

## Achille Viterbi

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For more than thirty years he had been a respected and well-liked specialist, a *libero docente* at the University of Parma, and chief ophthalmologist at the hospital in Bergamo. Even before the Fascist Medical Union disbarred him, he left, silently, as was in his character.

He was almost sixty years old and had an only son not even four years old. To give Andrea a better future, he and his wife crossed the ocean and led a modest life, without the comforts they were used to. But with no regrets: Andrew Viterbi became one of the fathers of the digital revolution.

### An uphill life

At the age of nineteen, Achille took over as head of the family after his banker father Eugenio left his wife, children, and debts and went to Turkey, permanently<sup>1</sup>. Achille was born in Mantua on 22 December 1881, before Giulio, born in 1885, and Emilia and Olga, born respectively in 1887 and 1890. After graduating from high school on 20 June 1899, in Correggio, in the province of Reggio Emilia, he enrolled on 14 November in Medicine and Surgery at the University of Bologna<sup>2</sup>. When he was in his third year, in 1902, he asked for a leave of absence<sup>3</sup>. He and his mother, Zelia Tedeschi (Mantova 1858 - Torre Pellice 1945), decided it was best to move to Turin, where Achille graduated on 4 July 1905, delivering a dissertation on ophthalmology,

<sup>1</sup> A photo of Eugenio Viterbi, born 1854, can be seen in University of South California Archives (USCA), *Andrew J. and Erna Viterbi Family Archives* (but 1924 is clearly not the date of the photo) <<https://digitallibrary.usc.edu>> (accessed 9 December 2021). On Achille's relationship with his father, see Andrew Viterbi, *Reflections of an Educator, Researcher and Entrepreneur*, New York, CPL Editions, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> ASUBo, *Facoltà di Medicina e chirurgia, Fascicoli personali degli studenti*, f. 4327, «Achille Viterbi», where his mother's name appears as «Delia».

<sup>3</sup> Archivio storico of the Università di Torino (ASUTo), *Facoltà di Medicina e chirurgia*, «Registro della carriera scolastica» no. 16, matr. 1885. The leave request document is undated. A series of student files is missing from the archives. Thanks to Paola Novaria for her research on the records and minutes of the graduation exams.

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*Fotocinesi in funzione del tempo* [Photokinesis as a function of time], which was published<sup>4</sup>.

He went from being a «volunteer student» at the Ophthalmic Clinic in Via Juvara 19, to a volunteer assistant in 1905-06 under the direction of the illustrious Carlo Reymond, the leading scholar in the field<sup>5</sup>. Achille became a member of the Reale Accademia di medicina of Turin and collaborated on scientific journals;<sup>6</sup> but he needed to work for his family and also to enable his younger sister to enroll at the university, in the Faculty of Science where there were very few girls<sup>7</sup>. So, Achille had put his academic aspirations on the back burner to find a job in Bergamo, in Lombardy, that had no university but that boasted a large and venerable hospital, the Ospedale Maggiore, which was founded at the end of the fifteenth century.

On 14 May 1906, as the winner of a public competition, he became the first assistant in the Ophthalmic Division of the hospital<sup>8</sup>. Along with other doctors, he was responsible for visiting elementary-school children; after a few years he became an assistant in the Ophthalmic Department and the owner of an ophthalmic office in his own name, which he advertised in «L'Eco di Bergamo»<sup>9</sup>. In short, he had settled down enough that he could afford to

<sup>4</sup> ASUTo, *Facoltà di Medicina e chirurgia*, «Verbali degli esami di laurea 1902-09», p. 150.

<sup>5</sup> In these two positions Achille Viterbi appears in the «Annuario della R. Università di Torino», 1904-05, p. 89 <<https://www.asut.unito.it>> (accessed 9 December 2021) and *Ibid.*, 1905-06, p. 105 <<https://www.asut.unito.it>> (accessed 9 December 2021).

<sup>6</sup> See «Giornale della Reale Accademia di medicina di Torino», 1906, p. 219 <<https://www.google.it/books>> (accessed 9 December 2021).

<sup>7</sup> All the Viterbi children graduated, except Emilia Viterbi, who perhaps took a teacher's license and married. The youngest, Olga, instead put in studies and work, graduating in natural sciences and taught in various institutes of Italy; she got married when she was forty years old, in 1930, to Luciano Beer (1883-1970), French teacher and her colleague at the high school in Perugia.

<sup>8</sup> The exact dates come from several archival sources, with some variations. See ACS, MI, *Direzione generale demografia e razza* (DGDR), *Divisione razza* (DR), b. 289, f. 21262 BEN, «Viterbi Achille», «A. Viterbi, Curriculum vitae su carta intestata», Bergamo, 31 January 1939. The appointment had been by resolution no. 77 of 9 May 1906.

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. *Ispezione medica nelle scuole elementari comunali*, «L'Eco di Bergamo», 1-2 December 1906, and *Gabinetto oculistico A. Viterbi*, *Ibid.*, 3-4 August 1907, 13-14 August 1907. Other news found in the same newspaper are reported by C.D., *Suo padre curava «malattie d'occhi»*, «L'Eco di Bergamo», 9 October 2007, p. 12. The qualification of *aiuto* (resident) is already in one of his scientific articles published in January 1907, Achille Viterbi, *La durata delle impressioni retiniche. Ricerche sperimentali*, «Archivio di fisiologia», 4, 2, 1907.

resume his commitments at the university. In 1911, at the age of thirty, he had therefore decided to sit for the exam to assume the academic qualification of *libero docente* in Ophthalmology and Ophthalmic Medicine, not at the University of Turin, but at the University of Parma,<sup>10</sup> where the chair had been held since 1888 by Camillo Gallenga (1858-1946), a student of Carlo Reymond (1833-1911), under whom Achille had also studied. And Gallenga was an expert in trachoma and oncological pathologies of the eye,<sup>11</sup> which the young scholar also dealt with in his publications.

### University accomplishments

He had submitted an application to the Ministry of Education, via the prefect of Bergamo, who sent it to Rome by registered mail on 19 September 1911, with an accompanying letter and four other attachments. On the 29<sup>th</sup> the application had been duly transmitted to the Higher Council of Education for the proposal of a commission, as the prefect (on behalf of the candidate) was assured when he inquired on 6 October whether the application had arrived and was complete. Dr. Viterbi was a bit anxious; in a long letter, dated Bergamo 11 November 1911, he wrote of having learned from Professor Monti, a member of the board,<sup>12</sup> that his application had not yet arrived and therefore he requested an urgent response «since it is of utmost importance to me that the appointment of a Commission, for which I applied on 17 September, not be delayed any longer».

The appointed commission had already been communicated to the rector of Parma with a ministerial note on 17 October,<sup>13</sup> he was informed. And, in fact,

<sup>10</sup> ACS, MPI, DGIS, *Divisione I, Liberi docenti, II serie (1910-1930)*, b. 343, f. «Viterbi Achille».

<sup>11</sup> See «Annuario del Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione», 1922, p. 164-165. See Alessandro Porro, *Gallenga Camillo*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 51, Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1998 <<https://www.treccani.it>> (accessed 9 December 2021).

<sup>12</sup> He was Achille Monti, professor of pathological anatomy at the University of Pavia, born in 1863, member of the Council and of the board from 1 July 1911 to 30 June 1915; and again, by election, from 1 July 1917 to 30 June 1921. See Gabriella Ciampi, Claudio Santangeli (eds.), *Il Consiglio superiore della Pubblica istruzione 1847-1928*, Rome, Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali. Ufficio centrale per i beni archivistici, 1994, p. 293.

<sup>13</sup> When the rector was, for a few days, Vito De Pirro, followed for the month of November only

a previous communication from the Council, on 27 September, indicated that the members of the committee were: ophthalmologist Camillo Gallenga and Professor Augusto Corona, both from the University of Parma; Domenico Bossalino, a senior lecturer in ophthalmology in Pisa; and Giuseppe Ovio, professor of ophthalmology at the University of Modena. Ovio would go on to have a great political career in the thirties when he entered Parliament as a senator; in 1945 he would be sent to the High Court of Justice to receive penalties because of Fascist involvement and declared disgraced<sup>14</sup>.

The competition had been quite demanding and had lasted more than a year, with four different tests and as many sittings, in front of all the mentioned professors of the Commission as well as Professor Ambrogio Ferrari who took part as dean of the Faculty since 1910<sup>15</sup>. The topic (drawn by lot among five proposed) was «Tumors of the eyeball», and the candidate had one year to write a dissertation on it; this was decided in the first session of 27 February 1912,. The next tests took place on 19 and 20 April 1913: the comprehensive discussion of the thesis, which Dr. Viterbi had «performed commendably»; the practical test, consisting of a visit with a patient for whom «he was able to easily arrive at an exact diagnosis»; and the 50-minute teaching test on «Spherical refractive defects» in which «he demonstrated order, clarity of ideas and ease of speech». The topics, both of the thesis and of the lecture, were those indicated by President Tommasi, who was not an himself ophthalmologist but a surgeon of good reputation, trained in Vienna

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by the professor Gino Segre, and from 1 December 1911, for almost three years by Luigi Tartufari; see <<https://www.unipr.it>> (accessed 9 December 2021).

<sup>14</sup> ACS, MPI, DGIS, *Divisione I, Liberi docenti, II serie (1910-1930)*, b. 343, f. «Viterbi Achille», letter from the president of the Board of the High Council to the minister, 9 October 1911, and correspondence between Achille Viterbi and the ministry, Bergamo, 11 November 1911, and Rome, 30 November 1911, respectively. On Bossalino (died in Sassari in 1949 as a *libero docente*), <<https://www.sba.unipi.it>> (accessed 9 December 2021), see the record *Ovio Giuseppe (1863-1957)* in Senato della Repubblica, *Senatori d'Italia* <<http://notes9.senato.it>> (accessed 9 December 2021).

<sup>15</sup> The exam was held according to the *Testo Unico delle leggi sull'istruzione superiore*, RD 9 August 1910, no. 795 (GU no. 280 of 2 December 1910) and in particular Chapter V. The tests provided for were in Art. 61, which referred back to Art. 98 of Law no. 3725 of 13 November 1859; for the required presence of the dean, see Art. 62, formerly Art. 99 of the Casati Law.

and specializing in gastric surgery, as well as being the head of the hospital<sup>16</sup>. The libera docenza was conferred unanimously. On 7 May, all the results were passed on to the Ministry for due verification, and they then issued the decree of qualification on 28 June 1913, and entrusted the implementation to Luigi Tartufari (1864-1931), professor of civil law, who was the rector of Parma until 1914<sup>17</sup>.

The family had something to celebrate that year: Achille published his dissertation at the important publishing house UTET in Turin, dedicating the volume to his brother Giulio; in December Olga graduated in Turin in natural sciences with a degree in chemistry and immediately began the process of qualifying to teach<sup>18</sup>. While she was beginning to tour Italian schools, on 16 June 1913, Dr. Viterbi had already asked, even before the appointment letter arrived, to teach a free course in the Faculty of Medicine in Parma on the propaedeutics of ophthalmology and institutions of ocular pathological anatomy. For this he had obtained the approval of Gallenga, director of the eye clinic, and the Faculty, and he submitted the program for this course for three consecutive years. In addition to minutes of the Faculty, his position also appears in the respective university annual reports for the academic years 1913-14 and the following 1914-15. Then there is a gap; the data are not published until 1920-21<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> See Mario Crespi, *Ferrari, Ambrogio*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, cit., vol. 46, 1996 <<https://www.treccani.it>> (accessed 9 December 2021). Ten days before the deadline, Dr. Viterbi made a written request to the dean for a two-month extension for the delivery of his dissertation, due to a printer's delay. He was granted this by the commission. See Archivio storico of the Università di Parma (henceforth ASUPr), 1913, b. 813, f. 1/21.

<sup>17</sup> Therein, minutes of the four meetings of the committee, one on 27 February 1912, two on 19 April 1913, and the last on 20 April 1913, with the final report, all sent to the ministry with eleven attachments by the rector of the University of Parma to the ministry on 7 May.

<sup>18</sup> Olga Viterbi attended the Magisterial School of the Faculty of Science at the University of Turin for two years; she graduated in chemistry on 4 December 1913, and on 13 December also received the Magisterial Diploma for her aptitude in teaching the discipline. See USCA, *Andrew J. and Erna Viterbi Family Archives*, cit., Diploma of the Magisterium, University of Turin, 15 December 1913.

<sup>19</sup> In the historical archives of the University of Parma there is currently no file registered in the name of Achille Viterbi; «for that period, the personal files have not yet been created and the documentation must be searched for in the measures according to the title divided by category», as Maria Grazia Perazzo of the ASUPr explained to me. See ASUPr, *Facoltà di*

In the middle of the period, in fact, the war: Achille had been called up for military service on 4 May 1915, and in three years had been promoted from lieutenant to captain and assigned to direct the Ophthalmic Department of Hospital 010, until 22 June 1918<sup>20</sup>. Finally back home, he returned to work at the hospital.

### Getting situated

He was not rich, but he was serious, well-educated, and had a promising career, so basically a «good catch»: this was the opinion of Mr. and Mrs. Luria, bankers for generations and parents to four daughters, the first two of whom were already married. Laura was born in 1888 and married to the chemist Flavio Finzi (1883-1933), and Beatrice was born in 1891 and married to Giuseppe Morpurgo (1887-1967), a high school teacher and literary critic<sup>21</sup>. Achille was introduced to their third daughter, Maria, twenty-five years old, very pretty but with an unfortunate engagement behind her and a teacher's certificate, though this was certainly not because her parents wanted her to work. On 12 July 1919, the wedding was celebrated in the splendid synagogue built in 1595 in Casale Monferrato, where the Luria family lived comfortably. The bride, thirteen years younger than the groom, naturally followed him to Bergamo where, on 1 January 1920, her husband was promoted to chief ophthalmologist of the hospital, first provisionally and

*Medicina e chirurgia, Verbali delle adunanze* [Minutes of meetings], 8 July 1913. A search for Achille Viterbi in the ASUPr was done back in 2006 at the request of his son, Andrew Viterbi, and the partial documentation he received has been haphazardly digitized in USCA, *Andrew J. and Erna Viterbi Family Archives*, cit.

<sup>20</sup> As a medical captain, part of the First Army Eye Service, he published a paper on traumatic neurosis. Dates of military service appear in a typescript document, «Servizio Ospitaliero», in USCA, *Andrew J. and Erna Viterbi Family Archives*, cit., presumably produced for the Ospedale maggiore Principessa di Piemonte in Bergamo. A letter, also reproduced here, shows that this documentation was searched for by Ferruccio Arnoldi, in 1998 at the hospital of Bergamo. On the military ranks of Achille Viterbi, see Daniela Roccas, Rosanna Supino, *Elenco di militari ebrei in sanità e rabbini in Italia durante la Grande Guerra*, p. 52, no. 515 <<https://moked.it>> (accessed 9 December 2021).

<sup>21</sup> Giuseppe Morpurgo (Ancona 1887 - Turin 1967) was a teacher at the Vincenzo Gioberti classical high school in Turin and author of novels, critical essays, and school manuals of Italian literature. His younger sister was Elena Luria (1898-2002) and married Ernesto Treves, also from Casale Monferrato; together they moved to Milan.

then by appointment, succeeding Teodoro Niccolini<sup>22</sup>.

In the city, Dr. Achille Viterbi was highly esteemed: a member of the Società chirurgica bergamasca [Bergamo Surgical Society] and since 30 May 1912, a member of the professional Association of Physicians, Surgeons and Dental Technicians of the province, in which he had also been a council member for at least the three-year period 1924-26<sup>23</sup>. He was part of the Military Health Corps and, from 5 December 1926, an officer in the military reserves. He was in charge at the Brescia command as a major doctor,<sup>24</sup> and at the same time out of social responsibility and philanthropy he also provided health care at *Patronato dei ciechi*, a charitable institution for the blind as well as, always free of charge, to the sick indigent population<sup>25</sup>. He received patients in Via Martinengo Colleoni and at his studio in Via San Giorgio 9 and later in Via Garibaldi 9, two beautiful buildings which also housed his residence,<sup>26</sup> and finally at his eye-care institute in Via Masone, which was also the street where he lived with Maria in the 1930s, at number 9<sup>27</sup>.

### Friends in Bergamo

In the hospital and healthcare environments of Bergamo resistance to the regime was not infrequent. In April 1923 the city council and its advisers

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<sup>22</sup> Appointment as head physician is 15 March 1920, by resolution, see «Servizio Ospitaliero», in USCA cit.

<sup>23</sup> See «La Rivista di Bergamo», 1931, p. 84, and for membership in the Order, the file «Viterbi Achille», in Archivio Ordine dei medici chirurghi e odontotecnici della provincia di Bergamo (AOMBe), Bergamo. I thank Guido Marinoni, President of the Order of Physicians Surgeons and Dental Technicians of the Province of Bergamo, for having sent me a copy of this document.

<sup>24</sup> *Annuario ufficiale delle forze armate del Regno d'Italia*, vol. 1, *Regio Esercito*, Rome, Istituto poligrafico dello Stato, 1938, p. 851.

<sup>25</sup> ACS, MI, DGDR, DR, b. 289, f. 21262 BEN, «Viterbi Achille,» letter from the prefect of Bergamo, 4 February 1940.

<sup>26</sup> These two addresses are noted in the «Viterbi Achille» file in OMECO Historical Archives, Bergamo. Photos of the two beautiful buildings can be seen in <<https://www.google.com/maps>> (accessed 9 December 2021) and <<https://www.google.com/maps>> (accessed 9 December 2021), respectively.

<sup>27</sup> The address of the home is taken from the identity card of Maria Luria Viterbi, Bergamo 1934, in USCA, *Andrew J. and Erna Viterbi Family Archives*, cit. For other information see *L'assemblea del patronato ciechi*, «L'Eco di Bergamo», 27 April 1922; *Guida sanitaria italiana*, Milan, Società editrice Unitas, 1924, p. 7 and p. 13.

resigned due to the impossibility of carrying out their mandate with dignity; taking part was then-councilman for health care Ferruccio Galmozzi (1889-1974), who had been working at the Ospedale Maggiore where Viterbi worked since 1915 and who, like him, after having spent three years at the front as a medical officer, resumed his hospital career, going from assistant in 1921 to head physician in 1931. A Catholic and member of the FUCI (Italian Catholic Federation of University Students) and of the Partito popolare [Popular Party], Galmozzi had refused to get a membership card for the Fascist party even though he was a public employee, but the hospital management did not oust him. He and his large family would go through various hardships, including the arrest of his son Nicola, who was a militant in the Giustizia e Libertà [Justice and Freedom] network, his partisan son-in-law living underground, and the confiscation of his property due to the racial laws. Meanwhile after 8 September 1943, his wife Lizaveta (Elisabetta) Ghelfenbein (1887-1950), a Jewish doctor from Odessa (they had met in Turin while studying medicine), was hiding in a convent in Gandino, 25 km from Bergamo, with the assistance of two nuns – help sanctioned by Bishop Adriano Bernareggi, who had come to Bergamo from Milan in 1931<sup>28</sup>.

Among Viterbi's acquaintances, it is worth mentioning a priest from Bergamo who was very close to Bernareggi: Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, the future Pope John XXIII,<sup>29</sup> who from 1905 to 1921 had been active in Bergamo as secretary to the bishop, as chaplain in the reserve military hospital, and as president of

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<sup>28</sup> Galmozzi was the representative of the Democrazia cristiana [Christian Democracy] in the Committee of National Liberation of Bergamo, he became the mayor of the reconstruction, elected in '46 and again in '51. See Giuseppe Belotti, *Ricordo del dottor Ferruccio Galmozzi sindaco di Bergamo*, «Atti dell'Ateneo di scienze, lettere ed arti», 90, 1976-77 and 1977-78, pp. 333-351. His son-in-law Carlo Cremaschi (1917-1984), husband of his daughter Marussia Galmozzi (1919-2007), area commander of the Brigade del popolo [People's Brigades], became a deputy to the Constituent Assembly, re-elected in 1948 for the Democrazia cristiana. For the story of his wife saved by an Ursuline nun, see Mario Benigni, *Un'anima e la sua storia. Madre Dositea Bottani nel rinnovamento del Concilio*, Rome, Ed. Paoline, 1992.

<sup>29</sup> It is Roncalli's definition of the bishop taken up in the title of Alessandro A. Persico, «*Consul dei*» Adriano Bernareggi (1884-1953). *Chiesa e società nell'Italia del Novecento*, Rome, Studium, 2019. For biographical references, see Francesco Traniello, *Giovanni XXIII, papa*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, cit., vol. 55, 2001 <<https://www.treccani.it>> (accessed 9 December 2021).



the Casa dello studente founded by the diocese. But Achille Viterbi's dearest friendships, also involving their respective spouses, were two: engineer Emilio Cattaneo, manager of the Crespi electric company, at whose home they spent the end of 1938;<sup>30</sup> and Giuseppe Muggia, the director of the neuropsychiatric hospital of Bergamo, who had arrived from Sondrio in 1931 and created the first neuropsychiatric dispensaries in the city and then in the province. He was a supporter of mental hygiene and prevention, and Viterbi was professionally in agreement with him on this matter and in their commitment to social medicine. Beside this, they had in common having done part of their university studies in Bologna (Muggia graduated in 1901), their Jewish origins and, it is often said, their political ideas.

The fact that Muggia's family, including his wife Maria Levi, was anti-Fascist was well known to the police. Their son Giulio had been under surveillance since university in Turin, where he had graduated in medicine under the famous anti-Fascist professor Giuseppe Levi and had become his assistant. In 1929 Giulio was arrested as a signer of a letter to Benedetto Croce (along with Paolo Treves, Massimo Mila, and other teachers and students from Turin) and given the severe sentence of confinement, which was later commuted to a reprimand<sup>31</sup>. Even in Maria Viterbi's family ideas of opposition to the regime circulated, especially among young people in their twenties. The three daughters of her sister Bice hung out in the Turin environment of Giustizia e Libertà, where they would find friends and boyfriends;<sup>32</sup> this is

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<sup>30</sup> On the friendship with the engineer Emilio Cattaneo, his daughter Barbara Cattaneo Mangini has sent some photos with Achille Viterbi to the son of the latter Andrew Viterbi, who talks about it in his *Reflections of an Educator*, cit., and which are partly visible here in the [gallery](#).

<sup>31</sup> The file of Giulio Muggia, born in 1907, in ACS, MI, DGPS, DAGR, CPC, b. 3452, covers the years from 1929 to '42. Very useful is Giorgio Mangini, *Una famiglia ebraica italiana: il caso dei Muggia*, «Studi e ricerche di storia contemporanea», 78, 2012, pp. 62-84, as well as the file on Giuseppe Muggia and the one on Viterbi in the website of the Istituto bergamasco per la storia della Resistenza e dell'età contemporanea <<https://www.memoriaurbana.it>> (accessed 9 December 2021).

<sup>32</sup> The three daughters of Beatrice Luria (Casale Monferrato 1891 - Turin 1967) and Giuseppe Morpurgo (Ancona 1887 - Turin 1967) were Maria Grazia (1914 - Turin 2009), later married to Sacerdote, the twins Lucia (Perugia 1920 - Turin 2009), married to Levi, and Gabriella (Perugia 1921 - Milan 2004), married to Treves.

how Giulio Muggia had met Carla. He married her in 1934, thus becoming part of the Malvano family, one of the best known of the Jewish bourgeoisie in Turin, and who intervened when he was sentenced to internment for three years in the province of Potenza in the summer of 1935. A young doctor from Trieste, Amov Chiabov (1904-1951), who was Giuseppe Muggia's trusted assistant at the psychiatric hospital in Bergamo, had also joined Giustizia e Libertà in Turin, where he had graduated university in 1930. He was linked in anti-Fascism above all with the Triestine doctor Bruno Pincherle and the teacher Ernesto Rossi, who had been living in Bergamo since 1926. In October 1930 Rossi was arrested as one of the leaders of Giustizia e Libertà while he was teaching in a classroom at the Technical Institute «Vittorio Emanuele II»<sup>33</sup>. His girlfriend at the time, Ada Rossi (1899-1993), taught mathematics at the same school. While he was imprisoned and in confinement, Ada lost her job there for spreading anti-Fascism ideas among the students; and in 1942 she too was sent into confinement by the prefect of Bergamo.

### **Problems at the university**

In addition to hospital work, Viterbi, like many other doctors, sought to develop his scientific interests. The former Associazione italiana di oftalmologia [Italian Association of Ophthalmology] (founded in Florence in 1869) had not met from 1911 until 1924, when its president Giuseppe Cirincione (who was also a senator of the Kingdom) relaunched it in Rome and transformed it into the Società italiana di oftalmologia [Italian Society of Ophthalmology] with a new charter<sup>34</sup>. Achille Viterbi had presented a report to the association and did so again the following year. At the same time some

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<sup>33</sup> See Mimmo Franzinelli, *I tentacoli dell'OVRA. Agenti, collaboratori e vittime della polizia politica fascista*, Turin, Bollati Boringhieri, 2020, pp. 101-102.

<sup>34</sup> See Matteo Piovella, *La Storia della SOI (Società Oftalmologica Italiana): cenni storici con allegata documentazione originale certificante*, «Notiziario SOI», 1, 2019, pp. 7-17; see also Filippo Cruciani, *Storia e cronache della SOI*, Rome, Gruppo editoriale Fabiano, 2017 and 2020. The contribution of Viterbi and other authors results from the congressional proceedings.

of his courses were approved by the Faculty up to 1922, and his name listed among the Faculty *liberi docenti* of the University of Parma from 1924-25 up to and including 1927-28. Between gaps and inconsistencies in the documentation, his name does not appear in the yearbook of the R. University of Parma<sup>35</sup> after the academic year 1928.

What happened? At a meeting of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery on 30 October 1928, dean Mario Pelagatti (1869-1944)<sup>36</sup> (who held that position from 1919 to 1930, and again during the period of anti-Semitic laws from 1938 to 1940) set up a commission, which he himself chaired, to examine the teaching activities of each university lecturer. This examination came in response to a ministerial circular of 15 September 1928, regarding lecturers who got their certification of *libera docenza* before 16 October 1923; those who had not taught in the previous five years had to say why not. In just five days the commission drew up a list of about fifty names, for each of whom indicating not only whether or not he had been teaching, and if not, whether he had justified his failure to do so, and also whether he had published scientific papers after 1923<sup>37</sup>. In the last column, after the date of the certification, a result was given: yes or no. On the next page, four groups of confirmed lecturers were listed (thirteen were found to have performed both didactic and scientific activity; eight of them didactic only; six scientific only but with justification because they lived far from Parma; and three neither), while a final group of fourteen lecturers were «not confirmed». Among these was Viterbi. Next to his name there was a «no» in the column for teaching, a «yes» for the justification he had evidently provided for not teaching; and

<sup>35</sup> See monographic issue devoted to *L'università degli studi di Parma*, «Annali delle università italiane», 9, 2005, pp. 29-216 (but no essay devoted to Medicine). The match was made by Maria Grazia Perazzo, whom I thank very much, on the following records of ASUPr, *Facoltà di Medicina e chirurgia, Verbali delle adunanze*, no. 9, 1908-1920, no. 10, 1920-1927, no. 11, 1927-1936.

<sup>36</sup> Scarce information on *Pelagatti Mario*, in Comune di Parma, *Dizionario biografico, ad vocem* <<https://www.comune.parma.it>> (accessed 9 December 2021).

<sup>37</sup> ASUPr, *Facoltà di Medicina e chirurgia, Verbali delle adunanze*, 30 October 1928, and the following one, 5 November 1928. There are various inconsistencies in the names on the remaining lists, which were originally intended to be longer.

finally, the column for scientific publications was left blank. And yet he had had some, even in the five-year period under consideration: for example the reports he had given at the national congresses of the Society of Ophthalmology,<sup>38</sup> this fact was certainly known by Camillo Gallenga, chair of the department at Parma and rector until 1927, who, among others, had given Viterbi the teaching certificate in 1913 and had also been his dean.

If among those confirmed there were also three lecturers who were judged to have completed no scientific or didactic activity and were not excused, what were the criteria applied to them? And how could the commission assume ministerial prerogatives?

### Unconfirmed?

*Libera docenza* was a title that made it possible to teach at the university level, a title conferred by a ministerial decree from Rome after a series of open national qualifying exams, and it could not be revoked locally. The Ordinance of Higher Education in effect at that time, issued by Minister Giovanni Gentile, stated that «the qualification is conferred by decree of the Minister for the duration of five years. It can be definitively confirmed by Ministerial decree upon deliberation of the faculty or school, which must ascertain and judge the scientific and didactic activity of the university *libero docente* during the five-year period»<sup>39</sup>. And he added that this term of five years could be extended «in case of failure to exercise for legitimate impediment», something that was also mentioned in the RD of 1910 in force when Viterbi received his qualification, which goes all the way back to the Casati law of

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<sup>38</sup> Achille Viterbi, *Lesioni del segmento anteriore del globo oculare esaminate alla lampada a fessura con microscopio corneale*, in *Società italiana di oftalmologia, Atti del congresso 1924. Roma, 27-30 ottobre*, Rome, Tipografia delle scienze, 1925, p. 63-67; Id., *Cataratte esaminate a lampada a fessura prima e dopo l'operazione*, excerpt from *Società italiana di oftalmologia, Atti del congresso di oftalmologia. Roma 27-30 ottobre 1925*, Rome, Tipografia delle scienze, 1926.

<sup>39</sup> RD 30 September 1923, no. 2102 (GU no. 239 of 11 October 1923), in art. 39, while forfeiture is in art. 46. All of this is included in the *Testo unico* and related RD 31 August 1933, no. 1592, *Approvazione del testo unico delle leggi sull'istruzione superiore* [Approval of the Consolidated Text of the Laws on Higher Education] (GU no. 283 of 7 December 1933, Ordinary Supplement), Sec. II, Chapter II.

1859<sup>40</sup>. The forfeiture was, therefore, if the *libero docente* «for five consecutive years has not practiced teaching without legitimate impediments».

In the charts presented at the Faculty meeting on November 5, the Commission had placed Viterbi among the non-confirmed and had first indicated that he had «justified the lack of exercise»<sup>41</sup>. In fact, in a letter to the rector of 24 October 1928, the interested party had hastened to explain that his failure to lecture in the previous five years was due to «the need to reorganize the ophthalmic division of the Ospedale Maggiore» in Bergamo, of which he was the director<sup>42</sup>. The reorganization of his clinic had completely absorbed him but it was now concluded, and therefore, «I would be very happy if I could resume the activity of *libero docente*». He enclosed four of his scientific publications, mentioning that several had been published by two of his assistants, given that the Commission also counted those in the appropriate tables.

In his case, it didn't. And in the minutes of the meeting, Viterbi's name is not even mentioned.

### Strange academic Procedures

The Faculty, praising the work of the committee, instructed it to draw up reasoned reports of confirmation and then cautiously reserved the right to examine them without commitment<sup>43</sup>. In the meantime, it approved the free courses for the academic year 1927-28, including the course in Normal and Pathological Anatomy of the Crystalline Lens, proposed by Alberto Carmi, who was a *libero docente* born in Parma and still living there. In the ophthalmology clinic of the same university, the *libero docente* Moisè Besso

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<sup>40</sup> See RD 9 August 1910, no. 795, art. 66, which referred back to art. 104 of L 13 November, 1859, no. 3725: «The private teacher loses this quality if for five consecutive years he does not exercise it without legitimate impediment».

<sup>41</sup> ASUPr, *Facoltà di Medicina e chirurgia, Verbali delle adunanze*, 5 November 1928.

<sup>42</sup> ASUPr, *Carteggio generale*, b. 1039, «Insegnanti privati - Corsi liberi», Viterbi's letter to the rector, Bergamo, 24 October 1928. The assistants he appointed were Borri and Busacca [?, illegible handwriting].

<sup>43</sup> ASUPr, *Facoltà di Medicina e chirurgia, Verbali delle adunanze*, 5 November 1928.

had held his first lectures in 1922-23. Jews both, they would be disqualified by the racial laws<sup>44</sup>.

In ordinary situations, according to the law, disqualification from teaching was «declared by decree of the Minister upon the report of the rector or director, after hearing the conclusions of the interested party». Instead, there is no trace of any of those steps taken by any of the three parties involved. Perhaps the Faculty was merely expressing its own opinion. Perhaps rector Antonio Pensa,<sup>45</sup> professor of anatomy, who had succeeded ophthalmologist Camillo Gallenga a few months earlier, never submitted any report to the minister before arriving at the disqualification decree.

If this lapse was due to documentary gaps, they would concern paperwork from both the University of Parma as well as from the Ministry in Rome since, even in the national archival fund entitled «*Liberi docenti*», the file of «Viterbi Achille» holds nothing about it. In the meeting of 22 December 1930, the Faculty of Medicine examined the applications of university *libero docenti* who had been working in the five-year period 1925 to 1930, and once again Viterbi is not mentioned<sup>46</sup>.

Meanwhile, work on the new hospital in Bergamo had gone ahead, and in September 1930 it was inaugurated in the presence of Princess Maria José and her consort, the future King Umberto I<sup>47</sup>. At the ultra-modern Ospedale

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<sup>44</sup> Moisé Besso appears among the forfeited free lecturers in Emanuele Edallo, *L'applicazione delle leggi antiebraiche alla R. Università di Milano*, in Marilisa D'Amico, Antonino De Francesco, Cecilia Siccardi (eds.), *L'Italia ai tempi del ventennio fascista*, Milan, Angeli, 2019, p. 254. For Carmi, a medical captain and professor in the eye clinic, dispensed from service since 14 December 1938, see Daniela Roccas, Rosanna Supino, *Elenco di militari ebrei in sanità*, cit., p. 8.

<sup>45</sup> Valentina Cani, *Pensa, Antonio*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, cit., vol. 82, 2015 <<https://www.treccani.it>> (accessed 9 December 2021). On the precise dates of office of the rectors, see <<https://www.unipr.it>> (accessed 9 December 2021). The rector who enforced the racial laws was another professor of medicine, surgeon Giovanni Razzaboni (1880-1953), who held office from 29 October 1938 to 29 October 1943.

<sup>46</sup> ASUPr, *Facoltà di Medicina e chirurgia, Verbali delle adunanze*, 22 December 1930; at the meeting of 2 June 1930, the *libera docenza* of ophthalmologist Besso was confirmed.

<sup>47</sup> See some photos and news on the website of the hospital of Bergamo in <<https://www.asst-pg23.it>> (accessed 9 December 2021); Ospedale maggiore, *Ospedale Maggiore «Principessa di Piemonte»*, Bergamo, 1931; Renato Ravanelli, *L'ospedale di Bergamo fra cronaca e storia. 1930-2012*, Bergamo, Cronaca e Arte, 2012.

Maggiore Principessa di Piemonte, Professor Viterbi had organized in 1931 the conference of the Lombardy Section of neuro-otorino-ophthalmology, continuing to attend professional gatherings in the field<sup>48</sup>.

In 1934, at almost fifty-three years old, Achille got a happy piece of news. After fifteen years of quiet married life, his wife Maria, who had turned forty, was pregnant. On 9 March 1935, Andrea Giacomo was born.

### **Censuses, dispensations, and disqualifications for racial reasons**

The census that the Royal Prefecture of Bergamo ordered, via a circular sent to the Questore on 21 August 1938, was carried out confidentially, as the ministry recommended to all prefects of the Kingdom. All that was needed was that the heads of families with even a single Jewish member should fill out the form. And in Bergamo, this would not have taken long, as there were few Jews, according to the list of names kept in the historical archives of the town:<sup>49</sup> seventy-three in the entire province, forty of whom were in the city, among them five foreigners, German and Polish refugees in Italy escaping racial persecution. But even the thirty-five Italian Jews, almost all of good social and professional standing, had arrived in Bergamo not too long before. First among them was Dr. Achille Viterbi himself, an employee of the hospital as of 1906, the owner of his own ophthalmic practice since 1907, and formally settled 1908 in Bergamo, where he lived with his wife «of independent means» and their son, who was the youngest of a mere three Jewish children counted in the city.

In September the anti-Semitic measures began to emerge; they affected

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<sup>48</sup> C.D., *Suo padre curava «malattie d'occhi»*, cit., which uses news from «L'Eco di Bergamo» of the time.

<sup>49</sup> See Biblioteca civica Angelo Mai e Archivi storici comunali, Bergamo, Archivio storico del Comune di Bergamo, *Sezione Post-Unitaria*, b. 468, f. 23, sf. 1, «Elenco nominativo delle denunce presentate dagli appartenenti alla razza ebraica, prescritte dall'art. 19 del RDL 17-11-1938 n. 1728», cited by Silvio Cavati, *Ebrei a Bergamo, 1938-1945*, thesis, Università di Bergamo, a.y. 2004-05, supervisor Edoardo Bressan, p. 12. See Silvio Cavati, *Aspetti della persecuzione degli ebrei nella bergamasca tra il 1938 e il 1945: il lavoro, i beni, la vita*, «Studi e ricerche di storia contemporanea», 41, 78, 2012, pp. 45-61, and Id., *Ebrei a Bergamo 1938-1945: la deportazione*, *Ibid.*, 32, 60, 2003, pp. 51-79, and 33, 61, 2004, pp. 55-80.

primarily those who attended schools of all levels and universities. Andrea was still too young to go to school; he did not have to suffer the traumatic and incomprehensible experience of being separated from his class and his friends, as happened instead to Viterbis' nephews, the children of his brother and those of Maria's sisters, who were students. In mid-December his sister Olga and her husband Luciano Beer lost their place as teachers at the at the junior high and high school in Perugia; on the same day his brother-in-law Giuseppe Morpurgo, a teacher at the Gioberti high school in Turin, lost his job: all by ministerial decree of termination of service<sup>50</sup>. As for Viterbi at the University of Parma, he had not taught open courses for years. He had always kept his academic qualification of *libera docenza* among the titles of his curriculum, and his business card read: «Prof. Dr. A. Viterbi – Professor of Clinical Ophthalmology at the University of Parma – Head of Ophthalmic Division at the Ospedale Maggiore in Bergamo». What else would they have had him do?

In 1938 the dean of the Faculty of Medicine was the same Mario Pelegatti who ten years earlier had declared him unconfirmed as a *libero docente*, although officially the title had never been taken away. It was he who enforced the racial laws in the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery; together with the Faculty of Law, it was the most affected in Parma<sup>51</sup>. From the historical archives of the University, documents attesting to the teachers who were dismissed from their duties or who were deprived of their teaching license are missing. Recently, however, a list of eight professors who were discriminated against at the University of Parma because they were Jewish

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<sup>50</sup> The decree of termination of service from the ministry of National Education was dated 13 December 1938. References to the respective files can be found in Annalisa Capristo, Giorgio Fabre, *Il registro. La cacciata degli ebrei dallo Stato italiano nei protocolli della Corte dei conti 1938-1943*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2018, p. 182, 200, 192.

<sup>51</sup> In the brief profile on Mario Pelegatti, in Carlo Gelmetti (ed.), *Storia della dermatologia e della venereologia in Italia*, Milan, Springer, 2015, pp. 126-127, not even a hint, as usual, about the role he played in the long fascist period of his presidency and for the application of the racial laws in the Faculty.



has been reconstructed<sup>52</sup>. Among the medical professors were the pathologist Guido Melli, who had just become a full professor, and the volunteer assistant Bruno Levi Della Vida. Also included were two *liberi docenti*: Giulio Faldini, who was also chief of orthopedics at the Ospedale Maggiore of Parma, and Alberto Carmi, who was qualified in ophthalmology. Carmi was dismissed on 18 March 1939, but the news was communicated to the rector on 5 June, and the next day the rector informed Carmi, with retroactive effect from 14 December 1938<sup>53</sup>. Faldini, however, did not receive the registered letter, because by June he had been in Peru for a month. But Viterbi never got his letter, assuming that the decree of disqualification was ever sent to him. Perhaps he had escaped the census of personnel at the University of Parma, or the checks on free professors, or perhaps his situation had never been clarified after 1928. There are many gaps in the documentation regarding his *libera docenza*; not only is there no decree of disqualification due to racial laws or for any other reason, but in his ministerial file there is no confirmation decree, which usually came after five years from qualification. In his case that would have been during the Great War, when Viterbi was a military doctor serving in mobilization zone<sup>54</sup>.

### Discrimination request

What is certain is that on 12 December 1938, Achille Viterbi was officially notified, with some advance notice, that he would be relieved of his duties as head ophthalmologist at the Bergamo Hospital as of 2 March 1939. After a

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<sup>52</sup> *Il dovere di ricordare. L'Università di Parma per il Giorno della memoria*, 27 January 2021 <<https://www.unipr.it>> (accessed 9 December 2021). In the Atrio delle colonne [Atrium of the columns] of the University, a stumbling stone was placed with the names of eight professors: Walter Bigiavi, Alessandro Levi, Enrico Tullio Liebman of the Faculty of Law, Guido Melli of the Faculty of Medicine, the *liberi docenti* Alberto Carmi and Giulio Faldini and the volunteer assistant Bruno Levi Della Vida of the same faculty, Alberto Montel, *libero docente* in Law.

<sup>53</sup> ASUPr, 1939, f. «Libere docenze», for the forfeiture of Albero Carmi see registered letter from the ministry to the rector of the University of Parma, 2 June 1939, but with departure stamp 5 June, and registered letter from the rector to Carmi, Parma, June 6, 1939.

<sup>54</sup> See ACS, MPI, DGIS, *Divisione I, Liberi docenti, Il serie (1910-1930)*, b. 343, f. «Viterbi Achille»; the file concludes with the outcome of the competition and the appointment as *libero docente* in 1913.

lifetime of work at the Maggiore, he was seven years away from retirement at sixty-five in 1946, as already established by the administration<sup>55</sup>. A few days after this bitter news, he and Maria made their decision. They confided it only to their closest friends, and the testimony has remained in the diary of a girl, Carla, daughter of Emilio Cattaneo:

31/12/1938. Tonight Mr. and Mrs. Viterbi came for dinner. They would leave in a few days for an unknown destination, since, being Israelites, they had to leave Italy. [...] We went to the cinema while listening to La Scala's *Werther* on the radio: we all enjoyed it very much, especially when Tito Schipa sang *Ah non mi ridestar!* Mom and Dad kissed and hugged the dear friends fraternally<sup>56</sup>.

Before leaving, however, Achille wanted to make an attempt. He carefully prepared the documentation, and on 31 January 1939, he presented a petition to the minister of the Interior, General Directorate of Demography and Race, and asked for the application of article 10 of the RD of 17 November 1938, so that articles 10 and 11 of the «Provisions for the defense of the Aryan race»<sup>57</sup> would not be applied to him. It was aiming to bring about *discriminazione* [discrimination], as the ambiguous and misleading Fascist glossary defined it; that is, a benefit to «Italian citizens of the Jewish race» to be exempted from some of the racial measures, granted on the basis of certain requirements that they had to document. Among the six categories of *benemerienze di guerra e fasciste* [Fascist-era and war merits] listed in the decree, none in particular pertained to Dr. Achille Viterbi, but by exclusion it can be assumed that he was trying to present himself for 1) as a decorated war veteran, or for 6) «exceptional merits» that were not defined and that were evaluated with extreme discretion by a special commission composed

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<sup>55</sup> See «Servizio Ospitaliero», cit.

<sup>56</sup> Diary of Carla Cattaneo, in private archives of the Cattaneo family, Bergamo, cited by G. Mangini, *Una famiglia ebraica italiana*, cit., p. 71 and fn.

<sup>57</sup> ACS, MI, DGDR, DR, b. 289, f. 21262 BEN, «Viterbi Achille», «Istanza in carta da bollo di Achille Viterbi al Ministro dell'Interno, 31 January 1939, with stamp of the Prefettura di Bergamo. See [here](#) the text of the RD of 17 November 1938, in particular article 14 («The Minister of the Interior, on the documented request of the interested parties, may, on a case by case basis, declare not applicable the provisions of articles 10 and 11, as well as of article 13, letter h»). See the categories and conditions required to apply for the benefit of discrimination, which could be extended to family members.

of the Undersecretary of State for the Interior, a deputy secretary of the Fascist National Party, and the Chief of Staff of the National Security Volunteer Militia (Article 16).

From the first line of the application, he presented himself as a former combatant: as lieutenant colonel in the medical complement, he had participated in «four campaigns of the World War, in war zones, always with mobilized units». Naturally, but almost secondarily, he also listed himself as a primary hospital ophthalmologist and university lecturer. Some of his notes suggest that he had tried to get statements from his superiors at the hospital; in the end he produced a series of self-declarations on the subject and quantified his medical responsibilities: on average he had 200 patients a year at the ophthalmic outpatient clinics, and about 700 in-patients in his ward, of whom he had operated on about 200<sup>58</sup>.

He attached as many as thirty-six documents, the first of which was his military service record. As proof of his Italianness, he cited some of his professional articles, attaching the title pages; he maintained that he had staked his work in Italian ophthalmology as his territory. He mentioned the dedication printed in his 1913 monograph to his brother Giulio who «in Hons and on the Mergheb builds and fights», and who boasted a silver medal in the 1911-12 Italian-Turkish war, a cross of war from 1915, as well as a Fascist party membership card from 1922<sup>59</sup>. Dr. Viterbi enclosed photographs of these merits of his brother as if they could add luster to his own qualifications as «Italian and Fascist», which in the latter aspect appeared clearly lacking.

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<sup>58</sup> Cfr ACS, MI, DGDR, DR, b. 289, f. 21262 BEN, «Viterbi Achille». A brief c.v. of him with these data, unsigned and undated but circa 1939, is found in the hospital papers.

<sup>59</sup> Giulio Viterbi (Mantua 6 February 1885 - Turin 29 December 1950), an engineer, was married to Cesarina Borelli; they had two sons, Aldo (1920-1988) and Mario (1922-1977), both born in Turin, where he was commander of the fire department. A decree RDL of 16 June 1938 renamed them *Vigili del fuoco* [fire brigade], due to the autarchic refusal of the French term *pompier*. On 23 September 1939, Giulio Viterbi was dismissed and replaced by Silvestro Rolando. See Michele Sforza, *I vigili del fuoco e i suoi dirigenti generali*, «Quaderni di storia pompieristica», 7, July 2021, pp. 2-3.

**Deeply Italian. But without fascist merits**

Achille Viterbi was aware of this. He justified himself:

I have never been involved in politics, nor did I hold any political office. I have been a Fascist only since March 1933, when I was invited by Dr. Chiodi, director of the Hospital, together with other Chiefs to join the Party. Before not, because [...] I remembered the warning of the highest «you understand that fascist means Roman Catholic Apostolic».

He, on the other hand, was a Jew. He had never hidden it, even though he had lived and worked for thirty-three years in one of the «most clerical provinces of Italy, which for 17 years has been among the most fascist»<sup>60</sup>.

His defensiveness risked worsening his position, because he reiterated the precedence of his Jewish identity and claimed that this had kept him from joining the PNF, the national fascist party, while even his brother had already joined in 1922. Not only that; it was clear that his late membership was not spontaneous, but due to a call from his superior. In that résumé aimed at proving dispensation, the arguments for his Italianness that he recast in a pro-Fascist light (even for past events) proved more pertinent. He belonged to «a family with profoundly Italian feelings», confirmed the prefect of Bergamo in his report to the Demorazza [General Directorate of Demography and Race]. But as Orfeo Sellani, federal secretary of the Fasci di combattimento of the city, underlined, «it does not appear – on the other hand – that he was ever distinguished for particular fascist merits», and he observed that the membership to the PNF of «Prof. Dr. Achille Viterbi», having ceased «on 13 December 1939 because he was of Jewish race», dated back to a fairly recent date, 24 March 1933. For this reason, and without any consideration of other aspects, on 27 January 1940, Sellani declared himself opposed to granting him exemption<sup>61</sup>.

Prefect Francesco Ballero, on the other hand, in his «confidential and

<sup>60</sup> ACS, MI, DGDR, DR, b. 289, f. 21262 BEN, «Viterbi Achille», «A. Viterbi, Curriculum vitae on letterhead», Bergamo, January 31, 1939, document 7 attached to the petition to obtain discrimination.

<sup>61</sup> The statement of the federal secretary to the prefect of Bergamo, Bergamo, 27 January 1939, is signed not by the sender but by Giovanni Frongia, chief of cabinet of the prefecture of Bergamo, see ACS, MI, DGDR, DR, b. 289, f. 21262 BEN, «Viterbi Achille».

entrusted» letter to the Ministry regarding the application, said further that the extensive documentation presented by the interested party

attests by itself to the military, moral, civil and professional conduct and the meritorious activity carried out by him in the scientific field, in teaching and in health care to the working masses. [...] Resident] in this city before the Great War [...] he has been much esteemed and well liked even beyond his professional skills, for his gentlemanly ways, for the gifts of character and also for philanthropy, being known that he willingly provides free health care to the poor when they are ill.

The prefect dwelled on further recognition of Dr. Viterbi's military merits: In 1927 he had been «recommended for the rank of Major in the Role of Medical Officers of the Reserve and in 1938 for exceptional merits to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel»<sup>62</sup>. He would have been entitled to the honor of a Distinguished Service Cross, if only he had requested it in time. Instead he had decided late, same as with the PNF membership card, «but he has always shown himself loyal to the directives of the regime and enthusiastic about the work of the Duce», added the prefect.

These words were in clear contrast to the laconic note of the PNF city secretary, which, however, the prefect himself quoted and sent to the Ministry, attached to his own laudatory assessment. Dr. Achille Viterbi, however, «is not in any of the cases provided by the current provisions to take advantage of the invoked benefit of discrimination», the prefect admitted in conclusion, warning that the Viterbi family was relocated. They were no longer in Bergamo, in Via Martiri Fascisti 4, but in Genoa, in Via Capo di S. Chiara 47/5<sup>63</sup>.

In reality, they moved much farther away.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., prefect to the Direzione generale Demorazza of the ministry of the Interior, Bergamo, 4 February 1940.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. On the prefect Count Francesco Ballero, see Alberto Cifelli, *L'istituto prefettizio dalla caduta del fascismo all'Assemblea costituente. I prefetti della Liberazione*, Rome, SSAI, 2008. In 1942 he was replaced by Luigi Giannitrapani, and transferred to Novara on 1 September; on 25 October 1943 he was placed at the disposal of the government of the Italian Social Republic.

## Preparing to leave everything

On 2 March, he was relieved from hospital service, which had been weighing on him for two months. It was very painful for him to leave:

It was not the shuttle between Bergamo and Genoa, not the cold for which I write from bed, not the hard work of moving that above all affects that saint who is my beloved companion; it is the need to not add to my emotionality that prevents me from coming to embrace her in these last moments in Bergamo

– he wrote to the hospital director on 20 March 1939, and invited him to eat fish at their new home in Genoa<sup>64</sup>.

On 7 March he was deleted from the register of the *Sindacato fascista dei medici* [Fascist Medical Union] of Bergamo – not for racial reasons, but per his request to «transfer to the Register of Genoa», it says on his name card<sup>65</sup>. In reality, he never signed up in Genoa. He was ahead of the game, since not even three months later Jewish doctors would be disbarred under Law 1054 of 29 June 1939, which «regulated the exercise of professions by citizens of the Jewish race», or rather prevented them from doing so, in whole or in part. Jewish doctors could see only patients declared to be of Jewish race, which in Bergamo were not many. Only if they granted him exemption could he continue to work. But he didn't hope for that. It was denied even to his meritorious brother Giulio Viterbi, engineer and commander of the Turin fire brigade, who on 23 September 1939, would be removed from his position and replaced.

The same anti-Jewish measures had affected his colleague and friend Giuseppe Muggia, who was well known in Bergamo as the director of the provincial neuropsychiatric hospital. He too left the city; along with his wife

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<sup>64</sup> See letter on letterhead from Achille Viterbi to the director, in a file in the archives of Ospedale maggiore di Bergamo, Direzione medica, 20 March 1939, forwarded in copy by Ferruccio Arnoldi to Andrew Viterbi in 1998, and digitized in USCA, *Andrew J. and Erna Viterbi Family Archives*, cit. The address in Genoa given in the letter is the same as that given by prefect F. Ballero in his report to the Demorazza mentioned above, but differs the house number.

<sup>65</sup> AOMBe, Bergamo, card «Viterbi Achille». I thank Guido Marinoni, president of the Ordine dei medici chirurghi e odontotecnici of the province of Bergamo, for finding this document, and I thank the Ordine dei medici chirurghi e odontotecnici of Genoa for informing me that Viterbi did not register.

and thirty-year-old daughter Franca, who was involved in the Federazione sionistica italiana [Italian Zionist Federation], he moved to Venice in March of 1939. His son Giulio, also a psychiatrist, who had already been arrested several times for anti-Fascism, left with his wife Carla and their two children for British Mandate Palestine; along with them were Paola, Carla's sister, her husband Renzo Luisada, and their two daughters<sup>66</sup>.

Already in the autumn of 1938 Viterbi had begun to think about it. Attributed to Monsignor Roncalli (without citing any documentation) is a recommendation that Viterbi leave Italy and an offer to help him, as indeed the future pope did for many Jews as apostolic delegate in Turkey and Greece<sup>67</sup>. But it was mainly his wife Maria who insisted that they should leave as soon as possible. Her sister Bice and her husband Giuseppe, who had been kicked out of the Gioberti high school, intended to stay in Turin with the three girls, just as her sister Elena and her husband Ernesto Treves were doing in Milan. But her sister Laura, widowed for five years, was preparing to leave for the United States with one son to join the other, who had left immediately, since they could no longer run the factory they owned nor keep in their employ personnel «of Aryan race», not even domestic staff, which they had always had<sup>68</sup>.

### How to get the documents

Achille had had his passport since 1934, issued by the Bergamo police

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<sup>66</sup> See *Giulio Muggia* (born 1907 in Venice) in *CDEC Digital Library* <<http://digital-library.cdec.it>> (accessed 10 December 2021). According to Arturo Marzano, Giulio Muggia with his Turin wife Carla Malvano settled in Tel Aviv in April 1939, where her sister Paola Malvano with her husband Renzo Luisada, and a sister of his, Gabriella Luisada, also went. Her other sister Elsa and her brother Aldo Luisada would go to the United States; see Arturo Marzano, *Una terra per rinascere. Gli ebrei italiani e l'emigrazione in Palestina prima della guerra (1920-1940)*, Genoa, Marietti, 2003, p. 376.

<sup>67</sup> On their relationship, cf. Marco Roncalli, *Giovanni XXIII. Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli una vita nella storia*, Milan, Mondadori, 2006, pp. 86-87.

<sup>68</sup> On the sister-in-law of Achille Viterbi, see ACS, *Fondo Questura di Roma, Ebrei 1938-1942*, b. 13, f. 20 «Luria Laura ved. Finzi - trasferita» (1939-1940), a document of the police station of Porta Pia concerning the maintenance of the «Aryan» servants, with information on the various relatives, children, mother, brother, deceased husband (but not her sister Maria).

headquarters and regularly renewed – and also his wife’s – but it would have expired on 26 June 1939, and was not valid for the United States. Maria had a friend named Tina, and Tina’s husband was vice quaestor Francesco Giongo, who would have done her a favor. The authentication of the photos in the passport is written in Giongo’s own hand: «These photographs depict Mrs. Maria Luria and her son Viterbi Andrea»; and it is also a statement that «the passport issued to Mr. Viterbi Dr. Achille is made valid for the United States of North America», and for his wife and son, of course. Giongo signed the authentication on 6 March 1939, and had the quaestor sign the visa as valid for the United States on 22 March with the annotation of the clearance of the R. Ispettorato di emigrazione [Royal Inspectorate of Emigration] of the Port of Genoa on 17 March. It would be valid until 22 March 1940,<sup>69</sup> but they needed immigration visas, not just tourist visas. Achille then thought to ask for help from Alfred Vogt (1879-1943), an ophthalmologist of his age and like him a student of Carlo Reymond, who had been a professor at the University of Zurich for many years. This colleague got him an appointment at the American Consulate in Switzerland: the QIVs, immigrant visas for the USA per the Italian quota, made out for the Viterbis and for Andrea, were signed by Vice Consul Kinsley W. Hamilton and issued on 29 June 1939.

That same day, the Senate and the Chamber of Fascists approved the law that expelled professionals of «Jewish race» from professional registers. But by then the Viterbi family had already closed their house in Bergamo, in Via Martiri Fascisti 4<sup>70</sup>. It would have been more convenient to sail from Genoa, where his mother-in-law Amalia Luria lived, in Via Giordano Bruno 27<sup>71</sup>.

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<sup>69</sup> See «Italian Passport Achille Viterbi», pp. 7-10, in USCA, *Andrew J. and Erna Viterbi Family Archives*, cit.. The friendship between Tina Giongo and her mother Maria is recalled by Andrew Viterbi. The name of the deputy quaestor in Ministero dell’Interno, *Bollettino ufficiale del personale*, Rome, Istituto poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1943, p. 480.

<sup>70</sup> *Annuario generale d’Italia e dell’Impero italiano*, Turin, Pozzo, 1939, p. 1396.

<sup>71</sup> Amalia Luria’s address is taken from the ship manifest related to the departure of Laura Finzi, Maria’s sister, 9 months after them, which gave precisely the address of their mother: see The Statue of Liberty - Ellis Island Foundation, *Passenger Search, ad nomen* <<https://heritage.statueofliberty.org>> (access on registration 10 December 2021).



Instead, they took the train on 13 August and went through Switzerland: a tourist trip, it is noted in the passport. But it was actually to arrive in France and embark at the port of Le Havre on 18 August. They declared that their last permanent residence was in Switzerland, in Lugano; as reference person in the country of origin they indicated Achille's mother, in Turin's via Clemente 1.

Built in England and flying the French flag, the De Grasse could carry up to 2,111 passengers<sup>72</sup>. The Viterbis met other Italians of «Jewish race», including the Volterra family from Florence; he too was a doctor and was accompanied by his (younger) wife and twins, Sara and Giovanna, four and a half years old,<sup>73</sup> who played together during the nine days of the crossing.

When they landed in New York, on 27 August, their nephew «Dr. Finzi, 322 W 107<sup>th</sup> Street, NYC» was waiting for them. This was Alberto, twenty-eight years old, the son of Laura, one of Maria's sisters, who had left England for the United States just three months earlier, on 24 May 1939, also with a visa in quota issued in Zurich. He had made the crossing together with the Milanese lawyer Nino Levi, a well-known anti-Fascist and defender of Gaetano Salvemini; as their reference in the United States, both had listed their friend Max Ascoli (who was from Ferrara, like Finzi) at the New School in New York, where he was a professor and where Levi, expelled from the University of Genoa, would also go on to teach<sup>74</sup>.

### **What awaited them?**

Achille was fifty-eight years old, Maria forty-five. They went to live on the same street as their nephew Alberto, at 304 West 107 Street, as recorded in the 1940 New York federal census, in a building constructed in 1926, on the

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<sup>72</sup> So in the ship information, you will also find, as usual, the name of the person who was waiting for them in the United States.

<sup>73</sup> The presence on board of Mario Volterra with his wife and children and their age is indicated in List 4, *Ibid.*, *ad nomen*.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

Upper West Side of Manhattan not far from Columbia University<sup>75</sup>. Of course they could not afford the maids they had always had, much less a nanny for the baby. Maria learned to do just fine in the kitchen, even without a cook. They both needed to learn English; judging by their worn copy, they made good use of a manual «for learning English without a teacher» as promised on the cover of *Il poliglotta moderno* [The Modern Polyglot], printed in 1905<sup>76</sup>. Achille also attended a course, probably at Columbia. In order to practice his profession, and therefore to provide for his family, he had to pass first a language exam and then the formidable exam covering all medical subjects in order to obtain the necessary license in the United States. The degree he had earned in Italy did not count, nor did his publications and long clinical experience.

All the doctors who had immigrated to America when they arrived in New York were in the same position, including the entire group of Italian doctors who had recently landed to escape Mussolini's racial laws. In New York Viterbi met the Florentine Mario Volterra, the Veronese Emilio Forti (both thirty-eight years old), and one other – he would become especially close to Roberto Funaro from Livorno, a pediatrician who had landed with his wife just a few days after the Viterbis and who immediately became the doctor of the children of Italian refugees. Among others, Funaro naturally treated Andrea and the seven Rosselli children, who arrived in 1940 with their grandmother Amelia and their mothers Marion and Maria. In terms of medical specialties, Achille and Roberto were different, but they were close in age, both in their late sixties, the eldest among their colleagues.

They studied together for the fateful exam. Both failed. There was nothing to

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<sup>75</sup> National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC, T627, Roll 4623, Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940*. The record is available online at <<https://www.ancestry.com>> (accessed upon registration 10 December 2021). The house can be seen at <<https://www.apartments.com>> (accessed 10 December 2021).

<sup>76</sup> Ernesto da Nova, *Il poliglotta moderno. Per imparare senza maestro la lingua inglese in 2 volumi*, Milan, Sonzogno, 1938; the cover of the copy belonging to the Viterbi family can be seen in USCA, *Andrew J. and Erna Viterbi Family Archives*, cit.

do but try again. Emilio Forti (who, with his wife Egle from Brescia, had crossed the ocean a little earlier, in July 1939)<sup>77</sup> said that in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts it was easier to get a license. He had done it. Achille then decided to take the board exam in Massachusetts and obtained his coveted medical license in the summer of 1941<sup>78</sup>.

In September, the Viterbis and their child moved to Boston, to Commonwealth Avenue, an elegant street. But their documents show two house numbers: 276 – where Achille took an office to receive his patients; and 250, a more modest home<sup>79</sup>.

With the declaration of war on Italy on 11 December 1941, they became enemy aliens. After the attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, immigrants of Italian origin, or Japanese or German, who did not already have American citizenship could even be arrested and interned on the basis of presumed guilt, if suspected of anti-Americanism, of being Fascists or Nazis. Nothing of the sort, of course, befell Achille, who was only forced to hand over his camera.

The news from Italy was more and more dramatic, and there was great concern for relatives and friends who had been left behind. The Finzi family's flour factory in Orte had been destroyed by the American Allied bombing raids of 29 August 1943, which grazed German military targets but struck civilian homes in the small town in Lazio and claimed about 300 victims<sup>80</sup>. After 8 September, the flight to Switzerland, including by their relatives, and the methodical hunt for Jews began, even in Bergamo of course, where they were few<sup>81</sup>. The Morpurgo family from Turin hid in a small village on the Alps.

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<sup>77</sup> For departure and arrival data of Emilio and Egle Forti, see The Statue of Liberty - Ellis Island Foundation, *Passenger Search, ad nomen* <<https://heritage.statueofliberty.org>> (accessed on registration 10 December 2021).

<sup>78</sup> His son Andrew Viterbi recounts this in his autobiography, *Reflections of an Educator*, cit.

<sup>79</sup> The area can be viewed at <<https://www.google.com/maps>> (accessed 10 December 2021).

<sup>80</sup> The country was awarded the Bronze Medal for Civil Merit in 2004: see <<https://www.quirinale.it>> (accessed 10 December 2021).

<sup>81</sup> See S. Cavati, *Aspetti della persecuzione degli ebrei*, cit.; Id., *Ebrei a Bergamo 1938-1945*, cit.

## Near and far

Even across the ocean, the world sometimes seemed small.

In Boston, the recently arrived Viterbis tried to make some acquaintances. Achille met a colleague who was an almost forty-year-old cardiologist from Florence who'd been expelled from the University of Ferrara: Aldo Luisada and his wife had an eight-year-old son, and Claudio became Andrea's playmate<sup>82</sup>. As they talked, it turned out that Dr. Luisada's brother had taken refuge in Tel Aviv with his wife from Turin along with her sister and her husband Giulio Muggia, who had previously worked at Olivetti; Muggia was the son of Achille's psychiatrist friend, his former colleague in Bergamo.

Who knows when they learned, perhaps through the Luisada family, that these friends the Muggias had been arrested by Italian public security agents in a raid between 5 and 6 December 1943? Detained in Venice, they were sent to the Fossoli concentration camp on 31 December. Having no news of them, his son Giulio was looking for them, and in July of 1944 he enlisted in the Royal Army Medical Corps, Palestine Section, and as a medical lieutenant returned to Italy. He was sent to Puglia, but on his way to Venice and perhaps resuming his contacts with the anti-Fascist crowd in Turin, he learned of the tragic fate of his family:<sup>83</sup> they were deported to Auschwitz on 22 February 1944, and Giuseppe Muggia, 67, and his wife Maria Ester Levi, 60, were killed in the gas chambers immediately upon arrival. Their daughter Franca passed the selection, but did not survive and the date of her death is not known<sup>84</sup>. Giulio returned to Palestine and took steps to start working as a psychiatrist again, like his father.

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<sup>82</sup> Testimony of Andrew Viterbi to the author, 24 September 2021.

<sup>83</sup> G. Mangini, *Una famiglia ebraica*, cit., p. 82. Giulio Muggia (1907-1990) was divorced in 1943 from Carla Malvano and each of them remarried, she in 1944 with Gavriel Shamir, co-owner of an important graphic studio, and he in July 1945 with the Venetian Costanza Sullam with whom they had two children, Michele in 1946, later a surgeon, and Dan Angelo in 1954, later a director and university professor. The son he had with his first wife, Enrico Giuseppe Muggia, also became a psychiatrist like his father and paternal grandfather, and from Israel he moved to the United States.

<sup>84</sup> Liliana Picciotto, *Il libro della memoria. Gli ebrei deportati dall'Italia 1943-1945*, Milan, Mursia, 2002, pp. 71-80. Further information in G. Mangini, *Una famiglia ebraica*, cit., pp. 80-82.

On the same convoy that transported the Muggia family to Auschwitz, there was a young chemist who was also interned at Fossoli almost a month after them. He survived and in October 1945 managed to return to Turin. His name was Primo Levi, and he began to tell his relatives and friends about what he had seen and experienced. He wanted to make a book out of it and, even before finding an Italian publisher, he sent some chapters to his cousin Anna, who was a radio journalist in Boston, in the hope that she would find an American publisher.

### **Primo Levi, Lucia, and other ties**

Anna and her husband, engineer Davide Jona (or Yona in the Americanized version), with their daughters Eva and Manuela, were among the closest friends of the Viterbi family, who were part of a very small circle of Italian Jews<sup>85</sup>. Even as an immigrant, Anna stood out for her anti-Fascist convictions in hosting the Italian-language programs on WCOP radio; Anna was the older sister of Vittorio Foa «the conspirator», who in 1935 was sentenced to fifteen years in prison and had since returned to Turin; both were related to the Malvano sisters and also to Giulio Muggia.

It is not improbable that, among friends, the Viterbis and the Jonas talked about Anna's cousin Primo Levi and his shocking testimony, also because Maria's Turin nieces, her sister's twin daughters, had known him for years: The young Jew and anti-Fascist was part of their own circle. Since his return, one of the sisters helped him every day in the writing of his memoir,<sup>86</sup> which began with his internment in the Fossoli camp in February 1944 and ended

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<sup>85</sup> Andrew Viterbi, in *Reflections of an Educator*, cit., recalls that a couple his parents often saw in Boston, besides Anna and Davide Yona, was Irma and Guido Segre, the Italian consul in Boston until 1938, when he lost his job as a Jew; both remained in Boston until 1946 with their two daughters.

<sup>86</sup> On the beautiful Lucia and her relationship with Primo Levi, whom she had known since the war and saw again in the Jewish New Year of 1946 in Turin, see the pages devoted by Ian Thomson, *Primo Levi. A Life*, New York, Henry Holt, 2003; Carole Angier, *The Double Bond. Primo Levi. A biography*, New York, Farrar, Strarus and Giroux, 2002, p. 251. Their photos in Roberta Mori, Domenico Scarpa (eds.), *Album Primo Levi*, Turin, Einaudi, 2017.

with the liberating arrival of the Soviet army at Auschwitz on 27 January 1945. In the family, the fact that Lucia had become so attached to Primo worried some. But the strict Giuseppe Morpurgo, having read Levi's typescript, had become friendly and full of admiration toward his daughter Lucia's fiancé<sup>87</sup>. They also knew this through their nephew Franco, who had returned to Italy in 1946 with the intention of reopening the family factory that had been destroyed by the bombing. He stayed there for several months before giving up and crossing the ocean again<sup>88</sup>.

On 8 September 1947, Lucia and Primo were married in the town hall. The announcement was of course also made to the Viterbi uncles, the Finzi aunt, and the cousins who were in America. After Franco, his brother Alberto Finzi, who had been the first member of the family to emigrate to New York in 1939, took the opportunity to return to Italy with his wife Valeria<sup>89</sup>. In October 1947, the first edition of *Se questo è un uomo* [*If This Is a Man*], published by De Silva of Turin, came out but went unnoticed. Achille received a copy right away from the author, his nephew by marriage. The publishers Anna heard from said that the American public would not want to know about such a book.

*If This Is a Man* would be published in New York only in 1959, translated by Stuart Woolf, a young historian from London of Jewish origin who came to Turin in 1956<sup>90</sup>.

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<sup>87</sup> See Ian Thomson, *The Genesis of If this is a Man*, in Stanislao Pugliese (ed.), *The Legacy of Primo Levi*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp. 41-58; Id., *Primo Levi*, cit.

<sup>88</sup> Testimony of Andrew Viterbi to the author; for Franco Finzi's various crossings, see The Statue of Liberty - Ellis Island Foundation, *Passenger Search, ad nomen* <<https://heritage.statueofliberty.org>> (accessed on registration 10 December 2021).

<sup>89</sup> The presence of Alberto Finzi at the wedding of his cousin Lucia with Primo Levi is asserted by I. Thomson, *Primo Levi*, cit. The Ellis Island Foundation's incomplete database shows his crossing back from Italy, but earlier.

<sup>90</sup> Stuart Woolf, *Tradurre Primo Levi, «Belfagor»*, LXIV, 6, 2009, pp. 699-705; and Id., *Translator's Afterword*, in Ann Goldstein (ed.), *The Complete Works of Primo Levi*, vol. 1, New York, Liveright, 2015, pp. 195-205. After the first edition by De Silva in 1947, *Se questo è un uomo* came out in May 1958 with Einaudi, which, as is known, had rejected it, and finally in 1959 in an English edition by Orion Press, a small publishing house in New York, then in London by André Deutsch Editions in 1960. Stuart Woolf worked on the translation with Primo Levi himself, who had met him at the home of Leonardo De Benedetti (1898-1983), a doctor, anti-Fascist, with

### A short visit to Italy

Achille and Maria waited until the summer of 1948 to see the relatives they had in Milan, Rome, and especially in Turin. The two of them and Andrew, no longer called Andrea, had become American citizens in April 1945<sup>91</sup> and as such would come to Italy to visit.

The trip, however, was expensive. On the return from Italy they made the crossing in third class, and on 10 September, on the *Saturnia* from Naples they landed in New York and returned to Boston<sup>92</sup>.

They resumed their modest lives with much dignity. In 1951, to save money, they moved to a less central and elegant area on Park Drive, but the apartment where Dr. Viterbi received his mostly Italian patients was larger; they did not need to spend money to rent a separate office. Income had been declining since the war, with the return of the many physicians who had been called into military service. Then, at age fifty-five, Maria decided to look for a job, and she found one. In the garment industry, almost all the workers were immigrant women, Italian and Jewish from Eastern Europe; Maria even joined the International Ladies Garment Workers Union,<sup>93</sup> whose vice-president was an anti-Fascist and anti-communist Italian American almost Achille's age. President of the Italian American Labor Council, trade unionist Luigi Antonini, also interacted with people of the caliber of Senator Carlo Sforza, who moved back to Italy in 1943, and Professor Gaetano Salvemini, who returned in 1949 after having lived for many years in the Boston area,

whom Levi had made the long journey back from Auschwitz, and uncle of Anna to whom Stuart became engaged and married. See Anna Segre, *Un coraggio silenzioso. Leonardo De Benedetti, medico, sopravvissuto ad Auschwitz*, Turin, Zamorani, 2008, with a preface by Stuart Woolf.

<sup>91</sup> The document declaring him an American as of 2 April 1945 is reproduced in USCA, *Andrew J. and Erna Viterbi Family Archives*, cit.

<sup>92</sup> Due to a typo in the surname, on the Ellis Island database this voyage appears only by looking for Maria Viterbi, or Andrew Viterbi, but not Achille Viterbi although the list shows him with his wife and son; see The Statue of Liberty - Ellis Island Foundation, *Passenger Search, ad nomen* <<https://heritage.statueofliberty.org>> (access on registration 10 December 2021). The same source also lists an address in Boston.

<sup>93</sup> This is the testimony of his son Andrew Viterbi, *Reflections of an Educator*, cit. On the history of the ILGWU, see Gus Tyler, *Look for the Union label. A History of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union*, Armonk, Sharpe, 1995.

on the other side of the Charles River, in Cambridge, where he taught at Harvard University.

That Andrew would have a good education was what Achille and Maria wanted for him. At the Prince public elementary school the boy had found himself quite isolated and struggling, but since 1946 he had been attending the Boston Latin School, which was the oldest in America, and he finally had high-caliber teachers. He was no longer the only Jewish boy (although other kids continued to bully him), and he would become a notable alumnus<sup>94</sup>. In 1952 he graduated and in order to become an engineer, as he had always wanted to, he was admitted to the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where physicist Bruno Rossi and Roberto Fano from Turin were also teaching. The two professors had left Mussolini's Italy in '39 like Andrew's parents, but as youngsters, at thirty-three and twenty-two respectively. Bob Fano (1917-2016), Ford professor at the Department of Engineering and Computer Science, and director of the MAC project, was his unforgettable teacher<sup>95</sup>.

That same year, Maria said goodbye to the sewing machine and returned to caring exclusively for their small family.

### **Coast to coast**

It was the son who was the trigger for a life change.

Once again Achille at almost seventy-five and Maria at sixty-three closed their house and left everything, but this time they were the ones to follow him, to the other side of America, in California. From Boston to Los Angeles, with

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<sup>94</sup> See Boston Latin School, *Liber Actorum 1952*, p. 70, in digital copy at <<https://archive.org>> (accessed 10 December 2021); for recognition see *Notable Alumni* on the BLS website <<https://www.bls.org>> (accessed 10 December 2021).

<sup>95</sup> Beautiful video of a lecture in which Robert Fano «explains scientific computing», 1964, which can be seen here: <<https://www.youtube.com>> (accessed 10 December 2021). In one of our conversations, in July 2021, Andrew Viterbi remarked to me the decisive but not enough recognized importance of this great scientist, son of the mathematician Gino Fano, brother of the physicist Ugo (1912-2001), who also emigrated to the USA, and cousin of the physicist Giulio Racah who emigrated to Palestine and remained in Israel.



Andrew driving a Chevrolet, it took them seven days, stopping at motels, and on 14 June 1957, to arrive at their destination. In Los Angeles, Andrew had some good job opportunities, and there they found Laura, Maria's sister, with her sons Alberto and Franco and their families<sup>96</sup>. Through his cousin Franco Finzi, Andrew met Erna Finci, who was born in Sarajevo and displaced with her family in Montenegro; interned in a village in the province of Parma, they had all escaped to Switzerland, and then emigrated to America in 1950.

On 15 June 1958 Andrew and Erna got married – she was twenty-four, he was twenty-three – the mother of the groom in tears<sup>97</sup>. That year, and several times in the following years, they traveled to Italy, although Achille, after his brief visit in 1948, never returned<sup>98</sup>.

Achille and Maria became grandparents to Audry in October 1959 and to Alan in December 1961; Alexander would be born in 1971. By 1963 their only son was pursuing an academic career at UCLA; in 1966 he published his first textbook and received great acclaim for the algorithm that was named after him, and he began his second career as an entrepreneur<sup>99</sup>.

That same year Achille died of Hodgkin's lymphoma. He had lived long enough to see Andrew's success. Maria lived another twenty years, having followed her son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren when they moved in 1973 to San Diego.

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<sup>96</sup> A. Viterbi, *Reflections of an Educator*, cit., pp. 22-24.

<sup>97</sup> UC San Diego Library, *Andrew Viterbi Interview - December 15, 2006* <<https://library.ucsd.edu>> (accessed 10 December 2021).

<sup>98</sup> A. Viterbi, *Reflections of an Educator*, cit., p. 32. In 1958, 1962, and in the following years Andrew and his young wife took every professional opportunity to make short trips to Italy to reconnect with his Italian and Jewish roots; in 1967 they also made a trip to Zagreb, Serbia, and Sarajevo, which was very painful for Erna who had lost so many relatives there; cf. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>99</sup> Exceptional was the career of Andrea/Andrew Viterbi, to whom the journalist Riccardo Chiaberge dedicated a volume, *L'algoritmo di Viterbi. Da profugo a re dei cellulari: la straordinaria avventura di un italiano in America*, Milan, Longanesi, 2000.

- *La durata delle impressioni retiniche. Nota preventiva di Achille Viterbi Laureando, Comunicazione fatta alla R. Accademia di Medicina di Torino nella seduta del 14 aprile 1905*, Turin, Unione tipografico editrice, 1905 (excerpt from «Giornale della R. Accademia di Torino», 1905).
- *Alcuni casi di ambliopia prodotta dall'aver fissato il sole nelle varie fasi dell'eclissi 30 agosto 1905. Comunicazione alla R. Accademia di medicina di Torino, seduta dell'8 giugno 1906*, Turin, Unione tipografico editrice, 1906 (excerpt from «Giornale della R. Accademia di Torino», 1906).
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- *Difese contro la cecità-infortunio*, s.l., s.n., [1922?], estratto da «Rassegna della previdenza sociale», 1922.
- *Histologie des plastiques conjonctivales dans les blessures perforantes de l'œil par le Docteur Viterbi*, «Bulletins et mémoires de la Société française d'ophtalmologie», 1923.
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- *Lesioni del segmento anteriore del globo oculare esaminate alla lampada a fessura con microscopio corneale*, in Società italiana di oftalmologia, *Atti del congresso 1924. Roma 27-30 ottobre*, Rome, Tipografia delle scienze,

1925, pp. 63-67.

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