 in advance on the national directives. It was comprised of a series of lectures, subsequently collected in a booklet, at the centre of which was Mussolini's racism, as a defence of the Italic race in the colonial context, and which translated the *Manifesto of racist scientists* point by point [Duranti, 2008; 358-360; La Rovere, 2003; 343n].

It is therefore not surprising that at the opening of the 1938-39 academic year, the secretary of the GUF dedicated a part of his speech to the course, highlighting how racial policy had immediately resonated with the youth of the University of Perugia<sup>60</sup>.

## Continuity...

Returning to the exclusion of academic personnel, racial laws affected the academic set-up of Perugia in a numerically small way: unlike other universities, only 7.7% of the teaching staff – comprising 25 *ordinari*, 11 *straordinari*, and 42 *incaricati* – were excluded from university life. The reasons obviously stem from the scarce presence of Jewish teachers in the Umbrian University; local research has indeed highlighted how the Jewish community of Perugia was historically involved above all in the commercial sectors [Toaff, 1975]. In our opinion, this scarcity is also due to the University’s structure which, on the eve of the Second World War, was an expanding university campus, yet still with a lower number of courses and with few professorships compared to other universities, and certainly affected by competition from the nearby Rome Faculties.

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<sup>59</sup> The reference to the newspaper is found in Tommaso Rossi.

<sup>60</sup> *Relazione del segretario del G.U.F. di Perugia intitolato al nome di “Ludovico Menicucci”*, in Regia Università degli Studi di Perugia, *Annuario per l’a.a. 1938-39*, Perugia, Tipografia G. Guerra, anno XVII, p. 20.

The numbers, however, have a purely functional role in contributing to the overall national picture on exclusion, whereas by focussing on a qualitative analysis, it is striking that in the Perugia context, racial laws essentially affected the three Faculties of *Medicina*, *Farmacia* and *Agraria*. The Faculty staff of *Scienze politiche*, a faculty dear to the rector who had been its dean and where he taught the *Storia e dottrina generale del fascismo*, and of *Giurisprudenza* were not affected by the provisions of 1938; this meant that no room had been left to the “enemies of the Fascist homeland”, whether Jews or Liberal Democrats, to interfere in the areas of the University of Perugia most important to Fascism. Their activity implementing the regime’s aims had continued unhindered under the leadership of Orano, who was soon to become Senator of the Kingdom, at the end of a long war whose foundations had also been ideologically built by the Perugian rector over many years dedicated to the formulation of his anti-Jewish thought [Battini, 2010].

Only in the Faculty of *Medicina* is there a trace of an open discussion that took place to decide how to replace Finzi, though more connected to the reorganization of studies than to the scientific worth of the teacher expelled<sup>61</sup>, while for the other courses there was nothing written to indicate any debate on the replacements. Instead of discussions, there is a simple list of new assignments to maintain teaching continuity. That same continuity was the objective pursued in October 1944 when, during the post-Liberation purging procedures regarding 6 *ordinari*, 15 other teaching staff (*professori incaricati, aiuti, assistenti* and *liberi docenti*), and 7 members of the technical and administrative staff [Flamigni, 2019; 77-79], the Faculty Councils discussed course reorganization and deliberated the suppression of Fascist courses, and the removal of *Dottrine corporative*, *Storia e dottrina del fascismo*, and *Biologia delle razze umane*, the latter taught by Aldo Spirito.

Just as these courses had become part of the didactic regulations, these teachings introduced by the regime were removed; just as the Jewish teachers had been expelled after 1938, after the war they returned once more to the university teaching staff. In most cases there was not even a faint greeting for the colleagues who had been forced to leave their positions, as was the case for Ruffini in the Thirties, who returned to the University without enthusiasm to be met with the deafening silence of his Faculty [Treggiari, 2014; 237]. In the Umbrian university, therefore, action was taken to put into practice the dictates of the regime, and the anti-Semitic measures had constituted an acceleration of a process of “fascistization” which began in the aftermath of the seizure of power by Fascism, in absolute continuity with a regime that always looked to Perugia, not just because of the presence of the Faculty of *Scienze politiche*.

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