

# Jewish Professors and Racial Laws at the University of Venice

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**Abstract.** University of *Ca' Foscari*, aligned with the regime in 1927, like many other Italian universities, diligently applied the racial laws. In little more than a decade, the Venetian University was prepared to the fascist anti-Semitic legislation promulgated in 1938 and it was ready to compile the census of Jews. Of the 74 teachers to whom the form was distributed, 4 were of Jewish race and were quickly suspended. Fascist anti-Semitism thus struck the well-known European historian Gino Luzzatto, who held the chair of *Storia economica* in Venice; the philosopher of law Adolfo Ravà, holder of the teaching of *Diritto privato*; the very young Elsa Campos, *assistente volontaria* to the chair of *Diritto commerciale* and Gustavo Sarfatti, lawyer and for just one year in charge of teaching *Diritto marittimo* as a *libero docente*. In addition to these names, we cannot fail to consider Olga Blumenthal: although not included in the lists, she was removed from the University where she was a *lettrice* of German language, later dying in Ravensbrück after being deported. The bureaucracy was also very attentive to the students and compiled a detailed list of 12 university students who were Jewish. At the end of the war, only professor Luzzatto returned to the University of Venice: he became *rettore* from 1945 to 1953 in the period of the reconstruction and the purge that did not punish those who had praised fascism and its politics racist.

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

## *Ca' Foscari* during Fascism

Interest in the young University of Venice – originally named *Regio Istituto di Economia e commercio* created in 1868 as a *Scuola Superiore di Commercio* – began several years ago with a project on university purges in Italy during the delicate transition from Fascism to the post-war Republic. Research involved consulting the University of Venice's archive while it was being reorganized<sup>1</sup> and viewing documentation from the fascist era and the period immediately after it [Casellato, Favero (eds.), 2018], garnering insight into who were the most important figures at that time. The first of these was the *rettore* who took over at the end of the Second World War, Gino Luzzatto, a well-known historian across Europe and chair of *Storia economica* at *Ca' Foscari* as of 1922 [Berengo, 1964; 879-925; Rossi, 2006].

In fact, a quote from a speech (originally lost)<sup>2</sup> made by Luzzatto at the reopening of the *Istituto superiore di Economia e commercio* in July 1945 inspired this article.

I believe that this ceremony is above all symbolic. It signifies the transition between two profoundly different periods of our institution. A period of nearly 23 years, that ended on April 28, was not as gray as the youngest or some forgetful people may think. On November 5, 1925, the day after Zaniboni's assassination attempt, a group of sectarians led by a criminal, who had enrolled as a student for the sole purpose of intimidating a tenacious, prominent group of dissidents, invaded the classrooms, ordered the resignation of the anti-fascist *rettore* while notices were posted along the streets demanding that five professors be removed. The *Consiglio Accademico* and the *Consiglio di Amministrazione* unanimously stood up in protest against the violation of academic freedom and declared their solidarity with the *rettore*<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> There is an informative guide about the Archivio edited by Antonella Sattin put together in 2015 currently being updated.

<sup>2</sup> The speech entitled *Cerimonia di riapertura dell'Istituto 21 luglio 1945* was reassembled from small typewritten pages found at the Archivio storico Università Ca' Foscari Venezia (Ascfev), Serie Rettorato, Scatole lignee, b. 29/D, file 2, folder 29/C/1 and a copy is now kept at Ascfev, Series personale docente, file *Gino Luzzatto*.

<sup>3</sup> *Cerimonia di riapertura dell'Istituto 21 luglio 1945*, p. 2.

The new *rettore*'s memory referred to the 1920s, drawing special attention to the advent and later triumph of Fascism when a group of professors at *Ca' Foscari*, including Luzzatto, tried to resist fascist infiltration. Alongside him was *ordinario* of *Istituzioni di diritto pubblico* Silvio Trentin, a Social Democrat deputy until 1930 who gave the opening speech for the 1924-25 academic year. The last part of Trentin's inaugural address contained a clear message for freedom of thought; in talking about the citizen's role in administrative decentralization and self-government, Trentin called on citizens not to "abdicate to the will of others, to resign oneself in the face of coercion" and pleaded that their "awareness of personal responsibility would never be darkened" so as not to be "forced to limit one's own energy to the petty terrain of small personal and selfish interests"<sup>4</sup>. The personal interests Trentin referred to were the ones he had set aside by opposing the regime, by signing the 1925 Manifesto of the Anti-Fascist Intellectuals, and one year later, prior to living in exile, giving up his academic position and resigning from *Ca' Foscari* because he could no longer continue his academic career "respecting his most intimate and resolute convictions as a scholar of public law" [Rosengarten, 1980; 86].

The hostile climate that had evolved at *Ca' Foscari* also involved the chair of *Storia economica* Luzzatto. He was consistently intimidated and often subject to fascist violence as were students who were close to him and against the regime. For example, one of Luzzatto's eminent students Massenzio Masia, whom he also mentioned in his 1945 opening speech. Masia graduated in 1928 and was one of the founders of the *Partito d'Azione* and an organizer of the Resistance; he was killed in Bologna in 1944 after being tortured and was later honored with the Gold Medal of Military Valor [Onofri, 1995; 165-168]<sup>5</sup>.

After Luzzatto was forced to resign, the school underwent three years of having an external commissioner overseeing its administration. *Senatore* and *ex-sindaco* of Venice, Davide Giordano, was instructed to bring *Ca' Foscari* up to fascist standards. His opening speech for the 1930-31 academic year contrasted starkly with the words spoken by Trentin just a few years before. Giordano expressed his satisfaction with the year "at our institute spent in serious studies demonstrating how the Regime's spirit, which intends to be uncompromising spiritual as well as physical preparation, continues to permeate the minds of young people who will be the hard-working leaders of tomorrow"<sup>6</sup>.

The Institute's transition from falling under the *Ministero dell'Economia nazionale* to the *Ministero della Pubblica istruzione* was part of the regime's reorganization of higher education organizations. The most important administrative change occurred with the royal decrees of 1935 and 1936, which transformed the university system of which the Institute was part into Type A Universities. With this change the Institute would receive funds directly from the state, which would pay the professors' salaries and relieve *Ca' Foscari* of one of its biggest budget burdens. The Institute's new legal form also meant it could issue degrees in *Economia e commercio* and *Lingue e Letterature moderne* as well as two master's degrees in *Economia e diritto* and *Ragioneria*<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> S. Trentin, *Autonomia, autarchia, decentramento*, opening speech for the 1924-25 academic year, in R. Istituto superiore di scienze economiche e commerciali, *Annuario 1924-25*, Venezia, Premiate Officine Grafiche C. Ferrari, 1925, p. 68.

<sup>5</sup> There is a file on him in Venezia at Ascfe, Studenti, file 4489.

<sup>6</sup> *Relazione del R. commissario dott. Davide Giordano senatore del Regno su l'anno accademico 1929-1930*, in R. Istituto superiore di scienze economiche e commerciali, *Annuario 1930-31*, Venezia, Libreria Emiliana Editrice, 1931, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> *Inaugurazione dell'anno accademico relazione del pro rettore*, in R. Istituto superiore di scienze economiche e commerciali, *Annuario 1936-37*, Padova, Tipografia del Seminario, 1937, p. 2.

*Ca' Foscari's* reorganization was a step towards its natural evolution as a stronghold of Adriatic imperialism, the cultural center of the "Great Venice", an idea of developing two different cities around culture and business was one of the plans that the new Venetian fascist political class led by Giuseppe Volpi insisted on [Distefano, Paladini, 1997; 100 et seq.]. The Institute became directly involved in imperialist politics; new courses in colonial policy and students being openly encouraged to participate in fascist military campaigns in Ethiopia and Spain were just a few of the most obvious examples of how the Institute shared the regime's vision. One of the main figures of this new phase of a regimented *Ca' Foscari* was Agostino Lanzillo, a revolutionary syndicalist who had joined the fascist party before the March on Rome. Lanzillo was the university's *rettore* until 1939. He in fact was responsible for providing space at the Institute for the new research advocated by Volpi for commercial and industrial expansion in colonial territories<sup>8</sup>.

The university's appearance also changed with the regime's new rituals. Its premises became home to solemn events such as the inauguration of courses for student military officers or ceremonies commemorating fallen fascists, like the one held in 1937 with the inauguration of a stele for the empire and for the *Ca' Foscari* exponents who died in battle in Africa [Bisutti, Molteni (eds.), 2018]; that same year Mario Sironi presented his idealized expression of the imperial regime in the form of a fresco decorating the new lecture hall designed by Carlo Scarpa<sup>9</sup>.

At the end of the 1930s the Institute could rightfully be called one of the regime's cultural centers. In his 1945 speech Luzzatto described how *Ca' Foscari* declined academically as it was gradually brought into line with the regime. The *rettore* blamed the lack of freedom in research and the regime's forced choices for smothering the school's scholastic vitality; however, he did not mention the many fascist teachers who made up the academic community of the university during the 1930s nor the racial laws that directly involved him and that sped the course of events towards a new world conflict<sup>10</sup>.

### **From census to exclusion**

In contrast with other schools, the reorganization of university's archive facilitated our research. We were able to track down the names of the people expelled among the *rettore's* papers; in fact, a file titled *Provvedimenti per la difesa della razza* (Measures for Defending the Race) contains all the documents of the 1938-40 period and the racial laws. The one that stands out the most is a table of the Jewish personnel census forms sent to the ministry of *Educazione nazionale* on September 30 and according to which Luzzatto, Adolfo Ravà, Gustavo Sarfatti and Elsa Campos were all Jewish "all of them also on their mother's side". Lanzillo wrote to the ministry, "I am honored to send you these forms, organized in groups, regarding the census of Jewish personnel" in addition to the summary table shown here below<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Ascfe, Serie Rettorato, Scatole lignee, b. 31, fasc. 2, Letter from Lanzillo to Volpi, 13 May 1936.

<sup>9</sup> The fresco depicts a muscular student who holds both a book and a musket with Venezia standing in the center like a queen surrounded by its symbols – Saint Mark's in the background and Ca' Foscari in her hands – and Italy victorious over Ethiopia that "will do it alone". Two marble stelae holding up icons of the king and Mussolini completed the whole.

<sup>10</sup> G. Luzzatto, *Cerimonia di riapertura dell'Istituto 21 luglio 1945*.

<sup>11</sup> Ascfe, Serie Rettorato, Scatole lignee, b. 31/b, file 2, Letter from Lanzillo to Bottai, 30 September 1938, and *Prospetto riassuntivo delle schede per il censimento del personale di razza ebraica* (it appears here like the original document).

Number of people the form was given to.	Number of people who are Jewish on father's side.	List of the people indicated in previous column with additional information requested.	List of people Jewish on mother's side.	List of people whose spouse is Jewish.
74	4	<u>Luzzatto Gino</u> , prof. ord. di Storia economica grado IV <u>Ravà Adolfo</u> , prof. incaricato di istituzioni di Diritto privato <u>Sarfatti Gustavo</u> , Libero docente di Diritto marittimo <u>Campos Elisa</u> , Assistente per provv. incarico al Seminario giuridico <u>all of them also on their mother's side.</u>	=	=

**Table 1: Table of Jewish Personnel Census Results**

(*Prospetto riassuntivo delle schede per il censimento del personale di razza ebraica*)

We can make several observations from this diagram. Four out of the 74 professors and administrative personnel who filled out the forms were categorized Jewish, which is 5.4 percent of the people surveyed. The table summarizing the results followed the ministerial memorandum's instructions to a tee and did not indicate there being difficulty in gathering the information requested<sup>12</sup>. It is hard to say if all personnel actually received the form; in fact, coming up with a complete list of personnel in Venice from the *Annuari* is rather complicated, especially considering the different or dual roles held by members of the teaching staff. For the 1937-38 academic year *Ca' Foscari* appeared to have 14 tenured positions of which 13 were actually filled (by 12 *ordinari* and one *straordinario*), with 9 internal and 17 external *professori incaricati*; in addition, there were 3 *liberi docenti*, 16 *aiuti* and *assistenti*, 10 members of the academic administration and 13 other employees. After checking the names and overlapping positions, the number appears to coincide with 74 forms<sup>13</sup>. Therefore, the hunt for Jews consisted of one *professore ordinario* out of 12 (8.3 percent), one *incaricato* out of 26 (3.8 percent), one *libero docente* out of 3 (33.3 percent) and one *assistente* out of 16 (6.25 percent).

<sup>12</sup> Ascfve, Serie Rettorato, Scatole lignee, b. 31/b, file 2, Circular on Census of Jewish personnel, 9 August 1938 and Communication to the rettori of Universities and to the direttori of Istituti Superiori, 16 August 1938.

<sup>13</sup> The *liberi docenti* and *ordinari* who were also *incaricati* have to be subtracted from the number 81 of the table in the *Annuari*, while the form was probably given to Valentino Dominedò and Giulio La Volpe who alternated as teachers of *Economia politica*; Dominedò left the position on January 19, 1938, and La Volpe replaced him the next day. All the information comes from R. Istituto superiore di scienze economiche e commerciali, *Annuario 1937-38*, Padova, Tipografia del Seminario, 1938.

Indeed, the Institute quickly met the central government's requests: the forms were distributed during the summer, swiftly filled out by the people concerned and returned to the university's administration<sup>14</sup>.

This also made it possible for the *rettore* to give a complete answer when asked by the chief editor of the magazine *Vita universitaria* for precise information about the university's figures. Other publications had made mistakes in this regard and had to retract the figures originally published by adding to the request for the names of *ordinari* also the names of *liberi docenti* and *assistenti*<sup>15</sup>.

Issued almost on a weekly basis, official memorandums and decrees on Jewish exclusion began to pile up, culminating in the consolidated law of November 15, 1938. Lanzillo quickly implemented all the measures issued by the Education minister Bottai, so much so he had already indicated the personnel of each category in the September list. Even on December 27, in the midst of the Christmas holiday, when the law on the exclusion of *professori emeriti* and *onorari* reached Venice, the *rettore* wasted no time in promptly informing the ministry that there were no professors at *Ca' Foscari* in that exclusion category<sup>16</sup>. Lanzillo demonstrated the same alacrity on December 16, when the day after receiving a request from Rome he immediately sent a new form filled out by the secretary Fernanda Palmarini since some answers were not clear on the racial form previously submitted<sup>17</sup>. A clear demonstration of the painstaking fascist endeavor of counting all the Jews in universities, but also an indication of the subjugation of the university administrations and the *rettore*, which strove to implement as quickly as possible every memorandum or law regarding the exclusion of colleagues from university life. Publishing companies also played their part in removing Jews from the academic world, and Cedam of Padova did not hesitate to inform the university that "books by Jewish authors" would be "eliminated from the [...] catalog and any other advertisement" of *Collana Ca' Foscari* and that in the future works by Jewish authors would no longer be received or published<sup>18</sup>. The letter was immediately brought to the attention of the *Consiglio di Facoltà*, which took note of it<sup>19</sup>.

At the opening of the 1938-39 academic year, Lanzillo presented the changes made to the teaching staff. The reasons for the "considerable" adjustments among the professors included "legislative provisions on racial policy", which had determined the "retirement from office" of four instructors. Not another word was made by the *rettore* save a brief biographical description of the four excluded teachers, as was also done for professor Rigobon who retired because he had reached the age limit. Lanzillo tranquilly ended his speech emphasizing the solidity and discipline achieved by the Institute, as commanded by Mussolini, and its task being the education of "aware and principled citizens, of teachers who feel their work is a mission, of soldiers ready to serve their Fatherland with life and death"<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, the University of Venezia Archives does not contain any copies of the forms sent but only a few notes written by the teachers that accompanied the returned forms.

<sup>15</sup> Ascfe, Serie Rettorato, Scatole lignee, b. 31/b, file 2, The editor-in-chief of *Vita Universitaria* to the *rettore*, 26 September 1938 and Letter from Lanzillo to *Vita universitaria*, 5 October 1938.

<sup>16</sup> Ascfe, Serie Rettorato, Scatole lignee, b. 31/b, file 3, Communication to the *rettori* of the Universities and to the *direttori* of Istituti Superiori, 27 January 1938 and Letter from Lanzillo to Direzione generale istruzione superiore, 5 January 1939.

<sup>17</sup> Ascfe, Serie Rettorato, Box, b. 31/b, file 3, Telegram of the ministry, 14 December 1938 and Letter from Lanzillo to Direzione generale istruzione superiore, 16 December 1938.

<sup>18</sup> Ascfe, Serie Rettorato, Scatole lignee, b. 31/b, file 5, Letter from Cedam to Lanzillo, 26 October 1938.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Consiglio di Facoltà, *Verbali delle adunanze 18 dicembre 1934-25 ottobre 1939*, 3 November 1938, p. 154.

<sup>20</sup> *Inaugurazione dell'anno accademico 1938-39 XVII, Relazione del Magnifico Rettore*, in R. Istituto superiore di scienze economiche e commerciali, *Annuario 1938-39*, Padova, Tipografia del Seminario, 1939, p. 29 and 34.

## The professors expelled from Venice

The first in terms of academic position to be expelled was Gino Luzzatto. As previously mentioned, the first *ordinario* in Italy for *Storia economica* came to Venice at the beginning of the 1920s, after starting out at University of Bari and Trieste, where he was also *rettore* for a year<sup>21</sup>.

The culture and value he brought to the university were immediately acknowledged. In fact, in 1925 he was appointed *direttore* for three years, but his position only lasted for a few months after signing Benedetto Croce's Manifesto of the Anti-fascist Intellectuals. His political views at first were aligned with Gaetano Salvemini's socialists and later the *Partito d'Azione*, and he directed his political action against the regime. In Venice, his political views were shared by men such as the Anglicist Ernesto Cesare Longobardi and the legal scholar Trentin, who resigned shortly thereafter. Dismissed from being *direttore*, Luzzatto continued to publicly speak out against the regime, and in 1928, during the crackdown after the attempted assassination of Vittorio Emanuele III, he was accused of being a member of the clandestine organization Giovane Italia and incarcerated.

After years of open opposition to the Fascism, in 1931, when faced with a second oath of allegiance imposed by the regime, Luzzatto accepted the recommendations of some anti-fascist circles and decides to take the oath in order to stay at the Institute where he taught *Storia economica* and *Geografia economica* [Goetz, 2000; Boatti, 2001]<sup>22</sup>.

The racial laws seemed far off in March 1938 when Lanzillo wrote to the Education minister Bottai for authorization of Luzzatto's trip to Zurich for an international history conference. The *rettore* described Luzzatto as "not a member of the party, [but of] absolutely impeccable [...] academic and civil conduct" and as the only person capable of best representing *Ca' Foscari* and the field of economic history<sup>23</sup>.

A few months later, however, the professor, like all his colleagues of Jewish origin, was expelled from his academic institution with the enforcement of the racial laws. Just like when he signed the 1925 manifesto, Fascism once again took his position away from him<sup>24</sup>.

Lanzillo wrote Luzzatto in November to inform him that the *Facoltà* had voted unanimously on Longobardi's proposal to express their gratitude and bid farewell to the professor forced to leave his position for "general reasons". He added that "all colleagues are saddened by your leaving because they are well aware of your superior ability in economic history and your passion for teaching". Luzzatto wrote back to the *rettore* that his letter in this particular context "is proof of a generosity and courage that other *rettori* certainly would not have shown"<sup>25</sup>. If we compare the situation in Venice with other universities, we can see that the chair of *Storia economica* was right; and yet, although the colleagues and *rettore* of the school in Venice did not appear to be lacking in courage, their praise of Luzzatto and Ravà was not followed by public actions of dissidence. Just like at other universities, at *Ca' Foscari* disapproval of what had happened was confined to the private sphere. In fact, in his opening speech for the 1938-39 academic year, when Lanzillo mentioned the names of the teaching staff expelled under the racial laws, he limited himself to briefly acknowledging their academic and scientific merit.

The next name after Luzzatto in 1938 was Adolfo Ravà, philosopher of law. Like other colleagues, he formerly worked at University of Padova where he was *ordinario* of *Diritto privato* at the *Facoltà* of *Giurisprudenza* and founded the *Istituto di Filosofia del diritto*, whereas at *Ca' Foscari* from 1923 onwards he taught *Istituzioni di diritto privato*. Purged from Padova as *ordinario* – a fate he shared with his son who was a *libero docente* at the same university – he was forced also to give up his teaching position in Venice [Opocher, 1996; 35]. Some documents in his personal file demonstrate how Ravà was admired as a teacher by his colleagues and Lanzillo. In fact, after the expulsion he felt the need to write the *rettore* to thank him and the *Facoltà* for what they said about him and Luzzatto

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<sup>21</sup> Ascfe, Serie personale docente, file *Gino Luzzatto*, Stato di servizio.

<sup>22</sup> Ascfe, Serie personale docente, file *Gino Luzzatto*, Minutes of the oath of allegiance, 20 July 1927 and Minutes of the oath of allegiance, 27 November 1931.

<sup>23</sup> Ascfe, Serie personale docente, file *Gino Luzzatto*, Letter from Lanzillo to Bottai, 31 March 1938.

<sup>24</sup> Ascfe, Serie personale docente, file *Gino Luzzatto*, Dispensation from service charge, 5 December 1938.

<sup>25</sup> Ascfe, Serie personale docente, file *Gino Luzzatto*, Letter from Lanzillo to Luzzatto, 4 November 1938; Letter from Luzzatto to Lanzillo, 8 November 1938 and Letter from Luzzatto to Lanzillo, 16 November 1938.

during the Institute's assembly. "With my heart as a teacher put to such a harsh test," wrote Ravà, "I especially appreciate your gesture in the present circumstances"<sup>26</sup>. Bitterness mixed with gratitude and affection for an Institute that expelled him and to which he would never return to teach.

Gustavo Sarfatti also came from the University of Padova; he had moved to the city in 1924 from Genova and was a *libero docente* of *Diritto marittimo*, the field that would bring him in October 1936 to *Ca' Foscari* as can be read in *Il Gazzettino di Venezia*, which welcomed him enthusiastically calling him "comrade Sarfatti"<sup>27</sup>. A serving officer in the First World War and *segretario generale* of the *Comitato parlamentare dei profughi di guerra*, Sarfatti was the first instructor to teach this new field at *Istituto superiore di Scienze economiche e commerciali*. Sarfatti became recognized at the Institute as a teacher capable of holding conferences on issues that were important to the regime and *Ca' Foscari*, while also being a proponent of the creation of an *Istituto marittimo* in the interest of the city and the university<sup>28</sup>. It does not appear, however, that he had a positive relationship with Lanzillo. The professor's personal file contains various requests that the *rettore* never answered (for example, changing the name of a course or lesson times that had not been agreed); for his part, Lanzillo also did not always obtain what he asked for. Perhaps this friction between the two led to professor Antonio Brunetti receiving the appointment for teaching *Diritto marittimo* in 1937-38 who, according to the *rettore*, would also have been confirmed the following year. In fact, Sarfatti was left only with a *libera docenza* in *Diritto marittimo*. In June 1938, he asked the *rettore* to consider appointing him and not Brunetti for teaching *Diritto marittimo*, proposing that the colleagues alternate. On July 25, 1938, Lanzillo informed Sarfatti that the syllabus for the course he proposed had been accepted but that the *Consiglio di Facoltà* had already approved Brunetti's reconfirmation<sup>29</sup>.

The promulgation of anti-Semitic laws, however, prevented Sarfatti from resuming teaching. The last document contained in his file dates back to June 16, 1939, when he received notice of losing his teaching credentials "because of Jewish race"<sup>30</sup>. The following year his name was removed from the bar association.

The fate of young Elsa Campos was no different. Originally from Split, she graduated in *Computisteria e ragioneria* and was hired immediately as an *assistente volontaria* to the chair of *Diritto commerciale* from 1934-35 and was in charge of the law seminar from 1935 to 1938<sup>31</sup>.

Her diligent work in compiling the repertoire of fascist economic legislation from the March on Rome to 1938, two prizes awarded by *Cassa di Risparmio delle Venezie* for monographs on land reclamation and the publication in 1937 of her research results in the Institute's series were not enough to prevent her removal<sup>32</sup>. Once the racial laws were issued, Campos shared the fate of the other Jewish teachers and left her position at the Institute where the career of this young 26-year-old woman had only just begun.

Another name to be added belongs to a woman who was not on the list Lanzillo sent to Rome. In fact, Olga Blumenthal Secrèant declared on the personnel form that she was Catholic since she had converted to the religion in 1929<sup>33</sup>.

Blumenthal was first an *assistente* from 1919-20 and then a *lettrice* of German until the 1937-38 academic year. Her work in preparing newly enrolled students of *Lingue e letteratura moderne* was ongoing and viewed positively by the tenured language professors.

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<sup>26</sup> Ascfe, Series personale docente, file *Adolfo Ravà*, Letter from Ravà to Lanzillo, 20 November 1938.

<sup>27</sup> *Il Gazzettino di Venezia*, October 14, 1936, in Ascfe, Series personale docente, file *Gustavo Sarfatti*. The file contains a copy of a three-page curriculum vitae indicating he joined the Partito nazionale fascista in 1932.

<sup>28</sup> Ascfe, Series personale docente, file *Gustavo Sarfatti*, Invitation to the conference *Il diritto marittimo prevalente creazione romana ed italiana. Ieri, oggi e domani*, 26 January 1937 and Letter from Sarfatti to Lanzillo, 13 May 1937.

<sup>29</sup> Ascfe, Series personale docente, file *Gustavo Sarfatti*, Letter from Sarfatti to Lanzillo, 24 June 1938 and Application for teaching assignment, 25 July 1938.

<sup>30</sup> Ascfe, Series personale docente, file *Gustavo Sarfatti*, Forfeiture of abilitazione della libera docenza, 16 June 1939.

<sup>31</sup> Ascfe, Series personale docente, file *Elsa Campos*, Certificate, 18 February 1935 and Certificate, 17 December 1937.

<sup>32</sup> Ascfe, Series personale docente, file *Elsa Campos*, Sheet undated; Attestation by the direttore Pichi-Tonelli, 9 March 1939; Certificate, 13 March 1939.

<sup>33</sup> Ascfe, Series personale docente, file *Olga Blumenthal Secrèant*, Personal Card, 1 September 1938.

In 1937, Blumenthal was supposed to retire because she had reached 60 years of age, but many appealed to the *rettore* to keep the *lettrice* who, contrary to legal provisions, should have obtained *libera docenza* after the first decade of assistantship<sup>34</sup>. Even Luzzatto and Longobardi insisted that the *rettore* find a way of not dismissing the *lettrice* and even recommending her for the German language teaching position<sup>35</sup>. Since the *rettore* could not accommodate the request, it was decided that she be in charge of a seminar on *Lingua e letteratura tedesca*, for which she was paid 500 lire a month. This solution allowed the *lettrice* to resume her work as an expert on the subject until the 1938 racial laws ended any continuation of her academic activity<sup>36</sup>. Her particular role recognized only within *Ca' Foscari* and her declared religious affiliation were probably the reasons why her name was not listed among the Jewish personnel. Her conversion, however, would not save her from being deported. She was arrested by the Germans on October 30, 1944, and was first imprisoned in Venice and later transferred to Risiera di San Sabba; that same year she was deported to Ravensbrück in November and died on February 24, 1945 [Picciotto, *Il libro della memoria*; R. Segre (ed.), 1995; 215].

Returning to our figures, all in all 5 people were expelled out of a total 58 of *ordinari*, *straordinari*, *professori incaricati*, *liberi docenti*, *aiuti* and *assistenti*, or 8.6 percent of the teaching staff at *Ca' Foscari* in 1938-39. Out of those five, two were women, a fact that fleshes out an often underestimated figure in research on individual universities [De Rossi, 2005]. This is due partly to the fact that women were obviously a minority but also because they held what were considered less important positions (*aiuti*, *assistenti* and *lettori*) in which it was very difficult to be reintegrated at the end of the war. Still today there is no study on the female experience providing a national overview, which would allow us to better understand the role of culture in the emancipation of Italian women and, more specifically, of Italian Jewish women, as well as the effects of the racial laws in terms of gender.

Differences between areas of study were of little importance at *Ca' Foscari* since there were basically only two, *Economia* and *Lingue*, and all staff worked in more than one location.

### **New courses and new appointments**

After the purge the first matter academic institutions had to face was replacing the people who had been removed. In Venice no requests were made by colleagues ready to take the place of the expelled teaching staff. The reorganization of teaching positions, however, did facilitate several changes. The loss of one *ordinario* out of 14 tenured positions justified the Institute asking the ministry to announce a competition for the professorship of *Scienza delle finanze e diritto finanziario*<sup>37</sup>, a core subject for the third year of the degree in *Economia e commercio* that had been taught until 1938 by *libero docente* and *direttore* of *Laboratorio* Ezio Vanoni – who would become a key political figure in post-war Italy [Ferrari Aggradi, 1956]. On November 16, 1939, Vanoni became *straordinario* winning the competition that he had been denied for some time<sup>38</sup>.

Replacements were made in rapid succession, but the teachers who had been purged were so respected that they participated directly in the selection of their replacements, due in part also to the fact that Venice had fewer teachers than other academic institutions in Italy.

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<sup>34</sup> Ascfe, Series personale docente, file *Olga Blumenthal Secr ant*, Letter from the ministry to the pro-rettore, 10 May 1937.

<sup>35</sup> Ascfe, Series personale docente, file *Olga Blumenthal Secr ant*, Letter from Belli to the rettore, 15 July 1937.

<sup>36</sup> Ascfe, Series personale docente, file *Olga Blumenthal Secr ant*, Letter from Blumenthal to Belli, 20 July 1937, Letter from Blumenthal to the rettore, 21 July 1937, Letter from Belli to the rettore, 22 July 1937.

<sup>37</sup> Consiglio di Facolt , *Verbali delle adunanze 18 dicembre 1934-25 ottobre 1939*, 3 November 1938, pp. 154-155. At the same session the Consiglio formalized a request for a competition for *Lingua e letteratura spagnola* to cover the second open position since in Venezia there were only 13 *ordinari* and *straordinari* for the 14 posts available.

<sup>38</sup> R. Istituto superiore di scienze economiche e commerciali, *Annuario 1937-38*, Padova, Tipografia del Seminario, 1938 and R. Istituto superiore di scienze economiche e commerciali, *Annuario 1939-40*, Venezia, Emiliana editrice, 1940.



In the case of *ordinari*, Luzzatto indicated his successor to the *rettore*, choosing his colleague Amintore Fanfani *straordinario* at *Università Cattolica* in Milan as well as a leading political figure after the Second World War [Bocci Girelli (ed.), 2013], with whom Luzzatto had an excellent relationship<sup>39</sup>. Ravà also had been working together for some time with his substitute Alberto Trabucchi, who afterwards was appointed as an *assistente provvisorio* the courses in *Istituzioni di diritto privato*. Ravà had described Trabucchi as a valuable colleague in a note to Lanzillo a year before the purge when Ravà had to interrupt exams and lessons due to a death and Trabucchi stood in for him<sup>40</sup>. Antonio Brunetti, who already taught *Diritto commerciale*, was asked to cover Sarfatti's role<sup>41</sup>. As for the *lettrice* Blumenthal, Heinz Karl Wilgalis took over her position in 1937<sup>42</sup> and Elsa Campos was substituted for the *Seminario giuridico* by the *assistente provvisorio* Aldo Sandulli<sup>43</sup>.

The straightforward replacement process was followed by a just as simplified procedure changing the courses offered to include as electives *Demografia generale e demografia comparata delle razze* which were assigned to professor Albino Uggé, *ordinario* of *Statistica metodologica ed economica*. The fact that there were no courses like *Biologia delle razze umane* is undoubtedly related to the areas of study at the Institute in Venice, which offered only two fields of specialization. So, it was not a form of resistance to the October 1938 official memorandum, formally received by *Ca' Foscari*, that demanded a "significant change in the direction and content of teaching based on the principles of the defense of the race asserted by the fascist regime"<sup>44</sup>.

## Students

The documents preserved at the University Archives also include the measures taken for students identified as Jewish. Excluded from public libraries, identified in every document with the wording "of Jewish race", provisional admitted to state exams and later unable to complete their university studies, students quickly became subject to anti-Semitic persecution<sup>45</sup>.

It is not clear how many Jewish university students were at *Ca' Foscari*. For the 1937-38 academic year, there were 1,604 enrolled students, including 1,078 men and 526 women, of which, respectively, 10 and 13 were foreigners, in addition to 352 students who were only identified as *fuori corso* (students taking longer than expected to graduate). The academic mobility that affected other Italian universities, after the racial laws were issued in Eastern Europe, did not regard Venice [Voigt, 1993 and 1996; Signori, 2000; 139-162]. Foreign enrolled students, although few, were a constant presence during the five year period between 1935-1940, oscillating between a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 23 in 1937-38; in general, the number of students grew consistently for the whole period of time in consideration<sup>46</sup>.

A typewritten list with additions made on February 1938 help fill in the picture. It contains the names of 12 students (9 typewritten and 3 written by hand on the right side of the paper) labelled as "probably Jewish".

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<sup>39</sup> Ascfe, Series Rettorato, Series organi collegiali (1901-1974), Senato accademico vol. VII 1937-1939, 14 October 1938, pp. 155-156.

<sup>40</sup> Ascfe, Series personale docente, file *Adolfo Ravà*, Letter from Ravà to Lanzillo, 16 February 1937.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. R. Istituto superiore di scienze economiche e commerciali, *Annuario 1937-38*, Padova, Tipografia del Seminario, 1938, pp. 26-27.

<sup>42</sup> Ivi, p. 27, 91, 94 and 97.

<sup>43</sup> R. Istituto superiore di scienze economiche e commerciali, *Annuario 1938-39*, Padova, Tipografia del Seminario, 1939, p. 86.

<sup>44</sup> Ivi, p. 30 and Ascfe, Series Rettorato, Box, b. 31/b, file 2, Circular of ministry, 22 October 1938.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Ascfe, Series Rettorato, Box, b. 31/b, file 2.

<sup>46</sup> R. Istituto superiore di scienze economiche e commerciali, *Annuario 1938-39*, Padova, Tipografia del Seminario, 1938, Tabella 2, p. 10 and R. Istituto superiore di scienze economiche e commerciali, *Annuario 1940-41*, Venezia, Emiliana Editrice, 1941, Table 2.

*The following students are probably Jewish:*

MILANI Tina Bice daughter of the late Angelo	Pächt Cristina
ROMA KERSCHBUMER Nives daughter of the late Luigi	Sonino Bice
FINZI Claudia daughter of Teobaldo	Polano Giulio
RIGHETTI Livio son of the late Giuseppe	
MANERA Guido son of Giacomo	
MANENTE Olga daughter of Virginio	
BENVENUTI Maria daughter of Giuseppe	
LUZZATTO Maria Luisa daughter of Angelo	
FRANCO Anna Maria daughter of Angelo	

February 1938

**Tab. 2: List of possible Jewish students** (*Prospetto riassuntivo dei possibili studenti ebrei*)

Unfortunately, the criteria used for this list is not clear: direct questioning, last names with Semitic qualities, assonance, etc. If, however, all 12 were actually of Jewish origin, Jewish students at *Ca' Foscari* would have accounted for little more than 0.7 percent of the entire student population. Again, the predominant feature of this table is the high number of women, no less than 9 out of 12 students. The figures illustrate a distinctive element of the Institute where the number of women grew steadily after the First World War and included female students from Jewish families, reconfirming that Venice had a rich, cultured and international middle-class that directed its daughters towards linguistic and economic studies [De Rossi, 2005; 58; Segre (ed.), 1995].

One woman's name deserves further explanation. The story of Olga Manente came to the attention of the working group that curated the exhibition for the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the racial laws at *Ca' Foscari* in 2018. They found previously unknown information about the young girl stating that she was "born in 1917 in Eritrea from a relationship of 'madamato', in other words the daughter of an Italian soldier and an African woman" [*Ca' Foscari allo specchio. A 80 anni dalle leggi razziali*, 2018; 65-67]. This explained the regime's interest in her, the first Afro-Italian enrolled at *Ca' Foscari*. She enrolled in 1937 and finally ended her studies in November 1945 once the war was over. Due to the color of her skin she was subjected to fascist Racism.

In Manente's case we know of her return to Venice to finish her studies after the end of the war. Additional research is required to find out how many of the students were actually Jewish and how their exclusion happened, if and how many decided to resume their studies and how much the climate of the purge, the "orthodoxy and [the] inflexibility" in applying the racial measures requested by the secretary of the Guf (*Gruppi universitari fascisti*) at the opening of the 1938-39 academic year, influenced their choice not to come back to the Institute<sup>47</sup>.

### **Return to "normality"?**

After September 8, 1943, Gino Luzzatto escaped to Roma and returned to Venice after the city had been liberated. In service as of January 1, 1944, the Allies recommended him as the new *rettore* at *Ca' Foscari* and he was unanimously elected by his colleagues, taking over from *pro-rettore* Italo Siciliano who had been running the University from May 1 to July 5<sup>48</sup>. The war, the Nazi occupation and the Italian Social Republic had all deeply marked the city and the Institute, so the University entrusted the transition from this difficult period to Luzzatto, who had been "distanced from teaching at the university by unjust racial laws"<sup>49</sup>.

Luzzatto was the only Jewish professor to return to teaching in Venice after the 1938 expulsion, meanwhile Ravà was reinstated at the University of Roma where he remained for 10 years [Ciarletta, 1961]. Prior to his election, he presided over the committee for purging fascists from their positions along with four other colleagues, which put together a final proposal for suspending a *docente di*

<sup>47</sup> *Relazione del segretario del Gruppo fascisti universitari*, in R. Istituto superiore di scienze economiche e commerciali, *Annuario 1938-39*, Padova, Tipografia del Seminario, 1939, pp. 38-39.

<sup>48</sup> Ascfve, Serie Rettorato, Scatole lignee, b. 1A, file 2, Letter from Luzzatto to the ministry of Pubblica istruzione, 28 March 1946.

<sup>49</sup> Ascfve, Serie Rettorato, Scatole lignee, b. 1A, file 2, Election of the *rettore* in *Ca' Foscari* attached to the letter from the *pro-rettore* to Major F. F. Gregory, 9 July 1945.

*ruolo* and a *professore incaricato*. The two teachers were Arturo Pompeati Luchini, *ordinario* of *Letteratura italiana*, who was accused of promoting Fascism during the war and was working at the university as of 1946, and Arturo Cronia, previously suspended from Padova where he was made professor of *Lingua e letteratura serbo-croata* in 1940 due to his renown [Flamigni, 2019; 135-136, 254].

No measures were taken against those who had run the University during the regime – applying anti-Semitic laws – or under German occupation and republican Fascism. Even Lanzillo eluded negative judgment thanks to Luzzatto who wrote in defense of his colleague, “from ’36 onwards he worked against Fascism and after September ’43 actively participated at great risk in the fight against the Germans”<sup>50</sup>. Why did the new *rettore* do everything he could to defend the person that had so quickly expelled him from his position and from the Institute? Was the memory of Lanzillo expressing his esteem after the issuance of racial laws enough for Luzzatto not to condemn him? We know that the two men wrote to each other during the last months of 1944 and in February of 1945 continuing a relationship that was never actually interrupted, in a climate in which at *Ca’ Foscari* too there were teachers who chose the path of anti-Fascism [Casellato, 2018; 97-112]. Lanzillo gradually distanced himself from Fascism, remaining tied to some of the movement’s original positions while not sharing the regime’s totalitarian choices; and yet he was a *rettore* under Fascism in one of the most important periods of the university’s standardization, and he never officially opposed Mussolini’s politics. For his part, Luzzatto continued his daily involvement in research even after he had been expelled; for instance, in 1942, as *vice-presidente* of the *Comunità israelitica veneziana*, he was among the organizers of a school for Jewish students and an exponent of the *Delegazione per l’assistenza agli emigranti ebrei*<sup>51</sup>. The relationship with the international academic world helped him partially overcome the humiliation of 1938 and the loss of solidarity from the city’s cultural circles. Such sentiments, however, do not seem to justify publicly eliminating what happened during the fascist period as the new post-Liberation *rettore* seems to have done [Mogavero, 2018; 121].

Moreover, in August of 1943 the *Consiglio di Facoltà* had voted for «the reappointment of professors [...] deprived of their teaching position for political or racial reasons». Luzzatto had learned about it from *il Gazzettino di Venezia* and thanked his colleagues, moved as he was that they had “spontaneously taken initiative for a provision that had it been made under [his] authority it would have been a source of painful uncertainty [for him]”<sup>52</sup>. This is another piece of information for evaluating Luzzatto’s reconciliation with the academic world, but it does not wholly justify his choice of minimizing the 1930s in his speech and focusing on the 1920s and Lanzillo’s months in the Resistance. It is therefore hard to provide an unambiguous explanation for the new *rettore*’s position.

The only public statement in Luzzatto’s speeches that regarded racial persecution was made at the opening of the 1945-46 academic year and referred to Olga Blumenthal<sup>53</sup>. After finding out about her tragic end, he said:

Mrs. *Olga Secrétant Blumenthal* was a German language *lettrice* for many years, and colleagues and students always remembered and still remember her with great respect. Deported in the summer of 1944, despite being seventy-seven years old and in poor health, she did not withstand – we have been told – the distress and abuse and died during the journey or right afterwards; another painful and shameful episode that is not the responsibility of a single man but the whole army and German people who blindly followed the orders of a mad criminal and coldly collaborated, without the slightest sense of human compassion, in the systematic and total destruction of six million unarmed and harmless people, whose only fault was belonging to a different race from the people elected<sup>54</sup>.

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<sup>50</sup> Ascfe, Series personale docente, file *Agostino Lanzillo*, Typescript from Luzzatto, 2 May 1946.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. the texts on Luzzatto mentioned above.

<sup>52</sup> Ascfe, Series personale docente, file *Gino Luzzatto*, Letter to Luzzatto without signature, 31 August 1943 and Letter from Luzzatto to the *rettore*, 1 September 1943.

<sup>53</sup> Her name was added to the list of *Ca’ Foscari*’s dead on the memorial monument, and on January 22, 2018, a *stolperstein* by Gunter Demnig commissioned by the university was placed in front of the university’s entrance. Cf. Bisutti, Molteni (eds.), *La corte della Niobe*.

<sup>54</sup> *Inaugurazione dell’anno accademico 1945-46*, in Istituto universitario di economia e commercio, *Annuario per gli anni accademici dal 1943-44 al 1947-48*, Venezia, Editrice Stamperia già Zanetti, 1948, p. 7.

A shared yet solemn recollection that however denies what had happened; there is no mentioning of Fascism's role in racial persecution, and Nazism and the German people are presented as the only culprits of the mass annihilation. It was certainly an oversimplified message coming from a scholar like Luzzatto, an internationally renowned historian, a collaborator on Marc Bloch's *Les Annales* as well as a prominent figure of the *Partito d'Azione*.

It was a narrative that was quickly embraced by a vast part of the country which, in the climate of reconstruction, preferred to forget what had happened to the Jews. So it was that the *rettore* too seemed to have given in to the flattery of the time and the academic world that re-embraced him, remaining at the helm of *Ca' Foscari* until 1953 and working with many people who had lived through the entire fascist period without putting up a fight.

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