



Gioenian academicians between the two World Wars: science and the fasces in the Palace

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Summary

This contribution proposes the results of an exploration of documents present in the historical archive of the Gioenian Academy of Catania (Italy), concerning active members of the association during the period 1923-1945. Research shows that during events such as fascism, anti-Jewish persecution and anti-fascist purge, in the vicissitudes of academic associates, mostly naturalists and mathematicians, there is a common plot that makes them indistinguishable or in communion with the experiences of colleagues of humanistic or economic disciplines active and/or processed in the same period. The Gioenian academicians have lived, suffered and repeated gestures of surveillance, accusation and defense that go beyond their specialist knowledge. They fit perfectly into a conceptual framework aimed at outlining the anti-Jewish purge first and anti-fascist after as events of transition towards a country that has returned to democracy after World War II.

Keywords: *Academies, statutes, University professors, naturalists, fascism, anti-Jewish persecution, purge, anti-fascist trials.*

Riassunto

Gli accademici gioeni fra le due guerre: la scienza e il fascio nel Palazzo

Questo contributo propone gli esiti di un'esplorazione di documenti presenti nell'Archivio storico dell'Accademia Gioenia di Catania, riguardanti soci attivi del sodalizio durante il periodo 1923-1945. La ricerca dimostra che durante eventi come il fascismo, la persecuzione antiebraica e l'epurazione antifascista, nelle vicissitudini di soci accademici, per lo più naturalisti e matematici, esiste una trama comune che li rende

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indistinguibili o in comunione con le esperienze di colleghi di discipline umanistiche o economiche attivi e/o processati nello stesso periodo. Gli accademici gioeni hanno vissuto, patito e ripetuto gesti di sorveglianza, accusa e difesa che prescindono dal loro sapere specialistico. Essi si inseriscono perfettamente in un quadro concettuale teso a delineare l'epurazione antiebraica prima e antifascista dopo come eventi di passaggio verso un Paese ritornato democratico dopo la Seconda Guerra Mondiale.

Parole chiave: *Accademie, statuti, professori universitari, fascismo, persecuzione antiebraica, processi di epurazione.*

1 Introduction

There is a large literature on the twenty-year period (*Ventennio*, 1923-1945) in Italy concerning the relationship between universities and fascism. Less on local or peripheral academies and fascism.

As institutes of culture, often very old institutions, they played a significant role in the panorama of national educational processes, cultivating international relations based on exchanges of scientific publications and associations of eminent personalities in the fields of science, letters and arts, not only European. Scattered throughout Italy, immersed in authoritarian political events that certainly were not able to govern, in the early part of the twentieth century have lived fully a twenty-year history of consensus or tacit dissent, witnessing undemocratic institutional changes, the enactment of racial laws, statist and radical economic reforms, the launching of imperialistic wars. Those vicissitudes are still hidden in the documents of the historical archives of the associations; so for example in those of the Accademia Gioenia in Catania.

2 Changes to the Statutes of the Gioeni's Academy (1919, 1934, 1948)

The Statute approved in 1919 included only 23 articles and was rather liberal, with no references to external control bodies on the elections to the offices of the Academy, on the administration and on the publications of the association.

Already in 1928, in advance with the suggested and expected statutory changes, the Ministry of Public Education urgently requested from the Academy secretariat (general secretary Professor Adolfo Campetti, full professor of Physics) the list of names "of managers with relative positions and a brief biographical note for each of them" (Accademia Gioenia's Historical Archive, henceforth [AGHA](#), b.66, c.53, r).

At the same time, the minister Balbino Giuliano (September 1929) worked to change the name of the Ministry of Education into "Ministry of National Education", in order to underline that the task of the State was to educate citizens on the new principles of the Fascist regime, rather than providing them with abstract notions of teaching.

Dated April 2, 1930, Year VIII E.F., is a letter sent by the Podestà of Catania, Antonio Grimaldi of Serravalle, to the President of the Academy Professor Achille Russo just elected (February 6, 1930), to congratulate on the initiative to change the Statute of the Academy (AGHA, b.86, c.27, r-v). Professor Russo had in fact proposed the establishment of a Consortium of Bodies to overcome the economic problems of the association and start an expansion of the sections of the Academy by introducing the title "Letters and Arts". For this purpose, a Commission was appointed to formulate a draft of a new Statute and budget (AGHA, b.22, c.135, r e c.138, v-r). In November 1930 the project was also exhibited to the new Prefect of Catania, H.E. the Apulian hierarch Nicola Spadavecchia, who discouraged the initiative, waiting for better times.

The new Statute will in fact be approved with R.D. of 16 October 1934, n. 2034, on the same date as approvals of Statutes of other Italian Academies. It included 32 articles, ten of which referred to the Control and Approval Body constituted by the Ministry of National Education (elections for President and Vice-President [(Russo Achille President, 1930-1955) (Vice- Presidents: Di Mattei Eugenio, 1930 -1935; Boggio-Lera Enrico, 1935-1944)], oath of loyalty to the Fascist regime of the same in the hands of the Prefect, under penalty of forfeiture; the appointment of the members; control of the administration), especially in the Final and Transitional Provisions (list annual awards, report on the activity carried out during the year, declaration of unworthiness of a member, approval of the Regulations). It should be noted that the Academy received from the Ministry of Education, then of National Education, an annual subsidy ranging between L. 1,000 or L. 3,000 since 1924, in addition to contributions from the Municipality, Province, University.

The "comrades" were appointed in the various classes with ministerial R.D. and were sworn in during a private session according to article 12. A letter from Minister Bottai dated 8 March 1938, Year XVI E.F. and addressed to the President of the Academy, where he is invited to "communicate three or more names of effective members to whom the positions of President and Vice-President of the Academy may be conferred" (AGHA, b.76, c.61, r). This letter was followed by the Decree of the same minister of April 26, 1938 with which Professor Achille Russo and Professor Enrico Boggio-Lera were reconfirmed as President and Vice-President of the Academy, with effect from 14 May 1938 (AGHA, b.76, c.78, r). The event relating to three-year ministerial appointments was repeated with another Decree of the Minister of National Education of 21 May 1941, Year XIX, with which Professor Achille Russo and Professor Giuseppe Marletta were appointed President and Vice-President for the three-year period up to 31 May 1944 (AGHA, b.79, c.17, r).

The Minister of National Education Bottai communicated, with a letter dated May 27, 1938, year XVI, to the Academies and Institutes and Associations of Letters and Arts the abolition "of the use of *Lei*" in the written and verbal reports of the employees of the State of any order and rank and those of public law entities: "they must give themselves the '*tu*' if equal in rank and the '*voi*' if of different rank" (AGHA, b.76, c.80, r).

This stringency and top-down control disappeared in the Statute, again liberal and democratic, always drawn up under the presidency of Achille Russo (President, therefore, elected according to two different and conflicting Statutes), approved with Decree of 24 November 1948, n. 1549, by the President of the Italian Republic. It only provided for a “communication” to the Ministry of Public Education of the elective appointments and those of the members, of the use of extraordinary sums, of the list of prizes to be put up for competition and of the revocation of unworthy members decided by the general assembly of effective members (Monterosso, 1950, 1962).

3 Gentile Reform

Professor Russo, at the time Rector of the University of Catania, clashed with Giovanni Gentile, Minister of Education in the first Mussolini government, due to the downgrading of the University of Catania foreseen by the Reform of higher education decreed in 1923. It gave birth to an authoritarian and centralized (Provisions on the organization of higher education, 30 September 1923, no. 2102). The higher education reform decree sanctioned the legitimacy of private universities for the first time; there were public universities totally dependent on the State (Bologna, Cagliari, Genoa, Naples, Palermo, Padua, Pavia, Pisa, Rome, Turin, plus six engineering schools and a school of architecture in Rome); the Universities to which the State contributed partially and which lived as consortia with the involvement of local authorities (Catania, Macerata, Messina, Modena, Parma, Siena and Sassari, subsequently Florence with the transformation of the Institute of Higher Studies, University of Milan in place of the scientific-literary Academy and finally, founded from scratch, the University of Bari). The institutional clash ended with the delivery of Russo’s resignation as rector after the session of the Academic Council on 8 October 1923 (Archivio Storico dell’Università di Catania, henceforth [ASUCT](#), Verbali del Senato Accademico, seduta del 19 gennaio 1924).

Shortly thereafter, the minister would nominate Pietro Delogu (1925-26), a professor of Roman law, prorector and then rector, who, unlike his predecessor, shared without exception the system of the Gentile reform.

In the session of the Board of Directors of the Academy of 5. XII 1924 ([AGHA](#), b.22, c.30, rv; c.35, v) the Council postponed the celebrations of the centenary, given “the university agitations and particularly those that occurred within ours, as a consequence of the Gentile law on the organization of university studies, our University cannot be said to be in a state of tranquility . . . on the occasion of the centenary celebrations of our Academy. Therefore it would seem opportune and convenient to postpone the start of operations for the beginning of the procedures relating to these celebrations to another short time”. The postponement was confirmed until February 1925 when the Committee for the celebrations was elected and the date was set for June 6, Saturday, to solemnize the centenary, speaker Professor A. Russo.

Already in 1921 Russo rector had worked to convince municipalities, provinces, chambers of commerce, banking institutions, public and private territorial bodies, to set up a consortium (Ente universitario autonomo, Autonomous university body) for the survival and maintenance of the University (Monterosso, 1956, 1962).

Shortly thereafter, the two characters met perhaps during the XIX SIPS Meeting (Italian Society for the Progress of Sciences) held in Bolzano-Trento (7-15 September 1930). One of the Presidents of Scientific Sections in Class B (Biological Sciences) was Professor Achille Russo (Zoology), while in the Class C of Moral Sciences was the senator Professor Giovanni Gentile (Philosophy).

The Gentile reform itself would have been modified several times. The downgrade was in fact repealed ten years later. The new authoritarian reform launched by the fervent fascist hierarch senator Cesare Maria De Vecchi, Minister of National Education from January 24, 1935 to November 14, 1936, in arranging for a broad centralization of powers and competences from the university faculties to the ministry, also established the transformation of all high schools into faculties (RDL 20 giugno 1935–XIII, n. 1071, *Modifiche ed aggiornamenti al testo unico delle leggi sulla istruzione superiore*; in: *Gazzetta ufficiale*, 152, 2 luglio 1935). The Piedmontese hierarch had been assigned the task of deepening and extending the school's "fascistization" process. De Vecchi's "counter-reform", depriving the universities of autonomy, also provided for the abolition of the differentiation between type A and B universities, under pressing revisionist academic pressures, implementing the administrative unification of the universities, through the consolidation of contributions of Municipalities, Provinces, Provincial Councils of Corporate Economy. The universities of Bari, Catania and Messina passed from consortium universities to state universities.

The Gentile reform also underwent its substantial rewriting by Giuseppe Bottai (law no. 899 of 1 July 1940, known as the Bottai law or reform, *La Carta della Scuola*). It was a law of the Kingdom of Italy on the national school system approved by the Grand Council of Fascism. In 1938, Bottai, minister of National Education for six years (November 15, 1936 - February 4, 1943), allegedly dismissed a new complex regulatory apparatus of school and university legislation. The reform, the first "organically and genuinely fascist", had as its objective the formation of a new fascist cultural elite at the service of the needs of the State. The XIX Declaration of the School Charter was dedicated to the University, according to which the University had the purpose of promoting, in an order of high political and moral responsibility, the progress of science and to provide the scientific culture necessary for the exercise of the offices. The text provided for the unification of the university structure from above, leaving the autonomy of the universities only for the performance of technical and consultative functions.

4 Participation in the celebrations of science during Fascist period

The first National Exhibition of the History of Science was an exhibition of scientific relics of historical value held at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni (parterre of San Gallo) in Florence from May to November 1929. Following the support obtained by the Fascist government, it was the first Italian exhibition event specifically dedicated to the History of Science with the aim of presenting the scientific achievements of the 'Italic genius' to the general public and providing a first census of the Italian historical-scientific collections. The Exposition was ordered by city. Room V housed material (museum collections, photos, books, tables, documents of historical importance and equipment owned by universities, academies, state archives) sent by some cities such as Catania, Palermo, Syracuse, Cagliari, Conegliano and San Remo ([Istituto e Museo di Storia delle scienze, 1952](#)). The catalog was only published in 1952. From Catania, among other small things, photos of Etna, two herbariums from Cupani, Gioeni's relics and photographic portraits of Carlo and Mario Gemmellaro were sent. In addition, the device for determining solar heat (cassette pyrhelimeter), an instrument used by Professor Adolfo Bartoli, former professor of Physics in Catania (1886-1893) and Secretary General of the Gioeni's Academy (1890-1893) ([Ente per le Attività toscane, 1929](#)).

The letter of invitation to participate, sent to the President of the Gioeni's Academy by the Directorate General for Academies and Libraries of the Ministry of Public Education, is dated 23 February 1929, Year VII ([AGHA](#), b.67, c.17, rv).

In the twenty years, previous scientific meetings that closely involved the Gioeni's academicians were:

- a) the XII Meeting SIPS (Italian Society for the Progress of Sciences, 1839) which was held in Catania, in the week of April 5-11, 1923. The President was Professor Pietro Bonfante jurist, and Vice-President Achille Russo;
- b) the XIII SIPS Meeting which was held in Naples, from April 29 to May 2, 1924. Achille Russo was the Vice-President. The academic members were Professors Gaetano Platania physicist, Giuseppe Grassi Cristaldi chemist, Filippo Eredia meteorologist, Bruno Monterosso zoologist;
- c) the XXIV SIPS Meeting which was held in Palermo from 12 to 18 October 1935. The Congress was, like the previous ones, a celebration of Fascist science. The Gioeni's Academy was represented by its President, Professor Achille Russo ([Alberghina, 2017](#)).

5 The President Professor Achille Russo

In the twenty years, Russo was absorbed by the city and national events that accompanied the Italian political order after the March on Rome. He does not figure among the famous Italian scientists who explicitly gave their support to

fascism. Like many intellectuals of the period, however, he seems not hostile, not resistant, if not favorable interiorly, to the political regime present in the country. In fact, he was not among the twelve Italian university professors who in 1931 refused to take the oath of allegiance to the political regime in place when the nation's fascistization process could be considered advanced. Like many personalities with institutional responsibilities, he appears as a figure who, occupying a position that did not allow to remain anonymous, inevitably ended up showing, in official relations, full adherence to the government in office, instead advancing strong criticisms when he was, less observed, in the shadow of everyday life.

Clarity on the subject of his political position does not emerge even reading the list of books donated in his lifetime by Russo from his private collection to the library of the Accademia Gioenia. In the inventory of the Fund stand out volumes or uncut booklets such as *Lo sviluppo storico del Fascismo* (G. Volpe, Palermo 1928, Anno VI, Quaderni dell'Istituto Nazionale Fascista di Cultura), *La Guerra italo-etioptica* (Firenze 1935), *Sui monti, nel cielo e nel mare. La guerra d'Italia* (gennaio-giugno 1916) (L. Barzini, Milano 1916), *Discorso pronunciato dall'Ecc. il Conte Galeazzo Ciano, Ministro per gli Affari Esteri, Bologna, 3 gennaio 1942-20* (G. Ciano, Roma, 1942), *Hitler* (tre fascicoli, Collezione Grandi Discorsi, 1941), *Il Duce nel primo annuale della guerra* (fascicolo 10 giugno XIX, Collezione Grandi Discorsi), but also *Carlo Marx* (Lenin V. I., Società Editrice l'Unità, Roma 1944, Collana Piccola Biblioteca Marxista n. 3), *Il socialismo dall'utopia alla scienza* (F. Engels, Società Editrice l'Unità, Roma 1945, Collana Piccola Biblioteca Marxista n. 6).

Russo was awarded honors related to the regime such as those of Officer of the Order of the Crown of Italy and Knight of the Order of Saints Maurice and Lazarus. In June 1939, no longer in active service at the University (service ceased in 1937), he was elected Academician of the Lincei and Academician of Italy.

Moreover, it should be noted that Russo exalted fascist Italy in his interventions at scientific conferences and made the usual statements of circumstance on official occasions in which the academicians considered (and unfortunately still believe) obligatory to express their gratitude to the government or to the political referent in load. In the informative letters addressed to the Prefect or Prefectural Commissioner, to the representative or to the President of the Province, to the Federal Secretary, to the Mayor of the city, since 1935 Russo addressed himself with the name of "Illustrious Camerata" (AGHA, b.81, c.19, r) and concluded by offering "Fascist greetings. President". Previously he signed with "Devoti ossequi" or "With obsequies".

In the short speech delivered at the opening of the scientific academic communications session on May 28, 1936, the President Russo expressed himself as follows: "Our voice of exultation goes first of all to the supreme architect of the Victory, to Benito Mussolini, who wanted, prepared and, with wise shrewdness, he triumphantly led to the land of Africa, for the valor and wisdom of a leader, a civilizing and redemptive enterprise of slave and barbarously cruel peoples. In the historic meeting of the 9 M, the Duce said that after 15 centuries the Empire

had appeared on the fatal Hills of Rome! This legacy could not be received more worthily than by a wise and warrior KING, by Vittorio Emanuele III! We therefore greet Camerati, with a fervent heart, the victorious KING and the founder DUCE of the Empire (Ethiopia); but, let us also raise our purest thoughts to the Italic youth which, with blood sacrifice, contributed to the Victory. Salute to the KING! Greetings to the DUCE!" The assembly responds: "Long live the KING! To us!" (AGHA, b.74, c.7, r).

In the following session of 18 June 1936, also chaired by Russo, at the opening the President read a telegram from His Excellency the Minister of National Education De Vecchi, who thanked and was pleased with the votes cast and for the acclamation of the foundation of the Impero in the previous session of 28 May (AGHA, b.74, c.14, r).

During the inauguration ceremony of the 114th year since the foundation of the Academy held on November 3, 1937, after the lecture given by the member Professor Antonino Clementi on "Recent advances in comparative animal biochemistry", the closing words of the President Russo recalled His Majesty the King Emperor and the Duce founder of the Empire. The meeting ended with the greeting to the KING and the greeting to the DUCE given by the President, to whom the assembly replied with a single voice: long live the KING! and to us! (AGHA, b.75, c.13, r).

In Russo's speech given on 28 October 1939 during the inauguration ceremony of the 116th year since the foundation of the Academy, at the end we read: "Your Excellencies Camerati, this academic inauguration takes place amid the bloody contrasts for a better structure in Europe, but in Italy it coincides with a great national event heralding peace and higher social justice, the end of the Sicilian latifundium [Russo referred to the colonization of the Sicilian latifundium decided by the fascist regime (legge del 2 gennaio 1940, n. 2 e decreto integrativo 26 febbraio 1940, n. 247. De Francisci Gerbino, 1940)]. We greet with a serene spirit the new era, created by the Fascist Revolution and, let us too, Camerati Members, prepare ourselves to give our contribution of knowledge and experience so that the natural resources of this land are for the benefit of the working people! Our devout thoughts therefore go to the two architects of the rebirth, Vittorio Emanuele III, King and Emperor, and Benito Mussolini Duce of Fascism, vigilant guardian of the power and dignity of the Fatherland, in whose name we declare the 116th year of scientific activity of this Academy" (AGHA, b.76, cc.96-99, r, r).

It should be emphasized that in the twenty years the publication of the Acts and the Bulletin published by the Gioeni's Academy shows a cultural independence from the Fascist reclamation of culture in the mathematical, physical and natural sciences. No ironclads emerge from the archival documents censorship perimeter within which the articles to be published could be checked. This is mainly because the Academy did not include members in classes of legal, social, historical or philosophical sciences who could have more easily expressed heterodox scientific contributions. The analysis of the communications read in the academic meetings and of the memoirs and published works allows us to affirm

that they were presented independently and without being censored. The latter data is particularly interesting because it confirms that, despite the initiatives of the years of autarchy and the proclamations of propaganda on the importance of scientific research and technological laboratories addressed to the economic and political needs of the country, the organization, the character and the expression of Italian university and academic research did not change significantly. The poverty of means with respect to people remained, while the overall dynamic was marked by a loss of cultural weight in the scientific area compared to the humanistic one.

6 The wind of the purge of professors and academicians

Between September 1943 and September 1945, since inside the Gioeni's Academy there were resident and non-resident members, activists and fascist sympathizers, President Russo also had to register the serial purification process against them conducted both by the AMG (Education Division and SubCommission), and by the territorial commissions appointed following the Lieutenant Legislative Decree of 27 July 1944, n. 159, defined as the "Magna Carta of purge" due to its importance. These two judicial bodies sentenced nationally suspensions from university teaching, censures, exonerations, acquittals, reinstatements and amnesties of hundreds of Italian university professors (Flamigni, 2017; Gueraggio and Nastasi, 2018). In the University of Catania, six aid workers, assistants and freelance professors were purged (dismissed) and three out of fifty full professors: Giulio Natali, professor of Italian literature, was suspended and reinstated in 1946 (ASUCT, personal file Giulio Natali, b.99), Giuseppe Usai, professor of financial mathematics, was suspended for a year, while Gaetano Zingali, professor of Finance, was fired.

The dismissals were not limited to schools and universities, but also the high culture institutions were purged: at the Academy of Medical Sciences in Palermo one member was suspended and one fired, at the Academy of Sciences, Letters and Arts, however, they were temporarily suspended 12 members and 14 expelled permanently, and 36 members were dismissed from the Accademia Peloritana in Messina (Flamigni, 2017).

A short list of local Gioeni's members, rightly or wrongly considered collaborators or apologists for the regime, includes: Antonino Clementi physiologist, full member, Filippo Eredia meteorologist, honorary member, Giuseppe Grassi Cristaldi chemist, full member, Giuseppe Muscatello surgeon and long-time rector, effective partner, Gaetano Zingali economist, resident correspondent partner.

A longer list of Gioeni's members elected before 1945, subject to complaints and/or sent for purge proceedings, includes: Giacomo Aymerich gynecologist, correspondent partner (Bari), Silvestro Baglioni physiologist, correspondent partner (Rome), Giulio Cotroneo anatomist, correspondent partner (Rome), Alessandro Ghigi zoologist and rector, correspondent partner (Bologna), Luigi Manfredini chemical engineer, honorary member (Bologna), Rinaldo Pellegrini

coroner, correspondent partner (Padua), Gioacchino Russo engineer senator, honorary member (Catania), Giuseppe Sangiorgi hygienist, correspondent partner (Bari), Paolo Vinassa De Regny geologist, correspondent partner (Pavia), Edoardo Zavattari zoologist, correspondent partner (Rome), mathematicians Michele Cipolla, correspondent partner (Palermo), Michele de Franchis, correspondent partner (Palermo), Gaetano Scorza, correspondent partner (Naples), Giulio Andreoli, correspondent partner (Naples), Francesco Severi, honorary member (Rome), Paolo Straneo, corresponding member (Genoa), Filadelfo Insolera, correspondent partner (Turin), Mauro Picone, correspondent partner (Rome), Ugo Amaldi, correspondent partner (Rome), Giuseppe Usai ([Flamigni, 2017](#); [Guerraggio, 2018](#); [Guerraggio and Nastasi, 2018](#); [Pelleriti, 2013](#)), effective partner (Catania) and Pia Nalli, shareholder effective (Catania) ([ASUCT](#), personal file Pia Nalli, b.62) ([Guerraggio, 2018](#); [Guerraggio and Nastasi, 2018](#); [Pelleriti, 2013](#)).

The story of the latter, full professor of Mathematical Analysis and a character with a difficult character and questionable professional behavior towards colleagues and students, includes her sending back, initiated in an unclear form (end of June 1944), to the Purge Commission of the university staff at the Ministry of Education (Rome), chaired by the councilor of the Supreme Court Andrea Lo Russo Caputi. A request to the rector of the University of Catania for a “detailed report in relation to the alleged charges” was sent by telegram by the Commission on 18 December 1944 (18). The immediate response was a detailed recommendation not to purge, communicated by letter (28.12.1944) by the rector Dante Majorana since “none of the charges foreseen . . . can be attributed to Professor Pia Nalli” ([ASUCT](#), personal file Pia Nalli, b.62). The conclusions of the Commission were subsequently communicated to the rector on January 27, 1945 “in order to deliver the provision to the person concerned”. A copy of the acquittal was communicated to professor Nalli on 07.02.1945, with the compliments of the rector ([ASUCT](#), personal file Pia Nalli, b.62).

Two other attempts at “failed purge” in the same University of Catania can be assimilated to the Nalli affair, the one relating to the effective member Salvatore Citelli, professor of Otolaryngology, and the one concerning another effective member Sebastiano Gussio, professor of Surgical Pathology and Clinical Propaedeutics.

Citelli, a professionally upright and socially respected figure, was referred to the Ministerial Purge Commission at the beginning of February 1944 for having participated in the active political life of fascism as a member of the Party’s Disciplinary Commission (single charge). He defended himself from the accusation by sending a memorial to the rector dated March 27, 1944, in which he explained the reasons for his membership in the Fascist Party in 1927, the appointment he had suffered in the Disciplinary Commission in 1943, and where he illustrated his voluntary non-participation to fascist activities as well as the slander suffered. He was defended by an information report dated December 14, 1944 signed by the rector Majorana, where he was defined as a “citizen with a moral conduct beyond reproach and in no way subservient to fascism or benefited by it” ([ASUCT](#), personal file, envelope 44). The acquittal is dated 11 May

1945.

Gussio, also alien from active political life, had taken on the card of the Fascist Party in March 1926, shortly after his transfer to Catania, and immediately afterwards, for a very short time and despite himself, the position of Trustee of the Combat Bundle of Catania. This participation was contested in December 1944 by the Roman Purification Commission which subsequently acquitted him, on May 11, 1945 (ASUCT, personal file, envelope 67).

7 Racial laws and the Jewish question

The Gioeni's Academy does not seem to have been involved in the anti-Jewish policy advocated by fascism. The first ministerial circulars of 9 and 19 August 1938 arranged for the compilation of the census forms for the staff of the Universities and for the members of Academies and Cultural Institutes (Circular no.11836 of 19 August 1938, sent by the Ministry of National Education, Directorate-General for Academies, Libraries, General Affairs and Personnel, concerning: *Census of academicians of Jewish race*; AGHA, b.76, c88, r) and the sending of lists provided by the same universities and academies regarding who was of "Jewish race" (from both parents, for part of a father or mother, or who had married a Jew).

A subsequent letter from the same Ministry of National Education, dated 26 September 1938, no. 12906, signed by Minister Giuseppe Bottai, was sent to the Academy to remind that the "cards for the census of Jewish academicians", which had been sent at the time, had to be delivered to all members without distinction (AGHA, b.76, c.94, r): "We are waiting for this Presidency to send the duly filled forms . . .". The compilation and sending of personal cards of the Gioeni's members had a continuation even after the landing of the allied army in Sicily. In February 1944, the compilation of individual forms, to be sent to the Regional Education Councilor resident in Palermo, Mr. Captain Koopman of the Allied Control Commission, Educational SubCommission, will be re-proposed and demanded by the allied military occupation government (AGHA, b.82, c.7, r).

The first Royal Decree Law (RDL) of 5 September 1938, n. 1390, "Provisions for the defense of the race in the fascist school" was approved by the Council of Ministers on 2 September and sanctioned the exclusion of people of Jewish race from the office of teacher in state or parastatal schools of any order and degree, by university assistantship and the achievement of free teaching. With the ministerial list of October 14, 1938, the Ministry communicated the names of full professors, aids, assistants, professors and temporary staff suspended from service as belonging to the "Jewish race". The total persecution of Jews in Italy was carried out only with the enactment of the RDL of November 17, 1938, n. 1728, "Provisions for the defense of the Italian race". With the issue of the RDL of November 15, 1938, n. 1779, which integrated and coordinated in a single text all the rules already issued for the defense of the Italian race in

schools, excluding Jews from any office or employment in schools of all levels, public and private, attended by Italian students, personnel already suspended from their duties were released from service and allowed to assert the titles for any retirement benefits; the Jewish professors were declared forfeited from qualification.

The Italian university professors expelled from the Universities of the Kingdom were 96, identified as Jews and suspended from service as of October 16, 1938, according to RDL 5.IX.1938, n. 1390, and then dispensed with effect from 14 December 1938, according to the Royal Decree of 15 November 1938, n. 1779; to these were added more than 400 including professors, freelancers, lecturers, aids and assistants.

Full university professors members of the Gioeni's Academy, victims of racial laws, were: Maurizio Mosè Ascoli (Palermo), full professor of General Medical Clinic and Medical Therapy, non-resident correspondent member, already effective; Tullio Levi Civita (Rome), full professor of Rational Mechanics, honorary member; Amedeo Herlitzka (Turin), full professor of Human Physiology, non-resident correspondent partner; Guido Fubini Ghiron (Turin), full professor of Mathematical Analysis at the Polytechnic and in charge of Higher Analysis at the University, non-resident correspondent partner; Carlo Foà (Milan), full professor of Human Physiology, non-resident correspondent member and Ugo Lombroso (Genoa), full professor of Human Physiology, non-resident correspondent member.

In 1938, on the basis of the Fascist census, only 75 Jews lived in Catania, of which few were originally from Catania (Archivio di Stato di Catania, Fondo Questura di Catania. Indexes of files concerning citizens of Jewish origin, 1938-1951). Among honorary members, effective members, resident and non-resident correspondents, a completed form was that of Professor Azeglio Bemporad, born in Siena (there is no document and no copy of the personal card in [AGHA](#)), already reported by the university administration.

The story of Bemporad, professor of Astronomy and full member of the Academy, can be reconstructed thanks to the archival material preserved in the Archives of the Astronomical Observatory and in the Archivio Storico dell'Università di Catania ([ASUCT](#), personal file, envelope 43). Openly fascist, he had been enrolled in the PNF (National Fascist Party) of Catania since 31 July 1933, but his card and badge had been revoked in July 1935. In 1938 his being a Jew first cost him the revocation of the qualification for free teaching (revoked provision 25 August 1944), forced retirement (telegram dated 15 December 1938 signed by Minister Giuseppe Bottai) without the right to awarding the pension, the deprivation of housing for himself and his family in the Observatory, the humiliating and burning refusal to the request for to be able to continue to work, even if only in a personal and free capacity, on the preparation of the much appreciated Astrophotographic Catalog. He will be reinstated in rank and functions shortly before his death, which occurred on February 11, 1945. The day before, Bemporad had written a letter to the President Russo in which he confided "the idea of another communication that you can take note of until

henceforth, with the title: Words of God to the righteous and the wicked according to Psalm 50 of Asaph" (AGHA, b.82, c.19, r). On 27 May following the Academy will commemorate its late Vice-President in the Hall of the Institute of Zoology, in Via Androne 25, memorial speech made by Luigi Taffara (AGHA, b.82, c.31, r).

Two academic members who passed unscathed from the anti-Jewish and anti-fascist storm were: Guido Izar clinical doctor (Siena) and Bruno Monterosso zoologist (Catania). The first had been registered as a Jew in Messina in 1938 and had been registered with the PNF since 1925 (D'Amico, 2020). The second, professor of Zoology and Comparative Anatomy since 1930 (Cagliari, Genoa, Catania), awarded the title of Officer of the Crown of Italy in October 1942 (ASUCT, personal file, envelope 52), pupil of Achille Russo (Monterosso, 1940), was charged with teaching the discipline "Biology of races" in the Faculty of Sciences of the University of Catania, from the academic year 1938-39. He was among the first teachers to give lessons inspired by the new theme generated by the fascist national policy entitled: The races as they arise and how they set, according to the decree of November 17, 1938 (Provisions for the defense of the Italian race). A didactic tool he used was his book: *Lessons on the biology of human races*, published by the University Fascists Group (GUF) (Catania, 1942, pp. 467), where surprising (anti-Semitic and anti-African) racial considerations and analyzes are expressed, which would testify to a racist inclination of the author (De Cristofaro, 2020). Monterosso continued to teach "Biology of races" until the mid-1950s (ASUCT, personal file, envelope 52), with more demographic, ethnological and genetical tones than hierarchical or discriminatory. That book was in fact transformed into *Elements of genetics and biology of human races* (Catania 1949, Casa del Libro, pp. 311).

8 Conclusions

Within the scientific and literary academies scattered throughout the country have celebrated events very similar to each other that have accompanied the lives of members for twenty years. Inside it is possible to intercept common signs of unease and few signs of disagreement with the authoritarian political atmosphere and the anti-Semitic choices of fascism. Manifesting one's dissent was dangerous, while cloaking oneself in a lukewarm opportunist consensus or silence was an almost universal and more advantageous position. Letting a detached political agnosticism slip on his shoulders saved the academic prestige acquired and the careers of the associates. The academicians, a diversified and exclusive community of scientists and scholars, thus appear men of double life, mostly university in the profession and lecturers in the classroom, all together lovers in the daily of places of proposition, scientific conversation and socialization, of encounters between scholars otherwise impossible. In the post-war period, it was observed the capacity of public institutions and academies in particular to absorb the damage of an undemocratic regime and to reintegrate,

albeit to different degrees and levels, men who had actively or unwillingly participated in authoritarian and racial policies. They could thus return to a role of social guidance and dissemination of scientific knowledge.

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