

## Aldo Neppi Modona

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In London and New York, the two main organizations for refugee scholars looking for work took on his case. He had positive references, but there were fewer and fewer university places available, even in the United States. What he himself should have done, and was advised to do, was to cross the ocean and move.

Without guarantees of a job, with a thousand unknowns to face and a dependent family, Aldo Neppi Modona did not feel up to it. The determination that he lacked to leave the country in 1938-39, however, never failed him in claiming his «rights so clearly violated». After the war, he requested the review of two university competitive examinations: the abominable racial laws had not allowed Jews to compete, otherwise with his scientific qualifications he might at least have been eligible and then be taken on. Which is what happened at the end of 1957: almost twenty years after those fascist laws and much suffering.

### Early years and a passion for the classical world

He was born on 20 October 1895 in Florence, to Ada Marianna Carpi and Leone Neppi Modona, both originally from Cento, in the Ferrara area. His was a bourgeois family, characterized by the fervent observance of the Jewish religion and by strong monarchical and patriotic sentiments. On the level of ideas, in fact, «God» and «Nation» were the most important points of reference for the Neppi Modona, and Aldo could not have failed to be influenced by them from his earliest years<sup>1</sup>. His education, moreover, took the path of home-schooling in the years of elementary education and was

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<sup>1</sup> See Kate Cohen, *The Neppi Modona Diaries. Reading Jewish Survival through My Italian Family*, Hanover (NH), University Press of New England, 1997, p. 14.

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then continued, in the direction of classical subjects, at the Liceo ginnasio Michelangiolo in Florence. It was thus exactly his passion for the classical world that led him to enrol in humanities at the Institute of Higher Studies of Florence (the future University of Florence), even if, from 1915, Italy's entry into the First World War slowed down his studies. This, however, did not represent a real problem for him: Aldo had, in fact, enlisted as a volunteer in the infantry, soon becoming an officer, and this experience helped to reinforce in him a proud nationalist sentiment, substantiated by the long correspondence with his mother Ada during the years of his stay at the front<sup>2</sup>.

With the war over, he was at last able to graduate in 1919: his teachers included prominent figures of the time such as Luigi Pareti, professor of ancient history,<sup>3</sup> and Luigi Pernier, professor of archaeology and history of classical art<sup>4</sup>. The following year, moreover, he obtained a specialization diploma in humanities, also in Florence, with a final thesis in archaeology on «Etruscan and Roman Cortona in history and art», which was judged good enough to allow Aldo to undertake an academic career in the field of antiquities. Indeed, starting from 1920, we observe the publication of a significant number of scientific articles, in which Aldo was able to go further not only into aspects of Etruscan civilization, but also into problems of Greek and Roman history, showing particular attention to the history of Jewish communities in the Hellenistic world<sup>5</sup>. It is not surprising, therefore, that already at the end of 1925 Aldo had obtained a place as a *libero docente* in

<sup>2</sup> The correspondence was donated by the family to the Archivio ligure della scrittura popolare [Ligurian Archive of Popular Writing] at the University of Genoa (ALSP). For the extent of the materials, now gathered in the Neppi Modona correspondence collection, I refer to <<https://alsp.unige.it>> (last accessed 18 July 2022).

<sup>3</sup> Luigi Pareti (1885-1962), professor of Ancient History at the Universities of Florence (1912-1933), Catania (1933-1940) and Naples (1940-1955), was a versatile and very prolific scholar, who dedicated his research to various fields of classical studies, including Etruscan history.

<sup>4</sup> Luigi Pernier (1874-1937), before becoming a university professor in archaeology and the history of classical art (in 1916), was director of the Italian School of Archaeology in Athens (from 1909 to 1916).

<sup>5</sup> See Nelida Caffarello, *Bibliografia di Aldo Neppi Modona*, in Ead. (ed.), *Archaeologica. Scritti in onore di Aldo Neppi Modona*, Florence, Olschki, 1975, pp. IX-XX.

classical antiquities, which he undertook at once at the University of Florence;<sup>6</sup> nor is it surprising that, in this same year of 1925, he was appointed an honorary member of the Etruscan Academy of Cortona and was enlisted in the creation of the Permanent Committee for Etruria (the future Institute of Etruscan studies), with the aim of organizing research and popularizing activities in the field of Etruscology (such as the publication of the journal «Studi etruschi», still a reference point in the discipline). Among those who wanted him to participate in the initiative were Pernier himself and Antonio Minto, then superintendent of Antiquities of Etruria, with whom was born a collaborative relationship that was destined to intensify in the following year<sup>7</sup>.

### **His stay in Rhodes and his troubled university career**

A turning point in Aldo's professional and family life took place in 1928: in that year, in fact, a specialist scholarship made available by the FERT (*Fortitudo Eius Rhodum Tenuit*) Historical-Archaeological Institute in Rhodes allowed him to stay for a semester (from June to December) in the Italian Aegean Islands, located off the Turkish coast and occupied by Italy since 1912<sup>8</sup>. The fundamental objective of the FERT Institute was to enhance the cultural heritage of ancient and medieval times guarded in the archipelago, and Aldo was able to carry out a task of this sort by starting to draft a monograph on the history of the island of Cos in Greek and Roman times (later published in 1933). But that stay was also decisive for another reason: in Rhodes, Aldo met Rachel Fintz, a young woman belonging to a Jewish

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<sup>6</sup> Ministerial Decree of qualification as a *libero docente* (24 November 1925) and Ministerial Decree of final confirmation of the same qualification (2 March 1931), in ASUFi, AC, SP, SLD, f. 1196, «Aldo Neppi Modona».

<sup>7</sup> Antonio Minto (1880-1954) was superintendent of the Antiquities of Etruria from 1925 to 1951. Noteworthy is his obituary published by Neppi Modona: see *Ricordo personale di Antonio Minto*, «Studi etruschi», 24, 1955-56, pp. XV-XVIII.

<sup>8</sup> The Italian Aegean Islands, and Rhodes in particular, were inhabited by a vibrant community of Sephardic Jews, which would be completely annihilated by the Nazis during the Second World War: see now Marco Clementi, Eirini Toliou, *Gli ultimi ebrei di Rodi. Leggi razziali e deportazioni nel Dodecaneso italiano (1938-1948)*, Rome, DeriveApprodi, 2015.

family from the island of Patmos, with whom he became engaged after going out with her for a brief time. This engagement finally led to their marriage, celebrated in Florence on 11 January 1929, from which their daughter Lionella would later be born, in 1931, and their son Leo, in 1932<sup>9</sup>.

The early 1930s also coincided with Aldo's attempt to establish himself definitively on the academic level: to this end, in 1932 he officially joined the National Fascist Party, having already joined the National Association of Fascist University Professors in 1929<sup>10</sup>.

Yet despite his best efforts, when the racial laws in 1938 erased all hope of maintaining public employment, Aldo had still not managed to obtain a university chair. In 1933, to tell the truth, he had taken part in the competitive examination for a post as professor of classical antiquities at the University of Florence, but his positioning as second of the three winners prevented him from being taken on at the University of Florence and instead obliged him to accept a high school teaching position in Latin and Greek literature outside Tuscany, first at the Liceo ginnasio in La Spezia, then at the «Umberto I» Liceo in Rome, where he moved with his family in 1935: this outcome was due to the fact that, by law, only the first of the three candidates had the right to be appointed as full professor at the University that had announced the competitive examination<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> On the importance of the period spent on Rhodes, I refer to Edoardo Bianchi, *Rodi e Coe nel percorso biografico e intellettuale di Aldo Neppi Modona*, in Id. (ed.), *Antichisti ebrei a Rodi e nel Dodecaneso italiano*, Naples, Editoriale scientifica (in press). As for aspects of his family life, I refer instead to University of Southern California (USC), Shoah Foundation (SF), Visual History Archive (VHA), Luisa Levi D'Ancona, *Interview with Rachel Neppi Modona*, 11 May 1998, tapes 1, 2 and 3, which can be viewed upon registration at the address <<http://www.shoah.acs.beniculturali.it>> (accessed 19 August 2022).

<sup>10</sup> K. Cohen, *The Neppi Modona Diaries*, cit., p. 16.

<sup>11</sup> In a university competitive examination, only the first of the final three (the «ternati») was entitled to be nominated as a full professor at the University that had announced the competition; the other «ternati», who might be eligible for appointment at a University within two years from the approval of the competition documentation, were considered winners of the competition in the Middle School, for positions in subjects comparable to the one for which the university competition had been announced (RD 1592 of 31 August 1933). In our case, see the Ministerial Decree approving the documentation of the Florence competition (23 November 1933) and the Ministerial Decree of Aldo's appointment as a high school teacher (28 December 1933): «Bollettino ufficiale del Ministero dell'Educazione Nazionale. Parte II. Atti di

It should be added that what may have contributed to this slowdown in his career was his poor relations with the historical school of the greatest ancient historian of the time, Gaetano De Sanctis, who – although now ousted from university roles for refusing to swear allegiance to the regime – still enjoyed secure academic power<sup>12</sup>. In particular, his distancing himself from De Sanctis' critique of Roman imperialism<sup>13</sup> does not seem to have benefited Aldo, nor did the dispute over the person of the emperor Claudius, carried out through reviews and counter-reviews with the most promising of De Sanctis's students, Arnaldo Momigliano<sup>14</sup>. The only consolations, therefore, for him came from an assignment to give the summer courses of Etruscan art at the University for foreigners in Perugia and, with the transfer to Rome, from a secondment to the Institute of Roman Studies, where Aldo went on free afternoons after classes at the Liceo «Umberto I»<sup>15</sup>.

amministrazione», 8, 1934, pp. 523-529, and 38, 1935, p. 3996.

<sup>12</sup> Gaetano De Sanctis (1870-1957) was the greatest Italian ancient historian of the first half of the twentieth century. Professor of Ancient History at the Universities of Turin (1900-1929) and Rome (1929-1931), he was expelled from these roles with effect from 1 January 1932; he was editor of the prestigious «Rivista di filologia e di istruzione classica». After the Second World War, he was appointed senator for life of the Italian Republic. For his poor relations with Aldo I refer to Edoardo Bianchi, *Aldo Neppi Modona e gli antichisti italiani nei carteggi del Gabinetto Vieusseux. Gli anni 1933-1940*, in Annarosa Gallo (ed.), *Ordinamento giuridico, mondo universitario e scienza antichistica di fronte alla legislazione razziale* (in press). I will limit myself here to recalling the very unfavourable review of Aldo's volume on the history of the island of Cos published in 1934 in the journal edited by De Sanctis: Mario Segre, *Recensione a Neppi Modona A., L'isola di Coe nell'antichità classica*, «Rivista di filologia e di istruzione classica», 62, 1934, pp. 413-417.

<sup>13</sup> I refer to the reading offered in the volume *L'espansione politica di Roma in Oriente. Delineazione storica delle sue direttive e delle sue conseguenze, seguita da analisi critiche delle fonti e della loro interpretazione moderna. Fascicolo I*, Rome, Istituto grafico tiberino, 1935, which dealt with a really hot topic in the fascist Italy of the thirties. In the text, the distance from De Sanctis was expressed through criticism of one of his pupils, the young Piero Treves (1911-1992). Treves later published a review of the volume, in which, albeit gracefully, he confirmed the difference of views between them («L'Italia che scrive», 19, 1936, p. 270): on Treves see here the *Vita in movimento* dedicated to him.

<sup>14</sup> For a profile of Arnaldo Momigliano (1908-1987), who became professor of Roman history at the University of Turin in 1936, see here the *Vita in movimento* dedicated to him (in course of publication). The dispute arose following the publication by Aldo of a review of Momigliano's volume *L'opera dell'imperatore Claudio* (Florence, Vallecchi, 1932) in the journal «Il Mondo classico», 2, 3-4, 1932, pp. 321-330, to which Momigliano had replied harshly in «La Nuova Italia», 3, 8, 1932, pp. 320-321. To Aldo's rejoinder in «Il Mondo classico», 2, 5-6, 1932, pp. 471-474, Momigliano had wanted to reply again in «La Nuova Italia», 4, 1, 1933, p. 31. Not satisfied, Aldo rejoined once again, in «La nuova Italia», 4, 2, 1933, p. 72.

<sup>15</sup> On the experience of summer teaching in Perugia, begun in 1930, see ASUSPg, *Corsi di Alta*

**Faced with racial laws: disappointment and isolation**

Unlike his other colleagues affected by racial legislation, Aldo did not immediately think of emigrating. Rather, by virtue of his attachment to his homeland and his sense of duty, he bitterly accepted the anti-Semitic shift formalized by the regime in September 1938. Not only that, but at least at the beginning he cultivated the uneasy hope that Mussolini would backtrack, if he only considered the merits that Jews had acquired in the service of Italy, especially during the Great War. In appreciating this attitude, the text of a short story, written at just this time by Aldo and kept among his papers, appears illuminating. In it the fortuitous encounter between two old comrades in arms, the Jew Isaac (Aldo's own *alter ego*) and the Aryan Carlo, once supportive partners, but now distant on the emotional level and not just precisely because of the racial legislation: in the dialogue attributed to the two, in fact, what is striking is the heartfelt appeal by the former so that the latter fully re-evaluates his loyal commitment to Italy, already demonstrated on the battlefield, which in any case never leads to open criticism of the regime's provisions<sup>16</sup>.

On the other hand, it seems significant that Aldo, always in compliance with the rules, also made a request for «exemption» precisely in virtue of the war merits that he could claim<sup>17</sup>. The results obtained, however, were paltry, since Aldo was in the meantime not only dismissed from teaching at the Liceo «Umberto I», but was also suspended from teaching in classical antiquities (as well as being deprived of teaching Etruscan art at the University for Foreigners in Perugia). He was only allowed to maintain his position at the Institute of Roman Studies temporarily, until March 1939, for the fulfilment of

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*cultura ed etruscologia, docenti*, b. 1930, f. 1: «Corsi di Cultura superiore (con antecedenti dal 1929)», 1930; s.f. 1930, «Prof. Aldo Neppi Modona». As for the secondment to the Istituto di studi romani, see Massimiliano Ghilardi, «La civiltà di Roma e i problemi della razza». *L'Istituto di studi romani e le leggi razziali*, in Alessandro Pagliara (ed.), *Antichistica italiana e leggi razziali*, Parma, Athenaeum edizioni, 2020, pp. 58-59.

<sup>16</sup> The text, written in October 1938, was published for the first time in K. Cohen, *The Neppi Modona Diaries*, cit. pp. 27-30.

<sup>17</sup> A copy of the request is kept at MEIS, *Fondo Neppi Modona*, all. 163.

some tasks which could not be deferred<sup>18</sup>. The reduction in family income at this time was compensated by income from teaching Latin and Greek language and literature, assigned to him at the time of the establishment of the Jewish Middle School in Rome in November 1938, under the control of the Ente nazionale per l'insegnamento medio: this, however, amounted to a monthly salary of no more than 1,000 lire. In any case, the sense of complete isolation because of his exclusion from Italian cultural life was much more serious: in this regard, the pages of his diary clearly highlight the profound frustration he felt when he was informed of his removal from several institutions with which he had collaborated for years and when even the typescripts of his very recent works on the ancient history of the city of Pisa were returned to him, now ready for printing but rejected for his belonging to the «Jewish race» (eventually published, with great delay, only in 1953)<sup>19</sup>. Thus, as the months went by, Aldo had to realize that Mussolini had no intention of backtracking.

### **Looking for a university position abroad**

On 6 December 1938 the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning in London opened a file in his name: it was not, however, Aldo himself who applied, but Cecil Roth, future reader in Jewish Studies at Oxford<sup>20</sup>. There was a long-standing friendship between the two, which dated back to the times of Roth's first visits to Italy: Aldo therefore used this friendship (or was induced to use it) to venture on the road to an academic relocation abroad, particularly in Great Britain<sup>21</sup>. Actually, from the available documentation, it does not appear that Roth later played a decisive role in the investigation of

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<sup>18</sup> M. Ghilardi, «*La civiltà di Roma e i problemi della razza*», cit., p. 58.

<sup>19</sup> K. Cohen, *The Neppi Modona Diaries*, cit., p. 51.

<sup>20</sup> Letter from David C. Thomson, general secretary of the Society, to Roth, of 6 December 1938: BLO, MS, SPSL 295/5, f. «Aldo Neppi Modona».

<sup>21</sup> The long-standing relations with Roth are attested to by the exchanges of correspondence, dating from 1927 and preserved in the Gabinetto Vieusseux di Firenze, Archivio contemporaneo Alessandro Bonsanti (ACAB), *Fondo Aldo Neppi Modona*, f. «Cecil Roth».

the case initiated by the Society<sup>22</sup>. Rather, it seems that, at the beginning of 1939, the Society had relied on the advice of the director of the British School of Rome, Courtenay Arthur Raleigh Radford, who, in addition to showing a sincere interest in Aldo's fate, suggested the names of two specialists from his research fields operating in Great Britain – Ronald Syme and Arthur Dale Trendall – to ask for a confidential opinion on his qualifications<sup>23</sup>. These scholars – at the time active respectively at Trinity College in Oxford and Trinity College in Cambridge – were indeed consulted and soon sent the Society their opinions, both positive. From their observations, however, emerged the highlighting of some critical issues which, in their view, would have seriously hindered the search for any academic appointment in British universities: in the latter's opinion, it was Aldo's lack of familiarity with spoken English and, in the opinion of both, of the fact that in Great Britain there were no research and/or teaching posts expressly dedicated to classical antiquities or Etruscology. It was for precisely this reason that Syme argued that they should look to the United States of America, where there would be more opportunities to find a job for him as a teacher<sup>24</sup>.

The Society actually took action in this direction, having managed to get in direct contact with Aldo for the first time and having consulted, at his suggestion, three referees in the United States: Karl Lehmann-Hartleben,

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<sup>22</sup> According to what we read in Lionella Neppi Modona, *Cronaca a due voci. Storie, vicende, persecuzioni di una famiglia ebraica (1938-1945)*, Florence, Aska, 2017, p. 34, «His dear friend Cecil Roth [...] obtained for him the chance of teaching at Cambridge»: there is, however, no documentary confirmation for this assertion.

<sup>23</sup> See the letter from C.A. Raleigh Radford to the general secretary of the Society, of February 4, 1939, in which he complains about the small number of British scholars among the referees indicated in the information sheet presented in the previous month of December. In point of fact, the names appearing in the dossier are: Giuseppe Cardinali, vice rector of the University of Rome; Astorre Lupattelli, rector of the University for Foreigners of Perugia; Giulio Quirino Giglioli, professor at the University of Rome; Bartolomeo Nogara, director of the Vatican Museums; Harold Idris Bell, a British Museum official; and Cecil Roth (BLO, MS, SPSL 295/5, f. «Aldo Neppi Modona»).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, letters from R. Syme dated 18 February 1939 and from A.D. Trendall on 16 February 1939. From the letter of 16 February, in particular, we learn an interesting fact: Trendall had been a student on the Etruscan Art courses given by Aldo at the University for Foreigners in Perugia, in summer 1932. Syme, on the other hand, did not know Aldo personally.



professor of Archaeology at New York University; Berthold Louis Ullman, professor of Latin at the University of Chicago; and Gisela Richter, director of the Greco-Roman section of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York<sup>25</sup>. These three scholars, in turn, sent the Society a statement of appreciation towards Aldo, but they could not fail to observe that the large number of refugees already received in the United States in previous years made it extremely difficult to find a position that was still free at the university level; at the same time, they stressed that Aldo's moving to the United States would still be desirable, as it would give him a secure opportunity to make himself better known in the American academic world<sup>26</sup>. From the documents present in the Society's personal file, it does not appear that other concrete initiatives were taken in favour of Aldo after the spring of 1939. He, however, was obliged to seriously consider the option of a move to the United States, if it is true that, as early as February 1939, he wrote in person to the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars in New York, probably after advice from Lehmann-Hartleben himself (who in turn wrote to the Committee to support his cause)<sup>27</sup>. The papers preserved today at the New York Public Library, however, show that nothing could be done materially in favour of Aldo, precisely for the same reasons highlighted by the scholars contacted by the British Society<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., letter from Aldo to the general secretary of the Society, 9 March 1939: BLO, MS, SPSL 295/5, f. «Aldo Neppi Modona».

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. See, respectively, the letters of K. Lehmann-Hartleben of 6 April 1939; by B.L. Ullman of 4 April 1939; and G. Richter of 20 April 1939. From these letters it is clear that Lehmann-Hartleben's sister, the Etruscologist Eva Lehmann Fiesel (who had also emigrated to the USA and died in 1937), had personally met Aldo in completing a research residence in Florence.

<sup>27</sup> NYPL, MAD, ECADFS, I.B., *Non grantees*, b. 98, f. 48, «Neppi Modona Aldo, 1939», letter from Aldo to the chairman of the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars, 9 February 1939; and letter from K. Lehmann-Hartleben to the Committee, 7 March 1939.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., letter of reply from the Committee to Aldo, 25 February 1939; and letter of reply from the Committee to K. Lehmann-Hartleben, 8 March 1939. In the file kept at the New York Library there is also a memorandum of 17 March 1939 with the list of 19 «refugee» scholars to be assisted, prepared by E.A. Lowe (professor of Paleography at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton), in which Aldo appears in 16th place.

### Giving up on emigration

Complicating the situation was the outbreak of the Second World War, which further hindered any plans for expatriation. For the moment, therefore, Aldo had no choice but to take advantage of the offer to take on the teaching of Latin and Greek literature at the Middle School run by the Jewish Community of Florence: in this way he was at least able to leave Rome, now considered a potentially insecure city, and return to Tuscany with the whole family in September<sup>29</sup>. For this purpose, a country house was rented a few kilometres from Florence, between the villages of Due Strade and Galluzzo: here their children Lionella and Leo continued to receive home schooling, in a protected environment; Aldo undertook his new teaching post by going daily to the city. This is what happened and, thanks also to the fact that Italy had not yet entered the war, life for the Neppi Modona family passed relatively quietly during the following winter. Indeed, thanks to the interest of some former colleagues – such as Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli, who the year before had become professor of archaeology and history of classical art at the University of Florence – Aldo was able to obtain the position of drafting, without however being able to sign them, some entries in the *Enciclopedia minore Treccani*:<sup>30</sup> we have confirmation of this from the correspondence exchanged in 1940 with Bianchi Bandinelli himself, in which the items that Aldo was called to prepare are duly listed (for a total of 21 columns and 58 lines) and the sum of money offered in exchange is indicated (90 lire per column)<sup>31</sup>. It was an unskilled job, which required only simple reworking of the corresponding headings of the *Enciclopedia maggiore* but useful for the family's economic support: in any case, it was not easy to complete, since, in

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<sup>29</sup> Probably his own family situation represented a further obstacle to the project of abandoning Italy, since, as subsequent events show (see below for details), Aldo must have disliked the idea of separating from his beloved mother Ada, now very old and dependent on him.

<sup>30</sup> Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli (1900-1975), professor of archaeology and history of classical art at the University of Pisa (1934-1938), Florence (1938-1943, 1944-1945 and 1950-1957), Cagliari (1947-1950) and Rome (1957-1964).

<sup>31</sup> ACAB, Fondo Aldo Neppi Modona, f. «Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli».

the absence of access to public libraries, Aldo was able to work on the volumes of the *Enciclopedia maggiore* only thanks to the help of a family friend - Edmea Bernini – a resident of Due Strade, who owned the entire work at home and made it available to him<sup>32</sup>.

### **The war years**

Between 1940 and 1941, after the final abandonment of any emigration project due to Italy's involvement in the war, the life of the Neppi Modona necessarily continued to gravitate towards Florence. Not only that, but in the late summer of 1941 the whole family moved from Due Strade to the city centre, to an apartment located in the family apartment building in Via dei Banchi. On closer inspection, the situation in the Tuscan capital was not yet dangerous : Aldo, in fact, continued with his teaching at the local Jewish community secondary school and, to supplement his salary, gave afternoon lessons to students in need of support; for their part, Lionella and Leo left home schooling behind and began to attend school, still in the city (the former, older by more than a year, in the same institute where Aldo taught, the latter in the Jewish section of the Giotto elementary school). From an economic point of view, therefore, the condition of the family was anything but easy, but not at risk. In 1942, in fact, Aldo managed to send his children to spend a few days of summer vacation in Cavi di Lavagna, on the Ligurian coast; also in the summer, the entire family had the opportunity to be guests in the house of their Ambron cousins in Bellosguardo, the hill overlooking Florence not far from the Roman Gate<sup>33</sup>.

Conditions, however, rapidly worsened between 1942 and 1943, due to the growing difficulties in the food supply, and this increased during 1943. Indeed, as emerges clearly from Aldo's diary, the fall of fascism and the

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<sup>32</sup> K. Cohen, *The Neppi Modona Diaries*, cit., p. 71: Edmea Bernini was the mother of the futurist artist Maria Luisa Lurini, better known as Marisa Mori.

<sup>33</sup> K. Cohen, *The Neppi Modona Diaries*, cit., pp. 100-112; L. Neppi Modona, *Cronaca a due voci*, cit., pp. 38-41.

subsequent Badoglio government's armistice with the Allies left Italian Jews in complete uncertainty about their future. In addition, Florence ended up in the hands of German soldiers: Aldo, therefore, believed, out of prudence, that the time had come to leave the apartment in Via dei Banchi and move with his family to the house in Bellosguardo. Soon, however, the news of the round-up of the Jewish ghetto in Rome, which they learned on 18 October, and the subsequent news of the round-up in Florence, on 6 November, made Aldo realise the urgency of evacuating the Ambron house as well, to seek shelter which could not be traced to the Neppi Modona or other Jewish families of the city. It was the beginning of an odyssey that lasted almost a year, during which the Neppi Modona family passed from one makeshift shelter to another without being able, at least in the beginning, to leave Florence: in fact, Aldo could not leave because of the serious illness that struck his mother Ada, unable to move and admitted to a city hospital.

### **False documents and hideouts**

Help came, however, from some old friends, such as the professor of ancient history at the University of Florence, Giulio Giannelli,<sup>34</sup> who accommodated Aldo and his son Leo in his house in Viale Volta, or the judge Agostino Agostini, who guaranteed them similar shelter with acquaintances in Settignano. The real turning point, in any case, came after Ada's death, in January 1944, when the way was found to obtain, for a payment, false documents which would allow the whole family to leave Florence: Aldo took the name of Alfonso Nistri Maddaloni, his wife Rachel that of Riccarda Fuciarelli; the children Lionella and Leo became respectively Luisa and

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<sup>34</sup> Giulio Giannelli (1889-1980), a student of Luigi Pareti, was professor of Ancient History at the Catholic University of Milan from 1923 to 1933 (as full professor from 1925) and subsequently at the University of Florence from 1933 to 1964; he was also director of the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa from 1960 to 1964. His relations with Aldo are attested by the correspondence, dated from 1925 and kept in the aforementioned Gabinetto Vieusseux: ACAB, *Fondo Aldo Neppi Modona*, f. «Giulio Giannelli». See also A. Neppi Modona, Giulio Giannelli, «Studi etruschi», 48, 1980, pp. 625-626.

Leonida. Provided with this new identity, the Neppi Modona family managed to take a train that brought them, in March, to Anghiari, a village in the Tiberina Valley not far from Arezzo where accommodation was rented<sup>35</sup>.

It was here that Aldo and his family spent the dramatic central months of 1944, which were characterized by the heaviest battles in the field in Tuscany between the Germans and the Allies. Apart from military events, however, their biggest problem was represented by the constant fear that their true identity would be discovered, as once again becomes clear from the pages of Aldo's diary. Precisely to prevent this from happening, the Neppi Modona family tried to integrate as much as possible into the daily life of the village of Anghiari, showing that they were Catholics and taking part in religious ceremonies on a regular basis. Aldo, however, did not give up keeping his *tefillin* and *tallit katan* at home, hidden in a pile of wood, just as he did not give up celebrating Jewish holidays privately. Only in the late summer of that year, when the Allies slowly gained the upper hand over the Nazi-Fascists, removing them from Florence, did the need to hide disappear. In fact, in the new climate of religious tolerance guaranteed by the victors, Aldo and his family – unharmed survivors of persecution and war – regained possession of their identity and decided to return to the Tuscan capital. So, leaving Anghiari on 30 September, the Neppi Modona family managed to reach Florence on 13 October and, while waiting for their apartment in Via dei Banchi to be vacated, they set up home again at the Ambron house in Bellosguardo<sup>36</sup>.

### **The difficult restoration: between Florence and Genoa**

The immediate post-war period was for Aldo marked by the urgent need to be readmitted to the world of Italian education and culture from which he had been ousted, because of the racial laws, in 1938. To this end he wasted

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<sup>35</sup> K. Cohen, *The Neppi Modona Diaries*, cit., pp. 147-157; USC, SF, VHA, L. Levi D'Ancona, *Interview with Rachel Neppi Modona*, cit., tape 4.

<sup>36</sup> K. Cohen, *The Neppi Modona Diaries*, cit., pp. 157-186; USC, SF, VHA, L. Levi D'Ancona, *Interview with Rachel Neppi Modona*, cit., tapes 3, 4 and 5.

no time: this is confirmed by the fact that, even before leaving Anghiari, he sent a letter to the Ministry of National Education, asking to regain his post as a high school teacher and to move to Florence. In fact, the ministry reinstated him and, fully accepting his request, moved him to a school in Florence particularly dear to him, the Liceo Michelangiolo, where he was able to take up service as early as the beginning of December of that same year<sup>37</sup>. In addition, he was guaranteed readmission to the Institute of Etruscan Studies, still directed by Antonio Minto, and access to the facilities and library of the University of Florence, where he was later also allowed to act as a *libero docente* in classical antiquities<sup>38</sup>. On the other hand, the chances of obtaining a permanent position at the University were immediately reduced, given that, despite the «eligibility» he had obtained in the Florence competitive examination of 1933, Aldo had never been appointed a tenured professor, nor was he able to make any formal claims in this regard (a case similar to his, and known to him, had occurred with Enzo Bonaventura, second in a competitive examination in 1931 and never subsequently appointed a tenured professor)<sup>39</sup>. On the other hand, the long years of segregation and the war had coercively kept him away from research activities, which were now difficult to resume. Aldo therefore decided to appeal to the specific legislative measures that had been enacted in order to redress the wrongs suffered by those who, for political or racial reasons, had been completely excluded from participating in public competitive examinations. We are informed of this thanks to his personal file at the Society for the Protection of

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<sup>37</sup> K. Cohen, *The Neppi Modona Diaries*, cit., pp. 182 and 193: it was the same high school in which Aldo had completed his high school diploma as a student. The notice of assignment to the Liceo Michelangiolo by the Florence superintendent, dated 5 December 1944, is kept at MEIS, *Fondo Neppi Modona*, all. 50.

<sup>38</sup> See the application for readmission as *libero docente* sent to the rector of the University of Florence, on 24 February 1947: ASUFI, AC, SP, SLD, f. 1196, «Aldo Neppi Modona». As for the renewed collaboration with the Istituto di studi etruschi, see A. Neppi Modona, *Ricordo personale di Antonio Minto*, p. XV; as well as Guglielmo Maetze, *Ricordo di Aldo Neppi Modona*, «Studi etruschi» 53, 1985, p. VIII.

<sup>39</sup> On the competitive examination affair, see note 11. As for the case of Enzo Bonaventura (1891- 1948), *libero docente* in psychology at the University of Florence, see here the *Vita in movimento* dedicated to him.

Science and Learning, which, in the spring of 1945, wanted to update its information relating to Aldo's story: when contacted for this purpose, he himself announced that he had in fact «already presented a claim to the Minister for [...] a reassessment of personal rights which have been so patently infringed»<sup>40</sup>. The reference was particularly to the request for a review of two university competitions that had been held after the coming into force of the racial laws and had resulted in the exclusion of his candidacy. These review procedures, in fact, had got under way,<sup>41</sup> but, due to their complexity and delicacy, they proceeded slowly: so, Aldo, who in the meantime had resumed research in the field of classical antiquities and Etruscology, had to continue teaching at the Liceo Michelangiolo. He did not give up, however, and, on the contrary, he could count on the advice of the jurist Edoardo Volterra, which eventually led to the desired result:<sup>42</sup> in 1956, in fact, the commission chaired by Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli and in charge of reviewing the competitive examination for the chair of archaeology and history of classical art held at the University of Cagliari in the now distant 1940, established that, if Aldo had been assessed at the time for his research activity in the field of classical antiquities, he would have been entitled to a place among the three winners<sup>43</sup>. Following this decision, the possibility of his recruitment, even as a supernumerary, in university roles opened up: this step was taken by the University of Genoa, which finally, in 1957, called him

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<sup>40</sup> BLO, MS, SPSL 295/5, f. «Aldo Neppi Modona», letter from Aldo, 30 July 1945.

<sup>41</sup> In line with DLL 238 of 5 April 1945, art. 16.

<sup>42</sup> A university professor of Roman law, Edoardo Volterra (1904-1984), had been appointed, after the formation of the Bonomi government, to be part of the commission of jurists wanted by the Partito d'azione for the purpose of drafting a single text for the abolition of the racial laws: on him, see here the dedicated *Vita in movimento* (in course of publication). His relations with Aldo are well documented at the correspondence level: ACAB, *Fondo Aldo Neppi Modona*, f. «Edoardo Volterra».

<sup>43</sup> The entire documentation relating to the procedure can be read in the copy in the Archivio di Stato di Siena, *Fondo Bianchi Bandinelli*, b. 83, f. 436. The other review process, relating to the 1938 competition for the chair of archaeology and history of classical art at the University of Florence, was not successful: see Luca Iori, *Il rientro degli antichisti ebrei nell'Università italiana*, in Alessandro Pagliara (ed.), *Antichistica italiana e leggi razziali*, Parma, Athenaeum Edizioni, 2020, pp. 237-240.

to fill a position as professor of classical antiquities, first as a temporary professor (from November 1957) and then as full professor (from November 1960)<sup>44</sup>.

Thus, it was at the University of Genoa that Aldo spent the years of his working maturity, becoming in addition dean of the Faculty of Literature and Philosophy, until his retirement in 1970. His scientific commitment, however, continued for the most part in relationship to the activities of the Institute of Etruscan Studies, of which he became vice-president in 1978<sup>45</sup>. Moreover, it seems significant that his residence never moved from Florence to Genoa, testifying to a very strong personal and professional bond with the Tuscan capital which remained constant over the years. At last, still in Florence, Aldo died on 25 May 1985.

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<sup>44</sup> ASUGe, f. «Neppi Modona Aldo», a note from the Ministry of Education to the rector of the University of Genoa on 11 November 1957, with reference to the appointment approved by the Faculty of Literature and Philosophy of the same university on 18 October 1957. Aldo's appointment took place in line with Law 844 of 4 November 1949, which – extending the provisions of RDL 535 of 27 May 1946 – provided for the posting of professors hired on the basis of DLL 238 of 5 April 1945, art. 16, on permanent posts created «temporarily» and intended to be «discontinued upon termination of service or transfer to another university or other higher institution of the holders of the subject relating to the posts themselves».

<sup>45</sup> For the academic activity he carried out at the University of Genoa, which was crowned in 1971 by his appointment as professor emeritus, see the career records kept at ASUGe, f. «Neppi Modona Aldo». For the roles he held at the Institute of Etruscan Studies, see G. Maetze, *Ricordo di Aldo Neppi Modona*, cit., p. VIII.



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