

Augusta Algranati Mondolfo

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Wife of the philosopher Rodolfo Mondolfo, she followed him in his academic transfers in Italy and in those of his Argentine exile. An energetic woman with a strong but also tender character, she was a perfect mistress, attentive in creating a domestic atmosphere that would allow Rodolfo to carry out his research and pedagogical commitments with tranquility¹. At the same time, she never forgot that she was also a woman dedicated to medical science, and in Argentina she put her Italian degree to good use. Although it was not revalidated, it allowed her to work in a histology laboratory, in the department of Pathological Anatomy of the University of Córdoba, and to investigate brucellosis and Chagas disease.

Family and education

Augusta Algranati was born in Naples on 2 September 1888. She was the daughter of Sandro and Laura Padovani. Her family, wealthy and dedicated to trade, was of Jewish-Sephardic origin; in all probability, they stopped in Italy coming from Spain, following the expulsion of the Jews in 1492 or the anti-Semitic massacres that began in Seville on 6 June 1391, which then extended to the Spanish cities of Christian faith².

On 25 June 1907, Augusta married Rodolfo Mondolfo in Padua, who, at the time, was holding the chair of History of Philosophy at the University of Padua, which Roberto Ardigò had held prior. The couple had known each other since childhood, as Rodolfo's family and the family of Augusta's mother

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¹ Cfr. Guillermina Garmendia de Camusso, *Augusta Algranati de Mondolfo*, in Julia Constenla (coord.), *Yo, italiana. Historia de vida de mujeres inmigrantes*, Montevideo, Tiempo de Ideas, 1993, p. 70.

² Cfr. María Esther Silberman de Cywiner, *La inmigración de judíos italianos perseguidos por el fascismo a partir de 1938*, «JSapiens. La Revista académica del Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano», 1, 1, 2017 <<https://jsapiens.org>> (accessed 15 June 2021).

were friends because they both came from Senigallia. This allowed them to meet despite Augusta living in Naples. Four children were born from their marriage: Ugo (1909-1968), Lucio (1910-2001), Silvano (1912-?) and Renato (1915-1918), who died from the consequences of the Spanish fever. Augusta and Rodolfo lived in Padua until 1909, then they moved to Turin, always following the philosopher's academic work; starting from 1913, and for the next twenty-five years, the Mondolfo family lived in Bologna (in piazza di Porta Santo Stefano, n. 2, and then in via Laura Bassi, n. 53), where Rodolfo had been appointed full professor in History of Philosophy.

Augusta started her university studies in Medicine at the University of Naples, but interrupted them on account of her marriage, to take care of her family. She resumed them in adulthood, in 1925, driven by the desire to help her son Ugo, who had been struck by premature deafness. She graduated from the University of Bologna on 10 July 1931 with a thesis on the pineal gland entitled «Anatomy of the pineal and its relationship with morphological types»³. After completing her studies, Augusta continued what she had done throughout her university years, namely she assiduously carried out her scientific activity as a voluntary assistant, focusing on pathological anatomy, ophthalmology, anthropometry and histology. She submitted scientific works and reviews, and prepared the bibliographic materials for the research of the professors with whom she collaborated, such as Giulio Tarozzi and Giacinto Viola.

On 16 October 1938, Augusta had to abandon her academic activity due to the first restrictions imposed on Italian Jews. Her name, together with that of her son Silvano, an orthopedic assistant, is among those who were disbarred from the university and from the Register of Doctors. It was then that Giacinto Viola issued her a detailed letter of introduction that underlined her scientific aptitude, her wide medical culture, and her profound knowledge of

³ Her children Ugo and Silvano also graduated in Medicine, while Lucio obtained a degree in

foreign languages (French, English, Spanish and German)⁴.

In Argentina

According to what Guillermina Garmendia de Camusso, a pupil of Mondolfo in Tucumán, states, it was Augusta who insisted on leaving Italy and «put[ting] the ocean between them and anti-Semitic fascism»⁵. Augusta and Rodolfo immediately turned to the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning in November 1938. In the questionnaire that all applicants had to fill in, Augusta declared to be of Jewish religion (but added that she was not practicing), her professional skills and qualifications, her knowledge of the English language, and the countries she would prefer to go to (France, England, Scotland, Ireland, Canada, the United States, and Egypt). For Latin America, she indicated Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, and Uruguay. She was not interested in China, Japan, or Russia and, in general, preferred small cities and small towns as a destination⁶.

Meanwhile, her family explored other possibilities for expatriation. Rodolfo's relations with foreign countries were scarce but, recalling that his Spanish translator, Marcelino H. Alberti, lived in Buenos Aires, he contacted him for a possible transfer to Argentina. Alberti took action and, also thanks to the intercession of the socialist senator Alfredo Palacios, Mondolfo received an invitation from Coriolano Alberini, dean of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Buenos Aires, to deliver a series of lectures on the subject of infinity in Greek philosophy. Giovanni Gentile, a friend of

Industrial Engineering.

⁴ The information about Augusta's university education in Bologna comes from the archive of the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning (SPSL, since 1997 called the Council for Assisting Refugee Academics, CARA) at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. The SPSL was born as a mutual aid association intended to financially help Jewish academics who were unable to continue their research due to Nazism. Augusta submitted a request to the SPSL with all the necessary documentation (including Viola's letter of introduction) but never signed the file. I wish to thank Patrizia Guarnieri for bringing these materials to my attention; they are available in BLO, MS, SPSL, b. 408/2, f. «Mondolfo, Augusta», 1938-46.

⁵ G. Garmendia de Camusso, *Augusta Algranati de Mondolfo*, in J. Constenla (coord.), *Yo, italiana*, cit., p. 72.

⁶ Cfr. n. 4.

Mondolfo's, had tried earlier to mediate directly with Mussolini to exempt him from the restrictions set forth in the racial laws, but his intervention had not been successful.

Mondolfo arrived in Buenos Aires from Genoa on 27 May 1939 on the *S.S. Conte Grande*, which had left on 11 May. His sons Ugo and Silvano traveled with him with their respective wives, Evelina and Adriana; Lucio, on the other hand, headed for the United States; Augusta joined them on 17 July 1939 aboard the *M.S. Augustus*, which had also departed from Genoa⁷.

Home life and science

In Argentina, Rodolfo Mondolfo, in addition to giving the aforementioned lectures to which others were added in Tucumán and Rosario, began a rather continuous collaboration with the daily «La Nación». Augusta herself informs us of this in the first of the letters (dated 6 October 1939) that she sent to Gentile's wife Erminia from Buenos Aires. In this letter, Augusta underlined the cordiality with which her family had been welcomed and the daily difficulties they faced, starting with the challenge of not being able to afford a full-time maid. She also made a few references to the work of her husband and her children, including Lucio, now permanently settled with his family in Chicago. In writing about the last months spent in Bologna, in the letter of 17 December 1939, she lamented the lack of contact from their friends, many of whom had remained silent after the departure of her husband, including Bassi (probably the politician and trade unionist Enrico) who, she said, «had sneaked away».

Augusta, too, had finally found two jobs in Buenos Aires; in the same letter she wrote:

I work now: in the morning, in a histology laboratory where in three

⁷ Cfr. Centro Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos (CEMLA), *Arrival Records*, <<https://cemla.com>> (accessed 20 June 2021). The information reported by some sources, according to which Augusta is said to have arrived in Buenos Aires with her husband and children, is incorrect. As an example, see Diego Tatián, *Huella de Mondolfo*, Buenos Aires, La Biblioteca, 2014, p. 29.

hours I should do the work of seven or eight hours, and for three afternoons, I compile a bibliographic file for a doctor, in a private clinic. All this pays well enough, but of course, all of my time goes into work and running around to reach the premises of [these jobs]⁸.

In general, Augusta was happy to live in Argentina, even amidst a thousand daily difficulties. In the letter of 6 March 1940, she wrote: «But on the whole we are so well, the country is so beautiful, bright, serene, the people [so] cheerful that I am really happy to be here». In the same letter, she gave news about other Italian Jews exiled to Argentina:

Here, we were filled with the sorrow of the sudden death of Prof. Pugliese, the son of the physiologist, who passed away suddenly, leaving his brother, a medical doctor, who must revalidate his credentials. From Cordoba, where his brother taught, it seems now that he will move to Buenos Aires.

Prof. M. Finsi [sic, in fact the jurist Marcello Finzi] is here (here so to speak, in Cordoba), and Prof. Beppo Levi is in Rosario, both with professorships; among those souls who are suspended is Prof. Treves, who does not know whether or not he will stay in Tucumán, where he had been contracted for a year and where the competition for an academic appointment has now been launched⁹.

From Buenos Aires, the couple moved to Córdoba (1941), where Rodolfo was appointed to teach a seminar in Ancient Philosophy and held the chair in Ancient Greek at the University. In Córdoba, Augusta worked as a researcher in the department of Pathological Anatomy of the University's Pediatric Clinic (even though she had not re-validated her Italian degree in Medicine in Argentina). In Córdoba, she also collaborated with the Brucellosis Study Commission, appointed to fight this infection, which affected cattle. It was around this time that she began to assist her husband in translating works by German philosophers.

In 1947, they moved to Tucumán where Rodolfo taught History of Ancient Philosophy and headed the Institute of Philosophy at the University. Augusta, instead, worked as a researcher at the Miguel Lillo Institute of Regional

⁸ Fondazione Giovanni Gentile, *Giovanni Gentile, Corrispondenza*, f. 1.1.4.742, «Mondolfo Augusta a Gentile Erminia», letter of 17 December 1939.

⁹ *Ibid.*, letter of 6 March 1940.

Medicine of the same university, focusing on Chagas disease, an infection also known as American trypanosomiasis.

Augusta suddenly died in Tucumán on 5 October 1950, leaving the Spanish translation of Hegel's *Science of Logic* unfinished, a translation which Rodolfo would complete later and publish in 1956, not without difficulty. Augusta's remains were temporarily placed in the chapel of the brother-in-law of Guillermina Garmendia de Camusso and after a month, when the procedures to confirm Augusta's Jewish origin were completed, they were transferred to the Israelite cemetery of La Tablada, in Buenos Aires, where Rodolfo Mondolfo also rests.

The philosopher was severely affected by the death of his wife, so much so that in 1952 he returned to Buenos Aires to be close to his children. In the work *La comprensión del sujeto humano en la cultura antigua*, he remembers her in his dedication as follows:

To Augusta Algranati Mondolfo. Your sacred memory is present in every page of this book, which you saw me begin in the serene joy of your cheering and consoling company and which, after your sudden passing, I was able, in my desolation, to continue and complete only thinking of consecrating it to your memory¹⁰.

Major publications

- *Di alcune ricerche sulla pineale*, «Archivio di anatomia e istologia patologica», 2, 1933, pp. 149-189.
- *Osservazioni sulle cisti della pineale*, «Rivista sperimentale di freniatria», 1, 1934, pp. 165-182.
- Reviews published in the journal «Endocrinologia e patologia costituzionale», 1931-1938, signed as A. M.

¹⁰ Buenos Aires, Imán, 1955, p. 9.

Translations

- Franz Hamburger, *Los fundamentos de la neurosis de la infancia*. Traducción de Augusta A. de Mondolfo, Buenos Aires, Americalee, 1946.
- William Arthur Heidel, *La edad heroica de la ciencia. El concepto, los ideales y métodos de la ciencia entre los antiguos griegos*. Traducción de Augusta de Mondolfo, prólogo de Rodolfo Mondolfo, Buenos Aires, Espasa Calpe, 1946.
- Oswald Spengler, *Heráclito*. Traducción de Augusta de Mondolfo, prólogo y introducción de Rodolfo Mondolfo, Buenos Aires, Espasa Calpe, 1947.
- Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Ciencia de la lógica*. Traducido por Augusta Algranati y Rodolfo Mondolfo, prólogo de Rodolfo Mondolfo, Buenos Aires, Librería Hachette, 1956 (other editions: Buenos Aires, Hachette, 1968; Buenos Aires, Editorial Solar, 1970, 1974, 1976, 1982; Buenos Aires, Las Cuarenta, 2013).

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- Raffaella Simili, *Sotto falso nome. Scienziate italiane ebree (1938-1945)*, Bologna, Pendragon, 2010, p. 56.

Camilla Cattarulla

Translated by Nicole Ann Doria

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