

Erich Goldberg

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The photograph in his university record at Pisa in 1933-34, shows him in a white coat, not as a student but as a doctor. And so he was, when at the age of 41 he escaped Hitler's regime. A specialist in neurology with teachers of international reputation, fluent in three languages, cultured, he was one of the assets wasted by Germany and gained by Italy. Mussolini, however, forced him to flee again. While waiting for a visa for Australia, he stopped with his wife in Singapore, where he found work in a public mental hospital. Having dealt with «war neurotics», he found himself an *enemy alien*, interned, suspected of being a fifth columnist and under bombardment by the Japanese.

An outstanding education

He was born on 28 September 1892 in Berlin. His father, Siegmund Goldberg, who was the public prosecutor, and his mother Margaretha Bohne, both Jewish by religion, lived in Markgrafenstrasse 25, in a building that no longer exists¹.

He attended the Kaiser-Friedrich-Schule high school in the elegant and cultured Berlin district of Charlottenburg², and graduated in medicine at the University of Breslau (now Wrocław). In 1917, in Frankfurt am Main he took the Imperial national qualifying examination for the medical profession, gaining top grades³. In Breslau, after hospital experience as a military doctor, which was accredited to him as an internship, he attended the neurological clinic

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¹ AOMFi, *Fondo Medici chirurgi cessati* (MCC), *Fascicoli personali* (FP), n. 770, «Erich Goldberg», «Birth certificate», 3 October 1892.

² ASUPi, *Carriere studenti*, f. «Erich Goldberg», certificate in German, Charlottenburg, 9 May 1910, authenticated 23 October 1933.

³ Ibid, copy with translation matching the original of the certificate for the national examination ta passed 25 April 1917, issued in Breslau 11 May 1933. Details of his clinical experience in Germany are derived from his request on official stationery to the Rector for enrolment, Pisa, 27 November 1933.

directed by Otfried Foerster (1873-1941), a specialist neurosurgeon, an expert in brain localization, whose reputation drew to his clinic young specialists from as far away as North America. Erich was also a lecturer at the Neurological Institute of Frankfurt University directed by Ludwig Edinger (1855-1918), who was succeeded by Kurt Goldstein (1878-1965), who with his collaborators was involved in the treatment of soldiers left brain-damaged during the First World War, and was at that period developing a holistic and humanistic view of organic pathology which was to have an enormous impact in Europe. Among the young Erich's publications, an article from 1919 deals with the treatment of the war neurotic in out-patient department⁴.

In 1933 Professor Goldstein was arrested in Berlin, beaten up and released on condition he left Germany. While waiting for his visa to emigrate to New York, he escaped to Switzerland, then to Holland, where in 1934 he published his celebrated book, *Der Aufbau des Organismus*, translated into English in 1939⁵. He was not alone: his group of co-workers in the Frankfurt clinic and in the Berlin hospital where he had moved were branded as unsafe individuals, almost all 'red' Jews, and were threatened⁶.

A loss for Germany, a gain for Italy

Erich too left Nazi Germany during 1933 and escaped to Italy: we do not know the exact date. His first stop was Pisa, where he enrolled at the University, to gain recognition for the degree already obtained in his own country. With a

⁴ Erich Goldberg, *Die ambulante Behandlung der Kriegsneurotiker in Ambulantenstationen für Nervenranke* [Outpatient treatment of the war neurotic in outpatient wards for nervous patients], «Deutsche Zeitschrift für Nervenheilkunde», 64, 3, 1919, pp. 118-132.

⁵ The English-language edition came out after his move to the USA: see Kurt Goldstein, *The Organism: A Holistic Approach to Biology Derived from Pathological Data in Man*, New York, American Book Company, 1939, later reissued with Oliver Sacks as editor in 1995; it should be noted that in Italy the same work was translated only around eighty years later: Id., *L'organismo. Un approccio olistico alla biologia derivato dai dati patologici nell'uomo*, a cura di Luigi Corsi, Roma, Fioriti, 2010.

⁶ Cf. Anne Harrington, *Reenchanted Science: Holism in German Culture from Wilhelm II to Hitler*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1996, p. 164.

certificate of German nationality issued to him by the German consulate in Livorno, he requested the reduction granted to foreign citizens enrolled in the Italian university and was thus enabled to pay just half of the university fees⁷. He was 41 years old and had an admirable scientific and professional CV: specializing in nervous diseases, he had worked with all the teachers of first rank, whom he did not fail to mention in his request for registration in the University of Pisa. He attached the certificates for his qualifications and his list of publications (unfortunately missing from his file) and on 27 November 1933 he presented it to the rector, Armando Carlini, who was an admirer of the philosopher Giovanni Gentile and an ardent fascist⁸.

Doctor Goldberg was admitted to year 6 of the Faculty of Medicine, with the requirement to take four supplementary examinations. He quickly passed these, all with the highest marks, and sat an extra one: the exam in legal medicine⁹. He even enrolled on other courses, from Italian literature and culture, which he attended, to surgery of the nervous system and physical education¹⁰. He clearly also knew Italian well. He graduated on 7 July 1934 with 110/110.

The degree in medicine from the University of Pisa did not, however, allow him to practice, as is clearly specified in the diploma signed by rector Carlini. So in the same year of 1934 Erich undertook the national examination at the Royal University of Perugia and obtained his licence to practice¹¹.

⁷ ASUPi, *Carriere studenti*, f. «Erich Goldberg», request on stamped paper from E. Goldberg to the rector of the University of Pisa, 27 November 1933; and the German Consulate in Livorno, certificate of German nationality, Livorno, 14 December 1933, signed by the German Consul Rudolf Braun, with the signature certified by the Livorno prefect, 23 December 1933.

⁸ Ibid., request on stamped paper to the rector, Pisa, 27 November 1933.

⁹ Ibid., Royal University of Pisa, exam certificate for the use of the degree committee, 5 July 1934.

¹⁰ Ibid., university record, with list of 10 courses in the years 1933-34, with professors' signatures for enrolment and for attendance.

¹¹ Ibid., Royal University of Pisa, degree certificate issued 12 February 1935 and Royal University of Perugia, certificate of qualification to practice, 1 February 1935.

Making a new life or a brief interval

In Pisa he lived at via Cristoforo Colombo 27¹². At the same address, at Miniati's, lived Annemarie Eleonore Curth, like him a doctor of medicine, almost twelve years younger, a graduate of Heidelberg and likewise enrolled in year 6 in the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery in Pisa. Among the papers in her personal file, apart from the coincidence of the same address, beginning with a document dated 22 October 1934 the student began to sign herself Curth Goldberg¹³. Whether the two had met in Pisa or before is not known: in any case Erich married her in Pisa in August 1934, after graduating.

Together they moved to Florence. From 22 November 1934 they took up residence at Lungarno degli Archibusieri n. 4, an old palace near the Ponte Vecchio, where the pensione Quisisiana was a meeting place for foreigners, the well-educated and the well-to-do¹⁴. And there they received patients, as is evidenced by a stamp with address and telephone number on the back of a photo of him: he was a specialist in «nervous diseases», and she, having graduated in the meantime, a specialist in «women and children»¹⁵.

To go into private practice in Italy, it was obligatory to be enrolled in the register of the Fascist medical union. On 9 February 1935, Erich presented a

¹² His address is derived from here, a request on stamped paper to the rector, Pisa, 27 November 1933.

¹³ The Pisa address and the variation in signature will be found in various papers in AOMFi, MCC, FP, f. n. 769, "Annamaria Eleonora Curth Murray-Aynsley". With regard to this, note that, just to complicate things, in at least a couple of letters the date is wrong: Curth writes 1933 but it is actually 1934, as can be seen from the contents of the letter and from the Fascist year. That the marriage had taken place in August 1934 in Pisa emerges from a CV for her in the voluminous file in the National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA), A434, *Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Immigration*, f. 1948/3/11818, «Goldberg-Curth Admission», Annemarie Eleonore Curth Goldberg, «Curriculum vitae», Perth, 12 September 1946 <<https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au>> (accessed by login 26 October 2020).

¹⁴ AOMFi, MCC, FP, n. 770, «Erich Goldberg», Municipality of Florence. Registry office, certificate of residence, 1 February 1935. For some information and historical photos of the hotel, which still exists, <<https://www.hoteldegliorafi.it>>; the structure took the name of Hotel degli Orafi after the bomb in via dei Georgofili <<https://ricerca.repubblica.it>>.

¹⁵ The undated photo is the one published here in the [gallery](#), always the same in various issues and with various stamps on the back; cf. NAA, A434, *Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Immigration*, f. 1948/3/11818, «Goldberg-Curth Admission».

request to the Fascist union of the province of Florence¹⁶. He certainly came into contact with colleagues in his field, but we do not know if he worked in any clinic or hospital; Tuscany enjoyed an international reputation in psychiatry, and, as elsewhere, special institutes had sprung up for the treatment of the «war neurotics», the most important of which was directed by the neuropsychiatrist Arnaldo Pieraccini, a follower of the German school of neurology, the brother of Gaetano, also a doctor, both antifascists¹⁷.

But for Erich and Annemarie the opportunity to work did not last long even in Italy, despite the fact that they felt well received.

The first of Mussolini's racial measures were issued at the beginning of September 1938. At once, that same month, the Fascist medical union in Florence distributed a «personal card» to its members to register them on a racial basis. On the card he completed and returned to the union, the German doctor declared, lying, that his parents were not Jewish and that he was a Protestant, although registered in the Jewish community. When asked about a possible religious conversion, he replied that he did not belong to any religion, nor did his father, and that he had been baptized on 17 January 17 1895¹⁸.

On 3 February 1939 Erich signed in his own hand the receipts for the two registered letters with which the union communicated to him and to his wife, as to other foreign Jewish doctors, that they had been removed from the Register because of Jewish race. On 14 February the Goldbergs submitted a petition to the prefecture (the copy is missing), and asked for a temporary

¹⁶ AOMFi, MCC, FP, n. 770, «Erich Goldberg», n. 770, request on stamped paper from E. Goldberg to the prefecture administrator, 9 February 1935, at the bottom in pencil: «iscritto il 30/03/1935».

¹⁷ For the neurological institute created in Arezzo by Arnaldo Pieraccini, brother of Gaetano, like him a doctor and anti-fascist, already expelled from the hospital and from the register, and for his specialist interest in the war insane, see Marco Romano, *Soldati e neuropsichiatria nell'Italia della Grande Guerra [Soldiers and neuropsychiatry in the Italy of the Great War]*, Florence, FUP, 2020, pp. 115-138. Gaetano Pieraccini, future mayor of Florence in the reconstruction, was expelled from the hospital of Santa Maria Nuova for incompatibility with the directives of the regime.

¹⁸ AOMFi, *Miscellanea non inventariata*, «Scheda Personale Dott. Erich Goldberg», 20 September 1938.

permit to continue doing their work. In just two days, the petition was rejected, on the grounds they had no "grounds to appeal". And nothing was granted them¹⁹.

Registrations for Australia

Thus they were obliged to leave once again. Mussolini's first racial measures, launched in September targetted foreign Jews and laid down that those who had arrived in Italy after 1919 had to leave Italian territories, even those outside the peninsula, within six months of the decree²⁰. Among the foreign doctors removed from the register like them was the German Willy Oppler, from Breslau, and the Pole Karl, or Carlo, Schapira, who made it to New York; their colleagues from Florence, Mario Volterra e Giacomo Ancona, also headed for the United States and settled in San Francisco; others, like Benjamin Jolles, reached Great Britain.

The Goldbergs decided to go even further. On 15 February 1939 he filled in the request form for a visa to enter Australia: he stated that his wife would accompany him; that they had their German passports and £300 sterling; and that he intended to settle in Perth, where friends, whose names and address he provided, vouched for them. He attached certificates of «good character» issued by the city and the court; for the certificate of good health he turned to the chief consultant at the hospital in Fiesole and to his colleague, the director of the «Vincenzo Chiarugi» psychiatric hospital in Florence, and the latter certified, on stamped paper, that the couple had never been admitted to the mental hospital in Florence²¹.

¹⁹ AOMFi, MCC, FP, n. 770, «Erich Goldberg», Fascist doctors' union to the Florence prefecture, 16 February 1939.

²⁰ RDL 7 September 1938, n. 1381, *Provvedimenti nei confronti degli ebrei stranieri*, GU 12 September 1938, n. 208.

²¹ NAA, A434, *Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Immigration*, f. 1948/3/11818, «Goldberg-Curth Admission», statement on stamped paper from the director of the psychiatric hospital of Florence, 13 February 1939, who at that time was the psychiatrist Gino Simonelli, successor to Paolo Amaldi; and also a certificate from Rodolfo Benelli, consultant physician at

From a voluminous file preserved in the National Archives of Australia it becomes clear that Erich was counting on an important recommendation: the Anglican archbishop of Perth. The archbishop wrote to the Secretary of the Department of the Interior in Canberra: Australia was short of doctors specialising in nervous disorders; Dr Goldberg was most suitable to take up a vacant position and was under pressure, since he and his wife were German Jews who had been exiled twice, and their expulsion order lapsed on 12 March²². In addition the secretary of the Provincial Immigration Committee of the Anglican Church in Western Australia, Alfred Arthur Robertson, intervened:

Dr Goldberg is an unusually highly qualified specialist in nervous disorders with degrees from several universities, both German and Italian, and he has friends in Perth who will arrange for his welfare upon arrival. He is not without money and he is registered by the appropriate medical boards in Germany, Italy and London. His wife is also a doctor in practice... Both applicants speak several languages, including English»²³.

In short the Goldbergs were not the normal migrants they were used to. If they wished to come to Australia it was because, «being non-Aryan Christians», they had been expelled from Germany in 1933 and for the same reasons also from Italy, «the Italian viewpoint now having been changed». Robertson persisted in asking the leader of the opposition in the Commonwealth Parliament to do something, and in his turn the Labor Party leader John Curtin approached the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, Joseph A. Carrodus, undoubtedly influential in the politics of immigration but, to judge from correspondence,

the Ospedale di Camerata in Fiesole, 9 February 1939 (in English).

²² NAA, A434, *Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Immigration*, f. 1948/3/11818, «Goldberg-Curth Admission», Erich Goldberg, «Application to the Secretary, Department of Interior», Florence, 15 February 1939; and letters from the Archbishop of Perth to the Secretary, 28 February 1939 and 6 April 1939.

²³ *Ibid.*, A.A. Robertson to John Curtin (Canberra), 22 April 1939, and a telegram to him of 28 April 1939, with the letter from John Curtin to the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, 1 May 1939. From 1943 Robertson was mainly involved in organizing the emigration of British children to Western Australia; about 200 arrived, welcomed at Swan Homes: see the archive sources and photos in <<https://www.findandconnect.gov.au>> (accessed 4 November 2020).

not especially sympathetic²⁴.

Two days later, on 28 April, the Secretary informed «His Grace», the Archbishop of Perth: the permit was approved, and they would send it to him on payment of one Australian pound, for him to forward to Dr Goldberg. Informed by the archbishop, on 4 May Robertson sent the receipt for the fee paid and, explaining to Carrodus that they would reimburse him, he asked for the permit to be sent to the authorities in Singapore, where Goldberg and his wife had now arrived, so that they could resume their journey²⁵. A cablegram for Singapore went out on 9 May. But the Australian Department of the Interior also wanted a guarantee that Goldberg would be in possession of 350 Australian pounds on disembarkation, in addition to the reimbursement of shipping costs.

An intense exchange of messages between the people involved went on for months about these issues; on 22 July Robertson sent the repayments for postal expenses, advising that he had not heard from Goldberg, who was still in Singapore.

Exactly when and how much the person in question learned of the situation is not known.

In Singapore

From Florence, at the beginning of March 1939, Erich and his wife had obtained registration from the *General Medical Council* (GMC)²⁶, the body which held the records of doctors qualified to practice in British territories, including the dominions and colonies. They embarked on 12 April; the deadlines of the law

²⁴ Cf. Lyn Anne Riddett, *Carrodus, Joseph Aloysius (1885–1961)*, in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Melbourne University Press, vol. 13, 1993, under name, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University <<http://adb.anu.edu.au>> (accessed 4 November 2020).

²⁵ NAA, A434, *Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Immigration*, f. 1948/3/11818, «Goldberg-Curth Admission», A.A. Robertson to J.A. Carrodus, 4 May 1939; all correspondence referred to in the text is in there.

²⁶ *UK Medical Registers, 1859-1959*, accessible under name at <<https://www.ancestry.com/>> (accessed by login 27 October 2020); he and his wife are found registered on 6 March 1939.

under which foreign Jews had to leave Italy had now long expired and they were afraid. On 1 May they arrived in Singapore, a highly developed British colony, with a large naval base and a population mainly of Chinese and immigrants. They wanted to carry on, because Erich had the chance of being taken on as a neuropsychiatrist in Perth, but they could not do so without the visa to enter Australia. They had asked for it two and a half months earlier but it had not arrived. They did not know what to do, Annemarie recounted years later²⁷.

In Singapore the director of medical services offered Erich a post as assistant medical superintendent in the island's old asylum, the Central Mental Hospital in Tanjong Rambutan, a small town near Perak. It was an official appointment, which thus regularized their status with documents, but the doctor must start work immediately, from 1 June: take it or leave it. He accepted. After which, it is not clear when, arrived the longed for *landing permit*. Goldberg then tried to backtrack; they certainly would rather live in Australia because they would feel much safer there²⁸. There were other Germans in the area, and with war imminent four «Aryans» left, leaving fourteen, according to the Singapore English language daily, which mentioned among these Dr Goldberg and his wife²⁹. They persuaded him to stay, as he himself recounts, assuring him he would have available considerable resources for research, and in the event of war he would be well treated³⁰.

²⁷ NAA, A434, *Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Immigration*, f. 1948/3/11818, «Goldberg-Curth Admission», letter from A.E. Curth Goldberg to A.R. Peters, Department of Immigration, Sydney, 30 April 1946. The wife's reconstruction of events is evidenced by a previous document from the archdeacon of Perth, sent to the Department of the Interior in Canberra, 31 October 1941, *ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Landing permit n. 32102. It was valid, however, only for a year, until 9 May 1940.

²⁹ *Germans To Stay in Kuala Lumpur, from the Correspondent at Kuala Lumpur*, «The Straits Times», 3 September 1939, p. 15 <<https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg>> (accessed 7 November 2020); The article, however, contains various inaccuracies on the work of Erich's wife and on the numbers: it counted Czechoslovakians and Austrians as Germans, and in addition, the 14 were with wives, so it was 28 persons in total.

³⁰ NAA, A434, *Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Immigration*, f. 1948/3/11818, «Goldberg-Curth Admission», letter from Goldberg to the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, Government of the Australian Commonwealth, Singapore 23 October 1941.

In the internment camps: almost on holiday?

The promises were not kept; and when the two-year contract was almost up he declined the offer to stay and work in that mental hospital, which was overcrowded, without staff, with patients suffering from non-psychiatric illnesses, and where scientific research was impossible³¹. What he had not foreseen was that without this state employment he was deprived of grounds for exemption from treatment as an *enemy alien*: he would be arrested and interned. The permit to leave for Australia, received late, had expired the year before³². Although in the press they wanted it to be believed that in the Singapore internment camps «Germans are happy», «all are bronzed and fit», thanks to good food, comfortable accommodation, sporting activities, etc.,³³ the situation was quite terrible. Certainly Goldberg did not want to end up interned. A cablegram marked «confidential», sent on 16 August 1941 from Kuala Lumpur on headed paper of the department of the Prime Minister of the Federated Malay States, asked if the Australian government could grant a new visa to Dr Goldberg and his wife, Germans of Jewish origin. It explained that Goldberg had been a doctor in the Imperial German Air Force in 1917-18 and this had made him unpopular with local public opinion: he had been granted the opportunity to leave Malaya by the end of that month, after which he and his wife would otherwise have been interned. They did not have valid identity

³¹ His persistent interest in research in the neurological field and the lack of adequate staff in the mental hospital are also testified to in the British Singapore newspaper in a letter to the editor and a short article; cf. Dr Erich Goldberg, «*Soul surgery*», *Portuguese Scientist's Discoveries*, «The Straits Times», 7 March 1940, p. 4 <<https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg>>, and the blurb *Shock Therapy at the Mental Hospital*, ivi, 2 August 1940, p. 11 <<https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg>> (both accessed 7 November 2020). See further Y.K. Lee, *The Mental Diseases Hospital, Singapore (1st 100 years)*, «Singapore Medical Journal», 34, 1993, pp. 67-73.

³² NAA, A434, *Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Immigration*, f. 1948/3/11818, «Goldberg-Curth Admission», Landing permit n. 32102, valid to 9 May 1940.

³³ *Somewhere in Singapore 37 Germans are Happy. We Take You into the Internees' Camp*, «Sunday Tribune», 7 January 1940, p. 3 <<https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg>> (accessed 7 November 2020). In the same vein also *Singapore Internment Camp Praised*, «The Straits Times», 10 April 1940, p. 10 <<https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg>> (accessed 7 November 2020). The police raid on homes at night to take 25 other Germans and deport them to the camps with the Italians no longer suggests a pleasant holiday: *25 Germans Rounded Up*, «The Straits Times», 4 July 1940, p. 10.

documents, but they would have had these issued to them if the Australian government granted the visa, as the writer hoped.³⁴

Someone, however, recommended in pen, at the bottom of the page, that permission be not granted.

The copies, which are decoded, either lack signatures or have illegible signatures. It is unclear who is the sender, who is the recipient, and especially who is to decide, beyond the specified titles (for example The Secretary) and sometimes the names typed on the sheet, like that of Colonel Longfield Lloyd. Clearly the secret services were involved in the matter, because Eric Edwin Longfield Lloyd (1890-1957), an Australian, a highly regarded expert in Japanese politics, with years of service in the Pacific, was from March 1941 director of the new Commonwealth Security Service, though involved in such disputes that he was replaced in January 1942³⁵. Admitting the Goldbergs to Australia – as the Security Service in Canberra conveyed several times –, was «considered undesirable from a security point of view». But it was also «undesirable that they should be permanently interned here» was the telegraph message from Singapore: a reply was urgently needed; the date had already expired³⁶.

On 19 September an opening, by cablegram, «SECRET»: the Commonwealth government was «prepared to accept for internment the two aliens in question [...] on express understanding that they will not be released in Australia and that you will arrange for their deportation from Australia after

³⁴ NAA, A434, *Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Immigration*, f. 1948/3/11818, «Goldberg-Curth Admission», cablegram booked in the name of the colonel, High Commissioner, Kuala Lumpur, 16 August 1941 with annotations from others, 17, 20, and 28 August.

³⁵ Cf. David Sadleir, *Lloyd, Eric Edwin Longfield (1890–1957)*, in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 15, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 2010, under name, later National Centre of Biography, Australian National University <<http://adb.anu.edu.au>> (accessed 2 November 2020).

³⁶ For the sequence of communications, in chronological order and in the text, I refer to NAA, A434, *Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Immigration*, f. 1948/3/11818, «Goldberg-Curth Admission», draft of the «confidential» letter from Canberra, 21 August 1941, and draft 27 August; but from Singapore 12 September 1941 and 18 September 1941.

the war ends»³⁷.

Now they were no longer Dr Erich Goldberg and Dr Annemarie Goldberg, but *aliens* without identity, to be interned and deported.

What happened then?

His version of the facts, and indifference

A 9-page memoir – Singapore, Goodwood Hotel, 24 October 1941 – addressed to the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, Government of the Australian Commonwealth, written by Erich Goldberg himself, provides his version of the facts, or at least the version that he wished to make known to those who had the power to grant or reject his request for a second *landing permit* for Australia³⁸.

It was a detailed and distressing letter, replete with citations. He summarised the ups and downs of his departure from Italy right up to his resignation from the state mental hospital in Tanjong Rambutan. His troubles had begun at that point, because the government of Perak, which had first offered him a renewal of his post and then accepted his resignation, then gave notice that he must leave the Malay States. If he and his wife had not done so by the end of July, they would have them arrested as *enemy aliens*. In conclusion: they considered he was a Nazi. Quite illogically, observed Goldberg, not only because they had not considered him as such during the war while he was working as a government psychiatrist, but because he was on the contrary a «refugee from Nazi oppression»: an established specialist doctor, he had left Germany not because he had to – he said he could have gone on for another two years –, but because he did not want to contribute even indirectly to supporting Nazism. So he had moved to Italy; and at the age of 41 he had started again as

³⁷ Ibid., cablegram from the Secretary of Department of the Interior to the governor of the Singapore settlements, 19 September 1941.

³⁸ Ibid., letter from Goldberg to the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, Government of the Australian Commonwealth, Singapore 23 October 1941.

a student, then succeeded in remaking a good practice for himself: his speciality was much in demand during war time.

Italy, however, had become «Nazi»; he had then decided to leave again: «to save my soul».

Goldberg appeared to claim, underestimating Mussolini's racial laws, brought in, according to him, from Germany, that he would have been able to remain in Italy. If he had not done so, and had sacrificed a comfortable way of life, it was to remain true to his moral values. He cited the words of the bishop of Chichester, to the effect that enemies in war could not be identified by nationality but only on principles. He recalled the regulations of the British government, which having interned refugees after the onset of war, was releasing foreign doctors who were working to help the population. Why, on the contrary, did Perak wish to intern the only neurologist in the whole of the Malay States and the only woman doctor in Ipoh (where his wife practiced), who could help the country? To punish him for resigning from the asylum. They wanted to imprison them or drive them out. But where could they go? With their German passports expired no country was willing to accept them. Goldberg said that he knew the government of the Malay States had explored in August the possibility of the Australian government's admitting them, and he knew that the response had been negative. Since, however, he did not know how that request had been made, he intended to provide information which was correct and, in his view, convincing. A lawyer in Kuala Lumpur had warned him that according to the High Commissioner the negative response from the Australian government was due to the fact that he had served in the German air force during the war and should have been interned for this. Goldberg wanted to clarify this and defend himself: in 1917-18 he had been not a pilot, but a medical officer with exclusively medical duties; as a doctor he was a «non-combatant», according to the international Red Cross convention, which the Malay States also recognized.

With their skills, he and his wife could still be useful to the British people, and

would gladly do so as good Europeans. Given the recent political change in Australia, he renewed his visa application³⁹.

Escaping to Australia

He was well informed. A fortnight before in Australia there was a new government, and from 7 October at its head was John Curtin, who in 1939 had taken an interest in his case (assuming that Goldberg knew), at the request of the Anglican archbishop. While the prime minister had changed – and he was totally absorbed in the war in the Pacific, negotiations with the United States and Churchill's complaints – the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, to whom Goldberg was appealing, was the same as before: Joseph Carrodus, an old-school official who showed a persistent and considerable disregard for Jewish refugees, widely shared by the rest of the federal government, which was concerned only that they should not come into the country⁴⁰.

The long letter from the anti-Nazi German doctor was sent to the Secretary from the archdeacon of the Anglican Church in Perth, who pleaded Goldberg's case, and reminded him that as far back as 1939 the bishop had asked for a *landing permit* for the couple, and that the reply from Canberra had been positive⁴¹.

This time, though, it was not. A memo from the Department of the Interior retraced the issue in 8 points, from the landing permit granted to the prominent people who had recommended it, leading to this conclusion: the request for the second permit was rejected. For what reasons, it was not said;

³⁹ Ibid., letter from Goldberg to the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, Government of the Australian Commonwealth, Singapore, 23 October 1941, which was sent to accompany his letter from the archdeacon of Perth, 31 October 1941.

⁴⁰ Questa attitudine di Carrodus è sottolineata anche da L.A. Riddett, *Carrodus, Joseph Aloysius*, cit., a proposito della mancata accoglienza in Australia di un grande numero di rifugiati ebrei tra il 1936 e il '45.

⁴¹ NAA, A434, *Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Immigration*, f. 1948/3/11818, «Goldberg-Curth Admission», letter from the Anglican archdeacon of Perth to the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, Government of the Australian Commonwealth, 31 October 1941, who also sent the aforementioned letter from Goldberg, 23 October 1941.

but someone had clearly noted it in the margin of the archdeacon's letter: the Goldbergs were German nationals and «as such» were not eligible⁴².

That not all Germans were Nazis was a statement of the obvious not taken into consideration.

The couple were interned in Singapore in November 1941 as *enemy aliens*.

Years later, an investigation source reported that a certain Dr Murdoch, superintendent of the psychiatric hospital where the German doctor also worked, had accused his colleague of making anti-British propaganda among the native personnel and of showing a lot of interest in naval movements. This Murdoch, the source claimed, harboured a strong personal dislike for Goldberg⁴³. Perhaps out of envy; perhaps the highly qualified neuropsychiatrist seemed to him a formidable rival, one to be got rid of, since it was Murdoch who moved to Perth to work, as the other asked to be able to do in order to save himself.

Nothing of this is mentioned in Erich Goldberg's memoir. Yet being suspected of acting as a «fifth columnist» tormented him at the point of despair. While awaiting the verdict, he attempted suicide, his wife seems to have revealed as she tried to protect him⁴⁴.

Escaping from hell

That the second request for admission to Australia had been refused was communicated, perhaps not to them, but certainly to the archdeacon on 8 December 1941⁴⁵. A tragic date: on that day the Japanese invaded the Malay States and launched a coordinated attack, bombing Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, Manila, Hong Kong, Singapore. By mid-January 1942 the defence of Singapore

⁴² Ibid., Department of the Interior, Memorandum, Perth 2 dicembre 1941.

⁴³ Ibid., Attorney General's Department, Investigation Branch, Memorandum, Perth, 1° May 1946.

⁴⁴ Ibid., copy of Memorandum, no date or year, but c. September 1946.

⁴⁵ Ibid., a series of confidential or secret telegrams and with the Minister of the Interior and various correspondents, between September 1941 and January 1942. See at least the copy of the communication of refusal to Archdeacon L.W. Parry, December 8, 1941.

came to seem difficult, the city was undergoing heavy aerial bombardments. At first it was said the the population was not in real danger because the Malay States would be defended, but among the Europeans the women were encouraged to leave with their children for Australia, South Africa or Great Britain, while men under 50 years of age were asked to remain and work. In any case, no-one could leave Singapore without permission⁴⁶.

At the end of January 1942 it seems that a chance of embarking for Australia had opened also for the Goldbergs, perhaps from further pressure on the part of the Anglican diocese of Perth or perhaps by a personal approach of their own: in a couple of «secret» cablegrams of 23 and 30 January the question was: where were they to send Goldberg and his wife? To the port of Sydney or that of Melbourne? «Both qualified doctors», they also had 20 cases of books and instruments to transport⁴⁷. The cases were loaded on 10 February on the *Gordon*, and were duly unloaded at Fremantle⁴⁸.

It was a matter of a few days. Everyone wanted to escape from that hell. The British troops suffered increasing losses and surrendered, among the civilians it was a massacre.

According to Dr Annemarie Goldberg's later account, on 12 February 1942 she and her husband received an order for evacuation: they had to leave the island immediately. It seems that in the initial confusion of embarkation they lost

⁴⁶ A short but effective report is on the website of the Muntok Peace Museum in Muntok, Banka Island, Indonesia <<http://muntokpeacemuseum.org>> (accessed 6 November 2020), opened at the site of the massacre of civilians and nurses on 16 February 1942, and which was set up on the initiative of the family members of the prisoners and the Malayan Volunteers' Group to remember what happened to the civilians who were held prisoner by the Japanese from February 1942 to November 1945. Thank you very much to Dr. Judie Balcombe, whose grandfather died in Muntok prison Muntok Jail in August 1944, for introducing me to this site and for the information on the controversial case of Annemarie Curth Goldberg.

⁴⁷ NAA, A434, *Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Immigration*, f. 1948/3/11818, «Goldberg-Curth Admission», copy of the cablegram of the Governor of the Straits Settlements, Singapore, 23 January 1942 and 30 January 1941 [*sic* but 1942], received 31 January 1942. These are the latest documents relating to Erich Goldberg, in the voluminous file on the admission to Australia of him and his wife.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Letter from Kim Beazley to Arthur Calwell, Minister for Immigration, Perth, 16 August 1946.

sight of each other. Only she got on board the Vyner Brooke, overladen with passengers, mostly women and children. On 14 February the ship was bombed by the Japanese and sunk. She was among the few survivors. Erich Goldberg was reported missing⁴⁹. His fate has never been resolved. Perhaps he was killed by the Japanese; someone has speculated that he might instead have been killed by someone who thought he was spying for them.

Even the statements by his wife were contradictory, and her entire behaviour during the years she remained in Japanese camps in Indonesia is quite controversial. Dr Erich Goldberg had lost his life on 14 February 1942, killed by a Japanese bomb «while he was providing help to the wounded and sick», his widow reported to the Doctors' Association of Florence in 1963, after over twenty years of unspeakable hardships⁵⁰.

In the autumn of 1944, after the Liberation of Florence, the reconstituted provincial association of doctors-surgeons enrolled Dr Erich Goldberg in the professional register ex officio, as it did automatically for all those formerly enrolled who had been struck out because of the racial laws, abolished at last. As no news had been received concerning him, the Council of the Association resolved on 31 December 1948 that his name should be deleted from the Register, because of unavailability and arrears.

Of him and his tragic end in the Far East more than six years before no-one was aware⁵¹.

Major publications

- *Das Auricularissymptom der Meningitis: Zu dem gleichnamigen Aufsatz von Herrn Dr. Bruno Mendel in Nr. 17 der Klin. Wochenschr.* [The auricular symptom of meningitis: On the essay of the same name by Dr. Bruno

⁴⁹ Ibid., Annemarie Eleonore Curth Goldberg, Curriculum vitae, Perth, 12 September 1946.

⁵⁰ AOMFi, MCC, FP, f. n. 769, «Annamaria Eleonora Curth Murray-Aynsley», Dr Murray-Aynsley to the ENPAM and to the Association of Doctors of the province of Florence, 18 March 1963.

⁵¹ AOMFi, MCC, FP, n. 770, «Erich Goldberg», minutes of the meeting of the Council of the Association of Doctors of the province of Florence, 31 dicembre 1948.

Mendel...], «Klinische Wochenschrift», 2, 29, 1923, pp. 1365-1365.

- *Über die Wirkungsweise des Trichloräthylens (Chlorylens) und die Indikationen für seine therapeutische Anwendung* [On the mode of action of trichlorethylene (chlorylene) and the indications for its therapeutic use], «Deutsche Zeitschrift für Nervenheilkunde», 82 1-2, 1924, pp. 10-16.
- N.B. Other publications of a medical kind – author Goldberg Erich –, found in the catalogue of the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek, are not listed here because the name may apply to other authors.

Archival sources

- Archivio di deposito dell'Ordine dei medici di Firenze (AOMFi), *Fondo Medici chirurghi cessati* (MCC), *Fascicoli personali* (FP), f. n. 770, «Erich Goldberg».
- AOMFi, MCC, FP, f. n. 769, «Annamaria Eleonora Curth Murray-Aynsley».
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Patrizia Guarnieri

Translated by Tom Dawkes

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