

Thomas (Tommaso) Eugene Goldstein

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Thomas was twenty years old and a university student when he fled with his parents from Nazi Germany to Italy. Aged twenty-five, a graduate of Florence University and employed as a teacher, he fled fascist Italy which had embraced anti-semitism, going first to Norway. From there he fled again, together with Lili, each time in search of a home, employment and a country in which to settle.

Childhood in Germany

Thomas was born in Berlin on 23 June 1913, the son of Anthonie "Toni" Charlotte Schlesinger and Moritz Goldstein, a well-known journalist and writer; and it was there that he went to school and university. He had socialist sympathies and participated in a theatre group run by Erwin F. Piscator, the foremost exponent, together with Bertold Brecht, of so-called epic theatre. Piscator left Berlin in 1931 for Moscow.

From Berlin to Florence

When the Nazis came to power in Germany in 1933, Thomas was forced to interrupt his university studies in history and economics. He followed his father to Florence where Moritz Goldstein, together with Werner Peiser, established the *Landschulheim Florenz*, a school for refugee children from Germany, catering for both Jews and non-Jews. The school opened on 17 October 1933 in a villa between Florence and Fiesole. The Goldsteins lived at via Benedetto da Maiano 13. The previous June, the family had already started to prepare the necessary documents, with official legal translations, so that Thomas could continue with his studies in Italy: Thomas' birth certificate, where his mother was listed as of the Mosaic faith; his school

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leaving certificate with his grades¹. On 13 December Thomas, as he continued to sign his name, enrolled at the University of Florence, and was admitted as a third year student at the Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia as Tommaso Goldstein. At his graduation on 5 November 1936, he was awarded a classification of 110/110, presenting his thesis on Emperor Frederick II and internal conditions within the Italian communes². On the examining panel of professors were Mario Salmi and Attilio Momigliano, who two years later would be respectively head of faculty at the time of the dismissals on racial grounds and one of the most distinguished of those dismissed. On 2 December 1936, Thomas applied to the Scuola di bibliotecari ed archivisti (School of Librarians and Archivists) at University of Florence, asking at the same time for financial assistance which he was granted. Thomas gained practical experience at the Archivio di Stato in Florence and took his first steps towards an academic career, collaborating with the «Archivio storico italiano». He lived at via Garibaldi 6³. At the same time, he held a teaching position at the *Landschulheim Florenz* where his father was the administrative director. The *Landschulheim*, which in the meanwhile had moved to new premises in Pian dei Giullari, was forced to close in the wake of the racial legislation which singled out foreign Jews as early targets. They were given six months to leave the country, among them the teachers or former teachers at the *Landschulheim Florenz*: Ernst and Marianne Manasse, Ernst Abrahamson, Paul Oscar Kristeller, Heinrich and Renee Kahane⁴. Thomas

¹ See ASUFi, AC, SS, f. «GoldsteinTommaso», birth certificate, 28 June 1933, sworn translation of 5 September 1933, and school leaving certificate Grünewald, Berlin, undated, sent to the University of Florence for Thomas' enrolment.

² Information about his university career, ivi, T. Goldstein to the rector, 25 September 1936, 2 December 1936; certificate of graduation, 5 November 1936.

³ Information from *curriculum vitae*, undated (but after April 1941) written in the first person in English, in NYPL, MAD, ECADFS, I.B. Non Grantees, b. 63, f. 13, «Goldstein, Thomas», 1941-43. See also *Thomas Goldstein (Historian)* <<https://en.wikipedia.org>> (accessed 24 November 2018). In Catherine Epstein's valuable book, *A Past renewed. A Catalog of German-Speaking Refugee Historians in the United States after 1933*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, 88 academic German emigrants are included, but not Goldstein.

⁴ Irmtraud Ubbens, *Das Landschulheim Florenz. In Kindheit und Jugend im Exil. Ein*

decided to go to Norway, while his parents fled to France in the hope of reaching Britain. Both father and son had for some time been placed under surveillance as suspect individuals by the Italian police, following an alert from the Gestapo which sought information on German citizens considered harmful to Germany's political reputation⁵.

Norway and Santo Domingo

In Oslo Thomas undertook a few temporary jobs for an advertising agency and also some free-lance work as a journalist whilst at the same time studying Norwegian, in which he became rather fluent. Following the Nazi invasion of Norway Thomas had to flee again. On 1 January 1941 he and his wife Lili arrived in the Dominican Republic with the intention of obtaining an entry visa for both of them to the USA⁶. During this time, Thomas managed to organize some lectures on historical subjects at the Santo Domingo Jewish Refugee Club as well as giving private lessons in English. He also took charge of Jewish Youth for the community of Santo Domingo. Finally, on 3 April 1941 the visa arrived and on 15 April the couple sailed from Ciudad Trujilli (as Santo Domingo was named in 1936 in honour of its dictator) on the *Borinquen*. Thomas was 27 years old and Lili, who was also from Berlin, 20. In the USA, they were registered as Jews, with their last residence listed as Oslo. Both of them spoke German, English, French, in addition Thomas spoke Italian and Lili Norwegian. Although Lili's papers stated she was a housewife,

Generationentema (Exilforschung. Ein internationales Jahrbuch. Band 24), München, Edition text + kritik, 2006, pp. 117-134.

⁵ Klaus Voigt, *Zuflucht auf Widerruf. Exil in Italien 1933-1945*, Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 1989 ad indicem.

⁶ See Ellis Island Foundation, *Passenger Search*, «Thomas Eugene Goldstein» <<https://www.libertyellisfoundation.org>> (accessed on registration 27 November 2018). The aim of the journey to Santo Domingo is declared in the cited CV, undated, in NYPL, MAD, ECADFS, I.B. Non Grantees, b. 63, f. 13, «Goldstein, Thomas», 1941-43.

in reality she had worked in the art world. The reference they gave in the USA was their friend Abraham Gittenger, resident in Brooklyn⁷.

New York – a permanent home

The couple arrived on 21 April 1941 and Thomas immediately turned for help to the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars which opened a file on him on 1 May. «A tall, good-looking fellow very nice manners, cultivated», wrote Miss Drury who interviewed him and took note of his knowledge of Norwegian, Italian, German, Spanish and French, as well as English. The committee's secretary also noted that he was a historian specialising in palaeography and that he had taught, not at a university, but at the *Landschulheim Florenz*. Maybe she remembered that this was also true of other Germans who had passed through Italy and were in receipt of help from the committee.

Thomas indeed did not have an academic position; he did not even have the title of *libero docente*. His *Curriculum Vitae* in English did not contain any scholarly publications, and referred in general terms only to his collaboration with a historical periodical in Italy and with newspapers in Norway and Domingo. Although in theory Thomas did not thus meet the conditions that would have allowed him to be helped by the Emergency Committee, he did in fact become one of the committee's not so rare exceptions. Paul Oskar Kristeller, who after he started working at Colombia was often used as a referee, was asked to provide a reference on Thomas. Kristeller declared that he had met Thomas in 1934 at the *Landschulheim Florenz* and that he much admired his father Moritz who was currently living in Britain⁸. Meanwhile the young Goldstein couple stayed with the economist Hans Landsberg at 419 W 119th street, Manhattan⁹.

⁷ Ivi.

⁸ Ivi, letter from P.O. Kristeller to Miss Drury, 17 September 1941.

⁹ Ivi, the address as it appears in Thomas E. Goldstein's CV.

Thomas, who was stateless, declared he was seeking funding for a research project on American influence on intellectuals in Europe from 1492 to the French Revolution. He listed his various areas of competence: design, political history, art history, as well as five European languages in addition to Latin.

Thomas had to content himself with temporary jobs including working as a counsellor for a Jewish summer camp and as a research assistant¹⁰. On 19 March 1943 his file with the Committee was closed, not because his case had been solved, but because he had not been heard from¹¹. Thomas Goldstein found further work the details and chronology of which are hard to establish, including as a commentator for the «Voice of America». In October 1947 his parents arrived, his mother Toni dying 3 years later.

In 1955, Thomas finally found work as a lecturer in history at Brooklyn College, followed by a post at New York University and at the New School for Social Research, an institution certainly open to welcoming European intellectuals fleeing fascism. Another at the New School was Thomas' former drama teacher E. Piscator (who had been in the USA since 1939), who was invited to give a dramatic workshop. Among the participants were Harry Belafonte, Marlon Brando and Tony Curtis¹².

In 1959 at the age of 46, Thomas was appointed lecturer at City College New York (CUNY) where he later became professor of history, and where he remained until his retirement in 1978, in the year following his father's death. In December 1960 during a meeting of the American Historical Association, Thomas proposed, together with James Ford Bell, the establishment of an interdisciplinary society to encourage research into exploration and discovery. The Society for the History of Discoveries was duly founded in 1961, initially with 20 members, and is still active today. The society publishes

¹⁰ According to two updates in Thomas' ECADFS file, 9 September 1941 and 16 January 1942.

¹¹ Ivi.

¹² Cfr. John Willett, *The Theatre of Erwin Piscator: Half a Century of Politics in the Theatre*, London, Methuen, 1978, p. 13.

«Terrae incognitae», for which Goldstein wrote several articles¹³. Of the books he published on the history of science, characterised by their broad descriptive sweep, the most well-known covered the period from the Arabs to the renaissance. In retirement, from 1980, he wrote frequently for the «New York Times», mostly political commentary.

In common with his parents, Thomas never returned to the countries from which he had had to flee, although his interest in the history of Italian culture continued. He died in New York on 19 November 1997.

Principal Publications

- *Geography in Fifteenth-Century Florence*, in *Merchants and Scholars: Essays in the History of Exploration and Trade Collected in Memory of James Ford Bell*, ed. by John Parker, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1965, pp. 11-32.
- *The Renaissance Concept of the Earth in its Influence upon Copernicus*, Amsterdam, Nico Israel, 1972.
- *Dawn of Modern Science: from the Arabs to Leonardo da Vinci*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1980.

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- Ellis Island Foundation, *Passenger Search*, «Goldstein Thomas Eugene» also «Goldstein Lilli» <<https://www.libertyellisfoundation.org>>.

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¹³ In 2010 there were more than 300 members, see <<https://www.sochistdisc.org>> (accessed 27 November 2018).

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