

## Umberto (Moshe David) Cassuto

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One of the pre-eminent Hebrew scholars of his day, Umberto Cassuto was Chief Rabbi of Florence until 1925. He was dismissed from his professorship at the Università di Roma, where he had replaced Giorgio Levi Della Vida, one of 12 university academics who refused to swear the Oath of Allegiance to the fascist regime. Cassuto was, in turn, replaced by Eugenio Maria Zolli (Israel Zoller), Chief Rabbi of Rome until 1945 when he converted to Catholicism. Cassuto went on to teach Biblical Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, despite significant difficulties (he was initially only given a short-term post, on half the normal salary). He remained in Jerusalem, as did most of his family, severely affected by the persecution of those years.

### Family and education

Born in Florence, on 16<sup>th</sup> September 1883, into a traditionalist Jewish family, Umberto's parents were Gustavo Cassuto (1853-1931) and Ernesta Galletti (1859-1941). From the age of 6, Umberto attended the Istituto Rabbinico (later known as the Collegio Rabbinico Italiano), where his teachers were Samuel Hirsch Margulies and Hirsch Peres Chajes. He gained his first rabbinic title, Maskil, in 1901, and was made Chakham ha-Shalem in 1909<sup>1</sup>. During these years he also attended and finished high school at the R. Liceo Michelangiolo, going on to graduate in 1908 from the Istituto di Studi Superiori Pratici e di Perfezionamento di Firenze (later to become the Università di Firenze), specialising in Semitic Languages and qualifying as a

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<sup>1</sup> The same information is found in entries for *Umberto Cassuto*, in both *Rabbini italiani*, s.n.t. <<http://www.rabbini.it>> (accessed 20<sup>th</sup> July 2019), and in Angelo M. Piattelli, *Repertorio biografico dei Rabbini d'Italia dal 1861 al 2015, 2a ed. rivista e aggiornata* (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 2010), online <<http://www.archivio-torah.it>> (accessed 12<sup>th</sup> June 2019).

university professor of Hebrew<sup>2</sup>.

At the age of 24, on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1907, he married Bice Corcos, from Leghorn. They went on to have four children between 1908 and 1914: first Milka, then Nathan - the longed-for son - and finally Lea and Hulda. The family moved first into Via Giambattista Vico 4 and later into Via Cairoli<sup>3</sup>.

Rejected for military service by the local army recruitment offices and then exempted from military service because he was a religious minister of the third category<sup>4</sup>, he acted as secretary to the Jewish community of Florence from 1906 to 1922. Following the death of Rabbi Samuel Hirsch Margulies (1858-1922) - which occurred while assistant Rabbi Elia Samuele Artom (Cassuto's brother-in-law) was in Tripoli and Alexandria - Cassuto was appointed Chief Rabbi of Florence and director of the rabbinical seminary, roles he carried out from July 1922 to June 1925<sup>5</sup>.

### **An academic career first and foremost**

In May 1924, the university in Florence approved the proposal to appoint Cassuto directly as a professor with full tenure, following the retirement of

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<sup>2</sup> Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Direzione Generale dell'Istruzione Universitaria, Divisione prima, *Fascicoli personali dei professori ordinari, III versamento 1940-1970* (henceforth ACS, MPI, DGIU, DP, FPPO, III versamento 1940-1970), b. 105, f. «Umberto Cassuto», decree granting *libera docenza* (the qualification necessary to become a professor), Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione (henceforth MPI), 27<sup>th</sup> June 1914. See Ida Zatelli, *Umberto Cassuto e l'eredità fiorentina*, «La Rassegna mensile di Israel» 82, 2-3, 2016, pp. 107-115.

<sup>3</sup> As is apparent from the headed writing paper, for example, Cassuto's letter to the MPI, Florence, 19<sup>th</sup> February 1925, and his letter to the minister of Educazione Nazionale, 14<sup>th</sup> November 1932, both in ACS, MPI, DGIU, DP, FPPO, III versamento 1940-1970, b. 105, f. «Umberto Cassuto». The date of his wedding is taken from the biographical entry for *Cassuto, Umberto Moses David*, in Eva Telkes-Klein's, *L'université hébraïque de Jerusalem à travers ses acteurs. La première génération de professeurs (1925-1948)*, Paris, Honoré Champion, 2004, pp. 166-170, where it gives the impression that Bice Corcos Cassuto had taught alongside Maria Montessori, although it was actually her mother, Marietta, who did (account given by David Cassuto to Patrizia Guarnieri, 5<sup>th</sup> August 2019).

<sup>4</sup> The note regarding his exemption and signed by him, is to be found in the Archivio Storico of the Università di Firenze, Amministrazione Centrale (hereafter ASUFi, AC), *Stati di servizio, «Cassuto Umberto»*.

<sup>5</sup> Lionella Viterbo, *Umberto Cassuto da segretario della Comunità a Rabbino Capo di Firenze*, «La Rassegna mensile di Israel», 82, 2-3, 2016, pp. 91-106.

Francesco Scerbo (1849-1927), ordained as a priest in 1873, and professor of Hebrew Literature since 1903. The Consiglio Supremo della Pubblica Istruzione, however, expressed a «*parere contrario alla nomina*», opposing Cassuto's appointment without a competitive selection process, citing insufficient evidence of clear renown<sup>6</sup>. As a result, the University had to trigger a formal competitive selection process on 25<sup>th</sup> November 1924, whilst in the meantime giving Cassuto his first annual academic teaching contract<sup>7</sup>. Having heard the assessment given by Paolo Emilio Pavolini (1864-1942), professor of Sanskrit and a known fascist (like his son Alessandro), the University excluded one of the three candidates for the post, Carlo Bernheimer, who appealed against the decision, but to no avail<sup>8</sup>. Thus, the choice remained between Cassuto (the internal candidate) and Salvatore Minocchi (a former priest and modernist, a pupil of David Castelli), who had held the same teaching post in Florence for 25 years: «two completely different types of scholar», each with much to recommend them. The academic selection panel, which included the senior professors Ignazio Guidi and Giorgio Levi Della Vida, along with Alberto Vaccari (a Jesuit professor of the same subject), deliberated that Cassuto should come top of the selection

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<sup>6</sup> ASUFI, Biblioteca Umanistica, Sala Rari, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, *Verbali*, meeting of 6th May 1924, proposal to appoint Cassuto as a professor with full tenure; meeting of 15th November 1924, new decision to appoint him as a professor without a permanent position and the decision to trigger the relative competitive selection process. These minutes were tracked down thanks to Anna Teicher. The negative opinion given by the Consiglio Superiore della PI, at a plenary meeting on 25th-26th October 1924, was based on the RD of 30<sup>th</sup> September 1923, n. 2102, art. 17, comma 2, regarding clear renown; see Consiglio Superiore PI, n. 1867, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1924, in ACS, MPI, DGIU, DP, FPPO, III versamento 1940-1970, b. 105, f. «Cassuto Umberto».

<sup>7</sup> ASUFI, AC, *Stati di servizio*, «Umberto Cassuto», the contract for the academic year 1924-25 is chronologically his first. The competitive selection process was advertised in MPI, *Bollettino Ufficiale*, 1st December 1924, p. 2533.

<sup>8</sup> *Relazioni della Facoltà di lettere e filosofia e della Commissione giudicatrice del concorso per professore non stabile alla Cattedra di Lingua e Letteratura ebraica nella R. Università di Firenze*, in MPI, *Bollettino ufficiale, II. Atti di amministrazione*, 52, 2, 1925, pp. 2117-2121, extract from the minutes of the meeting on 28 December 1924, pp. 2117-2118. In reference to the appeal launched by Carlo Bernheimer, see Gabriele Rigano, *Aspetti della cultura ebraica italiana nella prima metà del '900. Levi Della Vida, Cassuto e Zolli sulla cattedra di Ebraico della «Sapienza»*, «Quaderni di diritto e politica ecclesiastica», 17, 2009, pp. 165-190: 176-177 and 183n.

process. Cassuto resigned from his post as Chief Rabbi<sup>9</sup>. In November 1927, after three years during which Cassuto had been without a permanent contract and his entire salary had been paid for by the Università di Firenze, rather than the education ministry<sup>10</sup>, the Facoltà di Lettere, presided over by Pavolini, initiated the process to make Cassuto's post as professor of Hebrew Language and Literature permanent. In this regard, the minister sought a favourable opinion from the same selection panel in February 1928<sup>11</sup>.

In relation to his academic career, Cassuto owed much to Levi Della Vida, as proved by the numerous letters he wrote to him, all concerning the job application process and the other members of the selection panel<sup>12</sup>. Levi Della Vida's anti-fascist leanings were already well known at the time and when, in 1931, all university lecturers were being forced to swear an Oath of Allegiance to fascism, Levi Della Vida was one of the twelve academics in the whole of Italy who refused to do so. On 19<sup>th</sup> November of that year he informed the rector of the university in Rome of his decision, taken «whatever the consequences», even though he realised these would be by no means insignificant for himself and his family, and despite not having yet worked for the necessary minimum number of years in his academic post to retire with a pension<sup>13</sup>. On 1<sup>st</sup> January 1932 he was expelled from his post at

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<sup>9</sup> *Relazioni della Facoltà di lettere*, cit., pp. 2119-2121. ACS, MPI, DGIU, DP, FPPO, III versamento 1940-1970, b. 105, f. «Umberto Cassuto», draft of MPI appointment decree, 15th February 1925, followed by a letter of thanks from U. Cassuto to the minister, 19th February 1925.

<sup>10</sup> ASUFi, AC, *Stati di servizio*, «Umberto Cassuto».

<sup>11</sup> ACS, MPI, DGIU, DP, FPPO, III versamento 1940-1970, b. 105, f. «Umberto Cassuto», draft of MPI decree of appointment to full-tenured professor, 1st March 1928, salary to be wholly paid by the Università di Firenze, preceded by the favourable judgment expressed by the University's Faculty of Arts, see *ivi*, *Estratto dal processo verbale dell'adunanza della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia in data 26 novembre 1927*. On the minister's request, the same panel members, Guidi, Vaccari and Della Vida, met again on 28th February 1928; see *ivi*, *Relazione della Commissione giudicatrice della stabilità del Prof. Umberto Cassuto, non stabile di Lingua e letteratura ebraica nella R. Università di Firenze a S. E. il Ministro della P. I.*

<sup>12</sup> As reported by G. Rigano, *Aspetti della cultura ebraica*, cit., p. 176, who cites 15 letters written by Cassuto between 11<sup>th</sup> December 1924 and 19<sup>th</sup> February 1935, held in the Fondo Giorgio Levi Della Vida archive, f. «Umberto Cassuto», together with several letters from Elia Samuele Artom on the same topic.

<sup>13</sup> For more on this, see again G. Rigano, *Aspetti della cultura ebraica*, cit., pp. 176-177 and *Id.*, *Umberto Cassuto all'Università di Roma*, «La Rassegna mensile di Israel» 82, 2-3, 2016, pp. 117-

the Università di Roma.

It had already been rumoured that Cassuto would be the one to replace him. Indeed, in December 1931, the chairman of the Consorzio delle Comunità Israelitiche, concerned for the future of the Collegio Rabbinico in Florence, asked Cassuto for clarification. Cassuto denied the rumours and stated that the chair was to go to Professor Giuseppe Furlani<sup>14</sup>. Whether Furlani had been informally consulted and had refused the post, we do not know; nearly a year later, on 15<sup>th</sup> October 1932, Cassuto's appointment as professor of Hebrew and Comparative Semitic Linguistics was approved by a majority decision of the members of the faculty committee at the university in Rome<sup>15</sup>. He accepted immediately and «willingly»<sup>16</sup>. The ministerial decree authorising his transfer, dated 25<sup>th</sup> October 1932, stated Cassuto's acceptance. He took up his post in Rome on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1932<sup>17</sup>, and expressed his regret to his «good, dear friend» Levi Della Vida; following this their correspondence ceased<sup>18</sup>.

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136. For the 12 refusals, see H. Goetz, *Il giuramento rifiutato. I docenti universitari e il regime fascista*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 2000, in particular pp. 50-61. The *Regio decreto of 28th August 1931, n. 1227*, implemented on 8th October, is reproduced here in the section on *Leggi fascistissime and the racial laws*.

<sup>14</sup> Archivio Storico dell'Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane (AUCEI), fonds *Attività dell'Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane fino al 1933*, b. 47, f. 174, typed draft, 29th December 1931, «Prof. Levi Della Vida» written in pencil. Thanks are due to Gabriele Rigano for pointing out this document.

<sup>15</sup> ACS, MPI, DGIU, DP, FPPO, III versamento 1940-1970, b. 105, f. «Cassuto Umberto», extract from the minutes of the meeting of the Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, 15th October 1932, Rome, 20th October 1932.

<sup>16</sup> Ivi, letter from U. Cassuto to the minister of Educazione Nazionale, 14th November 1932. Since he started work on 1<sup>st</sup> November he had surely already accepted the post, as suggested by G. Rigano, *Aspetti della cultura ebraica*, cit., p. 188 and as indicated by the aforementioned decree of 25<sup>th</sup> October 1932.

<sup>17</sup> Ivi, Educazione Nazionale ministry draft, transfer decree, 25th October 1932. Cassuto swore the oath before the university rector in Florence on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1927, when the formula did not yet contain any direct reference to fascism, and again on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1931. Only the first oath is recorded in ASUFI, AC, *Stati di servizio*, «Cassuto Umberto»; signed copies of both in ACS, MPI, DGIU, DP, FPPO, III versamento 1940-1970, b. 105, f. «Cassuto Umberto».

<sup>18</sup> Cited by G. Rigano, *Umberto Cassuto all'Università di Roma*, cit., pp. 132-133.

## Two offers from Jerusalem

Six years later, Cassuto too was banished from his post as professor of Hebrew and Comparative Semitic Linguistics: as a consequence of the fascists' Racial Laws, he was released from service by decree on 30<sup>th</sup> November 1938. He was immediately replaced by Professor Michelangelo Guidi, son of Ignazio Guidi and close friend of Levi Della Vida<sup>19</sup>. Cassuto, now 55 years of age, immediately made up his mind to leave, together with his wife and daughters, to pursue his scholarly activities elsewhere. Two of his daughters had already lost their teaching jobs: Milka had formerly been working in a high school and Hulda in a middle school. His son had been dismissed from his post as voluntary assistant at the Clinica Oculistica dell'Università di Firenze. Of those who had studied with him in Florence, Jacob Teicher was already in Great Britain, while his pupils David Diringler and Kalman Friedmann (originally from Galicia) were to go to Great Britain and the United States respectively.

Cassuto was confident that he would manage to get a job in Jerusalem. In the summer of 1935, the academic council of the Hebrew University, wishing to expand the study of Biblical Philology, had already proposed appointing him as «second professor» for Bible Studies, in addition to Rabbi Moshe Z. Segal (1876-1968) who had been teaching there since 1925. It was recorded that, in the view of several members of the Institute of Jewish Studies, this proposal failed to meet one of the previously agreed prerequisites, namely that a conservative attitude had to be reflected when teaching the Bible. From an undated summary, we learn that «Prof. Cassuto gave a negative answer, [and] the Board of Governors passed no resolution in this regard in 1935»<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> ACS, MPI, DGIU, DP, FPPO, III versamento 1940-1970, b. 105, f. «Cassuto Umberto», decree issued by the minister, secretary of state for Educazione Nazionale, 30<sup>th</sup> November 1938.

<sup>20</sup> Central Archive of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem (henceforth CAHU), f. «Umberto Cassuto», copy of the academic Senate's deliberations, 16<sup>th</sup> July 1935, summary document concerning the nomination of Cassuto, s.d., p. 2, point 2a (in Hebrew). For the proposal, Governing Council of the Institute of Jewish Studies 1935, Appointment in Bible, Document No. J/4, and then U. Cassuto to David W. Senator, Rome, 10th March 1939 (in Hebrew).

The Racial Laws of 1938 forced him to reconsider that possibility. His main supporter was Joseph H. Hertz, Chief Rabbi of the United Congregations of the British Empire, who had a reputation as a tough conservative. From London, Hertz bombarded the upper echelons of the Hebrew University with letters; he informed them that, replying to a letter from Hertz himself, Cassuto had expressed his wholehearted agreement and satisfaction regarding the proposal that he might work as a professor of Bible Studies at their university<sup>21</sup>.

It was mid-September; the official dismissal from his academic post in Rome was to come two months later, but the wait for his appointment to the post in Jerusalem seemed never-ending. Roughly nine months passed, marked by an intense correspondence in English and, mainly, Hebrew. Following reassurances from rector Hugo Bergmann and chief administrative officer David Senator, Rabbi Hertz, member of the Board of Governors of the Hebrew University, pressed the new rector, Abraham H. Fränkel, for a decision on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1938<sup>22</sup>. During the sitting of the Academic Senate on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1938, mention was made of the favourable opinion given of Cassuto by the Institute of Jewish Studies. However, it was also argued that an «injustice» would have been committed if Rabbi Moshe Z. Segal, father to 5 children, were not promoted to the professorship, given his international teaching experience and the fact that he had hitherto «represented the field of Biblical Studies in the university for 13 years»<sup>23</sup>. The Senate held a further session on 4<sup>th</sup> December 1938 and, by a vote of 19 to one, passed a motion bringing Cassuto's nomination before the executive commission. As for Segal, he was over the course of 1939 promoted from lecturer in Bible Studies and

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<sup>21</sup> Ivi, letter from Joseph H. Hertz to D.W. Senator, London, 18<sup>th</sup> September 1938 and similar others written by him on the same date to H. Bergmann, S. Schocken *et alii*.

<sup>22</sup> Ivi, letters from D.W. Senator to J.H. Hertz, s.l., 6<sup>th</sup> October 1938; from H. Bergmann to J.H. Hertz, s.l., 31<sup>st</sup> October 1938, from J.H. Hertz to A.H. Fränkel, London, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1938.

<sup>23</sup> Ivi, session of the Academic Senate, 16<sup>th</sup> November 1938 (in Hebrew), followed by a summary relating to Cassuto's nomination, s.d., p. 2, point 5 (in Hebrew).

Semitic Linguistics to professor *ad personam*<sup>24</sup>.

### **Funding problems at the Hebrew University**

To proceed with the plan, it was still necessary to solve one, not insignificant, problem. The executive commission «cannot readily agree to this new expenditure unless additional sources of income are tapped». Salman Schocken, the head of the Commission, therefore asked Hertz if he had the funds to cover half Cassuto's salary: 15 Palestinian pounds a month for three years, which was lower than the relevant normal salary, but in line with the measures already introduced in 1933 to deal with academics fleeing Nazi Germany. The «collapse of European Jewry» had caused the university in Jerusalem significant financial problems<sup>25</sup>.

Hertz's reply took a long time coming. Schocken sent him a telegram: «Anxiously awaiting favourable reply Cassuto. Otherwise appointment improbable». In a joint action, Senator informed the representative of the Chief Rabbi's Emergency Fund at the Council for German Jewry: the Board of Governors had decided to call «this gentleman [Cassuto...] if and when the financial position of the University would permit thereof», in other words, if Hertz were able to provide half the salary<sup>26</sup>.

Rabbi Hertz eventually felt it necessary to explain his position: his particular interest in Cassuto's case was down to two factors: firstly, the fact that the main professorship in Jerusalem had lain vacant for some 14 years; secondly, the fact that the Italian scholar was the best qualified candidate for the post. Nonetheless, it was unthinkable that he might provide funding; he already had much to deal with: «nearly 200 German rabbis and scholars are – largely through my endeavours – coming to London». They should offer Cassuto a

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<sup>24</sup> Cfr. E. Telkes-Klein, *L'université hébraïque*, cit., pp. 294-297.

<sup>25</sup> CAHU, f. «Umberto Cassuto», letter from S. Schocken to J.H. Hertz, s.l., 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1938.

<sup>26</sup> Ivi, telegram from S. Schocken to J.H. Hertz, s.l., 17<sup>th</sup> January 1939; letter from D. W. Senator to Maurice L. Perlzweig, s.l., 21<sup>st</sup> January 1939.



reduced salary of 15 Palestinian pounds a month; Hertz assured them that Cassuto would undoubtedly accept it and «out of pity for the man» he recommended that they appoint him as soon as possible<sup>27</sup>.

Schocken told Hertz he was most vexed. Nevertheless, they proceeded as he had suggested. On 15<sup>th</sup> February 1939 the chief administrative officer of the Hebrew University wrote to Cassuto clarifying their conditions: «since currently there are insufficient funds for the creation of a post of full professor, [...] the University offers you the position of part-time Bible professor until the end of the 1939-1940 academic year»<sup>28</sup>. It was not an actual fully tenured professorial post, despite what is often read about Cassuto's move to Jerusalem<sup>29</sup>, but a part-time, short-term post, for just one year, with a reduced salary. Of course, they would have worked «to find additional resources», however, Senator deliberately abstained from making a firm commitment regarding the stabilization of the post. Instead of making empty promises, they tried to make it clear that the situation was dire for everybody. The Hebrew University wanted to «save the largest possible number of people»; therefore, it was obliged to set salaries that were well below expectations<sup>30</sup>.

### What alternatives?

Cassuto took almost a month to reply. The letter from Jerusalem had been mistakenly sent to Prof. Augusto Cassuto, Via Boncompagni 16, Rome, a Jewish urologist, with three children, who had also lost his job and was desperately seeking employment. So desperate was he that he even clung to

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<sup>27</sup> Ivi, letter from J.H. Hertz to S. Schocken, London, 12th January 1939, and Schocken's reply to Hertz, 7<sup>th</sup> February 1939.

<sup>28</sup> Ivi, letter from D.W. Senator to U. Cassuto, s.l., 15<sup>th</sup> February 1939 (in Hebrew).

<sup>29</sup> For example, also in J. Alberto Soggin, *Cassuto, Umberto (Moše Dāwid)*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 21, Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1978, *ad nomen* <<http://www.treccani.it>>.

<sup>30</sup> CAHU, f. «Umberto Cassuto», letter from D.W. Senator to U. Cassuto, 15th February 1939 (in Hebrew).

that unexpected, bizarre job offer from Jerusalem and was ready to set off for it, as can be deduced from the letter sent by the Hebrew University apologising for the regrettable misunderstanding<sup>31</sup>.

Umberto Cassuto replied that he could not refuse, whilst pointing out that «the conditions are somewhat different from those offered by the University of Jerusalem when I was invited to take up the post of full Bible professor in 1935». He asked whether the University might at least cover the travel costs for him and his family, and the shipping costs for their furniture and his personal library. He received a polite, but firm, refusal. At most they might perhaps manage to procure him discounted tickets<sup>32</sup>.

What other options did he have with his specialisation? Going to the United States might have been an option, however he spoke no English, which boded badly when, as we know, even the largest U.S. aid organisation dealing with Jewish academics was already having trouble finding employment for some. The Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars of New York (ECADFS) held a file in the name of George Levi Della Vida; he had been flagged up to them by Elias Lowe, a palaeographer of Lithuanian origin. The file also records that interest had been shown in the Italian scholar (who got a job at the University of Pennsylvania), by the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton, where Lowe himself taught from 1936. The ECADFS opened a file in the name of Umberto Cassuto in March 1939, thanks again to Lowe, who, also highlighted Bonaventura, Calabresi and 16 other Jewish scholars working in a variety of fields in the same list, even though he did not know

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<sup>31</sup> Ivi, draft of a letter from D.W. Senator to Augusto Cassuto, s.l., 27<sup>th</sup> February 1939, concerning the letter of 15<sup>th</sup> February. For letters from the desperate urologist, ready to implore the Jesuits for help and to emigrate, see the letters published by Robert A. Maryks, «Pouring Jewish Water into Fascist Wine», vol. II, *Untold Stories of (Catholic) Jews from the Archive of Mussolini's Jesuit Pietro Tacchi Venturi*, Leiden, Brill, 2017, pp. 147-157.

<sup>32</sup> CAHU, f. «Umberto Cassuto», letter from U. Cassuto to D.W. Senator, Rome, 10<sup>th</sup> March 1939, and Senator's subsequent reply, s.l., 26<sup>th</sup> March 1939 (in Hebrew).

them all personally<sup>33</sup>.

This file contains no offers or proposals, except for one from the Hebrew University, as we will see<sup>34</sup>. Cassuto himself alludes to a single offer: while complaining to Schocken about his low salary in Jerusalem, he mentions receiving, in late 1938, an (unspecified) invitation from Rabbi Stephen Wise to teach in New York, presumably at the Jewish Institute of Religion founded by Rabbi Wise in 1922. The invitation came to nothing and no trace of it remains<sup>35</sup>.

### Problems getting permits for Palestine

Having accepted the offer from Jerusalem on 10<sup>th</sup> March 1939, on the previously stated conditions, the next problem to arise was acquiring the necessary immigration papers. Cassuto's daughters would have qualified for them automatically had they still been minors; indeed, Senator had wrongly believed two of them to be underage. Instead Milka, Lea and Hulda were 30, 27 and 25 respectively. Cassuto requested that they might be granted a

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<sup>33</sup> New York Public Library, Manuscripts and Archives Division, Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars records (henceforth NYPL, MAD, ECADFS), I.A., b. 5, f. 5, «Cassuto, Umberto Moshe David», 1939-1944, ECADFS, File memorandum, 17<sup>th</sup> March 1939, containing a copy of Lowe's letter together with his list of 19 names, including Cassuto at no. 6.

<sup>34</sup> NYPL, MAD, ECADFS, I.B. Non-Grantees, b. 88, f. 28, «Levi Della Vida, Giorgio», 1939-42, with a copy of the previously cited Memorandum, n. 17 in Lowe's list. The correspondence with Princeton began in January 1939. Levi Della Vida had already been to the United States in October 1937; two years later he moved there arriving in New York on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1939, already with a permit and in contact with the University of Pennsylvania, see Ellis Island Foundation, *Passenger Search, ad nomen* <<https://www.libertyellisfoundation.org>> (registered access 5<sup>th</sup> August 2019).

<sup>35</sup> CAHU, f. «Umberto Cassuto», letter from U. Cassuto to S. Schocken, Jerusalem, 20<sup>th</sup> October 1939. Decades later, one of his daughters recounted that: «When it became known that he had lost his university post because of the antisemitic measures, he received numerous offers, especially from the United States. Numerous institutions and colleges called him, but he [...] turned down many places» (testimony given by Lea Cassuto Rocca, Jerusalem 18<sup>th</sup> January 1995, in Massimo Longo Adorno, *Gli ebrei fiorentini dall'emancipazione alla Shoah*, Firenze, Giuntina, 2003, p. 87). Without documentary proof, it seems somewhat improbable that there would have been a rush to recruit an Italian Bible scholar, albeit a renowned one, in post-depression USA in 1938, following on from the arrival of so many German Jewish intellectuals in 1933. The many offers from the United States, reported by his daughter, become a single, vague one in E. Telkes-Klein's, *L'université hébraïque*, cit., p. 168.

«special permit in exceptional circumstances»<sup>36</sup>. He wrote to Hertz on this issue and Hertz learnt from the Colonial Office that special permits were granted at the sole discretion of the High Commissioner for Palestine. They were refused. The official quota for the second half of 1939, published by the British authorities in April, was so limited – Senator observed to Hertz – that it would have been extremely difficult to guarantee three more permits for the Cassuto family, as well as those for Cassuto and his wife. The Jewish Agency only had 50, and although 50 more were reserved for farmers, the Agency was notoriously overwhelmed by requests regarding urgent and important cases. Senator requested the relative permits on 13<sup>th</sup> April 1939, «but it should not be forgotten that we have applied at the same time for other certificates on behalf of prospective employees of the University»<sup>37</sup>.

On May 2<sup>nd</sup>, Cassuto was notified that his *'aliyya* certificate had been issued and he had to go to Trieste to pick it up. No news for his daughters. Schocken intervened with the Immigration Department claiming that «the issue risked hindering the work of the University» and emphasizing that Cassuto's daughters were not able to remain in Italy, being denied any viable means of support<sup>38</sup>. Unfortunately, this circumstance was not unique to them, indeed Lea was a rare exception: teaching at the Jewish school in Rome, she was the only one in the family whose job had not been taken away from her<sup>39</sup>.

In the end, the two unmarried daughters were able to leave with their parents. Meanwhile, that summer, Hulda married Saul Campagnano and they

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<sup>36</sup> CAHU, f. «Umberto Cassuto», letter from D.W. Senator to U. Cassuto, s.l., 14<sup>th</sup> March 1939, in reply to a letter from U. Cassuto to D.W. Senator, Firenze, 5<sup>th</sup> March 1939, and U. Cassuto to D.W. Senator, Rome, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1939 (all in Hebrew).

<sup>37</sup> Ivi, letters from J.H. Hertz to D.W. Senator, London, 12<sup>th</sup> April 1939, and from D.W. Senator to J.H. Hertz, s.l., 19<sup>th</sup> April 1939; letter from D.W. Senator to the Department for Immigration of the Jewish Agency, Jerusalem, 13<sup>th</sup> April 1939 (the latter in Hebrew).

<sup>38</sup> Ivi, letter from the Department of Immigration of the Jewish Agency at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1939; letter from U. Cassuto to D.W. Senator, Rome, 11<sup>th</sup> May 1939; letter from M. Ben-David (General secretary of the University) to the Department of Immigration of the Jewish Agency, Jerusalem, 12<sup>th</sup> June 1939; from S. Schocken to the Department of Immigration of the Jewish Agency, 16<sup>th</sup> June 1939 (all in Hebrew).

<sup>39</sup> Testimony given by Lea Cassuto Rocca, cit., p. 87.

stayed on, living near her brother Nathan, his wife Anna and their young children. The two couples were very close: they stayed in Italy by choice, as is said regarding Nathan, but also because it would have been impossible to get visas for everyone. Wishing to attend the ceremony bestowing on his son the rabbinic title of Chakam, on May 31<sup>st</sup>, 1939, Umberto Cassuto decided not to leave until the day after the ceremony. On June 5<sup>th</sup> Cassuto, his wife Bice, Milka and Lea disembarked at the port of Haifa, whence they continued their journey to Jerusalem, where, as Cassuto told Alfonso Pacifici, they were greeted by a welcoming committee arranged by Salman Schocken<sup>40</sup>.

### Further practical problems

As soon as 11<sup>th</sup> June, however, he requested that the University apply for a return visa in his name<sup>41</sup>. On the 28<sup>th</sup> he left for Rome to deal with his personal affairs and the move. From Rome he sent off heartfelt pleas for help. He wrote to forty-year-old Cecil Roth, a recently recruited reader in Post-Biblical Jewish Studies at Oxford:

Dearest friend,

I am writing to you this time on a matter of the utmost importance: a matter of life or death for me and my family [...]. It is urgent, urgent, urgent! I have desperate need of one hundred and fifty (150) pounds, within a week, before next Friday. I have nobody to turn to, except my friends there. The anguish I am experiencing is terrible. Please, I implore you, contact Rabb. Hertz [...] And with him see if you can get this sum for me; if you can't talk to Rabb. Hertz, please do all you can to find me this sum. It is essential that it be found and that I receive it within the week [...] if possible, send it by telegraph money order. As soon as you receive my letter, please write to me immediately, via

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<sup>40</sup> CAHU, f. «Umberto Cassuto», letter from U. Cassuto to D.W. Senator, Rome, 20<sup>th</sup> May 1939. The documents relating to his emigration (*'aliyya*) in the National Library of Israel, *Umberto Cassuto Archive*, ARC 4\* 1787: 01/17, are mentioned by Ariel Viterbo, «Maestro di Bibbia nel Paese della Bibbia»: *Umberto Cassuto in Eretz Israel*, «La Rassegna mensile di Israel», 82, 2-3, 2016, pp. 159- 161. Cfr. Letter from Cassuto to Alfonso Pacifici, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1939, in The Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, *Archivio Pacifici*, P172, b. 69. For more about the controversy between the two, see Angelo M. Piattelli, *Umberto Cassuto: dalla formazione al Collegio Rabbिनico Italiano alla polemica con Alfonso Pacifici*, «La Rassegna mensile di Israel», 82, 2-3, 2016, pp. 61-89.

<sup>41</sup> CAHU, f. «Umberto Cassuto», letter from M. Ben-David to the Director for Migration, 11<sup>th</sup> June 1939.

air mail, for my peace of mind. Maybe even call me if you can<sup>42</sup>.

He also implored him to translate the letter, which was written in Italian (Cassuto could not speak English)<sup>43</sup>, «literally and completely», and to send it to Hertz.

That money was necessary for his transfer. He was in such a hurry because if his return visa expired (he did not say when) he would «lose for good the right to return to Palestine. It would be a disaster, an annihilation, for me and my family [...] I will be so grateful to you, from the bottom of my heart, that goes without saying. It will be something that I will never forget»<sup>44</sup>. He was down to the last of his funds and had already paid for the same journey twice over the space of just a few days, in the expectation of receiving severance pay from the Collegio Rabbinico Italiano, where he had taught for 33 years. In his words: «the administration had left room for hope for a decision to that effect». But he had been clutching at straws: the milieu «of Italian Judaism» and the College could «do nothing about it», as they had obviously told him.

On July 21<sup>st</sup>, he received a prompt reply from Cecil Roth, an expert in the history of Italian Judaism, who knew Florence and the Jewish community there well, including the Accademia Colombaria from which he had resigned in protest at the antisemitic laws (Cassuto too had been member)<sup>45</sup>. Roth wanted to help him, but meanwhile suggested that he ask the Hebrew University; Cassuto admitted that he had already agreed one «small sum [...] as a contribution to my new home in the new location»; this amount was 60

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<sup>42</sup> Wiener Library London, Document 507/II, *Italian Jews. Cecil Roth - Original Correspondence*, letter (in Italian) from U. Cassuto to Cecil Roth, Rome, 16<sup>th</sup> July 1939. This source was pointed out and sent by Anna Teicher.

<sup>43</sup> In the biographical file for Cassuto, by E. Telkes-Klein, *L'université hebraïque*, cit.; Cassuto is said to have: Latin, Greek, French, German, Armenian and a good knowledge of Hebrew, as well as Italian, *ivi*, p. 166.

<sup>44</sup> Wiener Library London, Document 507/II, *Italian Jews. Cecil Roth - Original Correspondence*, letter from U. Cassuto to C. Roth, Rome, 16<sup>th</sup> July 1939.

<sup>45</sup> See Vivian David Lipman, *Roth Cecil*, in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2<sup>a</sup> ed., Detroit, Thomson Gale, 2007, pp. 479-480. For Cecil Roth's acquaintances in Florence, see Cecil Roth, *Una pensione e i suoi frequentatori*, «Israel», 20<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> April and 18<sup>th</sup> May 1961.

Palestinian pounds, equivalent to 4 months' pay of his agreed salary<sup>46</sup>. But the 150 pounds was to be used «for expenses here (travel fares, the shipment of furniture and books)». He hoped that Providence would grant him «a new position that will allow me to repay my debts sooner or later, in one way or another». In the meantime, he put off his return and counted on the concrete «fraternal benevolence of friends»<sup>47</sup>. Roth was indeed organizing a collection: someone sent him 10 pounds, another declined the invitation; the archivist Richard Barnett suggested a few other contacts in the British Sephardic community<sup>48</sup>. Whether Roth managed to recoup the money he appears to have provided as an advance is not clear.

Two months later, on 17<sup>th</sup> August, Cassuto sailed from Brindisi to Jerusalem, where he arrived on 22<sup>nd</sup> August. The family moved into Gaza Rd. 22<sup>nd</sup><sup>49</sup>. Less than one month later, on 13<sup>th</sup> September 1939, his brother-in-law, Rabbi Elia Samuele Artom, also moved to Jerusalem, with sons Emanuele and Ruben, 23 and 11 respectively. Giulia, Artom's wife and Cassuto's sister, had sadly died three years previously. Davide Artom had arrived before the others in December 1938, at the age of 20. They too had to settle in.

### **The impossibility of living on 15 Palestinian pounds a month**

The early days - trying to fit into life in Mandate Palestine (*Eretz Yisrael*) and the academic environment - were particularly traumatic. Cassuto turned to

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<sup>46</sup> CAHU, f. «Umberto Cassuto», letter from financial secretary M. Schneerson to U. Cassuto at the Tan-Ezer lodging house in Jerusalem, 25<sup>th</sup> June 1939.

<sup>47</sup> Wiener Library London, Document 507/II, *Italian Jews. Cecil Roth - Original Correspondence*, letters (in Italian) from U. Cassuto to C. Roth, Rome, 21<sup>st</sup> July and 24<sup>th</sup> July 1939. Roth's letters are missing here.

<sup>48</sup> Ivi, signed letter, 30<sup>th</sup> July 1939; and letter from Richard Barnett, 4<sup>th</sup> August 1939, full of names, references and clues to decipher. The invitation was declined by Charles Sebag-Montefiore, of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews' Congregation in London, where they were discussing whether to set up an aid committee for Italian Jews. Thanks are owed to Anna Teicher for this information and the copies of the cited letters to Roth.

<sup>49</sup> For the date of travel see, CAHU, f. «Umberto Cassuto», letter from U. Cassuto to J.L. Magnes, 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1939. For the address see, various documents, including those in the Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri, *Archivio scuole* (henceforth ASDMAE, AS) 1920-1955, b. 124, f. «Cassuto Umberto».

Schocken for help several times: in June he appears to have been convinced that his monthly salary would have been doubled in August, though it is not clear why; he admitted that he may have misunderstood. In any case, he could not now go back to Italy and moving to New York (he refers to the previously mentioned invitation from Stephen S. Wise), was expensive and «impossible now, because of the war», as he wrote on 20<sup>th</sup> October 1939, a time when many Italians were still entering the United States. He said he was living «a situation of general destruction, the complete annihilation of my existence and the existence of my family, that is my wife and my daughters. If the situation does not change, we will just have to die»<sup>50</sup>.

Cassuto and his wife had been plunged into «a really desperate state of mind», his superiors noted. The professor appeared «very much depressed and impeded in his work by difficulties and worries with regard to his economic situation»<sup>51</sup>. The one-off payment he had been given does not seem to have brought him much relief, however his circumstances had been discussed with him numerous times: the 15 Palestinian pounds he was paid monthly were not enough to keep his family going. Moreover, this turned out to be his only source of income. At the time it was practically impossible for a Bible scholar in Palestine to find any other job additional to a university post, and he was not in receipt of a pension or payment of any other kind from Italy<sup>52</sup>. On this point, however, they were wrongly informed, since Cassuto had actually been a pension holder since December 1938 and their daughter

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<sup>50</sup> CAHU, f. «Umberto Cassuto», letter from U. Cassuto to S. Schocken, Jerusalem, 20th October 1939 (in Hebrew).

<sup>51</sup> Ivi, letter from A. Fränkel, L.A. Mayer, A. Assaf, to J.H. Hertz, s.l., 5<sup>th</sup> November 1939.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*. There was no mention of a potential job for Cassuto's daughters, who had been teachers in Italy and who would have been able to help boost the family income. The Hebrew University paid professors a subsidy for any children who were still minors, as in the case of Florentine professor Enzo Bonaventura, who had arrived just three months prior to Cassuto in March 1939, and who, after settling in, had sent for his wife and three dependant children in October of that year.



Milka had received a compensation payment<sup>53</sup>. In November 1939, dean Fränkel, the head of Humanities L.A. Mayer and the president of the Institute of Jewish Studies jointly approached Chief Rabbi Hertz. Having reminded him that he was the one who, in a letter dated 12<sup>th</sup> January 1939, had suggested offering the Italian academic the minimum salary, they formally enquired whether he could tap one of the funds at his disposal in order to provide a financial contribution, albeit temporary. The dean (a mathematician himself) also reminded Hertz of a conversation the two of them had had in September 1938, in London, in which Hertz had stressed the importance of Professor Cassuto's appointment to the Bible Studies professorship. «We also know that the present situation is far from easy for you. But as the man concerned is a scholar of the extraordinary qualities of Professor Cassuto, we sincerely hope that you will be able to give us a favourable reply»<sup>54</sup>.

### **Sacrifices all round**

Hertz's reply has not been found amongst the plethora of papers. However, Harry Sacher, a London businessman and Zionist, intervened; stating that he was «familiar with the history of the case», he aimed a barbed comment at Schocken: since the upper echelons of the Hebrew University were talking of taking on Polish refugees, it seemed to him that they would only need to show a modicum of generosity in order to give priority to Cassuto's case<sup>55</sup>.

Evidently, the director of Marks & Spencer was not well informed, came the reply. Cassuto had already obtained special supplementary funds, but due to

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<sup>53</sup> Regarding the pension attributed to Umberto Cassuto by decree on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1939, n. 8310, and the correction in the decree of 6<sup>th</sup> November 1942, n. 19182/141.73, see Annalisa Capristo and Giorgio Fabre, *Il Registro. La cacciata degli ebrei dalla Stato italiano nei protocolli della Corte dei conti*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2018, p. 143. Ivi for Milka Cassuto, p. 222. The professor stated that he had access to a pension, which he had delegated his son Nathan to claim until March 1940, since owing to the war he was unable to present his life certificate himself. ACS, MPI, DGIU, DP, FPPO, III versamento 1940-1970, b. 105, f. «Cassuto Umberto», letter from U. Cassuto to the MPI, Jerusalem, 19<sup>th</sup> November 1951.

<sup>54</sup> CAHU, f. «Umberto Cassuto», letter from A. Fränkel, L.A. Mayer, A. Assaf, to J.H. Hertz, s.l., 5<sup>th</sup> November 1939.

<sup>55</sup> Ivi, letter from H. Sacher to S. Schocken, London, 27<sup>th</sup> November 1939.

the reduced income brought about by the war, the University's deficit was such that they had had to delay the implementation of measures which had already been approved, such as giving full-time professorships to academics who had been waiting for them for years, including Hanoch Albeck (1890-1972), a Talmud professor and leading Mishnah scholar. No new refugee, from Poland or elsewhere, had been added, sadly, because of this lack of funds, but if they had been, they too would have had to accept the minimum salary for a year or two. Professor Racah, for example, who had just been taken on to teach theoretical physics, received a part-time salary of 15 Palestinian pounds a month, just like Cassuto<sup>56</sup>. The example had not been chosen at random: Giulio Racah was from Florence and had trained in Rome; he was a great scientist (a future Israel Prize winner) in a subject in which, thanks to Fermi, Italians were leading the way and were much in demand in both the United States and Great Britain.

From London, Sacher sent what pretty much amounted to an apology: he appreciated that the Hebrew University was doing a great deal, given the circumstances, and he would pass on the detailed reply to Rabbi Hertz, which was obviously the real reason for his intervention<sup>57</sup>.

### **Funding and tragic news**

From then on there were no more complaints or demands. As a result of Italy joining the war, Cassuto was arrested for several days as an enemy alien, in mid-June 1940, along with other Italians. It fell to Senator to deal with Cassuto's release and papers<sup>58</sup>. In July 1940, Cassuto was informed that a Bible Department was to be opened in the forthcoming academic year and that, as of October 1940, he would have been promoted to the post of full

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<sup>56</sup> Ivi, letter from the chief administrative officer of the Hebrew University S. Ginzberg, who was replying instead of Schocken to Sacher's ill-judged intervention, s. l., 17<sup>th</sup> December 1939.

<sup>57</sup> Ivi, letter from H. Sacher to S. Ginzberg, London, 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1940.

<sup>58</sup> Ivi, letter from D.W. Senator, same recipient, s. l., 13<sup>th</sup> June 1940; letter from D.W. Senator to A.F. Giles, s. l., 13<sup>th</sup> June 1940.

professor, on a salary of 30 Palestinian pounds a month<sup>59</sup>. This was not much less than the 400 Palestinian pounds a year which Enzo Bonaventura (an Italian professor of psychology who had arrived in the same period) had been earning since the previous year. It was the average salary, albeit low, which the Hebrew University could afford to pay a full-time professor at the time. However, Cassuto was not yet a full-time professor there: not only was the previously mentioned, rather conservative Segal already teaching Bible Studies in the Faculty of Humanities, so was the somewhat unorthodox Harry Torczyner (1886-1973), future first head of the Academy of the Hebrew Language, who had fled Berlin in 1933 together with his wife, a pianist, and their two children<sup>60</sup>.

Where was funding to be found? The American Friends of the Hebrew University (AFHU), whose premises were in the Mercantile Building 10 East 40<sup>th</sup> Street (New York's tallest skyscraper in the 1930s<sup>61</sup>), had obviously been in touch with the Emergency Committee, whose offices were on 45<sup>th</sup> West Side. The regulations meant that a displaced scholar could not apply for funds directly, rather it had to be the institution hiring them. In this case a collective negotiation was undertaken for a group of academics who, although already recruited for short-term contracts by the Hebrew University, were unable to finalise their contracts since approximately half the University's budget had been lost due to the outbreak of war. This group of academics included four newly arrived Italians. Throughout the whole of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem there were 52 refugees, with salaries ranging from 700 to 350 Palestinian pounds per year. The AFHU chairman

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<sup>59</sup> Ivi, letter from D.W. Senator to U. Cassuto, Jerusalem, 18<sup>th</sup> July 1940 (in Hebrew).

<sup>60</sup> An overview of courses taught can be found in E. Telkes-Klein, *L'université hébraïque*, cit., p. 44; as well as previously cited biographical entries, see the entries for Harry Torczyner and Naphtali Tur Sinai, pp. 309-314. Differing assessments and information are offered by S. David Sperling, *Major Developments in Jewish Biblical Scholarship*, in Magne Sæbø (edited by), *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament: the history of its interpretation*, vol. III/2, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015, pp. 377-378.

<sup>61</sup> See the illustrations on <<https://www.emporis.com>> (accessed 8<sup>th</sup> August 2019).

provided the ECADFS chairman with a list of 20 names indicating their respective departments and salaries (550-350 Palestinian pounds). It was up to the New York Committee to choose who would get a share of the funding requested for 1940-41. The same happened in the following years, until January 1944. Five professors were selected each year - how and by whom the personal files do not say - for a total annual contribution of \$5,000, meaning each professor received \$1,000. Three were Italians: Bonaventura for Psychology, Cassuto for Bible Studies, Racah for Physics<sup>62</sup>.

Cassuto's academic career as a «Bible teacher in the land of the Bible» progressed satisfactorily. He was involved in a generously funded project (£30,000) at the Hebrew University to promote Biblical Studies in Hebrew without offending orthodox Jewish sentiments<sup>63</sup>, and he also edited the volumes produced which were devoted to Genesis (1944-1949) and Exodus (1951). He was also one of the first eight members of the Academy of the Hebrew Language.

In the meantime, Cassuto's son Nathan had been appointed rabbi by the Jewish Community of Florence in February 1943. Nathan was, however, arrested on November 26<sup>th</sup>, closely followed by his wife, Anna, and brother-in-law Saul on November 29<sup>th</sup>. All three were deported to Poland. Although Cassuto and his wife must have heard this tragic news not long after, Cassuto never wanted to accept that Nathan was dead<sup>64</sup>.

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<sup>62</sup> NYPL, MAD, ECADFS, I.A., b. 5, f. 5, «Cassuto, Umberto Moshe David», 1939-1944. Copies of the same documents can be found in the files of each of the professors cited; payments are shown in several instalments in 1943-1944, see letters drafted by Betty Drury to the AFHU, 19<sup>th</sup> October 1943, 26<sup>th</sup> October 1943, 14<sup>th</sup> January 1944 and 26<sup>th</sup> January 1944.

<sup>63</sup> Cfr. A. Viterbo, «*Maestro di Bibbia nel paese della Bibbia*», cit., pp. 146-150. CAHU, f. «Umberto Cassuto», letter from the generous financier Silas S. Perry to Leon Simon, chairman of the Executive Commission, Gerrards Cross (UK), 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1946. Negotiations were conducted by the Friends of the Hebrew University, with explicit references made to payment for Cassuto: see *ivi*, letter from Walter Zander to D. Senator, s. l., 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1946.

<sup>64</sup> See David Cassuto's touching testimony, in M. Longo Adorno, *Gli ebrei fiorentini*, cit., p. 149.

### Reinstated or readmitted to service in Italy?

In May 1942 the Ministero dell'Educazione Nazionale asked the Demorazza, somewhat late in the day, for information regarding the exceptional merits which Cassuto had invoked in his appeal to obtain the benefit of discrimination, as provided for by article 14 of the racial laws. The request, which is not to be found in the file, was rejected<sup>65</sup>.

Instead, three years later, in June, a year after the liberation of Rome, the Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione notified him of the decree of 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1945: «Prof. Umberto Cassuto is readmitted to service, as full professor of Hebrew and Comparative Semitic Languages in the R. Università di Roma, in accordance with and to the effects of the RR.DD.LL. 6<sup>th</sup> January 1944, n. 9; 20<sup>th</sup> January 1944, n. 25 and the DD.LL.LL. 7<sup>th</sup> September 1944, n. 264 and 19<sup>th</sup> October 1944, n. 301. He should come to the Rome office as soon as possible». The economic conditions were backdated to January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1944, with the corresponding termination of his pension<sup>66</sup>.

The minister at the time was Arangio Ruiz (1884-1964), anti-fascist, jurist and professor at the Università di Roma. It was Cassuto himself who, following the proclamation of the aforementioned provisions, had submitted a request to the Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione for his «reintegration in the post of university professor», as well as the payment of the pension he had not drawn over the previous two years<sup>67</sup>. In March of that year, he had already conveyed his thanks to the representatives of the Italian Consulate in London: «I would be happy to be reinstated to the post of full, tenured

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<sup>65</sup> ACS, MPI, DGIU, DP, FPPO, III versamento 1940-1970, b. 105, f. «Cassuto Umberto», letter from the Ministero dell'Educazione Nazionale to the Demorazza, Rome, 12<sup>th</sup> May 1942; Cassuto's request and the outcome are missing here.

<sup>66</sup> Ivi, copy of the decree by the Ministro Segretario di Stato per la Pubblica Istruzione, Rome, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1945, art. 1. A copy of the notification Cassuto claimed to have received is missing, as is subsequently stated.

<sup>67</sup> ASDMAE, AS 1920-1955, b. 124, f. «Cassuto Umberto», copy of note no. 1335/23 from the MPI to the Ministeri del Tesoro e degli Affari Esteri, Rome, 1<sup>st</sup> December 1944, refers to receipt of the application for reinstatement (missing), but does not specify the date. Also contains documentation relating to his pension.

professor in Italian universities»<sup>68</sup>. In reality, official correspondence from Italy spoke not of reinstatement, but «the repeal of racial measures» and «readmission to service», the terms of which were subsequently modified: the *decreto legislativo luogotenenziale* of 5<sup>th</sup> April 1945, no. 238, introduced, under specific conditions, the possibility of doubling up and creating supernumerary academic teaching posts for those readmitted to service, repealing the measures of the previous decree, no. 301, issued on 19<sup>th</sup> October 1944.

### Silence on both sides

Cassuto did not go to Rome. Neither did the Facoltà di Lettere or the Università seek him out. In order to understand why he chose not to go back it is necessary to look at both sides of the story.

The situation in the Facoltà in Rome had indeed become somewhat complicated in 1945<sup>69</sup>: from 1938 to 1941 Cassuto's courses had initially been entrusted to Michelangelo Guidi, professor of Islamic History and Institutions, and subsequently, until 1944-5, to Giuseppe Furlani, professor of Assyriology and Oriental Archaeology and a former colleague of Cassuto's in Florence.

In the meantime, Giorgio Levi Della Vida (who had returned to Rome from the United States in October 1945 to be reunited with his non-Jewish family) had also applied to be readmitted to his place of work at the Università in Rome. The position, from which he had been expelled for political reasons in 1932, after 16 years of tenure, was the same post that Cassuto had taken up and then also been expelled from in 1938, after 6 years of tenure. Consequently, it would not have been possible to grant true reinstatement to both academics, namely reinstatement to the very same position from which

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<sup>68</sup> Ivi, copy of a letter from U. Cassuto to the Italian representatives in London, Jerusalem, 4<sup>th</sup> March 1945, and various ministerial messages regarding the repeal of the racial laws and reinstatement at work.

<sup>69</sup> Already well documented by G. Rigano, *Umberto Cassuto all'Università di Roma*, cit., pp. 134-136, and, previously, Id., *Aspetti della cultura ebraica*, cit.

they had both been dismissed. Levi Della Vida was readmitted to service, albeit reallocated to the chair of Islamic History and Institutions<sup>70</sup>.

In January 1945, the Facoltà di Lettere also deliberated on the teaching of Epigraphy and Ancient Semitic Language and Culture, appointing Israel Zoller to the chair. Zoller, Chief Rabbi of Rome since 1939, had been recommended to the rector of the university and two government ministries in letters signed by Cardinal Ernesto Ruffini and in other anonymous missives<sup>71</sup>. Not having emigrated, Zoller was immediately available to take up academic posts once again and was able to swiftly regain the right to his professorship in Hebrew and Comparative Semitic Linguistics.

Zoller was an old acquaintance for Cassuto: following in the footsteps of Hirsch Perez Chajes (1876-1927), their mutual mentor in Florence, the pair had been the last Italian exponents of the Science of Judaism. Cassuto undoubtedly learnt (particularly because it had hit the headlines) of how Rome's former Chief Rabbi had converted to Catholicism and been christened, on 13<sup>th</sup> February 1945, in the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli in Rome, taking the name Eugenio Mario Zolli, in homage to Pius XII, Pope Pacelli. The events surrounding the Austro-Hungarian (Galician) academic continued to impact Cassuto's potential reinstatement, of which there was no sign in Rome for the time being. Strikingly, the ministerial file devoted to Cassuto contained copies of various documents pertaining to Zolli, even when Cassuto himself was not mentioned at all. In November 1946, the Facoltà di Lettere appointed Eugenio Zolli to the remunerated post of professor of Hebrew and Comparative Semitic Linguistics, with full tenure, to

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<sup>70</sup> Also related in Bruna Soravia, *Levi Della Vida, Giorgio*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 64, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2005, *ad nomen* <<http://www.treccani.it>>. Disappointed by the academic environment, he left again, with his wife, in August 1947, to stay for a time in Philadelphia.

<sup>71</sup> See Gabriele Rigano, *Il caso Zolli. L'itinerario di un intellettuale in bilico tra fedi, culture e nazioni*, Milano, Guerini e Associati, 2006, and Alberto La Torre, *Eugenio Zolli semitista e orientalista in dialogo con la storia delle religioni*, doctoral thesis, Università di Verona, 2007, online, regarding the period in Rome see Chap. 7 <<https://iris.univr.it>> (accessed 10<sup>th</sup> July 2019).

be flanked by both Guidi and Giuseppe Furlani.

### **Return impossible for the time being**

In early 1948 there was still «no precise news» from Cassuto, which posed several problems. According to the rules regulating the readmission to service of teaching staff dismissed for political or racial reasons, those who were abroad were deemed to be on unpaid secondment missions, although this possibility was to remain valid for only up to a year after the measures had been introduced. On closer examination, however, there was a loophole: the norm regulating the availability and placement of those teaching abroad on secondment did not entail any time limits and as such could be infinitely prolonged, thereby negating the aforementioned one-year deadline<sup>72</sup>.

In an attempt to move things on, the Direzione Generale per l'Istruzione Superiore contacted the Ministero degli Affari Esteri on 6<sup>th</sup> February 1948:

Since Prof. Cassuto has, to date, not communicated further regarding whether he intends to take his teaching post up again, nor does his personal position appear to be regulated by any other special provision (such as, for example, placements made by this Ministry, in line with art. 96 of the *Testo Unico* of the laws regulating higher education), any information would be most welcome [...] concerning the work and intentions of the above-mentioned Professor<sup>73</sup>.

A few days later, having evidently been alerted to the problem, Cassuto finally got back in touch. He claimed that he heard that he had been «readmitted to service» on 28<sup>th</sup> June 1945 and that he had replied to the Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1945 by registered post (no trace exists of this), saying that he was unable to return to Italy for the time

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<sup>72</sup> ACS, MPI, DGIU, DP, FPPO, III versamento 1940-1970, b. 105, f. «Cassuto Umberto», DGIU, «Appunto per il sig. Ministro», s.d., but Feb.-May 1948, for the references it contains.

<sup>73</sup> ASDMAE, AS 1920-1955, b. 124, f. «Cassuto Umberto», note no. 1291 from the MPI to the Ministero degli Affari Esteri (henceforth MAE), 6<sup>th</sup> February 1948.



being. He also said that, at the time of writing, 10<sup>th</sup> February 1948, he was still unable to return, on account of his «important scientific work at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem», on which he expounded at length. Furthermore, he pointed out, in Florence in late November 1943, his son and son-in-law had been «captured by the Germans and then deported to Poland, not to return. Their five children, now 6 to 12 years of age, have been staying with me with their respective mothers [...] and for now I am kept here by the sacrosanct duty of giving these unfortunate families a decent home»<sup>74</sup>. He asked, therefore, to be nominated as «on secondment to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem», as suggested in the letter from the Ministry referring to art. 96 of the *Testo Unico*.

### Available abroad

Addressing the Ministero degli Affari Esteri, the consul highlighted the fact that the «group of Italian professors [at the Hebrew University] bring honour to our country and to the respective universities that the individual academics come from. Their teaching adds prestige to our culture and lays the foundations for a noble kind of propaganda». The ministry's response was favourable<sup>75</sup>. The impact of the professor's prestige was matched by the strikingly wretched misfortune of his grandchildren, who had lost their fathers, «slaughtered by the Germans». The children had arrived with Hulda three years earlier, on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1945. The Cassutos' daughter-in-law, Anna Di Gioacchino, survived the Theresienstadt concentration camp and, in November of that year, she was reunited with her three children who had

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<sup>74</sup> Ivi, copy of a letter from U. Cassuto to the Italian minister for Education «S. E. il Ministro della Pubblica Istruzione», Jerusalem, 10th February 1948. See here Patrizia Guarnieri, *Anna Di Gioacchino Cassuto*, and in the file on *Umberto Cassuto* the further details regarding «relatives who emigrated» revised and corrected by David Cassuto (speaking to P. Guarnieri, 5<sup>th</sup> August 2019), to whom grateful thanks are due.

<sup>75</sup> ASDMAE, AS 1920-1955, b. 124, f. «Cassuto Umberto», *telespresso* n. 1312/79 from the Italian Consulate General, MAE, Jerusalem, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1948; *telespresso* n. 4129/542 from to the MAE to the MPI, 28<sup>th</sup> April 1948.

been brought to Palestine by their aunt and maternal grandparents, who had then returned to Italy. Tragically, on 13<sup>th</sup> April 1948, while on her way to work, Anna was killed in an Arab ambush on a convoy to Mount Scopus; she died alongside 78 other people, including Enzo Bonaventura.

Having been informed by Cassuto of this further dreadful tragedy, on 7<sup>th</sup> December 1948, eight months to the day since the application had been made, the Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione granted Cassuto's secondment to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, a move which guaranteed him his right to the maintenance of his tenure track seniority and all financial benefits. This was to last until 31<sup>st</sup> October 1949 and was then renewed for a further year, following receipt of a report filed by Cassuto outlining his university work, which had obviously been restricted by the war<sup>76</sup>.

Simultaneously, the Facoltà di Roma and the University's administrative council ratified the appointment of Zolli as Cassuto's substitute in the professorship for the 1948-9 academic year and renewed his «appointment to substitute Prof. Cassuto in the teaching of Hebrew and Comparative Semitic Linguistics» until 1950-51, matching the renewals granted to Cassuto in Israel<sup>77</sup>.

### «In the higher interests of scholarship»

The situation was, however, unsustainable: Rome's professorship in Hebrew and Comparative Semitic Linguistics needed to be sorted out officially. The Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, headed by Gino Funaioli (the philologist and

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<sup>76</sup> Ivi, note no. 12578 from the MPI to the MAE, 10th December 1948, and no. 18382, 21<sup>st</sup> November 1949. Also, *Relazione del Prof. Umberto Cassuto sulla sua attività didattica e scientifica nell'anno accademico 1948-49*. Article 96 of the *Testo Unico* applied referred to the RD of 31<sup>st</sup> August 1933, n. 1592.

<sup>77</sup> ACS, MPI, DGIU, DP, FPPO, III versamento 1940-1970, b. 105, f. «Cassuto Umberto», letter from the DGIS to the head of the Segreteria Particolare of the MPI, 4<sup>th</sup> August 1948. See also the letter from the DGIS to the rector of the Università di Roma, 18<sup>th</sup> January 1950; letter from the Università di Roma, 18<sup>th</sup> March 1948; copies of the MPI decrees appointing and confirming the appointment of Zolli, 10<sup>th</sup> July 1949, 10<sup>th</sup> January 1950 and 24<sup>th</sup> April 1951; extract from the minutes of the sitting of the council of the Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, 13<sup>th</sup> June 1950.

former colleague of Cassuto's in Florence), agreed «in the higher interests of scholarship» to a further renewal for Cassuto, provided he could guarantee his return for the start of the following academic year<sup>78</sup>. On the contrary, on 24<sup>th</sup> June 1951, Cassuto informed the Italian consul in Jerusalem that he was unable to return to Rome for health reasons. He proposed that he be placed *fuori ruolo* (losing tenure and taking early retirement) from 1<sup>st</sup> November 1951, so the Facoltà could proceed with appointing another academic to the post. Alternatively, he suggested, he might be given study leave with exemption from teaching<sup>79</sup>.

Both requests were inadmissible: the study leave proposal conflicted with the fixed deadline set by the Facoltà; as for the *fuori ruolo* proposal, Cassuto had been taken back on and thus could not retire until he was 75 years of age (DLL 5<sup>th</sup> April 1945, no. 238, art 19). Moreover, he had been «rehired in soprannumero» (as a supernumerary), and as such, were he to leave, no post would have become available for Hebrew and Comparative Semitic Linguistics, thereby damaging the academic discipline<sup>80</sup>.

Things were now clear. Nevertheless, and «not without great regret», on 7<sup>th</sup> September Cassuto submitted a request for early retirement, for serious illness, aggravated additionally by «on-going serious family reasons». He explained that he had previously been thinking of returning to Rome, leaving his grandchildren in the care of his eldest (then single) daughter. However, 43-year-old librarian Milka had recently married, in April 1951, making the

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<sup>78</sup> ASDMAE, AS 1920-1955, b. 124, f. «Cassuto Umberto», note no. 10663 from the MPI to the MAE, 11<sup>th</sup> December 1950; note no. 5150, 25<sup>th</sup> May 1951. ACS, MPI, DGIU, DP, FPPO, III versamento 1940-1970, b. 105, f. «Cassuto Umberto», copy of an extract from the minutes of the sitting of the council of the Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1951.

<sup>79</sup> Cassuto had suffered a heart attack in November 1949, when in Italy. ASDMAE, AS 1920-1955, b. 124, f. «Cassuto Umberto», letter from U. Cassuto to the Italian Consul General, Jerusalem, 24<sup>th</sup> June 1951.

<sup>80</sup> ACS, MPI, DGIU, DP, FPPO, III versamento 1940-1970, b. 105, f. «Cassuto Umberto», DGIS, «Appunti per il Sig. Ministro» (Notes for the Minister), s.d., the text is underlined. ASDMAE, AS 1920-1955, b. 124, f. «Cassuto Umberto», note no. 6908 from the MPI to the MAE, 4<sup>th</sup> August 1951.

proposed solution unfeasible<sup>81</sup>. Who did Professor Cassuto address this letter to? Not to the Facoltà or Università di Roma, nor to the Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, rather to the Italian consul in Jerusalem, who forwarded it to the Ministero degli Esteri. The letter was delivered to the relevant minister who then invited the professor to submit a formal application.

Cassuto submitted the application over two months later, on 25<sup>th</sup> November 1951. On 18<sup>th</sup> December of that year Cassuto died suddenly, in Jerusalem. He was 68 years old<sup>82</sup>.

He had only returned to Italy once, for a sitting of the Accademia dei Lincei in Rome on 12<sup>th</sup> November 1949, at which he read a contribution regarding the Qumran Caves Scrolls (also known as the Dead Sea Scrolls) which had recently been discovered in the Judaeian Desert<sup>83</sup>. It was also at the Accademia dei Lincei that Giorgio Levi Della Vida read Cassuto's obituary and eulogy<sup>84</sup>.

### Major publications

For Cassuto's many publications, see the list compiled by his daughter Milka Cassuto Salzman, *The Life-Work and Achievements of M.D.U. Cassuto (1883-1951). An up-to-date Bibliographical List of his Scientific Publications*, in Haim Beinart, Samuel E. Loewenstamm (eds.), *Studies in Bible Dedicated to the*

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<sup>81</sup> Ivi, letter from U. Cassuto to the Italian Consulate General, Jerusalem, 7<sup>th</sup> September 1951.

<sup>82</sup> ACS, MPI, DGIU, DP, FPPO, III versamento 1940-1970, b. 105, f. «Cassuto Umberto», application for early retirement U. Cassuto, Jerusalem, 25<sup>th</sup> November 1951. ASDMAE, AS 1920-1955, b. 124, f. «Cassuto Umberto», *telespresso* n. 987/270 from the Italian Consulate General to the MAE, Jerusalem, 20<sup>th</sup> December 1951. The ministerial documents continue with the decision to ignore the inadmissible application for early retirement in order to help Cassuto's widow. Since the request was for early retirement, she would have lost her right to an immediate pension, which she had applied for in February 1952. Ivi, DGIU, note for *Dottor Di Domizio*, 6<sup>th</sup> March 1952.

<sup>83</sup> Cfr. Umberto Cassuto, *Gli antichi manoscritti ebraici teste scoperti in Palestina*, in «Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Rendiconti della classe di Scienze morali, storiche e filologiche» (with the date of the session), Serie VIII, 5, 1-2, 1950, pp. 18-21.

<sup>84</sup> Giorgio Levi Della Vida, *Umberto Cassuto*, in «Rendiconti dell'Accademia dei Lincei. Appendice: Necrologi di Soci Defunti nel decennio dicembre 1945-dicembre 1955», 1957, pp. 74-77, reprinted in Id., *Aneddoti e svaghi arabi e non arabi*, Milan-Naples, Ricciardi, 1959, pp. 305-309.

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