

Umberto Genazzani (Hizkiyahu Cesare Nitzani)

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In 1938, Umberto Genazzani was a medical captain in the army and a *medico condotto* [a municipal general practitioner] in Florence. After being discharged from the service due to the Racial Laws, he decided to emigrate to Tel Aviv together with his family.

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[Nello Rosselli](#)
[Maria Todesco Rosselli](#)

From Florence to Florence

Son of Gioacchino and Matilde Della Torre, he had two sisters, Adriana and Margherita, and two brothers, Mario and Ruggero.

He had obtained the title of «Maskil» at the Collegio rabbinico in Florence, between 1914 and 1915, and his classical high school diploma at the Liceo Michelangiolo in Florence on 24 May 1915, the day in which Italy entered the war. He was immediately re-enlisted and began actual service on 26 November 1915. A medical student, he served in the Sanità militare [military health system] until 31 December 1919 with the rank of sergeant first and then as an «*aspirante medico*» [a candidate to become a doctor], while also participating in war campaigns.

On 14 July 1921 he graduated in medicine and surgery at the University of Florence, with honors, defending the thesis, «Quinine prophylaxis in malaria» with Professor Cesare Frugoni.

In 1922, Umberto married Tina Calò. He became a general practitioner and health officer in the municipality of Montegabbione (Umbria) where a typhus epidemic broke out. Umberto, the only Jew, and the priest of the village turned the church into a hospital and out of seventy sick only one child and one old man lost their lives. Still as a medical doctor and medical officer he moved to Castiglione del Lago (Umbria). His children were born, Franco in 1923 and Enzo in 1926.

He returned to Florence in September 1930, to pursue his medical studies further. At the «Clinic of Children's Diseases» (Ospedale Meyer), he obtained a specialization in pediatrics in July 1932. In the period from 1930 to 1938, he practiced the medical profession as an internist and as a pediatrician, directing the pediatric clinics of the Istituto nazionale per la maternità e l'infanzia in Ricorboli-Bandino (Florence) and Borgo San Lorenzo (Florence). On 22 October 1935, he won the *concorso* [national contest to secure a public post] as a *medico condotto* of the municipality of Florence and became the head of the prestigious *condotta* [urban subdivision under the responsibility of one health officer and physician] of Piazza Torino, now Piazza Isidoro Del Lungo. In the years following his graduation, he advanced in rank in the army, until he was promoted to medical captain on 1 July 1936.

In 1937, as a pediatrician, he was called by Maria Todesco, widow of Nello Rosselli, to assist little Alberto who was only a few months old. For this reason, Maria also expressed her gratitude to him in the short letter, edged in black, which we attach here, giving him the book *Carlo Pisacane in the Italian Risorgimento*, which Nello had published in 1932¹.

In November-December 1938 he was «dismissed», with official letters, from any public activity and office, including that which he held in the army, in accordance with the RDL n. 1728 of 17 November 1938². His children, Franco and Enzo, were removed from their respective schools.

On 5 December 1938 he went to Tel Aviv as a «tourist» to explore the possibilities of life, work, and study that might become available for him and his family. He stayed there for three weeks and when he returned, he often loved to repeat an emblematic song of the time, «יצאור המישה», «Hamishà lazù»³.

¹ The book and the letter were moved to Tel Aviv in 1939; they were sent to Gigliola Mariani Sacerdoti in 2002 to be displayed in the cases of the National Library of Florence, on the occasion of the exhibition and conferences (*Lessico familiare. Vita, cultura e politica della famiglia Rosselli all'insegna della libertà*) that took place there from 14 May to 14 June of the same year. See image 2 in the gallery.

² See images 3 and 4 in the gallery.

³ <<https://www.youtube.com>> (accessed 31 March 2019).

This song told the story of five Jewish workers in the kibbutz Ma'ale Hahamisha, killed in an ambush by the Arabs⁴. Perhaps it was the refrain that had conveyed intense meanings to him, which he immediately wanted to communicate to the rest of his family: «Five had left to build a homeland and each of them had left his mother, his sister, a baby child and his wife». He decided to leave Italy and go to Palestine with his family.

From Florence to Tel Aviv

They left Brindisi a week after celebrating their son Enzo's «Bar-Mitzvâ» in the synagogue on via Farini in Florence, and arrived in Tel Aviv on 17 April 1939, without Franco, the eldest son, because the English authorities had denied him a visa; he would get it five months later.

For five years Umberto Genazzani was unable to practice the medical profession officially, because the mandate power granted only ninety licenses a year, and the doctors who arrived in Palestine in 1938-39 were over eight hundred, in a population of just over 400,000 souls. Genazzani took the opportunity to specialize further in internal medicine and social medicine.

He could only make vaccinations and go to places far from Tel Aviv, moving north, from Migdal Tzedek to Afula, as well as to the south of the country, where he treated the Bedouins. He also managed to assist the workers of Solel Boneh, the famous construction company. Then, he found a way to help a doctor in Galilee who dedicated himself to the treatment of malaria, of which Umberto was an expert (see the topic of his degree thesis).

He took Palestinian citizenship, which automatically changed to Israeli citizenship when the birth of the state of Israel was proclaimed. He obtained the license to practice the medical profession on 1 January 1943 and was appointed «general doctor» of the staff of Tel Aviv City Hall. Although it was

⁴ <<https://en.wikipedia.org>> (accessed 31 March 2019).

difficult, in those years, to communicate with Italy⁵ – due to the well-known war events and the complex international political relations – he managed to get to his and his wife's families the news that the license had finally arrived. From the materials in our possession, we learn that his relatives, aware of the importance of that document, found a way to congratulate him.

He changed his surname from Genazzani to Nitzani («nitzàn» means bud in Hebrew).

He held the post of general doctor of Tel Aviv City Hall staff for twenty years, until 30 April 1963, when he retired. Although retired, he was invited to serve in the department of industrial medicine of the «Kupat Cholim» (Health insurance) of Tel Aviv, because, in the meantime, he had obtained the diploma of «specialist in social and industrial medicine».

He died in April 1981 in a home for the elderly in Ra'anana, near Tel Aviv.

Major publications

- *Sulla patogenesi della malattia da siero*, «Riforma medica», 43, 3, 1927.
- *Di una rara forma di pielonefrosi dovuta ad un zooparassita: l'Eustrongilus Gigas*, «Riforma medica», 43, 16, 1927.
- *Favism*, «Harefuah. Journal of the Medical Association of Israel», 24, 6, 1943 (in Hebrew).
- *A Case of Acrocephalo-syndactylia*, «Harefuah. Journal of the Medical Association of Israel», 37, 2, 1949, p. 17 (in Hebrew).
- With N. Lass, *The Casoni Test in Hydatid Disease*, «Harefuah. Journal of the Medical Association of Israel», 51, 9, 1956, pp. 205-208 (in Hebrew).
- With N. Lass, Z. Paul, *Hydatid Disease in Israel (Echinococcosis)*, «Hebrew Medical Journal», 1-2, 1957, pp. 194-200.

⁵ Communication was possible through the Red Cross or through the Vatican Secretariat. See images 5 and 6 in the gallery.

- *Poeti d'Israele. Antologia della poesia ebraica moderna da Bialik a Carni*, edited by Giorgio Romano, Padova, Rebellato, 1969, translation by Lydia Bigiavi Levi with the collaboration of Umberto Ch. Nitzani.

Archival sources

- Enzo Nitzani Private Archive, Savyon, Israel.

Gigliola Mariani Sacerdoti

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