

Roberto Coen Pirani

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Once the director of the Montecatini Chemical Laboratory, then removed from the position for racial reasons, Roberto Coen Pirani embarked on the *Rex* at 32 years of age with his wife and three young children. After difficult, yet very important, years in New York - exile was an eye-opener - he returned to Italy for the reconstruction (unlike many relatives of his and his wife's who stayed abroad), and the largest Italian chemical industry, which had taken sides with the regime, «very happily» rehired him, as he was a competent industrial chemist, who knew Giulio Natta, America, languages, and the international patent system well.

Education and large families

Born in Pisa in 1907, and the second son of Armando Coen Pirani and Berta Coen, who had his siblings Liana, in 1906, and Mario, in 1915, Roberto attended school and the first two years of university, majoring in chemistry, in Pisa. In the academic year 1926-27, he enrolled in industrial chemistry at the University of Bologna, where Mario Giacomo Levi, the husband of his aunt Adriana and signatory of Gentile's Manifesto of fascist intellectuals, had founded the Scuola superiore di chimica industriale [School for advanced studies in industrial chemistry] in 1922, and began directing a special department for the study of fuels right in 1926¹. His paternal uncle Renato Coen Pirani with his wife Nella, and his cousin Emma, who studied at the Facoltà di Lettere [School of Humanities], also lived in Bologna. Roberto graduated on 5 November 1929².

In 1931, he studied with a scholarship at the Polytechnic of Milan, where

¹ See Luigi Cerruti, *Levi, Mario Giacomo*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 64, Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2005 <<http://www.treccani.it>> (accessed 4 April 2019).

² ASUBo, *Archivio studenti*, f. 287, «Roberto Coen Pirani» <<https://archiviostorico.unibo.it>> (accessed 4 April 2019).

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Giulio Natta taught chemistry and where his uncle Levi had been teaching since 1927. At the age of 25, in 1932, he obtained another scholarship from KWG, Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaften, a complex of institutes founded in 1911 to promote the development of natural sciences (reorganized and renamed Max-Planck-Gesellschaft after the war). He was at the Berlin Dahlem branch, which was dedicated to research in physical chemistry, electrochemistry, and radiochemistry³.

On 9 July 1933, he married Leonora, who was from Ferrara, three years his junior, the daughter of Marcello Finzi (a jurist and an academic) and Adele Olschki, therefore becoming part of a large, wealthy and cultured family⁴. They had three children: Leo was born on 7 October 1934 in Bologna, where his birth was personally assisted by his uncle Renato, a professor of obstetrics; Claudia was born on 7 November 1936 in Bergamo; and Paolo was born on 10 February 1939 in Milan.

These were the cities where Roberto was making his career as an industrial chemist (not without Levi's advice) at various companies, from Brambilla, an artificial fertilizer company with an international business also in terms of patents, up to the leading Italian chemical industry originating from the Tuscan Società anonima delle miniere of Montecatini [a mining company] in 1888: the Montecatini company, whose president Guido Donegani had immediately sided with fascism, had about 50,000 employees and operated in multiple sectors by the end of the 1930s. Roberto was hired in 1937, when he was 30 years old⁵.

³ Written testimony of his son, Leo C. Pirani, to the Author, 2 March 2019. On the KWG in Berlin-Dahlem, see Fritz Krafft, *La fisica e il suo divenire. Sull'esperienza storica della conoscenza fisica*, Rome, Armando, 1990, pp. 188 ff.

⁴ For genealogy and personal data, also of family members who emigrated on Leonora Finzi's side, see *The Rosenthal and Olschki families*, Florence, Olschki, 2008. A few missing dates and places are provided here thanks to other sources.

⁵ For mobility and professional advancements, and several other pieces of information, I take advantage of my conversations with his son Leo C. Pirani, whom I thank most sincerely, from between November 2018 and April 2019.

Racial laws: relatives around the world

On 13 May 1939, Montecatini, the General Society for the mining and chemical industry of Milan, informed Roberto Coen Pirani that «in accordance with the racial directives [...they had] come to the decision to forgo [...his] services»⁶.

Therefore, he lost his directorate position at the laboratory in Milan and his position at the Centro studi [research center] in Novara. But he had expected it. As a consequence of those laws, his father-in-law had been expelled from the University of Modena; his uncle Renato Coen Pirani was expelled from the clinic and stripped of his academic title; his other uncle Mario Giacomo Levi was expelled from the Polytechnic; his brother-in-law and his cousins - all of them, in one way or another - were left without work and the younger ones without the possibility of starting one. From Milan - they lived at via Montebello 30 - he wrote to his parents that he and Leonora were seriously considering the idea of leaving with the children⁷. His father and mother did not want to leave Italy and Liana, his sister, as well as his cousin Emma, did not feel like leaving their respective parents alone. His brother Mario, on the other hand, who was not married and did not have any children to support, was willing to cross the ocean.

There was no hesitation on the part of Leonora's family. Everyone was organizing to leave, including her parents and relatives on her maternal side: they knew multiple languages, were either born abroad or lived there for a period of time, and had travelled in Europe and the Americas. The Olschki branch of the family - not to mention the Rosenthals, to whom aunt Margherita and her five children were related - had fled Germany in 1933; several of them took refuge in Italy and now found themselves forced to flee

⁶ Letter from the Montecatini General Secretariat to Roberto Pirani, 13 May 1939 (copy in the gallery here), courtesy of Leo C. Pirani. See Mario Perugini, *Il farsi di una grande impresa. La Montecatini fra le due guerre mondiali*, Milan, Angeli, 2014.

⁷ Alessandra Minerbi, *Lettere americane. Roberto Coen Pirani dopo le leggi razziali del 1938*, «Diario del mese», January 2006 <<https://digilander.libero.it>> (accessed 12 January 2019).

again like their ancestor Leo (or Lev Samuel), who was almost eighty years old, and his eldest son Leonardo, who had been expelled from the University of Heidelberg and was now leaving for the United States.

Leonora's aunt Elvira and her second husband Arthur Rosin had already moved to New York from Berlin three years prior, along with their two children;⁸ they had a nice house in Manhattan on the Upper East Side. They could help them. They had already given the affidavit to Leonora's brother; they were happy to guarantee it to her and her husband too, especially since the young couple had small children and Leo, the eldest, should have already started school.

Roberto was able to earn something as a chemical consultant at the Tuscan nitrogen company in Figline Valdarno, which had about 200 employees and had been open for a couple of years⁹. But it would only last for a few months.

To ensure his children «...a different and better world»

In fact, in July 1939, Arthur and Elvira Rosin's affidavit arrived at the American Consulate in Rome¹⁰. They were very worried and felt morally responsible for

⁸ Elvira and Arthur Rosin seem to have left Genoa for the United States on 24 September 1936 on the *Rex*, and arrived on 1 October in New York with a quota immigration visa; they had indicated Rome as their last city of residence, and provided the Italian address of her brother, Cesare Olschki, in Florence, while the New York one was The Croydon, 12 E 86th Street near the Neue Galerie, then a residential hotel built in 1932. They seem to have spent some time in 1936-37 with the daughter of Arthur's first marriage, Karen Rosin Gutmann (Berlin 19 August 1905 - New York 23 September 2000); the other son Alex Gerhardt Rosin was also in New York City (Berlin 11 December 1907 - New York 27 March 2007). The movements of Elvira and Arthur Rosin are very complicated, judging by the ship manifests on the Ellis Island website. In 1937, for example, they stopped in San Francisco, then Washington, and then Buenos Aires, where Pablo (Paul) Keins lived (Berlin 16 August 1909 - Buenos Aires 20 January 1967). Pablo, a son from Elvira's first marriage, married Trude Lebermann (Nuremberg 13 May 1937 - East Meadow, NY 20 May 1996) on 9 May 1934 in Nuremberg. They had a child, Vera (Florence, 22 September 1936). See Ellis Island Foundation, *Passenger Search*, «Rosin Arthur» and «Rosin (Olschki) Elvira» <<https://www.libertyellisfoundation.org>> (accessed upon registration 5 April 2019). For Pablo Keins and others, see Bernard M. Rosenthal, *Cartello, clan o dinastia? Gli Olschki e i Rosenthal, 1859-1976*, «Bibliofilia», 114, 2012, pp. 39-59.

⁹ Ibid. On the Tuscan Nitrogen Society, which exploited the nearby lignite mine, see M. Perugini, *Il farsi di una grande impresa*, cit., and the Municipality of Cavriglia, *Miniere di carta*, Cavriglia, Museo Mine, May-June 2018.

¹⁰ Letter of affidavit from Arthur Rosin and Elvira Rosin to the American Consulate in Rome, 4 July 1939, in the Leo C. Pirani private archive, here as a copy in the gallery.

the well-being of Roberto and Leonora Pirani, as well as their three young children. For this reason, they expressed their immediate availability to host them in their 8-room apartment for as long as necessary. They swore that they would never allow their relatives to become a financial burden for the community or municipality, which was what the authorities were interested in. As a guarantee, they provided documented details of their considerable financial assets.

They also specified that they had applied for the first papers since November 1936, and that they had previously given three affidavits: for their 27-year-old niece Lore Misch, a physicist who no longer needed it because she was now associate professor at MIT in Cambridge (MA);¹¹ for their 25-year-old nephew Corrado Finzi, who they said would receive funds from other relatives to buy a farm since he was in the agricultural sector; and finally they had given an affidavit for Elvira's 49-year-old brother Cesare Olschki, who they said would open an office in America for the business of his father, who was internationally known in the fields of antiquarian book trade and scientific publishing. In fact, Cesare did not go to the United States; Corrado instead sailed from Genoa to New York on 20 July 1939 on the *Conte di Savoia* with his cousin Corrado Levi¹².

Roberto and Leonora, who had applied for a visa, «were eager to immigrate to the United States», wrote their American relatives. If Leonora's parents had decided, in turn, to leave for Argentina, Roberto rather expressed to his parents his «uncertainty about the future, the pain of leaving [them], but, above all, [...] the thought of doing everything possible to ensure [his] children a different and better world»¹³.

11 Lore Clara Misch (1910-1996), nuclear physicist, refugee from Germany to the United States, was married on 14 March 1940 with the renowned Swiss-Jewish physicist, Felix Bloch (1905-1983), future Nobel prize winner for physics.

12 See Ellis Island Foundation, *Passenger Search*, «Corrado Finzi <<https://www.libertyellisfoundation.org>> (accessed upon registration 6 April 2019); Corrado Levi is also found on the same page of the ship manifest.

13 Roberto Coen Pirani's letter, 16 September 1939, is cited by A. Minerbi, *Lettere americane*, cit.

This is what he wrote on 16 September 1939. On the 30th of the same month, they had the immigration permits with «quota» status; on October 6, all five left Genoa. A photo shows Claudia, aged 3, and Leo, aged 5, playing with other children on the bridge of the *Rex*, on the crossing to New York, where they arrived on October 15. During the trip, they saw many people that were used to going to and returning from Italy, so that they found comfort in them: they left but with the hope of returning «before long»¹⁴.

Little work, a lot of effort to find it

At the beginning, they went to live with family at 14 E. 75th Street, but they soon started looking for an apartment to rent. They found one in a less prestigious area, on W. 118th Street. In the 16th Federal Census of 1940, in April Roberto, aged 32, was living with his wife and three children. Also included was Corrado Finzi, aged 25, who was living with them at the time¹⁵. As Leonora's younger brother, and an immigrant with a quota visa and the intention to stay in the U.S., he had not yet found a job, except for a very brief one at a Michigan cheese factory. He had graduated with degrees in piano and law and, just before leaving Italy, had begun to learn cheese production techniques with the hope that it would benefit him in the United States, perhaps to organize the farm mentioned by the Rosins in the affidavit, with funding from the family (his father Marcello Finzi had inherited considerable land)¹⁶. In the spring of 1940, however, a bit due to the lack of job prospects in the USA and a bit due to the insistence of his parents, Corrado left and joined them in Cordoba, Argentina, where he would remain and practice

¹⁴ Letter from Roberto Coen Pirani, 13 October, *ibid.* A copy of the photo of the children on the *Rex*, October 1939, is here in the gallery; for the trip, see Ellis Island Foundation, *Passenger Search*, «Roberto Pirani» <<https://www.libertyellisfoundation.org>>; with his wife and minors Claudia, Leo, Paolo.

¹⁵ NARA, T627, *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940. Population schedule*, 4.643 b. <<https://www.myheritage.it>> (accessed 5 March 2019).

¹⁶ Letter of affidavit from Arthur Rosin and Elvira Rosin to the American Consulate in Rome, 4 July 1939, *cit.*, and written testimony from Leo C. Pirani to the Author, 14 February 2019.

criminal law like his father¹⁷. The other Corrado who had come with him to New York, Levi Pirani, their cousin from Pisa and a doctor, was also struggling to settle down, just like everyone else.

While Roberto assiduously studied English, he wanted Italian to at least be spoken at home because he was saddened by how children were forgetting it so quickly. It was not until October, one year after their arrival, that he found work as a chemist at Polak's Frutal Works, an artificial essence industry owned by Dutch Jews, who emigrated to the USA and by 1951, would patent and launch on the market new fragrances developed in the laboratory¹⁸. This experience would come in handy even though, at the time, it was not exactly the job he wanted because he would have preferred to continue scientific research. He had some connections at New York University, but this would mean embarking on a very precarious and uncertain university path, and a lack of immediate earnings. At least at Polak, the daily problem of supporting his family was solved.

They moved again to 370 Riverside Drive in New York City. It is in that beautiful 14-storey building, built in 1922 on the Upper West Side by Schwartz & Gross, that Leonora's parents visited them. Now residing in Córdoba with their son Corrado, professor Marcello Finzi and his wife, Adele, embarked on the *Brasil* from Buenos Aires on 7 March 1941 to see their daughter, grandchildren and Roberto again¹⁹.

17 Leonora's younger brother, Corrado (later Conrado) Finzi (Ferrara 18 August 1911 - Valle Hermoso, Córdoba, Argentina 1 May 1986), lawyer, had left for New York on 20 July 1939 with Corrado Levi; he then emigrated to Argentina and settled in Córdoba, where his father, who arrived with his wife the year prior, taught at the police academy. After abandoning the farm project, he resumed his criminal law studies and authored important translations in the field of criminal law. See Carlos Julio Lascano, *Breve semblanza de los juristas Marcello Finzi y Corrado A. Finzi*, Córdoba, Instituto de Ciencias Penales de la Academia Nacional de Derecho y Ciencias Sociales de Córdoba, 14 March 2018.

18 Ernst T. Theimer (ed.), *Fragrance Chemistry: The Science of the Sense of Smell*, New York, Academic Press, pp. 515-517.

19 See Ellis Island Foundation, *Passenger Search*, «Marcello Finzi» and «Adele Finzi» <<https://www.libertyellisfoundation.org>> (accessed upon registration 10 April 2019), which shows the address of Roberto and Leonora Pirani. For the image of the building, see <<https://www.cityrealty.com>> (accessed 10 April 2019).

Exile opens one's eyes to human suffering

They mainly met up with other Italians undergoing similar difficulties; Spanish and Italian refugees in New York; the Pontecorvo siblings, who were scientists from Pisa (like Roberto); Roberto and Piera Funaro from Livorno (she was a sculptor and he was the pediatrician of the Pirani children); Paolo Milano, the Roman literary critic; and Paolo Contini who, like Leonora, was from Ferrara. Both Contini and Milano were at the democratic New School for Social Research, in the inner circles of Gaetano Salvemini and Max Ascoli, another notable person from Ferrara. Friendships that were destined to last were established - recalls his son Leo -²⁰ such as with Baldina Di Vittorio, the unionist's daughter and a member of the Communist Party of Italy since 1938, and her husband Giuseppe Berti, one of the founders and leaders of that same party. Both adventurously arrived in the United States from France, where they had expatriated each on his or her own account, and where Baldina was interned in the Rieucros camp²¹.

The Pirani couple departed from Italy, not pro-fascist but neither anti-fascist. It was during their exile in America that Roberto and his wife became politically sensitive and began to profess leftist ideas. They spent more time with people they might not have had relationships with before, and frantically tried to understand what was going on in Italy and in Europe by looking around them. They could see how Italian immigrants lived in certain areas of New York city. In Elmhurst, Queens, where they went to live for a while, there were mainly Jews and Italians at that time and, in Long Island where Roberto went for work, there were mostly Italian and Russian Jews of

²⁰ Testimony to the author by Leo C. Pirani, who pointed out the names mentioned in the text of people who spent time with his parents in New York. It seems probable to me that they also met with Renata Calabresi, as she was born to a well-known family in Ferrara, as did Leonora, albeit much younger, and because they certainly had friends in common, such as the Milanos (husband and wife), Paolo Contini and Max Ascoli. In addition, she too would go to live on Riverside Drive, like Nino Levi, only a few meters away.

²¹ Balda Di Vittorio Berti, also called Baldina (Cerignola, Foggia, 16 October 1920 - Cerignola, 2 January 2015). She was already active in the French communist organizations and, on returning to Italy, she was part of the presidency of the UDI (*Unione donne italiane*), was elected to the Chamber in the PCI lists in the spring of 1963, and elected to the Senate in 1968.

the latest generation. They were day laborers and poor people, whom anti-Semitism and prejudices weighed on, and who had settled in neighborhoods called San Remo or Marconiville²². Leonora said it well:

Exile [...] has not closed our eyes; on the contrary, I would like to say that it has opened them for the first time; [...] I realize that, until yesterday, we have dealt too little with human suffering and that, if we want to gain a place in the world, we too must participate in the reconstruction of a world that will have nothing to do with yesterday's²³.

Distant and without anymore news from Italy

Roberto sent letters to his parents full of nostalgia for Italy, the sea, and the Apennines of Tuscany. Then from autumn 1941, during three long years of war, he could no longer communicate with them. There was no direct news, only the anguish about the war and the Nazi occupation.

They finally learned something thanks to Corrado Levi, Roberto's cousin who had finally found a stable job at the Michael Reese Hospital in Chicago. A colleague of his served in Tuscany as a medical captain for the IV army. In 1944, Leo Kaplan, at Corrado's request, set out in search of his uncles, Roberto's parents; in October of that same year, he notified him that they were still alive²⁴. After the bombings in the summer of 1943, they had been displaced to Luccesia, with false documents, and for a period of time, they even hid in an asylum. Liana and her husband Said Passigli had taken refuge in Rufina near Florence, but she - Armando Coen Pirani told his nephew Corrado in a letter - had to go to the city and was arrested in February. In May, she was brought to Fossoli. They had no further news since then. Roberto's father was more optimistic: even if she was in a concentration camp, at least she was still in Italy. It wasn't until the end of the following year that they discovered she had not survived Auschwitz²⁵.

22 See Salvatore LaGumina, *From Steerage to Suburb: Long Island Italians*, New York, Center for Migration Studies, 1988, on Marconiville pp. 34-35.

23 Letter from Leonora Finzi Pirani cited by A. Minerbi, *Lettere americane*, cit.

24 Ibid., and testimony of Leo Coen Pirani to the Author.

25 Ibid. On Liana Coen Pirani (Pisa, 14 June 1906 - Auschwitz, 8 February 1945), wife of Said

After the war, they thought about returning to Italy. Leonora's parents and brother intended to stay in Argentina; many of her relatives, wherever they were, were in no hurry to return and would have rather stayed. Roberto, however, did not want to live so far away from his parents, who had their house bombed and were suffering from their losses, first of all from the death of their daughter and also of his brother - uncle Corrado had also not survived Auschwitz²⁶.

Generations, public and private

The idea of returning aroused fear and worry over what they would return to and the changes they would encounter: «Of course we do not hide from ourselves the difficulties that we will encounter, particularly at the beginning [...] and especially for the children, for whom the change will be a great shock»²⁷. Paolo left Italy when he was a baby and was now almost seven years old; therefore Italy was an unknown place for him. Perhaps even Claudia and Leo, who were 10 and 12, did not remember much anymore. But the longer they waited, the more difficult it would be for them to detach themselves from where they had grown up to settle down again.

Naturally, Roberto would need to find a job in Italy. It seems that he contacted Manetti & Roberts to stay in Tuscany. However, the greatest job opportunities in the industrial chemistry sector were in the North, in Milan. In July 1945, his uncle, Mario Giacomo Levi, returned to teaching at the Polytechnic, even though he had to wait several years before being officially reinstated. He was readmitted when he was over seventy years old and only

Passigli, arrested on 29 February 1944, deported to Fossoli and Auschwitz, see CDEC, *Digital Library, ad nomen* <<http://digital-library.cdec.it>> (accessed 8 April 2019).

²⁶ See CDEC, *Digital Library, ad nomen* <<http://digital-library.cdec.it>> (accessed 10 April 2019); Corrado Gustavo Coen Pirani (Pisa, 19 May 1885 - Auschwitz, 28 October 1944) was arrested on 30 May in Torre Bolzone, imprisoned in Bergamo, interned at the Bolzano camp and deported, and killed on the day of the arrival of his convoy in Auschwitz. Shortly before his arrest, he tried to cross the border into Switzerland, but was rejected.

²⁷ Letter from Roberto Coen Pirani to his parents, April 1946, cit. in A. Minerbi, *Lettere americane*, cit.

as a supernumerary faculty member²⁸. On the contrary, Leonora's father, professor Marcello Finzi, who was formally reinstated as *professore ordinario* [full professor] at the Facoltà di Giurisprudenza [Law School] of the University of Modena in 1946, was waiting to return. And he waited until he was past retirement, since he had emigrated «not on a whim, but as a result of the inauspicious racial laws», as he reminded his colleagues who were dismissing these circumstances²⁹. Levi and Finzi were of the same age - the former was born in 1878, the latter in 1879 - and belonged to the older generation; whichever provision the university that expelled them in 1938 were to adopt, they were about to retire. Roberto's situation at 40 years old, like that of all his generation, was completely different because they needed to work.

On 14 January 1946, he wrote directly to the Montecatini General Society for mining and Chemical Industry, located at via Principe Umberto 18 in Milan:

In May 1939, after serving for two years as the director of the Central Chemical Laboratory in Milan and [...] at the research laboratory in Novara, I was fired from this company «in accordance with the racial directives».

After a six-year stay in the United States, I prepare to return to Italy within the next few months. I would therefore be interested to know what the chances of my being reinstated by the Company are in the current circumstances. I would be grateful if you could tell me something about it.

Since my stay in the United States will have to continue for a few more months, I would be willing to take on any technical assignment that the Company deems useful to entrust to me³⁰.

The Company probably gained additional information, since Pirani made no

28 Luigi Cerruti, *Levi, Mario Giacomo*, cit.

29 Marcello Finzi (Ferrara, 1879 - Rome, 1956) was full professor of criminal law and procedure at the University of Modena when he was expelled on 30 November 1938. He took refuge in Argentina, where he held a position at the University of Córdoba until the end of the war. He returned to Modena in 1952, when he was 73 years old and had been retired for a year from the University of Modena, which formally reinstated him in 1946-47. He continued to work and publish. The Municipality of Modena dedicated an avenue to him in 2006. See Elio Tavilla (ed.), *Marcello Finzi giurista a Modena. Università e discriminazione razziale tra storia e diritto. Atti del Convegno (Modena, 27 gennaio 2005)*, Florence, Olschki, 2006, and Valeria Galimi, *La politica della razza all'Università di Modena*, in Ead., Giovanna Procacci (eds.), *Per la difesa della razza. L'applicazione delle leggi antiebraiche nelle università italiane*, Milan, Unicopli, 2009, pp. 50-52.

30 Letter from Roberto Coen Pirani to Montecatini, 14 January 1946, in the Leo C. Pirani private archive.

mention of his professional experiences from the past six years. There was no response for over a month and a half, but it was positive when it arrived: «We are pleased to inform you that, on your return to Italy, we will gladly negotiate for your return to the Society's management». In fact, they thanked him very much, especially for his willingness to take on technical assignments while he was still in the United States. They were certainly interested³¹.

The task of reconstruction

In July 1946, Roberto, Leonora, and their children embarked on the *Vulcania* to return home. They were joined on this trip by Mrs. Amelia Rosselli, her daughters-in-law, Maria and Marion, and their children (except John, who was called to duty by the British army). Among so many uncertainties and fears, what enlivened them most was not nostalgia, but hope and the «task of reconstruction», as the widow of Nello Rosselli had said.

Roberto was re-hired in the Centro studi in Novara, where he was before the racial laws were put into effect, and was then placed in the Milan Patent Office, which was directed by the engineer, Giuseppe De Varda. The technical skills and experience he had developed in New York were certainly valuable for the job he was about to take on, and the Montecatini Society did not overlook them. It was in 1946 that the leadership passed from Guido Donegani to Piero Giustiniani, with Giulio Natta, who was planning a trip to the United States to see how petrochemistry was supplanting carbon chemistry. In those years the Society was heavily investing in the research in macromolecular chemistry of Natta and his group; it acquired Italy's exclusive license for all of Karl Ziegler's present and future researches and patents, and with the results that it gathered, the first isotactic polypropylene was produced under the brand name, Moplen.

Pirani participated in this climate of growth and innovation for the Italian

³¹ Ibid. Service letter from the Montecatini personnel office to Roberto Pirani, Milan, 3 March 1946, here in the gallery.

chemical industry and for the country in the 1950s. After De Varda, he was the key figure in the Montecatini Patent Office. He greatly interacted with Giulio Natta, who, in 1938, had replaced Mario Giacomo Levi in the direction of the Institute of chemistry at the Polytechnic and who, in 1963, along with Ziegler, received the Nobel Prize in chemistry. Theirs was a long-lasting relationship, always formal but of mutual respect. Roberto Pirani traveled extensively for work, especially in the United States.

The crisis of the Montecatini company, which continued until the merger with Edison and the birth of the Montedison group in 1966, is significant and exemplary of the parable and shattering of many hopes.

Major publications

- Leo Coen Pirani recalls some early scientific publications of his father Roberto, which we have not been able to identify.

Archival sources

- Private archive of Leo Coen Pirani, letters from Roberto Coen Pirani to his parents, May 1939 - Spring 1946, and various documentation.
- ASUBo, *Archivio studenti*, f. 287, «Coen Pirani Roberto», <<https://archivistorico.unibo.it>>.
- Letter to Roberto Pirani in Archivio Giulio Natta, *Carteggio Natta, Ufficio Brevetti, 1954-71, Corrispondenza varia con Ing. Varda*, <<http://www.giulionatta.it>>.

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