

Guta Gluckmann Medshiboshski

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Escaping to France from tsarist Russia to rejoin her husband, a political exile, she settled with him in Italy from 1913. Guta had three small children, but she did not intend to put her university degree and her ambitions away in a drawer. She repeated her medical degree, and in 1922 opened her own surgery, next to her husband's. In the whole province of Florence there were just two women enrolled in the Doctors' Association; she was the third and the most determined, given the opposition she had to face. In 1939 the Fascist Union deprived her and all Jewish professionals — but first of all foreigners — of their license to work. Yet «Aryan» patients continued to want to be treated by the «Russian doctor», who was instead denounced by her colleagues and convicted of practising unlawfully.

A Russian woman graduate at the start of the 20th century

The daughter of the merchant Itzig and Ester Berislavski, she was born near Riga (then in the Russian Empire, which later became the capital of Latvia) namely in Dinaminde, on 5 February 1885, as shown in the authenticated birth certificate and various other documents, although it is sometimes found that she was born on 9 November 1885, in Tukum (which between the two wars changed to Tukums, in Russia, later in Latvia), a city of the Russian Empire 36 miles from Riga¹. At the end of the 19th century, this was the third largest city after Moscow and St. Petersburg, with a predominantly Latvian population and large percentages of Germans,

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¹ In the discrepancy over dates and places of birth, I prefer what appears in several documents of the country of origin, kept in the archive of the Doctors' Association of Florence (AOMFi), *Fondo Medici Cessati (MCC), Fascicoli personali (FP)*, f. n. 349, «Gluckmann Meggiboschi Guta», including the certified translation by the Ministry of the Interior, on stamped paper, of the extract from the birth register issued by the Rabbi of Riga on 27 April 1912 and then validated by the Russian consulate in Florence, 11 November 1918. Tukum or Tukum with another date appears, however, in subsequent and Italian documents, including her degree from the University of Florence, December 17, 1921, and the certificate of «Residence of foreigners in Italy», issued by the Police Headquarters of Florence on 22 December 1934, in ASUFI, AC, SS, f. «Gluckmann Meggiboschi Guta».

Russians, and about 6% Jews. The official language was German, and from 1891 Russian. Guta had studied in Charkov (Russia, now Kharkiv, Ukraine), an intellectual centre and an important railway junction; and in the university, founded in 1830, she graduated in medicine in 1907. A few years later she married the doctor Josip Medshiboshski in Riga, probably in 1911, and on 15 May 1912 their first son Abraham was born.

Exiles in France

Josip was suspected of anti-tsarist activities and risked arrest. They therefore decided that he would leave for France by taking ship in Odessa. Guta would join him as soon as possible. Alone, and with a nursing baby, she faced a long and difficult train journey to Paris. Little or nothing is known about how they lived at this period. In the French capital it seems that she was also able to follow a postgraduate course in dentistry, probably in 1912, when she had a birth certificate for educational purposes, issued by the Rabbi of Riga, according to which she was the daughter of Izik Glickman [sic], merchant, and Ester Leibovna². In addition to Russian and German, which were the languages of her country, Guta evidently knew French and would soon learn Italian.

Emigrating to Italy

From France, in fact, Guta and Josip wanted to move to Italy. In 1913, at the beginning of August, they settled in Florence, where the Russian presence of aristocrats, diplomats and intellectual travelers was strengthening with the arrival of exiles and was starting to structure itself in institutions, literary salons, magazines, associations, which maintained relationships with Italian intellectuals and other foreigners, especially British and American, already numerous in the

² The certificate, Riga 21 April 1912, was resubmitted by her for university use eight years later, and is kept in ASUFI, AC, SS, f. «Gluckmann Meggiboschi Guta». The details, however, of Josip and Guta's movements from Riga to Paris, in unspecified years, and from Paris to Italy in 1913, I owe to the accounts of their descendants, the Boralevi Meggiboschi family, whom I thank, grandchildren from the maternal line of Guta and Giuseppe Meggiboschi.

Tuscan capital. Precisely because of the increase of Russians in Florence, the Orthodox church was built in 1899 between Viale Milton and Via Leone X, announced in the city newspaper «La Nazione», which would become an important centre of the Russian colony³. The qualification that Guta and Josip had gained when they were in Russia was not recognized in Italy. So, in order to work and support his family, Josip enrolled in Medicine at the Istituto di Studi Superiori Pratici e di Perfezionamento. He was admitted to the fifth year; he quickly graduated in 1914 and began to work as a doctor in local authority practices in Tuscany. They moved in line with his frequent transfers: they were living in the province of Arezzo, in Montevarchi, when Guta gave birth to her second child on 16 April 1915, to whom they gave the name of Ester, after her maternal grandmother. When Flora was born on 9 June 1917, they were residing in San Giovanni Valdarno, also in the Arezzo area, and in the summer of 1920 they were living in Capannoli, in the province of Pisa⁴. Meanwhile Guta decided she wanted to be like her husband. She wanted to get her degree in Italy too. So she could start doing her job.

Bureaucracy and determination

It was not easy, however, even to have the qualification already gained recognized, so that she would not be asked to start her studies from scratch. After the October Revolution in 1917, the war, the cession of the Baltic countries to the Germans, Germany's capitulation, and finally Latvia's independence, with Riga as capital on 18 November 1918, it was practically impossible to have the documentation of her previous student career sent. Nonetheless, on a sheet of stamped paper, on 21 November 1919, Guta Medshibosiski (or Medshiboshiki) requested enrollment in the fifth year of the Faculty of Medicine of the Institute of Higher Studies: «given the current political state in Russia and the complete lack of communications, it is

³ *La chiesa russa a Firenze*, «La Nazione», 41, 22 ottobre 1899, p. 2. See Marcello Garzaniti, *La comunità ortodossa russa a Firenze tra Ottocento e Novecento*, «Annali di storia di Firenze», 8, 2013, pp. 285-295.

⁴ Comune di Capannoli e Circondario di Pisa, «Stato di Famiglia di Meggiboschi Giuseppe», handwritten certificate, 12 July 1920, preserved by the Boralevi Meggiboschi family.

not possible to [...] present the original documents and therefore [declares] that she has obtained a diploma in dental surgery [...] equivalent to the fourth year of an Italian university at the imperial university of Charkoff (Russia) »⁵.

The application was accompanied by various letters from Count Moussine Pouchkine (Ivan Musin-Pushkin), consul general of Russia in Florence, who was also president of the Florence section of the «Russian League for the resurgence of the homeland in close union with the Allies», who for patriotic and anti-Bolshevik purposes had requested support from the prefect of Florence in 1918⁶. In a certified translation by the secretary of the Russian embassy in Rome, a testimonial signed by the consul listed 15 exams and declared that Mrs. Meggiboschi Augusta — as she was named in Italian style — had passed, because otherwise «he would not have been able to obtain the aforementioned diploma».⁷

This deductive statement of 30 October 1919, on paper from the «Consulat Impérial de Russie, Florence» (the word «Impérial» was crossed out in pen), with authenticated signature on 5 November, was evidently not enough. Following this, on 3 January 1920 the consul added that Mrs. Guta Meggiboschi «was undoubtedly liable» also for two other examinations in medical and surgical pathology, «without which she certainly could not obtain the diploma», as they were compulsory.

Eventually, upon payment of university fees, and with a further declaration by the consul on 11 November 1919, Guta was admitted to the fifth year of Medicine, and was registered as the daughter of Isaac and Esther Glikman [sic], who had studied at the University of Karcof [sic] or Charkov (now Charkiv, in Ukraine), as shown in the pre-filled enrollment form, signed by her on 13 February 1920, with her married surname now Italianized⁸. In that academic year 1920-21 there were three other Russian students at the Istituto di Studi Superiori in Florence, two of them in the Faculty of Medicine⁹.

⁵ ASUFi, AC, SS, f. «Gluckmann Meggiboschi Guta».

⁶ On the Russian League, see <<http://www.russinitalia.it>> (accessed 20 October 2020). The headquarters were in viale Duca di Genova 30, which after Fascism became viale Giovanni Amendola.

⁷ ASUFi, AC, SS, f. «Gluckmann Meggiboschi Guta».

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Giuseppina La Rocca, *L'aquila bicipite e il tenero Iris. Tracce russe a Firenze nel primo Novecento*

There was still the problem of attending classes. At that period, the Meggiboschi family were living in Capannoli in the province of Pisa, and coming to Florence, with three small children to look after and no family help, was another by no means small undertaking. Guta was not the type to give up: she took eleven exams within a few days of each other — including medicine of mental and nervous diseases with Professor Eugenio Tanzi, hygiene with Achille Sclavo, paediatric medicine with Carlo Comba. These men were luminaries; and the Russian woman did not worry about getting quite low marks in the exams for the sake of obtaining the coveted degree.

She graduated on 14 December 1921 with a mark of 80/110, attesting to the certificate signed by Giulio Chiarugi, chairman of the committee and dean of the Division of Medicine¹⁰. For her thesis, on alveolar pyorrhea, she had an independent lecturer (*libero docente*) who taught at the School of Dentistry and Dental Prosthetics inaugurated in Florence in 1915 by Chiarugi himself: Giuseppe Cavallaro directed the practical exercises of the students on patients and hospital staff, and accompanied them to private dental practices like his, which was in via Cerretani, near the Baptistery¹¹.

«The Russian lady dentist»

Immediately after graduation, Guta Gluckman Meggiboschi was enrolled in the Register of the Doctors' Association of the province of Florence, in which independent professionals were required to register in order to practice. From 1 March to the end of December in 1922 there were 27 enrollments: she was the only

(1899-1939), Pisa, Pisa University Press, 2018, pp. 161-162.

¹⁰ This is the correct date, as shown in the documentation in ASUFI, Registry 19, p. 253, and ASUFI, AC, SS, f. «Gluckmann Meggiboschi Guta». According to an obituary, of which the family has preserved the page, but whose place of publication is not identified, she would have graduated instead on 21 October 1921, but this is a mistake.

¹¹ I found her thesis in the Biblioteca Biomedica, Università di Firenze, fondo Tesi storiche, T.L.4.7. thesis of G[uta] Meggiboschi, «Piorrea alveolare», Florence, Istituto di studi superiori pratici e di perfezionamento, a.y. 1920-21. It was presented (not discussed) on 30 November 1921, with the name of the supervisor, Giuseppe Cavallaro, whose address appears in «Atti della Società italiana per il progresso delle Scienze», 4, 1911, p. 929. See further Angelo Chiavaro, *Notizie e commenti. La scuola di odontoiatria e protesi dentale di Firenze*, «Annali di odontologia», 1, 1, January 1916, pp. 56- 59.

woman in that year. And the third in the Florence Association since 1911, preceded only by two doctors specializing in pediatrics¹². She, however, was a dentist: the Russian dentist, they called her in Florence, where the spouses went to live and to work side by side. In 1924 both appeared as doctors at Piazza Strozzi, her husband at no. 5, she at no. 3, in the centre¹³.

According to the 1933 «Annuario generale d'Italia» there were 49 dentists in the province of Florence, including the director of the university dental clinic: judging by the names, some foreigners and all men apart from Guta Meggiboschi, who also belonged to the Italian stomatology federation, Florence section, where Giuseppe's name, however, does not appear¹⁴. In the thirties they also practiced in the province of Lucca, in Montecatini, first just he, then she too, and from 1937 together with their son on his graduation¹⁵. She is also mentioned, with the usual Florence address and telephone number, in the Almanac of Italian women published in Florence for the year 1938¹⁶.

Palazzo Strozzi, near her studio, was the premises of the Gabinetto Vieusseux, which had hosted Fyodor Dostoevsky; the possessor of a considerable collection of Russian books and magazines, it registered hundreds of Russians among its readers and associates by the first twenty years of the twentieth century, including the consul and his wife, a countess¹⁷. Doctor Guta Meggiboschi was a member of the Italian Lyceum, an international women's club in Florence, which was based in via Ricasoli, near her private home in via Cavour. Founded in 1908 by a committee

¹² These were Aldina Francolini (1874-1949), who graduated in Florence in 1899 and was a collaborator of Carlo Comba, and Nella Pecchioli (1890-1992), who graduated in 1916, during the war when the number of members was reduced to just one. The data is in *1910-2010. Cento anni di vita ordinistica del primo associazionismo fiorentino, opuscolo dell'Ordine provinciale dei medici chirurghi e degli odontoiatri di Firenze*, without printing details, with several inaccuracies, including with regard to Guta Meggiboschi, p. 61.

¹³ See *Guida sanitaria italiana*. 1924, Milan, Soc. ed. Unitas, 1925, p. 195; their professional activity is confirmed in *Annuario Toscano. Guida amministrativa, commerciale, professionale della Regione*, 25° edizione, Florence, C. Ruffilli, 1930, p. 313.

¹⁴ *Annuario generale d'Italia. Unica Guida generale amministrativa professionale commerciale e industriale del regno e delle Colonie*, Genoa, Stab. Tip. G.B. Marsano, 1933, vol. II, p. 698.

¹⁵ See «Bollettino della Accademia medica pistoiese Filippo Pacini», 12, 1937, p. 295.

¹⁶ «Donne Italiane. Almanacco annuario», 1938, p. 391. Note that it was published by a Jewish woman, Silvia Bemporad, with Giannini & Giovannelli.

¹⁷ On Russians in the Gabinetto Vieusseux, G. La Rocca, *L'aquila bicipite*, cit., pp. 50-58.

promoting the city's aristocrats and upper class, it had immediately shared with the first Lyceum Club of London «the aim of encouraging women to research or to literary, artistic, scientific and humanitarian works, cultivating and promoting female activity in each of these intellectual fields»¹⁸. During these twenty years, the character of the Lyceum also changed accordingly. The original promotion of professions among women was fading, so as to stress the philanthropic side; cultural activity was increasingly guided by the fascist sympathies of the then president of the Literature Section, a position that had previously been entrusted to Amelia Rosselli, who in 1924 had resigned as vice president of the Lyceum, in which, however, she remained enrolled. In 1938, a further change, in the charter itself: «to belong to the Lyceum, it is essential to belong to the Aryan race». The members of non-Aryan race — Rosselli and her daughter-in-law Maria Todesco, already in exile, Laura Orvieto and many others like Guta Meggiboschi — would have been considered as «resigning» from 1 January 1939¹⁹.

Shortly before the racial laws, her son Abraham graduated in medicine at the University of Florence on 13 July 1938. Soon after the laws were issued, Ester also managed to graduate in Literature at the University of Pisa on 15 November²⁰. Flora, the youngest, was still a student at the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery in Florence.

¹⁸ Lyceum. Circolo femminile italiano, *Statuto*, Florence, Tip. Enrico Ariani, 1908, art. 1. The categories of members included those whose profession made them eligible as well as the wives and daughters of professionals (art. 4). The listing of Guta Meggiboschi is shown in «Bollettino Lyceum di Firenze», 16, 7, 1932, p. 85.

¹⁹ Archivio storico Lyceum, Florence, s. 1/1.5, f. 24, Circular of 19 January 1939, cited by Barbara Imbergamo, *Breve introduzione alla storia del Lyceum*, in Ead. (editors), *Lyceum 1908-2005. Inventario*, p. 6n. Cf. also Ead., *Un Club femminile del Novecento. Il Lyceum dalla fondazione agli anni Settanta*, in Alessandra Contini and Anna Scattigno (editors), *Carte di donne II*, Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2006.

²⁰ ASUPi, Carriere studenti, f. «Meggiboschi Ester», certified copy of the original certificate for the degree obtained on 15 November 1938 at the Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Degree Course in Literature, signed by the rector Giovanni D'Achiardi, University of Pisa, 30 March 1939. In December 1934 she had enrolled at the Facoltà di Lettere in Florence, from which she had taken leave to move to that of Pisa in November 1937, see ASUFI, *Schede studenti*, under name f. 196, insert 3677.

A foreign Jewish professional woman

On 30 January 1939, the doctor was removed from the professional register, like her other foreign colleagues, by order of the provincial executive board of the Fascist Union of doctors and surgeons of Florence (the association had been suppressed in 1935)²¹. She received the 4-line communication on 3 February: three days later she replied, on her own letterhead, that she opposed the measure: she had resided in Italy since before 1919, and therefore did not fall within the provisions of the **law of 7 September 1938** which the order invoked²². This was the RDL n. 1381 focussed on foreign Jews: these had to leave Italy, and its territories in Libya and the Aegean, within six months, if they had arrived after 1919. This was not the case with the Meggiboschi, while among the twenty non-Italian doctors of the association, younger colleagues or those more recently arrived found themselves forced to leave, on pain of being forcibly expelled²³. Some protested that not even in Germany had foreign Jews been so badly treated²⁴.

A few months later, however, the Russian doctor was «hurrying to communicate to this esteemed Union, that she admittedly at present belongs to the Jewish race and is stateless»²⁵. In the meantime, in fact, the law of 29 June 1939, n. 1054, which prohibited the practice of professions to citizens of Jewish race, with partial exceptions and various obligations. Under art. 6, Jewish professionals were obliged to report their membership of the Jewish race within twenty days of the entry into force of the same law. Otherwise the penalty was triggered: arrest for up to one

²¹ AOMFi, MCC, FP, f. n. 349, «Gluckmann Meggiboschi Guta», copy of the registered letter from U.L. Torrini, provincial secretary of the provincial Fascist medical union, to Guta Meggiboschi Gluckmann di Isacco, Florence, 31 January 1939, with the acknowledgment of receipt attached on 3 February 1939.

²² Ibid., note from Guta Meggiboschi to the provincial Fascist medical union, 6 February 1939.

²³ The first removed from the Register of Doctors and Surgeons of Florence were in fact 23 foreigners, a list of whom was published only in 2018 by the one who had been president of the Association for thirty years, cf. Antonio Panti, *Ottanta anni fa le leggi razziali. Una vergogna anche per i medici. Ecco cosa accadde a Firenze*, «Quotidiano sanità.it», 27 January 2018. In the list n. 6 is Gluckmann Meggiboschi Guta.

²⁴ Alessandra Minerbi, *Il decreto legge del 7 settembre 1938 sugli ebrei stranieri*, «La Rassegna mensile di Israel», 73, 2007, pp. 169-186.

²⁵ AOMFi, MCC, FP, f. n. 349, «Gluckmann Meggiboschi Guta», note from Guta Meggiboschi to the Provincial Fascist Medical Union, Florence, undated, but registered as received 10 August 1939.

month and a fine of up to 3,000 lire.

The terms of the law had already passed when the doctor sent her note to the Fascist Union, undated — through forgetfulness or by design — but recorded on 10 August 1939, where she cited that law. This is why she was in a rush to proclaim herself Jewish and stateless.

In the dramatic series of racial regulations and the confused and contradictory interpretations that followed, it was easy to fall into statements that would later prove to be counterproductive. Racial self-report was mandatory even if the professional had been awaiting an investigation; the penalty for omission would have been cancelled only by a possible outcome of Aryan race. In the meantime she had had to proclaim herself of «Jewish race».

In reality, the Union had already issued a questionnaire to its members, in order to take a census of them by race, in a similar way to what the University had done. However, the Guta Meggiboschi questionnaire is missing. It is not enough to say that she did not return it, contrary to what the overwhelming majority of both professionals and teachers did. But it is very likely that the lack of her questionnaire, and also that of her husband, was due to them. On 8 January 1940, the Secretary General of the Union sent her an urgent reminder to return «the personal form duly completed and signed». There is no trace of this either²⁶.

Appeals and complaints

What is certain is that she and her husband did not intend to give up. Like others disbarred, they filed an application to be readmitted to the register and thus to be authorized to practice their profession. Application rejected by the Union board on 16 November 1939. The two doctors were notified of this outcome in December 1939. On 23 December they presented an appeal to the president of the commission for special professional registers at the Appeal Court in Florence, and on the same day they sent a copy to the Fascist Doctors' Union. As far as she was

²⁶ Ibid, copy of the letter from U.L. Torrini to Guta Gluckmann Meggiboschi, 8 January 1940.

concerned, the doctor now justified her appeal by the fact that she was married to Doctor Giuseppe Meggiboschi, «who was born in Russia, belongs to the Aryan race and to the Orthodox religion, and who is stateless.» It followed, according to her, that the racial laws could not be applied either to him or to her, as already recognized by the administrative authorities regarding assets²⁷.

It is not clear why they hoped that their being stateless would protect them, even exempt them from the provisions against the Jewish race to which they had claimed to belong. That the regulation for striking off which applied to Italian citizens of Jewish race applied even more strongly to foreigners without citizenship had already been underlined by the secretary to the executive board, Umberto Luigi Torrini, in his communication to the doctor²⁸. Four months later, on 24 April 1940, with undisguised satisfaction, the same secretary informed her that her appeal had been rejected and confirmed her removal from the professional register. It followed from the racial laws; therefore only higher ministerial authorities could modify it. Until the assessment of race was defined (as requested by her husband), they had to suspend any form of professional activity «if you do not want to face the penalties that the law provides for practicing unlawfully»²⁹.

What else could they do to continue working?

Someone was telling her to subscribe at least to the special registers. Even Torrini had suggested this, at least, to the doctor³⁰. **Law no. 1054 of 1939** which removed them from the professional register provided for a special register for «not exempted» (*non discriminati*) Jewish professionals, who were thus allowed to practice, but exclusively with patients of Jewish race (article 16 and articles Chapter III and Chapter IV). For admission to the special registers the interested party had

²⁷ Ibid., registered letter from Guta and Giuseppe Meggiboschi to the Provincial Fascist Medical Union, 23 December 1939, with a copy of the appeal to the Court of Appeal, same date.

²⁸ Ibid., copy of confidential registered letter from U.L. Torrini to «dott.ssa Guta Meggibosci[sic] Glukmann», 1 December 1939.

²⁹ See *ibid.*, copy of registered letter from U.L. Torrini to Guta Meggiboschi, 24 April 1940.

³⁰ Ibid., copy of confidential registered letter from U.L. Torrini to «dott.ssa Guta Meggibosci[sic] Glukmann», 1 December 1939.

to submit an application and precise documentation. In August 1940, Guta and her husband did so, like other doctors, and she enclosed six or seven certificates³¹.

But she lacked the most important document. Among the indispensable requirements listed in the aforementioned law (article 9), the first was Italian citizenship, for which it was mandatory to submit the certificate together with the application for registration in the special registers (article 11). The doctor was 54 years old and she had lived in Italy since she was 28 : she worked there, she had raised her children there, two had been born there. She had, however, declared that she was stateless, and the secretary of the Fascist union knew this, as inferred by a letter from her. The information in her personal file with the union comprised a certificate of residence issued by the Florence registry office in June 1940, and an attested affidavit from ten years before, signed by four witnesses at the court in Florence³².

Without Italian citizenship, the application was inadmissible under the law. It is thus astonishing that the doctor presented it. In the very incomplete documentation, there is no trace that it was rejected. Only partial documents remain, from the post-war period, with which they after the event tried to reconstruct the lists of those disqualified, and therefore also of those enrolled in non-ordinary registers, but these do not provide certain evidence of which applications, at the time, had been accepted or rejected. Curiously, in a special list of about twenty doctors drawn up by the Court of Appeal of Florence on October 31, 1944, among the many expelled foreigners — precisely those who lacked Italian citizenship — there were only the Meggiboschis, who in a subsequent list in January 1945 were actually recorded with their original Russian surname Medshiboshski³³.

³¹ There, the list of documents attached to the application is on a sheet dated 12 August 1940, stamped by the Royal Court of Appeal of Florence. There is a reminder that «*discriminati*» Jewish professionals - those who had special merit awards, especially for war service - could practice also with Aryans by enrolling on «additional lists» (L n. 1054 of 1939, art. 3).

³² Ibid., Comune of Firenze, Ufficio Anagrafe [Registry Office], certificate of residence of Meggiboschi Guta, 26 June 1940.

³³ Ibid., the faded, incomplete and partly illegible copy of a «List of documents presented by Jewish surgeons for registration in the special register», drawn up on 22 January 1945 by the Court of Appeal in Florence at the request of the reconstituted Order of Doctors, does not indicate what those documents were and and certainly does not state that the requests from the twelve persons named

If we could find certain proof that their applications to be admitted to the special registers were accepted despite their being stateless, then we would have to explain the reason for this anomaly.

Patients and colleagues

What we do know is that, a few days before the Russian doctor applied to be included in the special register, someone reported her. This was Umberto Luigi Torrini, born in 1881 (and thus the same age as Giuseppe Meggiboschi), a native of Rufina and director of the Dental Clinic of the University of Florence. On 6 August 1940, the professor filed a complaint by registered letter with the prosecutor of the Civil and Criminal Court of Florence against Dr. Guta Gluckman Meggiboschi, accusing her of unlawful practicing the profession of surgeon³⁴. On 25 November he pressed the magistrate, again by registered mail; he asked him what measures had been taken following his complaint, and enclosed a letter from a colleague sent directly to him, which he had recorded:

«despite the law prohibiting Israelites from practicing their profession, Dr. Giuseppe Meggiboschi and his wife Guta Meggiboschi continue their practice as dentists in via Cavour n. 39.

If you want to convince yourself of this, ask for an appointment by phone on no. 24163 and it will certainly be granted to you [...].

This Stateless lady and gentleman, who have no citizenship, either Italian or foreign, are, as good Jews, anything but Italian in feeling»³⁵.

had all been accepted. At no. 7 and no. 8 in the list, Giuseppe and Guta Medshiboschki (?); they appear with the surname Meggiboschi in AOMFI, un-inventoried miscellany, «Special list for professionals of Jewish race », 31 October 1944. On these points see the degree thesis of Lucrezia Nuti, *Expulsions and purges compared: anti-fascists, Jews, fascists in the Florence medical area*, supervisor Patrizia Guarnieri, University of Florence, 2019-20.

³⁴ See AOMFi, MCC, FP, f. n. 349, «Gluckmann Meggiboschi Guta», copy of Umberto Torrini's registered letter to the prosecutor and with copies also to the prefect of Florence, 6 August 1940. Details on Torrini at the University of Florence, *Annuario per l'anno accademico 1936-37*, Florence, Galletti e Cocci 1937, pp. 74, 279 ff.; also *Raduno a Siena degli otorinolaringoiatrici toscani*, «Le forze sanitarie. Organo ufficiale del sindacato nazionale fascista dei medici e degli Ordini dei medici», 3, 1934, p. 1371.

³⁵ AOMFi, MCC, FP, f. no. 349, «Gluckmann Meggiboschi Guta», letter from Pietro Giagnoni to the secretary of the Provincial Fascist Medical Union, Florence, 21 November 1940, attached to the registered letter from Umberto Luigi Torrini to the magistrate of the Court of Florence, Florence, 25 November 1940.

It was signed by Dr. Pietro Giagnoni, who was angry with the doctor, with her husband and her son, guilty of the same breach of law, and he provided the addresses in Florence and outside where they received patients. Although they were «Jewish» doctors, there were evidently those who continued to want to be treated by them. It was their colleagues who showed outright discriminatory behaviour, in the name of racial laws but perhaps for personal reasons; some raged, some took advantage, all or almost all were silent.

Two weeks after the Dr. Torrini's urging, and the complaint from Dr. Giagnoni, whose surgery in via delle Mantellate was very close to via Cavour, where the Meggiboschi couple lived and worked, the latter were sentenced to the penalty of 1,000 lire each for unlawful professional practice, by a criminal decision of the magistrate of Florence, who communicated it to the Fascist union³⁶.

It was not enough. On 1 April 1941, Dr. Torrini sent one of his registered letters to the police headquarters in Florence, with whom he had a previous correspondence on the «plates indicating the profession of doctor». He had no law to appeal to, yet he pointed out that Dr. Guta Meggiboschi

has not yet deemed it necessary to remove the plate indicating the profession of doctor [...] well in view of the public [...]. Therefore, please provide for a new injunction against the aforementioned so that he may remove this plate as soon as possible, which no longer has any reason to exist³⁷.

He even asked for a reply. Which arrived a couple of months later: signed by the chief of police, it was guaranteed «that Dr. Guta Meggiboschi [had] taken steps to remove the plate some time ago»³⁸.

³⁶ Ibid., Public Prosecutor of the King Emperor at the Court of Florence to the secretary of the Doctors' Union, Florence, 21 December 1940.

³⁷ Copy of Umberto Luigi Torrini's registered letter to the Royal Police Headquarters of the Province of Florence, 1 April 1941.

³⁸ The communication from the Police Headquarters to the Provincial Fascist Medical Union, Florence, 12 June 1941, is not in Guta Meggiboschi's f., but in her husband's, although it does not refer to him, cf. AOMFi, MCC, FP, f. no. 239, «Giuseppe Meggiboschi».

Leave Italy or stay?

Some of those struck off had now left Italy, first and foremost foreigners such as Willy Oppler and Carlo Schapira, Beniamino Jolles and Emanuele Pekelis. Perhaps even the Meggiboschis gave some consideration to the idea of leaving. Both Guta and her husband appear in the official registers of the UK Medical Directory: the first time, in 1940, they were among practitioners resident abroad, at the Florence address of via Cavour 39; then again in the 1942 Directory, but with no address indicated³⁹. If accepted among physicians officially recognized in the United Kingdom by the General Medical Council, founded in London in 1858, even non-Britons could practice in the British colonies and dominions. Accordingly those who were willing to go to distant countries also signed up. Among those struck off from the Fascist Medical Union of Florence, at least Annemarie Eleonor Curth (1904-1997) and her husband Erich Goldberg (1892-1942), who intended to get to Australia and stopped in Singapore, Noemi Susani (1908-2000) who went to Syria; perhaps even others.

Guta and Giuseppe, on the other hand, remained in Florence: they were not as young as these colleagues, she was not in good health, and their third child had yet to finish her university studies and could not, as a Jew, be left behind with her exams. In the photo of the 45 undergraduates of the Faculty of Medicine here in the gallery, one of the four girls is Flora. As determined in a ministerial circular dated 19 November 1939, which the rector, Arrigo Serpieri, enforced with his well-known anti-Semitic zeal, the words «of Jewish race» would be printed on the degree diploma. Flora graduated, to her parents' great satisfaction, on 30 June 1943. Just in time, just before everything crashed.

They had to hide. They left Florence and took refuge somewhere in the Tuscan countryside, perhaps near Montecatini, where Guta's husband had treated so many patients. They were able to return to Florence, fortunately all safe, after the

³⁹ *Practitioners Resident Abroad*, in UK, Ireland, *The Medical Directory*, 1940, p. 2051, e *ibid.*, 1942 p. 2103, but without indicating the address, both accessible at <<https://www.ancestry.com>> (accessed by login 20 October 2020).

liberation of the city in August 1944. They returned to their apartment in Via Cavour. The owner, Guido Spadolini, father of the future Senator Giovanni, had taken steps to save their furniture, while many other Jewish houses had been plundered by the militia, and even by the neighbors⁴⁰.

They could also go back to work. The racial laws were abolished. The Doctors' Association was reconstituted. The Extraordinary Commission appointed by the Tuscan Committee of National Liberation was chaired by Dr. Luigi Rochat, a long-time anti-fascist, a Waldensian and father-in-law of Willy Jervis. He proceeded to re-enter the names of his Jewish colleagues in the register: Guta and her husband were re-registered on 25 September 1944, together with Dr. Sergio Levi, Giorgio De Leon Pereyra, Dr. Eugenia Jona and others⁴¹. They were among the first, so much so that the Meggiboschi did not even know. On 29 September, on stamped paper, the «Russian dentist» asked for her registration to be restored to the register of doctors in Florence, and «with seniority due to me since 1921»⁴². She certainly wanted to get back to work.

However, her health was compromised. Guta suffered from diabetes and she could not be treated in hiding. She died in Florence on 26 February 1947, at the age of 62. She had recently become a grandmother.

Archival sources

- Archivio di deposito dell'Ordine dei medici di Firenze (AOMFi), Fondo Medici chirurghi cessati (MCC), Fascicoli personali (FP), f. no. 349, «Gluckmann Meggiboschi Guta».

⁴⁰ Written evidence from the family to the author, 8 March 2019.

⁴¹ AOMFi, MCC, FP, f. no. 349, «Gluckmann Meggiboschi Guta», the dates are obtained from an unfortunately faded copy of a letter, in which twelve names of «Jewish» surgeons are listed, from the Florence Court of Appeal to the Association, Florence, 22 January 1945, in response to a request from the Association, dated 19 January 1945, which however is missing in the f.

⁴² Ibid, Guta Meggiboschi's request to the Association of Doctors in Florence, 29 September 1944. On the first page in pencil the note «Readmitted on 25. IX. 1944». On the request, she claimed to have been struck off and registered in the special register of Jewish doctors; under the law, enrolment in the special register was not admissible through absence of Italian citizenship, and in fact she is not found elsewhere. But it is one of the inconsistencies that can be found between different papers in the f.

- ASUFI, AC, SS, f. «Gluckmann Meggiboschi Guta».
- ASUFI, AC, SS, f. «Meggiboschi Flora».
- ASUPi, Carriere studenti, f. «Meggiboschi Ester».
- Biblioteca Biomedica, Università di Firenze, fondo Tesi storiche, T.L.4.7, thesis of G[uta] Meggiboschi, «Piorrea alveolare», Florence, Istituto di studi superiori pratici e di perfezionamento, a.y. 1920-21.

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