

David Asheri

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A specialist in Greek history, he taught for thirty years at the Hebrew University in Israel. He was a young boy of 13 years when he left Florence with his mother and younger brothers to join his father, who had found work in Palestine, in fact at the Hebrew University. His surname was Bonaventura. His life changed decisively from that October of 1939, although he would have been aware for at least a year that things would never be the same again, from the time when his father had lost his position at the University of Florence, and he and his brother were no longer able to go to the same school as their classmates.

In Florence

David was born in Florence on 1 November 1925, the son of the psychologist Enzo Bonaventura, a very active Zionist in the Jewish community in Florence, and of Matilde Passigli, four years after they celebrated their marriage on 14 September 1921. After him two other boys were born: Emanuel on 1 April 1928 and Daniel on 23 May 1936.

In Florence they lived in via Fra' Giovanni Angelico 67, just outside the centre and not far from the [river] Arno; they often saw their paternal grandparents Arnaldo (1862-1952) and Emma (1864-1946), though these did not go with them to Palestine¹. The first to leave was his father Enzo, who because of the race laws of autumn 1938 had even had to hand over the keys of the laboratory at the Institute of Psychiatry, where he went daily and where he had personally constructed some of the equipment. From the time when he was no longer able to go and teach because he was Jewish, David saw him

¹ Emma Fano was from Verona and married Arnaldo Bonaventura, a musicologist, violinist and journalist born in Livorno 28 July 1862. After graduating from Pisa, he worked at the National Library in Florence, and died in Florence on 7 October 1952; see the page dedicated to him in <https://www.myheritage.it> (Accessed 1 February 2019).

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much more often at home, worried and restless. When he left, in March 1939, he promised David and his brothers that they would join him as soon as he was settled. Six months went by and then in September they too left with their mother² to go and live where their father had found a new job at the university and a new house.

In Jerusalem

In Jerusalem, David was sent to the Ma'alé school for religious children. During the War of Independence, he fought with the Moria battalion of the Palmach, the strike force of the Haganah founded in 1941, whose motto was «We are ready to obey every command». Engaged in clandestine activities against British rule, he had to hide and adopt a false surname.

On 13 April 1948 he tragically lost his father. Enzo Bonaventura was a victim of the notorious attack on Hadassah, while he was going to work in the medical convoy escorted by the Haganah militia as it was on its way to the hospital on Mount Scopus:³ 97 of the 105 passengers died, among them also Anna Di Gioacchino Cassuto, the daughter-in-law of professor Umberto Cassuto.

After the war, together with Ada Feinberg Sireni and some friends, David took part in the founding of the Yiron kibbutz, on 20 May 1949, in northern Galilee, where he was put to milk the cows. It was in the same year that he changed his surname to Asheri, later adopted by his brothers, and forsaking his Italian surname as was normal⁴. In 1952 he had to leave the kibbutz, and went back to Jerusalem, but remained always deeply attached to the left-wing culture of

² See the list of immigrants from Florence in Arturo Marzano, *Una terra per rinascere. Gli ebrei italiani e l'emigrazione in Palestina prima della guerra (1920-1940)*, Genoa-Milan, Marietti, 2003, pp. 364-365. The arrivals of Enzo Bonaventura and of Matilde Passigli with the children are dated October, though the precise day is missing. The exact date, however, seems to be the one in the mother's *Palestine immigrant certificate* issued by the Immigration Department in Jerusalem, dated 20 September 1939: Daniel Asheri has provided a copy of this and authorized publication.

³ Harry Levin, *Jerusalem Embattled. A Diary of the City under Siege*, London, Cassel, 1997.

⁴ Written evidence from his granddaughter Rachel Bonaventura Snir to the author, 13 February 2019.

the founding fathers of Israel. He enrolled at the Hebrew University, studying history, and between 1952 and 1961 he obtained various qualifications including a PhD, while working as a bookbinder at the National Library.

In 1954 he married Maya Melnik and they had two daughters, Shlomit and Irit. He became a professor of Greek and Roman history and obtained a permanent position at the Hebrew University like his father, who had achieved this the year before he died. In 1991 David Asheri was nominated a member of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities. In 1993 he retired, but continued to research and to publish.

He died on 3 February 2000; although an Israeli citizen he had never renounced his Italian citizenship. He often returned to Italy on visits. As one of the lecturers at the University of San Marino he was a visiting professor at the University of Florence in the Faculty of Letters, chaired by Guido Clemente. In the studies in which he was a specialist he met often with Italian scholars such as Arnaldo Momigliano, who greatly inspired him, and the Roman history scholar Emilio Gabba (1927-2013). For the editorship of Einaudi's *I greci* he collaborated with Salvatore Settis and others. His meticulous work on the edition of the *Histories* of Herodotus for Mondadori is highly regarded.

Principal publications

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Archival sources

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